The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love Study Guide

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love by Oscar Hijuelos

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Oscar Hijuelos's novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* was published in 1989, and soon became a huge international bestseller. It tells the story of Cesar Castillo, an aged musician who once had a small amount of fame when he and his brother appeared on an episode of *I Love Lucy* in the 1950s. The book chronicles Cesar's last hours as he sits in a seedy hotel room, drinking and listening to recordings made by his band, the Mambo Kings. Events and characters whirl through his mind, evoking what he has lost over the years: his brother and collaborator, Nestor, who spent his adult life constantly rewriting one song about a lost love; the many lovers who gave themselves up to him as he rose triumphantly through the mambo music craze of the early fifties; and the way of life that disappeared for all Cubans after that country was overthrown by an insurrection led by Fidel Castro in 1959. In telling Cesar's story, Hijuelos weaves in cameo appearances by several real-life mambo musicians, including Desi Arnaz, Tito Puente, Pérez Prado, Machito and Mongo Santamaría.

This novel, Hijuelos's second, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1990, marking the first time that that prize was awarded to a Hispanic author. Hijuelos has published four more novels since then, frequently touching on the theme of immigrants and how they adjust to coming to America.

Author Biography

Oscar Hijuelos (his last name is pronounced "E*wa*ylos") was born in New York City on August 24, 1951. His parents came from the Oriente province of Cuba, emigrating in 1943 to the Spanish Harlem section of New York, which is where the author grew up. As a teenager in the 1960s, Hijuelos played guitar in Top 40 bands. He attended City College of New York, receiving a bachelor of arts degree in 1975 and a master's degree in creative writing in 1976. After college, he worked for Transportation Display, Inc., an advertising firm, for seven years. During that time, he continued writing.

In 1978, his short story "Columbus Discovering America" received a Pushcart Press citation for "outstanding writer." Following that, he won an Oscar Cintas fiction writing grant for 1978-1979; a Bread Loaf Writers Conference scholarship in 1980; a fiction writing grant from Creative Artists Programs Service in 1982; and a grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation in 1983.

His first novel, *Our House in the Last World*, was published in 1983. It concerns a Cuban couple, Alejo and Sorrea, who, like the author's parents, emigrate from Cuba to New York in the 1940s. It won several awards, including the American Academy in Rome Fellowship in Literature, which allowed him to live in Rome for a while. While in Italy, he developed an interest in archeology, a hobby which has affected the historical curiosity of his books.

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love, published in 1989, was Hijuelos's second novel, and is by far his most famous to date. Along with other honors, it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1990, making Hijuelos the first Hispanic novelist to take that award. He followed this up with *The Fourteen Sisters of Emilio Montez O'Brien* in 1993; *Mr. Ives' Christmas* in 1995; and *Empress of the Splendid Season* in 1999. Although Hijuelos has been an American citizen all of his life, his books are rich in images of Cuba that he gained from research and from the memories of older family members. This makes him distinct from other Cuban-American writers, whose works often contain a strong political element that draws on the sharp contrast between the two countries' systems.

Hijuelos's latest novel, his sixth, is *A Simple Habana Melody*, published in 2002. He still lives in New York City, near the Spanish Harlem apartment where he grew up.

Plot Summary

It Was a Saturday Afternoon on LaSalle Street

The first few pages of *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* are narrated by Eugenio Castillo, who is the nephew of the book's main character, Cesar Castillo. He describes an afternoon in his childhood, sometime in the early 1960s, when the landlady called up to the apartment where his family lived to let Cesar know that they were rerunning the episode of *I Love Lucy* that he and his brother had appeared on, performing the song that Eugenio's father Nestor wrote, "Beautiful María of My Soul." When Eugenio goes to the kitchen to get him, Cesar has a difficult time rising from the table, having been out until four or five in the morning playing the trumpet. With Eugenio's help, Cesar makes it to the couch, and Eugenio brings him a drink of whisky as he watches the most important moment of his life repeat once more.

Side A:In the Hotel Splendour, 1980

Cesar has checked into a room at the Hotel Splendour with his record player, a stack of records, and several bottles of liquor. He wonders if this is the room in the same hotel where he used to take girls in the old days. He recalls arriving with Nestor in New York in 1949 and forming the band. They were from a farm in Cuba and had been playing with a small combo in Havana before moving to New York, where they moved in with their cousin Pablo and his family at 500 LaSalle Street.

The early days of the band Cesar and Nestor formed, the Mambo Kings, were slow. They worked in a meat factory during the days and wrote songs, in particular "Beautiful María of My Soul," which Nestor eventually rewrote forty-four times. Cesar remembers that, before moving to Havana, he was with an orchestra run by Julián García in Santiago de Cuba. He married Julián's niece, Luisa, and she moved to Havana with him, but one of his many girlfriends told Luisa about their affair, and Luisa left Cesar while she was pregnant. They reconciled for a few months, but then she left him for good. Over the years he sent presents to their daughter, Mariela.

In 1950, Nestor met Delores Fuentes and they started an affair that made Nestor think back to his tragic affair with María. It had occurred several years earlier, in Havana: walking down the street one day, he heard a man and woman fighting, and, investigating it, found a man beating on María. He chased the man away, and he and María started a passionate love affair. Eventually, though, Nestor turned to his brother Cesar for advice about how to behave toward his woman, and Cesar recommended that he assert his manliness and abuse María. She left him and went back to her home village. When he eventually followed, he learned that she had just married the man he had seen beating her in Havana. In America, his affair with Dolores led to her being pregnant with Eugenio, so they got married. A daughter, Leticia, was born three years

later, in 1954. Nestor was a distant father and husband, always dreaming about María: writing her letters, and working on his song about her.

The Mambo Kings became one of the most popular bands in New York. One night in 1955, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball came to see them. After the show, Cesar struck up a conversation with Arnaz. They were from the same area of Cuba, and they had both sung in the Julián García band. Cesar remembers conversing into the night with Arnaz and Ball and inviting them back to his and Nestor's apartment, although he is not sure if that is how it went. Three months later, they went out to Hollywood to film the *I Love Lucy* episode in which the Castillo brothers play Ricky Ricardo's cousins who have just arrived from Cuba. They became wealthy from that appearance, as several singers, including Arnaz, recorded "Beautiful María of My Soul," and the Mambo Kings did their one and only national tour.

Nestor died in a car accident in 1957, sliding on an icy road into a tree while driving back from a performance. Cesar stayed in the apartment with Dolores and the children for a while, but he found himself too attracted to Dolores. He joined the Merchant Marines and traveled the world for two years. After a while of inactivity, he took a job as the maintenance man for the building at 500 LaSalle.

Side B:Sometime Later in the Night in the Hotel Splendour

During the night, a man from the next room at the Hotel Splendour comes over to borrow some liquor from Cesar. He invites Cesar back to his room to meet the woman he is with. Back in his own room, Cesar hears the couple through the wall, making love, and he is disappointed about what his own life has come to.

He remembers the doctor who told him that his body is incapable of processing alcohol, that it is like poison to him, and he pours himself another drink.

His mind drifts back to the early 1960s when he began to perform again, in order to make money to send to his family, which was suffering in Cuba because of the Communist revolution. With the backing of a local gangster, Fernando Pérez, he opens a small nightclub, the *Club Havana*, but he loses money because he hires too many friends, and the gangsters take control of it, using it as a place to sell drugs in the neighborhood.

Toward the End, While Listening to the Wistful "Beautiful María of My Soul"

Cesar recalls his most recent affair, when he was nearly sixty. Her name was Lydia Santos. She was in her mid-thirties, and had two children. Cesar began taking her out and buying presents for her children. Even after he determined that he was truly in love with her, he was insecure, always expecting her to leave him for a younger man.

As his health deteriorated, his doctor gave him prescription pain killers, which made him angry and disoriented. He said offensive things to Lydia, and later wondered why he said them. They finally broke up when she had to miss a date with him: she called later to explain that she had taken a child to the emergency room, but Cesar would not accept her excuse.

When I Called the Number

Like the first section, the last section is told by Eugenio. He talks about going to see Desi Arnaz about a year after Cesar's death. Mr. Arnaz remembers Cesar and Nestor well, and has a photograph of himself with them on his wall, along with photos of other celebrities. He starts singing "Beautiful María of My Soul," which he admires, but forgets some words. When he is out of the room, Eugenio has a fantasy that combines the appearance of the ghost of his father, Nestor, and the famed *I Love Lucy* episode.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love is the story of Cesar and Nestor Castillo, two brothers who come to America from Cuba in 1949 in their quest for a better life and the chance to play their mambo music. As the story begins, it is early in the 1960's in New York City and Eugenio Castillo, Nestor Castillo's young son, is being called in from the street by the landlady because a rerun of *I Love Lucy* is about to come on the television. This particular episode is special because Nestor and his brother, Cesar, appear with Desi Arnaz on the show and play the parts of two Cuban brothers playing in the imaginary club of Ricky Ricardo, Arnaz' character on the show.

The Castillo brothers perform a song that has made them popular in New York City, "Beautiful Maria of My Soul," which Nestor has written about a girl he loved and lost. Eugenio runs to the apartment of his uncle Cesar to tell him about the TV show but Cesar is no longer a young man and has spent the day recovering from another long night of playing and singing in a club. Eventually Eugenio is able to rouse Cesar who watches the program through slits of eyes and sees his wonderful brother, Nestor, again standing with Desi Arnaz in all their youthful prowess.

The story switches to Cesar's perspective and he sits in the Hotel Splendour where he has checked himself in with several items including old phonograph records, song lyrics, photographs, cigarettes and liquor. It is Cesar's intention to drink himself to death in this room because he is tired of living with the body of an old man whose machismo is long gone. Cesar looks around the room and thinks that he may have stayed in this room before with one of his girlfriends, Vickie Vane, in the early days of his life in New York. Cesar is overcome with the thoughts of the voluptuous Vickie and his mind wanders to the early days of playing in the band he led called the Mambo Kings.

Cesar and Nestor had come from Cuba in 1949 to escape an abusive father and in the hopes of making a nice living playing their music. Arriving in New York from Havana, the Castillo brothers had been completely unprepared for the harsh realities of life in New York City beginning with the snow that greeted them and soaked through their island shoes and think overcoats. Cesar and Nestor live in an apartment with their cousin, Pablo, and his wife and children. By day the Castillo brothers work in a meat packing plant but by night they play their music in clubs and in every job they can find. Arriving home in the middle of the night, Pablo's wife cooks them huge meals of Cuban food and then they sleep a short while and get up to go to their day jobs.

Pablo warns the brothers that it is love and family which make a man happy, not just playing mambo music but Cesar and Nestor have dreams of being famous musicians which had no place to grow in Cuba so the brothers continue the frantic lifestyle for which only young men have enough energy and drive. The brothers had brought with them from Cuba stacks of music they had written while playing with a small band in

Cuba, the most famous song being "Beautiful Maria of My Soul" written about a girl Nestor had once loved and lost. Nestor still mourns the loss of Maria and the night life of New York City does not really appeal to him and he goes out only at the repeated urgings of Cesar.

Maria is never far from Nestor's mind though and he carries her picture with him at all times and constantly hums the melody of the song which bears her name. Over his lifetime, Nestor will have rewritten the song forty-four times in an attempt at perfection he thinks befitting the beautiful girl. Back in the Castillo brothers' hometown of Santiago de Cuba, Cesar had met a mambo musician named Julian Garcia and soon became a musician in Julian's band. Cesar enjoyed the camaraderie of being part of this band where he first earned his reputation as the Mambo King for his musical and sexual prowess.

More than anything about the association with Julian, Cesar appreciates the sense of family within the band and with Julian's family. It is this sense of belonging and the hope of love which draws Cesar to Julian's niece, Luisa, who is not an exceptionally pretty girl but Cesar senses devotion and a feeling of peace with Luisa. Cesar and Luisa marry, move to Havana and have a daughter whom they name Mariela. Cesar's sense of family is dwarfed by his Latin masculinity and he soon strays claiming that his infidelity is the right of a Cuban man and that Luisa needs to accept this. For awhile Luisa looks the other way but when she learns that one of Cesar's girlfriends is pregnant, Luisa leaves Cesar and takes Mariela and the couple never reconciles.

The story now switches to Nestor's perspective as he recalls a day in 1950 in New York City when he sees a beautiful girl waiting for the same bus he is. Nestor rides the bus with the girl and learns that her name is Delores Fuentes who cleans house for a rich man in the city. Nestor is impressed that Delores is intelligent and beautiful and invites her to come to the Imperial Ballroom the following weekend to dance and hear the Mambo Kings play.

Delores has always been a studious and quiet girl having taken care of her father when just the two of them left Havana for America. Delores never understood the separation between her parents and is angry at her father who goes to the Cuban clubs at night and leaves her alone in the apartment. Finally one night Delores follows her father to one of the clubs and sees him smiling and dancing and knows that her father had sought joy in his life which is the reason for leaving her mother in Cuba.

Eventually Delores' sister, Ana Maria, joins her in New York and Ana Maria loves the nightlife while Delores is content to stay home and read books which transport her to places beyond the walls of the grimy apartment. But on this night, it is Delores who suggests that she and Ana Maria go out dancing because she has met a musician who plays at the Imperial Ballroom. Nestor and Delores connect again that night and soon become inseparable spending time together every moment they can.

Nestor feels very strongly about Delores but cannot get the thought of Maria out of his mind and he thinks about the day he first met her. Nestor had been walking down the

street and heard the sounds of a man and woman fighting and Nestor intervenes so that the woman will not be physically harmed. The woman is Maria and she devotes herself to Nestor and the two fall passionately in love.

This love affair lasts many weeks and Nestor proposes marriage and Maria continually evades the question. Nestor asks Cesar's advice on the situation and Cesar counsels Nestor that he needs to abuse Maria so that she knows that the man in the relationship is the one in charge. Nestor follows Cesar's advice and one day Maria does not show up for a date and Nestor cannot find her at home, at work, or at any of the clubs they had frequented. Finally Maria's landlord tells Nestor that Maria has moved away and Nestor finds her in a little house with the man who had been beating her on the night Nestor came to her rescue. Apparently that man is Maria's husband and there is no hope of reconciliation between Nestor and Maria.

Nestor's thoughts now return to present day and his relationship with Delores who is now pregnant. Nestor is still consumed with passion for Maria but marries Delores out of duty and the hope that a family life will erase any traces of Maria from his mind. Delores has a baby boy who the couple names Eugenio, followed by the birth of a daughter, Leticia, three years later.

It is now 1954 and Nestor is traveling with the Mambo Kings as they perform in cities all across America and he diligently sends letters and gifts to his family but the thought of Maria never leaves him. Back to Cesar's memories, the year is 1955 and the Mambo Kings are hugely popular in New York City clubs and have even had some minor success with some recordings. Cesar basks in the glory and the celebrity but Nestor is plagued by depression and extensive bouts of anxiety which never seem to completely go away. Cesar takes his brother for massages and herbal cleansings but these are only temporary solutions for the tormented Nestor.

Cesar is plagued by his own sort of melancholy in the loss of his daughter who still lives with his ex-wife in Havana. Cesar sends cards and gifts regularly and flies to Havana as much as he can, but the guilt and the loneliness eat at Cesar and no one knows the pain that hides behind the vigorous musician as he beats the conga drums and sings for the patrons of the Latin music clubs.

One night as the Mambo Kings are performing at the Mambo Nine Club, they are pleased to be greeted by Desi Arnaz and his wife, Lucille Ball, who have heard their act and are so impressed that Desi would like Cesar and Nestor to perform the song "Beautiful Maria of My Soul" on the *I Love Lucy* show in Hollywood.

During a conversation over drinks it is revealed that Arnaz comes from the same area as the Castillo brothers and an immediate friendship is struck. Arnaz had also played with Julian Garcia, just like Cesar did, and the men find many things to share. Cesar asks Arnaz and Miss Ball to dinner at Nestor's house where Delores will have prepared huge plates of Cuban food. Arnaz is quick to accept the invitation and the party moves to Nestor's home and Delores is pleased and surprised to host the celebrities in her humble apartment.

A few months later Cesar and Nestor find themselves in Los Angeles for their appearance on the *I Love Lucy* show. Cesar revels in the luxuries and dining made possible by the studio's expense account but Nestor cannot fully relax in anticipation of the appearance on the show. The brothers perform wonderfully on the show and a lifetime friendship is forged with the Castillo brothers and Desi Arnaz. Cesar takes the opportunity to bed as many California girls as possible in their brief stay in Hollywood but Nestor's sense of duty to Delores will not allow him to stray outside the marriage vows.

As the result of their appearance on the Lucy show, Cesar and Nestor achieve instant fame and their monetary fortunes change for the better with a national tour and recording royalties from the performance of "Beautiful Maria of My Soul" by other artists. The song is so popular that royalty payments would continue to arrive for the rest of the brothers' lives. With his new fortune, Cesar purchases a brand new DeSoto and feels as if he has finally arrived to be able to drive such a wonderful vehicle around the streets of New York and impress the women with his new tool of seduction.

One night soon after the purchase of the DeSoto, the Mambo Kings drive to New Jersey to play at a private party. The band plays their normal set of songs with Nestor playing especially brilliantly during his solo of "Beautiful Maria of My Soul." Vicki Vane, Cesar's girlfriend had come along this evening and she and Cesar are anxious to get back to the city for an intimate encounter.

At the end of the evening Nestor slips into the driver's seat of the DeSoto while Cesar and Vicki embrace amorously in the back seat. Before long the car hits a patch of ice and the DeSoto careens off the road and hits a tree and Nestor dies at the site. It is the winter of 1957 and Nestor was only thirty-years-old. Cesar is destroyed at the death of his younger brother and it is dawn before he arrives back in the city to deliver the sad news to Delores, Eugenio and Leticia.

Cesar helps to make the funeral arrangements and meets Vicki for a sexual encounter the day before the funeral because he cannot stand the stress and pain of Nestor's death. Cesar remains living in the same apartment with Delores and the children but finds that he has strong amorous feelings for his brother's widow. Once when Cesar comes home especially drunk he makes a pass at Delores and makes his feelings known but Delores deflects Cesar and soon begins to date an accountant named Pedro.

After Nestor's death, Cesar loses all heart and feeling for the music yet keeps the Mambo Kings together out of habit if nothing else. Cesar hires a trumpet player to replace Nestor and winces in pain every time the new man plays Nestor's solo during "Beautiful Maria of My Soul." Cesar's grief is so great he wishes he could trade places with Nestor so he could be relieved of this unending pain.

Soon the other band members suggest that Cesar take a small vacation and he returns to Cuba for a few weeks to visit his family. Cesar's mother is overjoyed to see her son especially with the death of Nestor still so fresh on her mind. Cesar's other three

brothers are also happy to see Cesar but their father is still reserved at showing any affection and cannot help but taunt Cesar about his failure to be a famous musician that the old man had predicted at the time that Cesar and Nestor left Cuba.

Cesar has only unhappy memories of his father, which more often than not involved some sort of violence ending with Cesar cowering in a corner or under a table to avoid his father's wrath. Cesar even remembers a time when the old man chased Cesar across a field with a machete for some unexplained offense on Cesar's part. As father and son run through the field the old man yells for Cesar to help him because he has impaled his foot on a stake which had been hidden in the weeds. The old man appears to be in severe pain but Cesar hesitates to come closer to his father for fear it is a trick and the old man will surely cut him in half as soon as Cesar is close enough. Eventually Cesar realizes that this is no ruse and he sees the wooden stake protruding through his father's foot. Cesar releases his father and practically carries him home and Cesar thinks that perhaps the argument is over but later that night the old man resumes his attack on Cesar now limited to words instead of a machete due to his wounded condition.

Seeing his mother on this visit is like a balm for the broken Cesar and he asks his mother to wash his hair in the courtyard like she used to do when he was a young boy. This simple act of caring and nurturing so close to his beloved mother does so much to heal Cesar's broken heart. Cesar is also happy to see the other women in the household who were a part of his raising with their household and kitchen duties.

While he is in Havana, Cesar has the opportunity to also visit his daughter, Mariela, who is now thirteen-years-old. Cesar's ex-wife, Luisa, has remarried and is happily pregnant. Luisa tells Cesar of Mariela's intelligence and gift for the ballet which she practices with much passion. Mariela is happy to see Cesar who treats her to meals and pretty dresses during his brief stay. Cesar tries to reassure Mariela that the divorce of her parents had nothing to do with her and that Cesar loves her and always will. Father and daughter part once more with Cesar promising to visit again as soon as he can. Cesar returns to New York and resumes his work but never returns to leading the Mambo Kings.

A short while later Cesar joins the Merchant Marines at the urging of Ana Maria's boyfriend and travels the world for a couple of years. Cesar embraces the opportunity to see different cities and he is particularly fond of the Mediterranean countries because they remind him of his native Cuba. Everywhere he goes during his travels, Cesar finds women for intimate encounters and continues to drown his depression in alcohol. Nevertheless Cesar never forgets his brother's children, Eugenio and Leticia, and sends them picturesque postcards from all his travels so that the children will always know they are loved.

When Cesar returns from his time in the Merchant Marines, he moves back into the apartment with Delores and the children even though Delores is now married to the accountant Pedro. Although it is Cesar's apartment and his name is on the lease, Delores will not allow Cesar and his friends to drink and play music into the wee hours

of the morning like they did when Delores was married to Nestor. Delores asks Cesar to find his own place and move out and he promises that he will but Cesar's sense of hopelessness and aimlessness stretch on into days, weeks and soon months of wandering and depression. As usual, Cesar drowns his sorrows in voluptuous women and alcohol. During this time, Eugenio takes special care to look out for his uncle and even Leticia cannot resist playing with Cesar as if they know their uncle mourns Nestor as much as they do and they need him for the connection to their dead father.

In boredom, Cesar takes a little of his savings and purchases an ice cream cart but ends up giving away most of the product because he always has a soft heart for children. Eventually Cesar sells the ice cream business and buys some new suits, a sign that maybe he is returning to his old self again. One day Cesar sees a "Help Wanted" sign in one of the windows of his apartment building and finds out that the owner, Mrs. Shannon, is looking for a new maintenance man. Cesar approaches Mrs. Shannon about the position and the old woman is pleased to know of Cesar's interest because she has always been enamored with the dashing Cesar.

Mrs. Shannon gives Cesar the job on a trial basis and he moves into one of the vacant apartments which pleases Delores and Pedro. Cesar maintains a close relationship with Nestor's children and has dinner with the family several times a week. Surprisingly Cesar adapts to the janitorial position quite well and becomes comfortable in his basement office surrounded by tools and his Mambo Kings recordings. Cesar makes friends with the tenants and calls begin to come in for Cesar to revive the Mambo Kings and to begin playing music again.

Part 1 Analysis

The author uses the techniques of memory and point of view to tell the story which is not directly related by Cesar but viewed from his perspective and his memories. This writing style can be confusing at first as the narrative switches back and forth frequently from the present to the past but soon it is easy to distinguish between the different timeframes. At times during the book, Cesar's comments regarding the situation he has just remembered will be seen in parentheses as if Cesar is talking to the person about the situation that he has just remembered. One example is Cesar's memory of his failed marriage to Luisa and how he tries to explain to Luisa in his own head how his infidelities are the source of his Latin masculinity and not a direct reflection on her as a person or as a wife. The author also sets apart sections of content specifically directed to the reader in attempts at explanation of cultural and historical elements which will help explain some cultural elements as well as motivations and behaviors of the characters. This can also be a little unnerving until the reader understands the purpose of these interjections and adapts to them.

In addition to the memory technique, there is also some foreshadowing particularly related to Nestor who becomes increasingly obsessed with death and when passing a cemetery each time, remarks to Cesar, "There's the future." Nestor also tells Maria that he "doesn't feel long for this world sometimes." In retrospect after Nestor's death, Cesar

thinks about these instances and wonders to himself whether Nestor actually lost control of the car that fateful night or whether he directed the car at the tree and crashed intentionally wanting a final release from his emotional pain.

The language of the characters is kept in a Latin dialect, and although not written in Spanish, there is a style and rhythm of the dialogue that accurately portrays the broken English of the Cuban natives living in America. The author also paints the characters with stereotypical Latin male characteristics, particularly Cesar, through his conquests of almost all the women with whom he comes in contact. There is an abundance of raw language related to Cesar's sexual encounters and conquests but it is important to Cesar's character because his sexuality is his identity as a Latin male.

Nestor is the opposite of Cesar with his brooding introspective personality that today would probably be diagnosed as depression, but in the middle of the twentieth century there was no discussion of weakness in males, particularly emotional weakness and particularly Latin males. The author even makes a side note about Nestor's depression needing clinical treatment but the time period in which he lived would not entertain the thought of treatment as appropriate. Stylistically, the author uses many similes and metaphors throughout the book to help explain his point with visual imagery that provides potent descriptions. Some examples include the description of the women of the Cesar's musical friends who he describes as "squealing, guitar-shaped wives."

Nestor watches the stars on his sleepless nights and wonders what they think about the human beings below, "What were they doing up there? Murmuring and sighing and looking down at love's follies, the way they did in songs? Were they lonely, or sad, longing to break free of the darkness that nurtured them? Or were they destined to remoteness, always to search for happiness - like Nestor?" Of course the stars cannot do these things but by assigning them human characteristics, the author adds a lyricism and another creative dimension to the piece.

In another example of describing the differences between Cesar and Nestor in the area of their sexual conquests, the author succinctly makes the point by saying "Despite his brother's constant seduction of women, Nestor wore his faithfulness like a badge of sainthood." The author describes nature many times in the novel with beautiful visual imagery such as the way Cesar mourns Nestor's death by saying "...he sometimes felt that the universe could be peeled away like the skin of an orange, revealing paradise, where his poor brother had gone."

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Cesar's attentions move from memories to the current as he hears a couple in the next room. The man next door knocks on Cesar's door to ask if Cesar has any alcohol he can buy from him as the couple has run out. Cesar offers up one of the bottles he has and the man invites Cesar to the room next door to meet his woman. Cesar is struck by the beauty of the Negro woman and stays for a short time but returns to his own room where he can hear the noise from the couple making love through the thin walls.

Cesar continues to drink throughout the night and thinks about his doctor's advice about stopping the alcohol consumption, which is slowly killing him. After so many years of alcohol abuse, the liquor is like a poison to Cesar's organs, which are failing. Cesar cannot or will not stop drinking and is careening toward death with every drink. With failing limbs and organs, Cesar is hospitalized in desperate condition but cannot resist trying to seduce the nurses by leering at them and leaving his hospital gown open indiscreetly.

The story turns again to Cesar's memories as he recalls what it was that returned him to playing music after his period of depression over Nestor's death. The music begins again for Cesar not for any emotional or spiritual reason but financial ones. Cesar's remaining brothers in Cuba had written to Cesar asking for money because life in Cuba under the new leader, Fidel Castro, is very difficult and they cannot make a decent income to survive any longer.

Between his regular maintenance job and his night gigs playing music, Cesar hides in his basement workshop mourning the changes which are now running rampant in Cuba and feels helpless to aid his family's distress. Cesar also wants to get his daughter, Mariela, released from the strict regime of the revolution but Mariela is now involved as an artistic director of a ballet company and does not want to leave. Mariela's stepfather is an official close to the Castro regime which affords Mariela and her mother the comforts which are denied to other Cubans.

Cesar continues to reminisce about people and events in his life and he thinks about the time he reconnected with an old friend, Fernando Perez, who is now a notorious gangster in the Latin community in New York City. Perez remembers kindnesses Cesar had shown to him when they were younger and would like to help Cesar now but there is nothing Cesar wants or needs. One day, however, Cesar finds a way to access Perez' offer of help when a local Irish pub becomes available for sale and Perez helps fund the purchase so that Cesar can convert the pub into a mambo club called The Club Havana. The renovation of the club and the new venue for performing mambo musicians briefly energizes the lagging spirits of the aging Mambo King.

During this time Cesar continues to host young Cuban musicians who have escaped to New York in search of new lives much like he and Nestor did years ago. Cesar houses the young men and provides money and temporary jobs in the club until the young men can get established. The routine of maintaining his regular job and running The Club Havana at night soon takes its toll on Cesar whose exhaustion leads to his hiring Eugenio to help with maintenance at the apartment building. The dream of the club is soon dashed too, as Perez can no longer abide the financial losses suffered from Cesar's indiscriminate generosity to others who are down on their luck.

Perez buys out Cesar's interests in the mambo club and converts the establishment to a rock and jazz venue which breaks Cesar's heart but Perez is a businessman intent on recouping the financial losses by offering a musical choice more consistent with what people like today. It also comes to Cesar's attention that the club is a front for drug sales but Cesar cannot do anything to stop the illegal activities because the club is no longer his. Cesar now thinks about his own decision to die and he begins to say goodbye to the people whom he has loved in his life. Cesar visits Bernardito Mandelbaum, an old friend who had worked with Cesar and Nestor at the meat packing plant during their early days in New York. Cesar gives some old Mambo King recordings to Bernardito who is pleased to rekindle the old friendship not knowing that Cesar will never see him again.

Cesar's hardest goodbye is to his nephew, Eugenio, whom Cesar invites out for dinner and drinks one night. It is important to Cesar that Eugenio knows how much Cesar loves him and Cesar cannot help but worry that Eugenio has inherited Nestor's melancholy but there is nothing Cesar can do at this point and simply asks Eugenio not to forget Cesar and soon Eugenio is on the subway headed home again as Cesar watches him disappear from his life. Drifting into another memory, Cesar thinks about the waning days of his life, which he spent as a mambo teacher to young musicians who want to learn from the Mambo King.

Cesar continues to play at random club engagements and at restaurants especially at the Mamey Tree Restaurant owned by an old Cuban friend, Don Emilio, who is now confined to a wheelchair. One morning Cesar returns to the restaurant to retrieve his guitar and Don Emilio sends him upstairs where Don's wife, Carmen, has placed the guitar in their apartment for safekeeping. Carmen seduces Cesar who has momentary pangs of guilt but is unable to stop himself from the inappropriate behavior.

In 1967 two of Cesar's three remaining brothers finally escape from Cuba and settle in Miami where Cesar visits a few times. Cesar cannot help but notice how his brothers are content to become old men and sit in their lawn chairs as life passes them by so Cesar chooses to remain in New York City where Cesar can relive his life through his friends and memories and still feel that he is not giving in to the ravages of old age. Cesar continues his seduction of women who enter his life thrilled to be with the famous Cesar Castillo, the Mambo King. One woman in particular Cesar remembers is an unmarried woman, forty-years-old, whose virginity Cesar takes through rape in the woman's apartment. The woman is devastated by Cesar's actions but Cesar justifies his behavior by telling the woman that it was way past time for her to have enjoyed sex.

Another woman Cesar dated for awhile, Celia, wanted to be the one who would land the elusive Cesar Castillo through marriage but Cesar resisted Celia's efforts to restrain him. One night Celia, frustrated at Cesar's refusals at being domesticated, pushes him into a chair and restrains him with rope to prevent his going out. Cesar would not be tied down in any way and that night ended that relationship. The string of women continues and the faces begin to blur... Estela, Frieda, Cecilia, Maria, Anastasia and on and on.

Part 2 Analysis

The theme of self-destruction for the sake of machismo is very clear in this section of the story as Cesar is near death in the hotel room where he has gone to drink himself to death. Even though the doctor has informed Cesar that alcohol is poison to his internal organs, the Mambo King cannot stop his alcoholic lifestyle and ultimately hopes that the drinking will end his life soon so that Cesar will find release from the emotional and physical pain which have plagued him for many years.

It is not part of the Latin male personality to ask for help and Cesar is not about to begin at this point, preferring to die in his own way without intervention of doctors or family members who do not understand that Cesar cannot live without the destructive lifestyle which defined his life. The same machismo which will not be told to stop drinking also drives Cesar's unrelenting pursuit of women with whom he never seems to make a lasting connection. The author points out the stereotypical Latin male persona of sexual prowess and superiority particularly in the example of the forty-year-old woman who loses her virginity when Cesar rapes her in her bedroom. Cesar rationalizes that he has done the woman a favor because she should have been enjoying sexual activity for quite awhile. Cesar is incredulous, at the woman's tears and cannot understand why she is upset and does not wish to see him again.

Ironically it is Cesar's sexual prowess that is the only physical attribute that does not fail him in spite of his diminishing appeal to women as he ages. It is also ironic that Pablo had told Cesar and Nestor a long time ago that it is home and family which make a man happy in life, not mambo music. Cesar has lived to understand Pablo's meaning and now it is too late for Cesar to cultivate a meaningful relationship and have a family of his own.

Cesar's life has not been without love however. Cesar was always generous with his daughter and Nestor's children as well as the other members of his family. The new Cuban-Americans who found their way to Cesar's door were also well provided for through Cesar's generosity and found ways to show their gratitude throughout the years.

Stylistically the author continues with graphic and sometimes rhythmic images to fully develop character moods and situations. When Cesar loses interest in his life, all he can hear in his head is the music, especially drums which the author describes in many types to show the unrelenting pounding of the sameness of every boring day..."coconuts-falling-out-of-the-trees-and-thumping-against-the-ground drums, a-fat-

man-slapping-his-own-belly drums, plates-and-coffee-cups-shattering-in-a-stack drums, beautiful-women-shaking-their-life-giving-hips drums..."

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when one of the young Cubans who Cesar is hosting marvels at New York City for the first time and tells Cesar that it is easy to see how someone could get lost here. Cesar asks if the young man means in spirit or in the streets and the young man means lost in spirit. There is a very strong possibility that the young man will suffer the fate of Nestor or Cesar whose own spirits were diminished by life in America and the whole pattern will repeat itself.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Cesar's job as maintenance man for the apartment building was supposed to have been a temporary position but Cesar realizes that he has held the job for twenty years. This fact is hard to believe given Cesar's flamboyant personality and personal style but day follows day and Cesar gains friends among the tenants and becomes content as a man can be without a wife and family of his own. Cesar's generosity over the years has left him with little money saved, employed in a job with no health benefits, and with no one to care for or to care for him every day. Cesar's health is also failing yet he refuses to pay attention to his doctor's warnings especially about the excessive alcohol usage.

Cesar continues to play mambo music at private parties and one night during a break is approached by a woman nearly half his sixty-years named Lydia. Lydia knows of Cesar by hearing her family speak of the Cesar Castillo, the Mambo King, many years ago. Cesar is flattered by the attention and is not sure how to proceed when Lydia provides her phone number before leaving the event that night.

Cesar waits a few days to call Lydia because he does not want to be made a fool; after all, Lydia is less than half his age and Cesar cannot imagine what she can want with him now that he is an old man. On the other hand, Cesar is still amorous at heart and cannot let an opportunity for love pass by so he calls Lydia and makes plans for a date for dinner and dancing. Lydia keeps Cesar waiting at the subway station for nearly a half hour due to child care issues and Cesar thinks that in his younger days he never would have stayed but Cesar is no longer young and does not want to miss the opportunity to know Lydia and the possibilities for friendship or maybe love.

Soon Cesar is seeing Lydia on a regular basis mostly in the evenings after Lydia got off from her job at a factory where she drilled holes in eyeglass frames. Cesar cannot believe his good fortune when he finds that Lydia is sincerely interested in him as a person and not for being the Mambo King. Cesar also grows fond of Lydia's children and brings gifts regularly and buys food and cooks dinner as if he has a ready-made family.

One Sunday afternoon Cesar offers to perform at a street festival sponsored by the local Catholic church and Cesar watches from the stage while Lydia dances with a young man. At the first opportunity, Cesar roughly pulls Lydia aside and demands that she never dance with another man because he will not be cuckolded in front of his family and friends. Lydia agrees to Cesar's terms and their relationship is mended and Cesar soon introduces Lydia to his family including Delores and Nestor's children. Delores is pleased that Cesar has someone to watch over him now. Delores is now divorced from Pedro so seeing Cesar with a new woman strikes her with jealousy and she chides Cesar for taking up with a woman who is so much younger than he is. Cesar

does not take the verbal bait and asks Delores to be nice to Lydia because she is Cesar's last chance for love.

Cesar is a happy man again despite the aches and pains that plague his body. Cesar becomes so happy being with Lydia that he no longer wants to take any music jobs preferring to stay home with her. Lydia loves Cesar's passion but does not know if she loves the entire Cesar, possibly only the fact that marriage would help her escape from the factory job which she hates.

The couple is happy for a long time until Cesar's physical ailments begin to obliterate everything good about the relationship. Cesar even begins to have nightmares and dreams where he sees five women who had been helped take care of him as a child in his mother's home. The women tell Cesar that they know he is very tired and soon it will be time for him to die. This is a recurring dream and Cesar even sees the five women in his hospital room a few months later repeating their prophetic chant. Soon Cesar is wracked with pain in his intestines and asks a pharmacist friend for narcotics which he combines with whisky in order to get through the nights. Cesar begins to have more visions such as Desi Arnaz pulling away from a curb in a cab and Cesar even thinks he sees Nestor walking down the street.

Cesar will not go to the doctor which Lydia encourages him to do and is concerned only that Lydia will stay with him and not leave for a younger man. One evening Lydia did not show up at Cesar's apartment for a date and did not call until eleven o'clock that night to say that she had been in the emergency room with her son and could not call until this time. Cesar rudely tells her that the relationship is over because he does not take such rude behavior from any woman. Later on Cesar cools and returns to reason and realizes it is just the pain and the constant routine of drugs and alcohol which make him angry, mean and then melancholy.

Cesar's physical health continues to decline and Lydia can no longer bear the diminished man Cesar has become and little by little finds excuses not to spend time with Cesar until eventually Lydia has removed from Cesar's life completely. From the bed in the Hotel Splendour Cesar recalls the people in his life through an alcohol-induced haze and when he is found dead the next morning, there is next to his body a handwritten note on which he has written the lyrics to the song "Beautiful Maria of My Soul."

The novel ends like it began, with narrative from Eugenio's perspective. Eugenio has called Desi Arnaz in Hollywood a year after Cesar's death. Arnaz had sent condolences at the time of Cesar's funeral and told Eugenio to come see him in Hollywood any time. Eugenio had hesitated to call Arnaz at first because Eugenio did not want Arnaz' invitation to evaporate into dust like so many things in this life had done.

Arnaz is pleased to see Eugenio and shows him around his pink Belmont ranch home complete with bougainvillea climbing up stone walls that remind Eugenio so much of Cuba. Everything behind the gated driveway is so perfect that Eugenio almost expects to hear the theme song from *I Love Lucy* come drifting out of the house. Arnaz offers

Eugenio lunch and leads the young man into the house past framed autographed pictures of stars from the movies and television. Eugenio looks past all the fine furnishings and photographs and sees the blue of the Pacific Ocean right outside the door. Eugenio presents Arnaz with old recordings of the Mambo Kings, items that clearly please Arnaz, who tells Eugenio that Nestor and Cesar had been really good fellows and good songwriters. Arnaz begins to sing "Beautiful Maria of My Soul" and hums when he cannot remember the words.

Arnaz and Eugenio share pleasant conversation for a short time and then Arnaz asks Eugenio if he believes in the afterlife. Eugenio cannot say one way or the other but Arnaz remembers when he thought life would last forever and tells Eugenio of being held in his mother's arms as a young boy. Eugenio thinks that he wants to fall on his knees and beg Arnaz to save him, to hold him tight and tell Eugenio that he loves him. When Arnaz retreats to another room to take a phone call, Eugenio sits in the beautiful home and thinks to the *I Love Lucy* episode where Nestor and Cesar appeared as two young men newly arrived from Cuba.

Eugenio imagines that his father and Uncle Cesar are sitting on the sofa across from him and then with the rattle of coffee cups and saucers Lucille Ball also enters the room to serve coffee. Nestor tells Eugenio that he is happy to see him again and his Uncle Cesar smiles. Arnaz returns to the room but he is no longer a white-haired old man but rather the vital Desi Arnaz of the 1950's. Arnaz asks Nestor and Cesar how things are in Cuba and Eugenio rises from his seat, crosses the room and sits next to his father and hugs him. Eugenio is pleased to find that his father is real flesh and blood again, not the ethereal vapors he expected to touch. Eugenio begins to feel himself fall through a space which is his father's heart and feels the comfort of affection.

Eugenio can see the scene from the famous *I Love Lucy* episode play out right in front of his eyes just like Eugenio had watched on television for so many years. Eugenio dreams that Cesar's heart swells to the size of the satin heart from the *I Love Lucy* show logo and then floats over the street where Cesar had lived until the heart lights at the church where a funeral is taking place. Instead of organ music the sounds of mambo float out onto the street as the coffin is carried out to the street. Another heart escapes from the coffin and floats higher and higher, expanding until it floats close to the other heart.

Part 3 Analysis

This section is poignant and melancholy due to Cesar's deliberate self destruction. It is as if Cesar's will to fully live died with Nestor and Cesar struggles in vain to recapture his joie de vivre and finally gives in to the inevitability of his demise. Cesar's death is particularly poignant because he has not really achieved anything of any consequence, having plowed through his life indulging in women and alcohol. There are no real bonds created with anyone, just a series of irrelevant characters met in bars and hotels. In the end, Cesar watches this parade of characters in his mind, and realizing that the release from emotional and physical pain is near, dies with a smile on his face.

Eugenio's narrative is heartbreakingly touching too in that he visits Desi Arnaz and finds himself wanting to embrace Arnaz and to be told that he is loved as if Arnaz is the embodiment of his dead father. Perhaps Arnaz is Eugenio's only link to his own Cuban heritage and Eugenio needs some connection. Apparently the bond is strong enough to elicit the appearance of Nestor and Cesar as well as a much younger Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball. It is not clear whether the appearances are apparitions or part of a dream but it does not matter because the appearances feel real to Eugenio and perhaps the boy can begin to heal from the loss of his male relatives and begin to find his own identity.

Cesar and Nestor are joined again, this time in death, as Eugenio witnesses the huge satin heart float out and away from Cesar's coffin to join Nestor's heart already floating in the sky. Again it is not clear if the image is a dream or the product of an overactive imagination. What is important is that Eugenio now knows that his father and his uncle are joined again and they watch him and love him from wherever they are. The bonds of love are unbreakable and Eugenio begins to understand Arnaz' question about the afterlife and knows that the aging Cuban entertainer had offered him the gift of seeing life and love from another perspective.

Characters

Desi Arnaz

Desario Arnaz is a real-life person who plays a crucial role as a character in the book. He was born in the Oriente province of Cuba and became a famous television star. When he hears the Castillo brothers in a nightclub, he invites them to perform on his television sitcom, *I Love Lucy*. Cesar remembers having Desi and his wife, Lucille Ball, to their apartment for some Cuban food, spending the night eating and drinking with them, but he questions whether his memory is accurate. In the last section of the book, Nestor's son Eugenio goes to visit Mr. Arnaz, and finds that he remembers the Castillos very well and has a picture of them on his wall.

Lucille Ball

Lucille Ball is a real person as well as a character in the novel. She was the star of the show *I Love Lucy*, which, in the book, the Castillo brothers appear on in the 1950s. Lucy is hardly mentioned in *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*. In her few scenes, she is gracious but slightly impatient with her husband, Desi Arnaz, who wants to spend time talking about Cuba with Cesar and Nestor.

Cesar Castillo

One final memory Cesar has is from his childhood: he wanted to be a musician so badly that he would pay a local musician for lessons with rum that he stole from his father. His father always beat him mercilessly for stealing, and treated him badly the rest of his life. Cesar also remembers his mother, who was at her happiest when dancing in the kitchen. Then he says goodbye to a succession of people who have been important in his life. He is found the next morning with a drink in his hand, a smile on his face, and a handwritten copy of the lyrics to "Beautiful María of My Soul."

Cesar is the focus of this novel. Except for a few pages at the beginning and a few at the end that are narrated by his nephew Eugenio, the book concerns Cesar sitting in a room at the Hotel Splendour in 1980, drinking and listening to the recordings he and his group, the Mambo Kings, made in the 1940s and 50s. He is sixty-two years old, depressed because his health is failing him, and purposely drinking himself to death because he can no longer drink or have sex, which were his main pursuits in life.

Cesar's reminiscences bounce around in no particular order, covering how he was abused by his father back in Cuba, how he left home to be a musician, working first in the capital city of Oriente province and then in Havana, before emigrating to New York City in 1949. As the leader of the Mambo Kings band, he lived the good life, meeting famous people, drinking and playing music all night, and having sexual encounters with dozens of women, some of which he thinks may have occurred in the same room he

currently occupies, before the Hotel Splendor became run down. The high point of his professional career was the brothers' appearance on *I Love Lucy*, which made them famous and led to high sales figures for their most popular album, *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love*, which sold ten thousand copies. After that, his life had a few problems, but for the most part he was where he wanted to be.

When his brother Nestor died in 1957, Cesar's life fell apart. He became uninterested in performing music, eventually taking a job as the superintendent of his building. He became sexually infatuated with his brother's widow. He lets his health decline, drinking recklessly, to the point where a doctor admitted him to into the hospital, warning that he faced a breakdown of his ravaged digestive system if he did not change his lifestyle. In his sixties, he had a love affair with a woman in her thirties, Lydia Santos. While mixing medication and alcohol, Cesar became abusive to her, and she stopped seeing him. With nothing to live for, he gave away prized possessions and came to the Hotel Splendour for a night of drinking and reminiscing. He is found dead in the morning with a drink in his hand and a smile on his face, having written out the lyrics to the haunting song Nestor worked his whole life on, "Beautiful María of My Soul."

Delores Castillo

Although he cannot forget María, whom he fell in love with in Cuba, Nestor marries Delores in New York, and they have two children together. She is a voracious reader and something of an introvert, having come to New York from Cuba when she was thirteen and taken care of her hardworking and hard-drinking father until he died. When she marries Nestor, she moves into the apartment the Castillo brothers share; after Nestor's death, she becomes uncomfortable because Cesar keeps trying to make love to her, and so she asks him to move out. When the children are grown up and her second husband dies, she goes back to school, something that Nestor had prevented her from doing. She has an affair with a young man who is also a student, and when he breaks off their relationship she wanders home through a bad neighborhood and is mugged and almost raped.

Eugenio Castillo

Eugenio is the son of Nestor Castillo. He is the narrator of the book's brief introduction, in which he remembers being a child and watching his father and uncle on an *I Love Lucy* rerun with Cesar, and of the last section, in which he goes to visit Desi Arnaz in California. Throughout the story, he is mentioned from Cesar's perspective as a moody art student and briefly as a trumpet player, although he gives up music early.

Leticia Castillo

Leticia is Nestor's daughter. She is seldom mentioned in the book except when, as a young woman, she develops a crush on one of the young Cuban musicians whom Cesar helps, and has her heart broken by him. Later she marries and has children.

Mariela Castillo

Mariela is Cesar's daughter in Cuba. Mariela's mother, Luisa, leaves him soon after the baby is born because he is having affairs with other women. He constantly sends gifts to his daughter from America, and returns to Cuba to visit her when she is thirteen, but he never sees her after that. They nearly meet in the 1970s, when she is in her thirties and appearing in Montreal with a Cuban ballet troupe, but Cesar is old and finds himself too ill to travel to Montreal, so they talk on the phone for one last time.

Nestor Castillo

Nestor is the more sensitive of the two Mambo Kings, younger than Cesar by ten years. As a boy, he has a strong bond with his mother, but he leaves to follow his older brother's success. He meets María in Havana. They have a brief but tempestuous affair, during which Nestor follows Cesar's advice to be more *macho*, ordering her around. She leaves him and goes back to her home village. Heartbroken, he writes a song about her, which eventually evolves into "Beautiful María of My Soul." Over the rest of his lifetime, Nestor writes forty-four versions of the song.

After moving to New York, Nestor joins Cesar in forming the Mambo Kings, but he is shy and for the most part just follows his outgoing brother. He meets Dolores Fuentes at a bus stop, falls in love with her, marries her and has two children with her, but still he cannot help thinking about María. One afternoon he buys a book called *Forward America!* at a newsstand and for the rest of his life he reads and rereads it, marking passages in the margins. It is an inspirational book, meant to tell readers how to lead happy, fulfilled lives. Even when the Mambo Kings make a fortune on the recording of the song they played on the *I Love Lucy* show, Nestor keeps his job at the meat packing factory.

Nestor dies in 1957, while driving Cesar's car back from a coming-out party in New Jersey, with Cesar and his date in the back seat. His funeral is attended by some of the most important Mambo musicians, and others send floral bouquets. Thoughts of Nestor haunt Cesar throughout his life.

Ana María Fuentes

Ana María is Delores' sister, and remains a part of Cesar Castillo's life throughout the decades.

Delores Fuentes

See Delores Castillo

Julián García

Julián is the leader of the band in Santiago de Cuba. He gives Cesar his first break in music when he is just nineteen. In one of Cesar's drunken memories, he thinks that he may have met Desi Arnaz when he came to audition for Julián's band, that Arnaz was the singer who was leaving on the day that he came to audition, but he soon questions whether that was the way it happened at all.

Luisa García

Luisa is the niece of Julián García, the orchestra leader whom Cesar works with in Cuba. Cesar marries her in 1943, and they have a daughter, Mariela. When one of Cesar's lovers confronts Luisa, she divorces him and eventually remarries.

Dr. Victor López

Dr. López is the person who puts Cesar in the hospital for a few weeks, and tells him he will be dead soon if he does not quit drinking.

Bernardito Mandelbaum

A lifelong friend of Cesar, Bernardito is neither a musician nor a Cuban, but an artist who is enraptured with Cuban culture. He designs the covers for several of the Mambo Kings albums. He has an extensive collection of Latin music. When he meets a woman, Fifi, at a Mambo Kings party, he falls in love with her. He moves in with her, but does not marry her for twenty-five years, because his parents disapprove.

Miguel Montoya

The pianist for the Mambo Kings and their musical arranger, Miguel Montoya is described as "elegant," and as a sharp dresser. In later life, Montoya makes a fortune by moving to Hollywood and playing with the commercial orchestra "Ten Thousand Strings," and also writing scores for cheap Mexican horror films.

Fernando Pérez

Fernando is an old friend of Cesar's, a gangster. When Cesar is poor, Fernando offers to back him financially in opening a bar. The place that they open is the *Club Havana*. It is successful, but it loses money because of Cesar's freewheeling practices, so Fernando buys him out. Under the control of Fernando's organized crime associates, the place gains a reputation for selling drugs in the neighborhood, until, after Fernando's death, it closes down.

Frankie Pérez

Frankie is from the New York neighborhood where Cesar and Nestor live. They meet him when he is dancing at a hall where the Mambo Kings are playing early in their career. He remains a friend of Cesar's throughout his life, after the band has broken up.

María Rivera

María is the subject of Nestor's song "Beautiful María of My Soul." When he meets her, she is a dancer in the chorus line at the Havana Hilton. He first sees her when, walking down the street, he finds a man abusing her and fights with the man. Nestor and María have a torrid love affair, but after a while Nestor takes his brother's advice and starts treating her badly, being verbally and physically rough. Soon after, she disappears from town. He goes to the village where she grew up and finds that she has married the man whom she was fighting with when they met. Through the years, Nestor continues to write María letters, proclaiming his love.

Lydia Santos

When Cesar is sixty-two, he begins an affair with Lydia Santos, who is thirty-five. She has two children, works at a menial job, and lives in a bad neighborhood. Cesar spends money on her and her children, but he finds it difficult to believe that she is actually interested in him romantically. He becomes jealous, and the medication that he takes as his health fails him makes him say rude things to her. One night Lydia does not show up for a date, explaining that she spent the night in the emergency room because her son was ill; Cesar refuses to believe her, and, with his feelings hurt, he quits seeing her.

Mrs. Shannon

Mrs. Shannon is the landlady of the building that Cesar lives in from 1949 to 1980. At first, she dislikes him, but after his appearance on the *I Love Lucy* show she becomes susceptible to his flirting, and gives him a job as the building's supervisor.

Vanna Vane

The Castillo brothers meet Vanna Vane when she is a cigarette girl at the Palm Nightclub. Cesar has an affair with her, and he has her photographed for the cover of one of the group's records. Through the years, he continues to date Vanna, and throughout his night in the Hotel Splendour he thinks of her, wondering if they ever had sex in that same hotel room. Vanna becomes pregnant by him, and he takes her to get an abortion. Eventually, she marries a man named Friedman who works for the post office, living with him and her two sons in Coop City in the Bronx, wondering whatever happened to Cesar.

Themes

Ideal Love

In *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Nestor Castillo is characterized by his devotion to the memory of María, with whom he had a love affair during his early twenties. Their affair was over after only a few months, and Hijuelos gives readers several reasons to doubt that the love between Nestor and María was really as deep as he remembers it to be. For one thing, the book refers to several uncomfortable moments between them, probably because she is trying to conceal her relationship with the man she eventually marries. Nestor does not really know much about her. Also, he does not seem to understand his own motive for being attracted to her. The novel leads into their first meeting with a description of Nestor wandering among the prostitutes along the waterfront and thinking how he could only sleep well, comfortably, in the arms of his mother, who was also named María. He is not aware of the simple psychological fact that he might be projecting onto María the dancer a purity that he associates with his mother, missing the fact that he does not really understand her at all.

The clearest indicator that Nestor's love for María is idealized and not actual can be seen in the way that he cannot relate his romance to real life. As a composer, he is limited to writing just one song, going back to rewrite it over and over, obsessed. He stays up nights rewriting his song about María and writing letters to her, neglecting the relationship that he should have with his wife and two children. He lives in a fantasy, consistently reliving a love that never was as solid and true as he has made it to be in his mind.

Machismo

Both of the Castillo brothers struggle to project a sense of machismo, which is especially important to men in Spanish-speaking countries such as Cuba. Machismo is a personality that emphasizes traits that are generally associated with masculinity, such as physical strength, aggression, and sexual virility. The term often has a negative connotation, because macho behavior often entails dominating and abusing women. It is also negative because it is often achieved through presenting a false front or adapting a macho pose, rather than being an honest characteristic that occurs naturally as part of one's true personality.

The insincerity often associated with machismo is clearly shown in the way that Nestor treats, and loses, María. On their first night together, Nestor tells her "everything about his short life, his childhood illnesses, his sense of unworthiness, his fears that he could never be a real macho in the kingdom of machos." Later, his uncertainty about her grows and Cesar advises him to be more macho with her: "A little abuse never hurt a romance. Women like to know who's the boss." Soon after, Nestor adapts a macho approach, María leaves him, going back to her old abusive fiancé.

Cesar's long life is spent pursuing machismo. Much of the novel bounces from one description to the next of his sexual conquests or graphic thoughts about women as conquests. Cesar's constant focus on affirming his machismo through sexual activity becomes increasingly tragic as he grows older and realizes that women do not see him as a lover anymore. When he falls in love, at age 60, with a woman in her thirties, his need to be macho defeats him: Lydia appears to be happy with Cesar, but he is insecure, focusing on any sign that she lacks respect for him and breaking up with her over a minor issue because his masculine pride is offended.

Success and Failure

The two sections of this novel narrated by Cesar's nephew Eugenio show readers the different fates that can befall musicians. The first, at the beginning of the book, shows the oncegreat Cesar Castillo as a failure, a washed-up has-been. Readers can tell that he once held some degree of fame because a neighbor sees him on the television (on a show taped so long ago that she has not entirely certain that it is him) and because the stacks of records that he knocks to the floor are ones that Cesar recorded. Still, the Cesar Castillo presented in this section, stumbling drunkenly around his apartment in the middle of the afternoon, shows no sign that he might once have been a television or recording star. Because this section is in Eugenio's eyes, Cesar looks like more of a failure than he does in the sections that present his life from his point of view.

At the end of the book, Eugenio meets Desi Arnaz, who shows all of the signs of commercial success. He has a large, expensive home, with horses and several gardens that overlook the Pacific Ocean. He is still involved in business deals, which is indicated by the fact that he excuses himself to "take care of some telephone calls."

Success and failure intersect in a shared wistfulness about the past. Cesar, drunk in a hotel room, listens to his old songs and reminisces about the people he has known, while Arnaz wanders around his huge estate singing phrases from his old songs, thinking briefly about the fact that his life will soon end, but then going on with his business.

In drawing the connection between the two, Hijuelos does nothing to diminish Arnaz's success, but instead he sheds a new light on Cesar's apparent failure. Eugenio feels comfortable in Arnaz's house, recognizing, for the first time in his life, the common denominator between Cesar, Nestor, and Arnaz, connecting Arnaz's graciousness with the modesty of his father and uncle. Once he learns to see beyond success and failure, he is able to accept their love in a way that he could not before.

Self-Destruction

Both of the Mambo Kings, Cesar and Nestor Castillo, are responsible for the ends of their own unhappy lives. Nestor's death occurs because of an accident that could have happened to anyone, a car sliding on a patch of ice. Still, there is no doubt that he had little value for his life, skulking around in sadness and barely involved in his

surroundings. The accident that causes his death is presented as a logical conclusion for Nestor who, at thirty-one, has nothing left to live for anyway, with his days and nights spent writing the same song over and over.

Cesar's self-destruction takes longer, and it is more deliberate. After Nestor's death he turns away from the best things in his life and begins a thirty-year downward spiral. He quits music for several years, drinks constantly, and finds more desperation than pleasure in sex. As the narrative points out, he tries "to keep his brother alive by becoming like him."

Knowing that his doctor has forbidden him to drink liquor, likening it to poison, Cesar gives away his most valuable possessions and spends his last night in the Hotel Splendour drinking himself to death. After thirty years of decline, Cesar, like Nestor, finds himself left with nothing but memories. When he is found dead in the morning, there is a "tranquil smile" on his face, indicating that his death has been a release from a life that he wanted to escape.

Style

Point of View

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love is told from two points of view. The first is that of Eugenio, who tells of his experiences in the first person, using "I" and "me." Eugenio is the narrator of the book's opening and closing sections, starting with a childhood memory that he has of his uncle Cesar and ending with a fantasy of the Castillo brothers' hearts being reunited after death.

Most of the book is from Cesar's point of view. The sections that concern him are told in the third person: not using Cesar's voice, but still relating the details of his experience as he would have observed them. From Cesar's point of view, women are described in terms of their sexual attributes, musicians in terms of their talent, and political events in terms of how they affect Cuban farmers. Readers are therefore given a biased view of the world, and can only experience unbiased reality in brief glimpses. An example of this is the way that Cesar's daughter Mariela shows little interest in him, even though he feels that he is going to great lengths to be a good father. There are also places where his memory of events is questioned, such as when, after describing his first meeting with Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball, the narrative explains that it may not have happened that way after all.

The point of view of the book is inconsistent, often relaying information to readers that Cesar would not know. At Nestor's funeral, for instance, the narrative gives a long paragraph of Dolores' thoughts, setting it off in parentheses to indicate that it is outside of the normal narrative flow. There are, however, no parentheses around the details given about Nestor's romance with María, details that would have been outside of Cesar's range of experience. Background about characters, such as the story of Dolores' encounter with the man who put on the beauty pageant and Mrs. Shannon's growing attraction to Cesar, are told directly to readers, despite the fact that Cesar would not have been aware of these details.

Structure

This book is divided into five sections. The first and last balance each other: each is short, less than ten pages, and consists of Eugenio Castillo discussing influential musicians, one who has sunk into obscurity and another who revels in fame. Between these two sections, there are two parts that are also balanced against each other. "In the Hotel Splendour, 1980" and "Sometime Later in the Night in the Hotel Splendour" are referred to, like an old vinyl record, as "Side A" and "Side B."

The symmetry of these two sets of pairs is broken, however, with the inclusion of a fifth section, titled "Toward the End, While Listening to the Wistful 'Beautiful María of My Soul.' " This section is conspicuous because it does not have a corresponding section to

balance out against, as the other sections do. It follows the narrative thread that runs through "Side A" and "Side B," but, following the "record" symbolism, it could not be "Side C," since records are flat and do not have a third side.

The events that Cesar thinks about in this uneven section cover his physical decline, which leads to his decision to drink himself to death, and the fulfillment of that plan. The fact that it extends beyond the "Side A" and "Side B" structure could mean that Cesar's life has gone beyond his musical identity, that he has transcended the Mambo King personality he once made for himself and risen, or sunk, into the realm of human reality.

Antihero

Cesar Castillo is not the sort of character that most readers would consider a hero. He spends most if his time drinking, thinking about his own sexual prowess, objectifying women and avoiding responsibility. He allows himself to wallow in self-pity rather than taking advantage of the opportunities made available to him. At one point in the novel, he thinks about a woman that he raped one Christmas day, puzzled at her tears because he feels he has done her a favor, taking her virginity at age forty: "It was about time for you," he tells her. He does not remember her name. And he dies at the end of the book without even regretting his crime.

Still, many readers end up feeling sympathy for Cesar. Musicians respect him for his talent, and this novel is steeped in the world of mambo music. Readers adapt the values of this small, specific society over the values that they might hold in the real world. The novel does not necessarily promote Cesar's perspective, which can be seen by the contrasting sections at the beginning and the end, which have Eugenio coping with a hopeless Cesar and a collected Desi Arnaz. In spite of his faults, the book respects Cesar, along with his weakness and self-destructiveness.

Historical Context

Recent Cuban History

After Cuba gained its independence from Spain at the turn of the century, the Cuban government was marred by political instability, incompetence, and corruption. Throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the most powerful politician was Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar. Batista served as elected president from 1940 to 1944, and then, as the 1952 election was underway, led a military coup that seized power, suspending the constitution and declaring himself president. Under his control, rich politicians became increasingly richer, while poverty grew among Cuba's poor. Social services were ignored: disease and illiteracy ran rampant. Resistance to the government, in the form of labor strikes and demonstrations, grew. In 1956, Fidel Castro, a young lawyer who had been exiled to Mexico for participating in a failed revolt after Batista's coup, returned to Cuba, and under his direction, the people's discontent grew into an uprising. With few soldiers supporting him but with military brilliance, Castro was able to stand up against the unmotivated, corrupt Batista army. The United States became impatient with the Cuban government's neglect of its own people, and in 1958 withdrew its military support. This gave Castro's supporters their chance to press their revolution. On January 1, 1959, the government toppled: Batista left for exile in the Dominican Republic, and Castro, then thirty-one years old, took control.

The Castro government's first order of business was undoing the economic turmoil the country had fallen into. Castro ordered reforms that gave the government control over land and industries that had been privately owned. Political opponents were executed and imprisoned, and the country was declared a one-party socialist state. Relations with the United States went downhill throughout 1960 and 1961, as the Cuban government nationalized major industries such as sugar and oil production, seizing control of the property of American investors. The United States severed diplomatic relations and began concocting plans to overthrow Castro. The most conspicuous of these plans was the Bay of Pigs invasion in April of 1961. Fifteen hundred Cuban exiles, financed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, left Miami for Cuba. They were captured as soon as they arrived, having been given insufficient military or tactical support. Shortly after, Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist and announced a formal alliance with the Soviet Union, America's adversary in the Cold War.

Since the early 1960s, relations between the United States and Cuba have been at a standstill. Travel between the two countries is restricted, and a trade embargo continues. Over the decades, different occasions have occurred to nearly break the status quo. In the 1970s, President Jimmy Carter supported a softer stance, loosening the embargo and giving Cubans access to American goods, but the next president, Ronald Reagan, took a hardline anti-Communist stance which assured continued antagonism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, when Hijuelos's novel was published, the Cuban economy plummeted, and political observers expected to see the Castro regime crumble. The economy rebounded in the mid-90s, however.

Today, Castro is in his seventies and showing signs of failing health: he has announced that plans have been made for a successor to his nearly-fifty-year reign. But Cuban exiles in America await the opportunity for political unrest that will come once he is gone.

The Mambo

The mambo was developed in Cuban ballrooms in the 1940s, when the traditional rumba was infused with Afro-Cuban rhythms that were becoming popular at that time in American jazz music. The word "mambo" comes from a Bantu instrument that was originally used in religious rituals. In the late 1930s, Cuban composer Orestes Lopez wrote a traditional *danzon*, or dance song, which he called "Mambo": it included elements of the *son*, a folk song style that is native to Oriente province, which the novel identifies as the home of the Castillo brothers and of Desi Arnaz. In Lopez's song, the orchestra leader would call for musicians to start their solos by shouting out, "Mil vices mambo! (A thousand times mambo!)."

The musical style first became popular in the United States through the work of flamboyant band leader Pérez Prado, who billed himself as the Mambo King. Prado, who worked as a piano player and arranger for the famous Orquestra Casino de la Playa, left Cuba in 1947. Settling in Mexico City, he released a string of recordings that made it onto the American charts, including "Mambo No. 5" and "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White." With his trademark goatee beard and showy style, Prado was identified with the mambo by audiences in the 1950s, even though music historians tend to downplay his significance in the development of the music itself.

A more lasting musical significance of the Americanization of mambo music is its fusion into American jazz. In the 1940s, trumpeter-arranger Mario Bauza introduced jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie to Cuban music. Gillespie is one of the most important and influential musicians in jazz history, credited with being one of the driving forces in the creation of bebop. Gillespie's collaboration with Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo in 1947-1948 created a musical style known as Afro-Cuban jazz, or, sometimes, as Cubop.

Mambo music achieved the height of its glory in the early- to mid-1950s in New York, particularly at the Palladium Ballroom on Broadway, often referred to as the "Temple of Mambo." Among the mambo dancers who became famous there were Mambo Aces, "Killer Joe" Piro, Paulito and Lilon, Louie Maquina and Cuban Pete. Many of the musicians who worked regularly at the Palladium are mentioned in *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, including Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and Machito.

In 1954 the mambo's popularity was challenged by a new dance craze, the *chachacha*, created by Cuban violinist Enriqué Jorrin. It was a simpler dance that was easier for non-professional dancers to master. The *cha-cha* was so close in nature to the mambo that Pérez Prado put out an open offer of $5000 to anyone who could demonstrate how the two musical styles differed. In the 1960s, the *chachacha* gave way to the *pachanga*

and the *boogaloo*. Eventually, all music coming out of the Latin New York scene has come to fall under the general blanket term of *salsa*.

Critical Overview

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love was a popular and critical success as soon as it was first published in 1989. It was heavily promoted by its publisher, Farrar Straus and Giroux, a fact that Nicholas Kanellos made note of in his review for *The American Review*: "a 40,000 copy first hard-cover printing, a $50,000 national marketing campaign, 100% national co-op advertising, rights sold in advance to England, France, Finland, Germany, Holland and Italy, extensive exposure at the American Booksellers Association. . ." Kanellos went on to observe that this extensive promotion "has paid off, with glowing reviews in all the right places, from *Time* and *The New York Times* to *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus*; and the first Pulitzer prize for fiction to a Latino. And," he added, "*The Mambo Kings* is worth it. This is the best Hispanic book ever published by a large commercial press."

While the book is generally praised, critics have also found fault with it. Critical difference regarding the book's quality have generally centered around two subjects: Hijuelos's success in rendering the central character, Cesar Castillo, as a rounded and believable human, and the book's loose, repetitive, almost plotless structure. Both views have supporters and detractors. In the *Time* magazine review that Kanellos mentioned, for instance, R. Z. Sheppard noted that Cesar's "flamboyant plumage and mating behaviors seem dated and may not appeal to readers who now find machismo to be a dirty word." But Sheppard went on to dispute that charge: "Hijuelos deflects this prejudice with sensitivity and a charged style that elevates stereotype into character." Cathleen McGuigan made nearly the same point in *News-week* when she noted that Cesar "is a classic portrait of machismo," and then explained that the book is so well written that the familiarity of the character type does not diminish it: "Fortunately Hijuelos has a tender touch with his characters, and Cesar is more than a stereotype." The most direct criticism of Hijuelos's characterizations came from novelist Nick Hornby, who reviewed the book in *The Listener*. Hornby's review, "Cuban Heels," proposed that *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* is actually about three main characters: "Nestor, Cesar and Cesar's penis." About the last, he wrote, "Its exploits are detailed with alarmingly loving care and though there are hints that Hijuelos has an ironic perspective on all this machismo, they come none too frequently."

Hornby also brought up Hijuelos's rambling, formless method of presenting the story. "Its other major disadvantage is that it is wildly under-edited," he wrote, "at just over 400 pages one is left with the feeling that there is a great short story in here struggling to get undressed." The same criticism came from Sven Birkerts, who, reviewing Hijuelos's follow-up book (*The Fourteen Sisters of Emilio Montez O'Brien*) for *The New Republic*, commented that *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love* had been "overweight by at least 100 pages." Acknowledging the absence of plot, Birkerts opined that "the true glory of the book was its prose, which was energetic, detailed, able to modulate from the silky to the percussive in the space of a line." Margo Jefferson noted the same effect in *The New York Times Book Review*: she praised Hijuelos's prose with the observation that the book "alternates crisp narrative with opulent musings—the language of everyday and the language of longing." Immediately following this praise, though, she

wrote, "When Mr. Hijuelos falters, as from time to time he does, it's through an excess of self-consciousness: he strives too hard for an all-encompassing description or grows distant and dutiful in an effort to get period details just right."

Several reviewers compared the novel's twisted, indirect form to the style of music that is its focus. In "Fascinatin' Rhythm," her review in *Newsweek*, McGuigan admitted that "The novel isn't conventionally plotted; it slides back and forth in time and meanders into dreams and fantasies." She found this to be an asset: "Like an album of mambo tunes, some of the sequences begin to sound alike, but the rhythms and colors are hard to resist." Hornby, too, took note of the similarities between the prose style and the Castillo brothers' profession. "Hijuelos seems to be trying to capture at great length the rhythms and resonances of the music in the writing," he pointed out. He, however, found this "improvisational" narrative theory easy to resist: "in practice the effect is more Black Sabbath than Charlie Parker, and phrases and incidents are repeated over and over without any discernible modulation."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at several colleges in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly explores the idea that The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love *would have been a more powerful novel if the character of Nestor had been edited out.*

Oscar Hijuelos's novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* offers readers a rich, vibrant concoction of characters and details, as hot and lively as the music at the core of the story. The narrative, in fact, may be a little too rich for its own good: readers come away from it knowing little more about the central character, Cesar Castillo, than they do about such arcana as the types of underwear women wore in the 1950s through the 1980s, or the plumbing in old buildings, or the costs of 78 r.p.m. records, or the books that were popular at the middle of the century. With so much information volleyed at the reader, it takes some concentration to see, at the end of the novel, how little Cesar develops as a character. Readers can turn to any page, in the beginning, middle, or end of the novel, and be assured that Cesar likes being drunk and having sex, and can reasonably guess that the possibility of a lengthy description of either is at hand. Cesar's true personality has very little below the surface, a fact that is obscured by the constant, attention-drawing parade of exotic minor characters like René stabbing Elva, Bernardito waiting twenty-five years to marry Fifi, gay Enrique marrying Teresa, Mr. Stein owning books in Hebrew and German and Angie Pé, who only shows up to record a message at Coney Island in 1954, and Leticia's crush on Rico Sánchez. Good novels fill in all of the corners with details, but there is also such a thing as being too detailed, distracting readers from what is really important by making everything seem important.

This book is well in need of a thorough editing job, in order to give some sense of perspective to its hundreds of details. It simply has too much going on. This is, of course, almost impossible to prove, since "too much" is a subjective judgement. Millions of readers have found *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* to be just fine the way it is. To them, there is no reason for the novel to be anything more than a simple story of two brothers, one introverted and one extroverted, one romantic and the other physical: *un macho grande* and *un infeliz*, in Hijuelos's words. The book could be taken at face value and accepted this way, but there really is no reason to not think about its weaknesses.

Although the two Castillo brothers, Cesar and Nestor, are talked about throughout the course of the novel, neither is developed as a complete, convincing character. They just ride through the Cuban-American culture of the 1940s through the 1970s, each holding on to his own solitary personality traits. When Nestor dies he is the same insecure mother's boy that he has been all along, and Cesar dies listing the women, family and friends who have passed by him without his having formed an attachment to any of them. There is no progress, no result, for all of the minutiae that the narrative heaps on.

In streamlining Cesar's story, there are thousands of details that could be left out. Many that are less closely related to plot or character can be justified as necessary for establishing the world that Cesar lives in; this makes them, in a roundabout way,

important for establishing his character. Many other stories, though, do not establish their importance, and instead focus on things and people that Cesar merely encountered along the way in his sixty-two year life. Having been encountered is not enough to earn them a place in his story; the fact that these events happened, even in a fictitious sense, does not in itself make them worth snaring part of the reader's attention. After accepting that some of the details presented in *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* must go—a fact that many critics take for granted, but one that Hijuelos, his publisher nor many of his readers seem to find essential—it becomes necessary to sort through all of the colorful information and decide which tell Cesar's story best. For instance, easily half of the sex scenes, and quite a few of the club dates that the Mambo Kings attend, draw their pay, then leave, could have been removed from this book without in any way altering anyone's sense of who Cesar is. The problem with editing would be deciding which scenes are truly telling of who he is, and which are just routine.

In trying to determine which parts of this story could be done without, one large, surprising element draws attention to itself: there would really be very little loss to the story if the character of Nestor Castillo had just been left out. This might at first seem to require a huge structural overhaul of the novel, which advertisers and critics alike, not to mention the screenwriters who adapted the novel to a movie, have defined as the story of two brothers whose combined life experiences make up the author's point. Actually, though, the brothers' significance in the book is in no way equal: Nestor is such a pale shadow that he has little use in the story of Cesar.

Cesar and Nestor are written as distinctly different characters, but their differences are not clear enough to justify more than one character. Nestor has just two or three salient characteristics. For one, he is fixated on his mother, who nursed him back to health when he was young. The second is the most notable character trait, but it might just be a continuation of the first: his infatuation with María. He loses sleep thinking about María, tries unsuccessfully to politely pay some attention to his wife and children, but ends up writing new versions of "Beautiful María of my Soul" in the middle of sleepless nights. He signs letters to his mother "your *hijito*" (baby boy). At one point, Nestor himself notices that his mother and María are linked by having the same name, but he never does become aware that his fixation on a woman whom he knew for just a few months goes beyond sweeping romance to a routine Oedipal attachment. As Hijuelos notes when talking about Nestor's insomnia, "Cubans then (and Cubans now) didn't know about psychological problems."

Nestor's third trait is his vague desire to assimilate. He totes around the book *Forward America!* by a certain D. D. Vanderbuilt, underlining passages about aggression and self-assurance. It never has much effect, though. After being unfaithful to his wife, he turns to the book's philosophy that "the confident, self-assured man looks to the future and never backward to the past," but, except for momentary lapses, the book shows no sign of easing his longing for the past.

After Nestor's death, Cesar inherits *Forward America!*, as well as his brother's predilection for turning to it in his spare time for advice. In his hands, it has no more power than it does in Nestor's. Hijuelos mentions the book occasionally, but not with any

consistency. As a symbol of Cesar's taking on his dead brother's traits, this is a particularly weak one: since readers do not see the book affecting Nestor's personality, having Cesar carry it around does not show any hint of his becoming like Nestor, it just shows that he has a sentimental attachment to one of Nestor's belongings. If this book is supposed to represent something more sweeping, such as the immigrant's struggle to suppress his tradition and adapt an American way of looking at things, then it could just as easily have been written as Cesar's book to begin with. The idea of Nestor looking to the past and not the future is so dwarfed by his melancholy that *Forward America!*'s significance is hardly noticeable. In Cesar's hands, the book could at least represent a struggle to find his place in the world.

Cesar is, of course, crudely drawn as a macho figure, one who derives his self-esteem from sex.

While Nestor's memories of childhood involve his mother comforting him, Cesar's memories focus on beatings from his father. The story draws so many distinctions between the two Castillo brothers that it seems almost eerie that each should remember only one parent. Since these are two different views of two different parents, it would make sense for these memories to exist in just one person, dividing the masculine and feminine aspects of the Castillo farm in Oriente so neatly and simplistically.

Nestor's main function in the book is to represent the hopeless romantic, who is so in love with a beautiful woman whom he cannot have that he allows himself to waste away. In theory, this is the reverse image of Cesar's boisterous, life-affirming carnality. In practice, however, Hijuelo does not show enough real difference between the two brothers to make readers feel the differences of their two personality types. When Nestor meets María, he defends her from a bully, a thing that one could easily imagine Cesar doing. When they begin their sexual relationship, though, any distinction between the two brothers becomes seriously blurred: Nestor and María's scenes together are indistinguishable from the book's many sex scenes involving Cesar. They are, in fact, indistinguishable from Nestor's lovemaking with Dolores.

This may well be the book's point—that Nestor turns sensual like Cesar when he meets the woman he loves and that Cesar turns mournful like Nestor after the death of his brother. The book puts them in situations meant to show they are not that different from one another. The problem is that the book never establishes their differences well enough to make their sameness worth noting. Nestor has their mother's traits, Cesar their father's: why are there even two main characters in this novel, when all of their experience could be encompassed by one character? Without Nestor in the book, readers would be focused on Cesar and his experiences, and the threshold for which descriptions and peripheral characters are relevant to his life would be lower. Without the distracting plot line of the two brothers switching personalities, the significance of all of Hijuelos's fine detail would be easier to grasp.

Of course, this is all speculation. The book is finished, and has proven itself extremely popular with audiences and critics just as it is. It is fine to imagine what the book would be like with a major change like the removal of one of the two main characters, all the

while bearing in mind that this is just a hypothetical exercise in literary criticism. There is no reason to pretend that there ever would be a version of the book like the one described here, with the character of Cesar Castillo embodying all of the traits and experiences given to himself and his brother in the novel. Besides, if such a book did exist, some critic somewhere would immediately comment on how much better it would have been if the Mambo King's passive and aggressive traits had been divided into two different main characters, perhaps brothers.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Perez Firmat examines Mambo Kings *within the context of the recent wave of Cuban culture in the United States, identifying how the novel both embraces and drifts from Hispanic influences.*

In the summer of 1990, the cover story of the June 25 issue of *People* magazine was devoted to Gloria Estefan, who, as you know, is the most important moving part of the Miami Sound Machine. At the time Estefan was staging what the magazine termed an "amazing recovery" from a serious traffic accident that had left her partially paralyzed; Estefan herself was upbeat about her prospects, and the point of the story was to reassure all of the rhythm nation that little Gloria would conga again.

I begin with this anecdote for two reasons: first, because it gives fair indication of the prominent role that Cuban Americans play in the increasing and inexorable latinization of this country—by now, few Americans will deny that, for better or for worse, the rhythm is going to get them. My other reason for bringing up the *People* story has to do with the photograph on the cover, which showed Gloria holding two puppies whose names happened to be Lucy and Ricky. Like one of the Miami Sound Machine's last records, the photograph cuts both ways: it suggests not only the prominence but also the pedigree of Latino popular culture. After all, if Gloria Estefan is one of the most popular Hispanic figures in this country today, Ricky Ricardo is certainly her strong precursor. Surprising as it may seem, Desi Arnaz's TV character has been the single most visible Hispanic presence in the United States over the last forty years. Indeed, several generations of Americans have acquired many of their notions of how Hispanics behave, talk, treat or mistreat their wives, by watching Ricky love Lucy. And just last semester I had a Cuban-American student who claimed that he had learned how to be a Cuban male by watching *I Love Lucy* reruns in his home in Hialeah.

But the connection between Estefan and Ricky goes further than this. The Miami Sound Machine's first crossover hit was "Conga"—the song that contained the memorable refrain, "come on, shake your body, baby, do the conga, / I know you can't control yourself any longer"; well, the person who led the first conga ever danced on North American soil was none other than Desi Arnaz, who performed this singular feat in a Miami Beach nightclub in 1937. Alluding to this historic (and quite possibly, hysteric) event, Walter Winchell later said, in a wonderful phrase, that a conga line should be called instead "a Desichain." It is well to remember, then, that a few years ago when Gloria Estefan entered the Guinness Book of World Records for having led the longest conga line ever (119,984 people), she was only following in Desi's footsteps, only adding another kinky link to the Desichain.

I can summarize the significance of this photograph by saying that it illustrates in a particularly clear manner the two forces that shape ethnic culture, which I will call *traditional* and *translational*. As a work of tradition, the photograph points to the genealogy of Cuban-American culture; it reminds us that Gloria Estefan is only the latest in a fairly long line of Cuban-American artists to have come, seen, and conga'd in

the United States. As a work of translation, it reminds us of the sorts of adjustments that have to occur for us to be able to rhyme "conga" and "longer." In this the photograph is typical, for ethnic culture is constantly trying to negotiate between the contradictory imperatives of tradition and translation.

"Tradition," a term that derives from the same root as the Spanish *traer*, to bring, designates convergence and continuity, a gathering together of elements according to underlying affinities or shared concerns. By contrast, translation is not a homing device but a distancing mechanism. In its topographical meaning, translation is displacement, in Spanish, *traslación*. This notion has been codified in the truism that to translate is to traduce (*traduttore, traditore*); inherent in the concept of translation is the sense that to move is to transmute, that any linguistic or cultural displacement necessarily entails some mutilation of the original. In fact, in classical rhetoric *traductio*—which is, of course, the Spanish word for translation—was the term to refer to the repetition of a word with a changed meaning. Translation/*traslación*, traduction/*traducción*—the mere translation of these terms is a powerful reminder of the intricacies of the concept.

What I should like to do here is explore these notions a bit further by discussing *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, a recent novel by Oscar Hijuelos that has been termed "the best Hispanic book ever published by a commercial press." Although only a couple of years old, *Mambo Kings* is already becoming something of a contemporary classic. Not only is Hijuelos the first Cuban-American writer to receive the Pulitzer prize for fiction; he is the only one of a tiny group of *Latino* writers to be published successfully by a major North American publisher. Just to mention one contrasting example: within a few months of the publication of *Mambo Kings*, William Morrow brought out another novel by a Cuban-American writer, Virgil Suárez's *Latin Jazz*. Yet Suárez's novel elicited only moderate interest and quickly sank from sight. One major difference between the two novels is that, unlike Suárez, Hijuelos writes from what may be termed a "translational" perspective. Like *Latin Jazz*, *Mambo Kings* divides its attention between Cuba and the United States, as it tells the story of a Cuban family that migrates to this country. Unlike *Latin Jazz*, however, *Mambo Kings* does not pledge allegiance to its Cuban roots, for it is very much a novel written *away* from Spanish and *toward* English; this drift is already visible in the title, which also moves from Spanish to English, from "mambo" to "songs of love." One reason for Hijuelos's success may well be the savvy—and even the *sabor*—with which he translates tradition. In subject matter, intention, and design, *Mambo Kings* places itself in the line of descent of some central works in the canon of contemporary Latin American fiction. At the same time, however, the novel's translational drift distances it from its Hispanic pedigree. Although *Mambo Kings* invites a general reading as a product of Hispanic culture and specifically as part of its literary tradition, it makes such a reading virtually impossible. In rhetorical terms *Mambo Kings* may be regarded as a sustained traduction, that is, a transfigured repetition of certain elements in Spanish American literature and culture.

The novel follows the lives of two Cuban brothers, César and Nestor Castillo, who emigrate to New York in the late forties and form an orchestra called the Mambo Kings, achieving ephemeral fame one night in 1955 when they make an appearance on the *I Love Lucy* show as Ricky's Cuban cousins. In talent as well as temperament, Nestor

and César are worlds apart. César, the leader of the band, is a consummate ladies' man with slicked-back hair, a mellifluous voice, and an irrepressible libido. He remarks that he had only three interests in life: rum, rump, and rumba. His brother Nestor is moody and melancholy; his main claim to fame is having written the Mambo King's greatest hit, "Bellísima María de Mi Alma," "Beautiful María of My Soul," a sad ballad about the girl who broke his heart in Cuba. For years Nestor works tirelessly on this tune, coming up with twenty-two different versions of the lyric; only his death in a car accident puts an end to his scriptural obsession. The story of the Castillo brothers is told in flashbacks by the agonizing César, who by 1980 has ended up broke and broken in a New York tenement and who spends his last hours replaying records of *recuerdos*.

The novel's debt to Hispanic literary tradition is evident in two principal ways. Given the episodic plot and the explicitness with which César's sexual exploits are recounted, one cannot read *Mambo Kings* without thinking of the genre of the picaresque, a subgenre that in Cuba includes such texts as Carlos Loveira's *Juan Criollo* (1927) and Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *La Habana para un infante difunto* (1979). Like the protagonist of Loveira's novel, César is a Don Juan *Criollo*, a creole translation of the Spanish literary type. In the classical picaresque, the protagonist is driven by hunger and spends a large part of his life in the service of successive masters. In the erotic picaresque, the moving force is a different kind of appetite, and instead of going from master to master the protagonist goes from mistress to mistress—not *de amo en amo* but rather *de amorío en amorío*.

This is perhaps the aspect of the novel that has elicited the strongest response from its readers, for the narration's attention to the nature of things erotic verges on the pornographic. This is not to say, however, that the text unequivocally endorses its protagonist's phallocentrism, for César's recollections are filtered through his nephew Eugenio, who puts distance between the reader and César's view of himself. Eugenio's mediating presence helps to turn the novel into something other than a celebration of the Castillos' not-so-private members. As César's closest relative and the author of the book's fictional prologue and epilogue, Eugenio occupies a position halfway between the narrating "I" and the narrated "he." In fact, as I will argue a bit later, Eugenio is best seen as César's translator, which means that their two voices are formally separate but often hard to tell apart. In this respect *Mambo Kings* is what one might call a "hetero-autobiography"—a text whose narrator and protagonist are in some ways distinct, in other ways indistinguishable.

Even though César's recollections are given in the third person, Eugenio's presence at the beginning and end makes him the medium for the interior story—so much so that some of his sentences are repeated verbatim in the interior text; thus, for example, his description of the Castillos' cameo on *I Love Lucy* matches word for word the description that the supposedly impersonal narrator had provided earlier. It's not entirely clear what one should make of this duplication, which is inexplicable unless one posits that the *entire* account is Eugenio's invention—an intriguing possibility that the text insinuates but does not confirm. Without going this far, however, one can at least venture that Eugenio "underwrites" César's memoirs. I use this verb in both of its meanings: to write beneath something and to guarantee. Even if Eugenio is not

responsible for the specific verbal shape of César's recollections, he is at least generally responsible for the memoirs as a whole. As the novel begins, Eugenio is watching a rerun of *I Love Lucy*. After the episode is over he remarks, "the miracle had passed, the resurrection of a man." Since the "resurrection of a man" is precisely the novel's own miracle, *Mambo Kings* can be regarded as a type of rerun whose origin is Eugenio. As his name already suggests, Eugenio is the source, the progenitor of the account.

The other token of tradition in the book is music, for Hijuelos's novel also connects with a spate of recent works of Spanish American fiction that derive inspiration from popular music. I am thinking generally of books like Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), Lisandro Otero's *Bolero* (1986), and even Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), with which Hijuelos's novel shares also the practice of providing explanatory footnotes. More concretely I am thinking of two specific novels: Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1980) and Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* (1965). Like *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, which centers on a tune by the same name, *Mambo Kings* revolves around one song, "Beautiful María of My Soul," whose lyric is finally transcribed in the last chapter; as in Sánchez's novel, Hijuelos's text establishes a counterpoint between music and text, or *música y letra*. Cabrera Infante's novel, which also gives high visibility to forms of popular music, includes a section entitled "Ella cantaba boleros" (She sang boleros), a phrase that Hijuelos seems to be transposing in his title, since the "songs of love" in the title is a translation of the Spanish *boleros*.

With its juxtaposition of mambo and bolero, Hijuelos's title alerts the reader to the importance of these two musical genres in the novel. The mambo was a mixture of Afro-Cuban rhythms and North American big-band instrumentation popularized by Dámaso Pérez Prado, whose nickname was in fact "el rey del mambo." Championed also by such orchestras as Tito Rodriguez and the Mambo Devils, Tito Puente and the Picadilly Boys, and Eddie Carbia y los mamboleros, the mambo enjoyed a remarkable popularity during the early and mid-fifties, giving rise to such mamboid compositions as "Papa Loves Mambo," with which Perry Como had a number-one hit in 1954; Vaughn Monroe's "They Were Doing the Mambo (But I Just Sat Around)"; Mickey Katz's "My Yiddishe Mambo" (about a woman who's "baking her challes for Noro Morales"); Rosemary Clooney's "Italian Mambo" (sample lyric: "you calbrazi do the mambo like a-crazy"); and Jimmy Boyd's "I Saw Mommy Doing the Mambo (With You Know Who)." This last song is a yuletide ditty about a little boy who catches his mother mamboing with Santa on Christmas eve (and it wasn't the only yuletide mambo—there was also a "Santa Claus Mambo," a "Jingle Bells Mambo," and a "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Mambo").

By the latter part of 1954, the whole country had fallen under the Afro-Cuban spell of the mambo. That fall, Tico Records organized "Mambo U.S.A.," a fifty-six-city tour that took the mambo to America's heartland and which Hijuelos's recounts; the troupe of forty mambists included Machito, Joe Loco, Facundo Rivero, and many others (as well as César and Nestor Castillo, of course). In December stores were full of mambo gifts: mambo dolls, mambo nighties, and mambo "kits" (a record, maracas, and a plastic sheet with mambo steps to put on the floor.) And that same month Paramount released

Mambo, with Silvana Mangano in the role of a dancer who has to choose between marriage and mambo. As a headline in the December 1954 issue of *Life* put it, with more than a tinge of racism, "Uncle Sambo, Mad for Mambo."

Pérez Prado himself was enormously successful. He appeared on American television and was booked in the best nightclubs. When he opened at the ritzy Starlight Roof of the Waldorf Astoria in July of 1954, his was only the second Latin orchestra ever to play that venue (the other was Xavier Cugat's). A year later his band was picked as the most popular orchestra in this country; that same year one of his songs, "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White," stayed on the Billboard charts for twenty-six weeks; surprisingly, only one other song in the history of U.S. popular music has enjoyed a longer run on the charts—Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel," which became a hit the following year. "Cherry Pink" also became the theme for a highly successful RKO movie, *Underwater!* (1955), in which Jane Russell, accompanied by Pérez Prado, dances a modest mambo—in a bathing suit.

Most of Pérez Prado's mambos are instrumental compositions characterized by Afro-Cuban percussion and dissonant sax and trumpet riffs. (Pérez Prado's favorite composer was Stravinsky.) The laconism of Pérez Prado's mambo was proverbial; typical in this respect is the lyric of the first famous mambo, the *ur*mambo as it were, whose title is "Qué rico el mambo," and which ran in its entirety: "mambo, qué rico el mambo, mambo, mambo, qué rico é é é é." Even the apopé of the "es" to "é" betrays Pérez Prado's penchant for verbal minimalism. It is not accidental, thus, that another of his hits was entitled "Ni hablar." In Pérez Prado's hands, the mambo was a medium for sound, not sense. Indeed his signature became the guttural grunts with which he punctuated the breaks in the music and which the jazz historian Marshall Stearns has compared to the cries of an "excited muledriver." I mention this because the mambo's lovely inarticulateness makes it an odd choice as a model for literary composition. To the extent that *Mambo Kings* derives inspiration from the mambo, it tends toward a kind of expressiveness whose medium is *not* language. Most literary transpositions of popular songs focus on their lyrics—thus it is, for example, with

La guaracha del Macho Camacho. But with the mambo, literary transposition is difficult because of the form's instrumental nature.

It is not surprising, for this reason, that what the mambo kings play are not mambos but "songs of love," for in the novel the bolero fills the void left by the mambo. Unlike the mambo, most boleros are sad, even whining ballads whose distinctiveness has less to do with the music than with the words. In the bolero, rhythm and melody take a back seat to verbal elaboration, as is suggested by Nestor's twenty-two versions of the lyrics to "Beautiful Maria of My Soul." The narrator describes Nestor's bolero as "a song about love so far away it hurts, a song about lost pleasures, a song about youth, a song about love so elusive a man can never know where he stands; a song about wanting a woman so much death does not frighten you, a song about wanting a woman even after she has abandoned you." The repetitive intensity of this description, which echoes Nestor's own obsessive rewriting, gives some idea of the bolero's involvement with language. In the novel, the bolero modulates the narrator's voice, providing him with structures of

feeling and forms of expression. This identification is evident in the fact that the title of the book is also the title of one of the mambo king's LPs—the scriptive record merges with the musical recording.

Not only does the bolero's wordiness contrast with the mambo's laconism; the two genres also serve as vehicles for discordant emotions. If the central preoccupation of the bolero is loss, the central impulse of the mambo is conquest. Both as music and as dance, the mambo is aggressive, uninhibited, seductive: wham, bam, thank you, mambo. It is no accident that one of the central numbers in the movie *Dirty Dancing* was a mambo ("Johnny's Mambo"). By contrast, in a bolero the speaker is typically passive and mournful. Like Nestor's "Beautiful María of My Soul," the bolero is a medium for bemoaning unhappiness in love, for questioning the injustice of fate. For this reason, the novel as a whole becomes a musical agon between mambo and bolero, lust and loss, conquest and relinquishment. And the musical question the novels asks is ¡la vida es mambo? ¡o la vida es bolero? Is life a chronicle of conquest—or is life a dirge?

This question is answered, of course, in the lives of the two brothers. César, with his "kingcock strut", is the mambo king; Nestor is the spirit of the letra of the bolero. As the narrator puts it succinctly, "César was *un macho grande;* Nestor *un infeliz*". The irony is that, in the end, the great macho turns out to be no less of an *infeliz* than his brother. Indeed, the plot narrates how, after Nestor's death, César gradually takes on his brother's temperament; early in the novel Nestor is described as "the man plagued with memory, the way his brother César Castillo would be twenty-five years later." The gradual merging of the two brothers culminates with César's last act, which is to transcribe the lyrics of his brother's composition, "Beautiful María of My Soul." When he writes down the lyrics as if they were his own, César becomes Nestor, remembrance becomes impersonation. César merges with his brother, becoming another man "plagued by memory."

César's final impersonation summarizes the drift of the book. Like the title itself, the novel moves from mambo to bolero, from conquest to loss. César lives in frenetic mambo time only to discover that life actually follows the languid measures of the bolero. The account of his many conquests is modalized by the reader's awareness that these chronicles of conquest are actually a derelict's last words. If Nestor composes his bolero in order to get María back, César reminisces in order to recapture his life as a *macho grande;* and the narration explicitly plays on the punning relationship between "member" and "remember"—at one point César "remembered a whore struggling with a thick rubber on his member." For César, remembering is a way of re-membering himself, a way of sleeping with the past. And like the bolero composed by Nestor, the novel itself is very much "a song about lost pleasures, a song about youth." Not one to avoid extremes, the narrator carries the mourning into the most unlikely places. Loss is so ubiquitous that even penises weep: "By evening they were sitting out on a pier by the sea necking, the head of his penis weeping semen tears."

My discussion thus far is intended to give some idea of the ways in which *Mambo Kings* incorporates Hispanic literary and musical culture. Having said this much, I should now like to reflect briefly on how the novel distances itself from this same culture. That is to

say, I should like to reflect on the text's translational impulse, which is evident, first of all, in the ambivalence that Hijuelos's novel demonstrates toward the Spanish language. In one sense, Spanish is everywhere in the text: in the place and character names, in the characters' his-panicized diction, and in the constant references to Cuban music. In another sense, however, Spanish is nowhere, for Hijuelos has of course rendered in English all of the characters' thoughts and words. Indeed, since César's memories make up most of the novel, and since these memories were almost certainly framed in Spanish, the text we read presupposes an invisible act of translation, somewhat in the manner of *Don Quixote*. The source of this translation must of course be Eugenio, who is both narrator and translator; indeed, Eugenio's genius, his *ingenio*, is to filter César's recollections in such a way that the reader tends to overlook Eugenio's responsibility for the text's language.

Significantly, the only sustained Spanish passage in the book is the lyric of "Beautiful María of My Soul," which appears at the very end. One cannot overlook the overdetermination of its appearance: Nestor's song of love, the book's preeminent statement on loss, is transcribed in a language that itself has been lost. The Spanish lyric is a testament to what is lost in translation. And Nestor's beautiful María may then be the emblem for the maternal language that was left behind in Cuba. Moreover, since César's last act is to transcribe this lyric, this Spanish interpolation is literally a testament. When readers finally come upon these words, they find themselves at a loss. For Anglophone readers, the loss is more acute—since they cannot understand what they read. The bolero, which is one of the novel's principal links to Hispanic culture, is also the novel's figure for the loss of that culture, a loss whose most fundamental manifestation is linguistic.

In a narrow but significant sense, this linguistic loss has been present throughout the novel in the surprisingly large number of misspellings of Spanish words and names. For example, Antonio Arcaño, who is one of the seminal figures in the early history of the mambo, becomes Antonio Arcana; the famous singer Bola de Nieve is strangely transformed into a Pala de Nieve; the equally famous Beny Moré loses his accent and becomes Beny More—a notable example of how "more" can be "less." These errata and others like them may be evidence of sloppy editing; nonetheless, they also constitute typographical reminders of translation as loss, displacement, as traduction.

But perhaps the best example inside and outside of the novel of traductive translation is Desi Arnaz, who is an important secondary character. In fact, the book ends with Eugenio's account of his visit to Desi's house in California, where Desi and Eugenio reminisce about the mambo kings. Think for a moment about the name of the character that Desi played on TV: Ricky Ricardo. The name is a bilingual text that contains both original and translation, since Ricky is a familiar American rendering of the Spanish Ricardo. But it is a translation that distances, a traductive translation: the Germanic Ricardo (which, incidentally, means "king") is not only anglicized but turned into a diminutive: it does not become Richard, or Dick, or Rick, but Ricky—a child's name (much as, one may add, Desiderio became Desi). And of the two given names—Ricky, Ricardo—it is the North American one that comes first. Ricardo—which in Spanish is seldom a last name and at that time was the first name of one of Hollywood's leading

Latin lovers, Ricardo Montalbán—becomes the last name. It is as if Ricky has pushed Ricardo into the lastname position, with the consequence that Ricardo's "real" last name, say, "Rodriguez," drops out of the picture entirely. In a sense, Ricky Ricardo is an orphan's name, one that reveals nothing about Ricky's parentage. Still, what matters about Ricky's ancestry is that he is Hispanic, and Ricardo functions well enough as a marker of ethnicity. Ricardo signifies that the subject is Hispanic; Ricky signifies that the Hispanic subject—the "I" in *I Love Lucy*—has been acculturated, domesticated, maybe even emasculated. Ricardo is the Latin lover, Ricky is the American husband.

The contrast between Ricky and Ricardo may well boil down to the different connotations of the final letters in each name, "y" and "o." In English, the suffix "y" is used in forming diminutives, nicknames, and terms of endearment or familiarity. By attaching a "y" to a proper name we establish an affective relation with the name's holder, we make the name contingent or dependent on us—an effect that may have to do with the other function of the suffix "y," which is to turn a noun or a verb into an adjective, as when we turn "touch" into "touchy" or "feel" into "feely." By contrast, the final "o" is a marker not of familiarity but of foreignness, and not of endearment but of distance. Think, for a minute, of the words in English that end in "o." Once we get past the names of some instruments—piano, cello—and a few fruits and vegetables—potato, tomato, avocado, mango—we run into such words as psycho, weirdo, tyro, bimbo, Drano, Oreo, buffo. The fact that in Spanish "o" is a masculine ending probably also acts on our sense of the suffix in words such as macho, mambo, Latino, Gustavo. The story of "o" is a tale of estrangement, for the English language treats owords like foreign bodies. Thus by replacing the "o" in Ricardo with the "y" in Ricky one removes the unfamiliarity, and perhaps the threat, of the foreign body. (One might recall here that the radical spelling of "women" is "womyn, where the "y" feminizes, takes the "men" out of "women.") Replacing Ricardo with Ricky is, at the very least, an acculturating gesture, a way of turning the resident alien into a naturalized citizen. Ricky is the price that Ricardo pays for sleeping with Lucy—the price he pays for being allowed to enter Lucy's bedroom and America's living rooms. Lucy and Ricky—the "y" that ends their names is not the least significant thing they have in common.

Ricky Ricardo's name alerts us, therefore, to the schisms that bisect what Michael Fisher has called the "ethnic I." For me a handy emblem of the erosion of Ricky's subject position is the transition from the initial "I" of the show's title to the final "y" of his Americanized name (Desi Arnaz once remarked that he wanted to be remembered as the "I" in *I Love Lucy*). This is a transition from agency to contingency, from activity to passivity, from visibility to invisibility. It would be easy to ridicule the stereotypical elements in the portrayal of Ricky, who like Desi himself used to do, ends each rendition of the Afro-Cuban song "Babalú" with an entirely unAfrican "olé." But it may also be possible to see Ricky Ricardo (name and character) as a moving emblem for what is lost—and perhaps what is gained—in translation. Every time Ricky breaks into his nearly unintelligible Spanish or says "wunt" for "won't" or "splain" for "explain," his words, beyond whatever comedic value they may have, remind us of the risks—and also of the rewards—of loving Lucy.

I propose something similar happens in Hijuelos's novel. At one point in the *Mambo Kings*, during an interview on a radio show, César Castillo praises Desi Arnaz. The emcee replies. "But no one has ever considered him very authentic or original." To which César counters: "*Bueno*, but I think what he did was difficult. For me, he was very Cuban, and the music he played in those days was good and Cuban enough for me." "Good and Cuban enough"—this statement may apply equally well to Hijuelos's novel, a dance to the music of time that, like Desi and Ricky, loses and finds itself in translation. As a Hispanic product repackaged for North American consumption, *Mambo Kings* clearly illustrates the predicament of ethnic culture, which is that it must walk a narrow line between the danger of cooptation on the one hand and of unintelligibility on the other. In this also it resembles the mambo, whose big-band sound was similarly criticized for not being Cuban enough, but whose success was due in some measure to its impurities.

In a fine book, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, Ramón Saldivar has argued that what distinguishes Chicano narrative is the power to demystify relations between hegemonic and minority cultures. I do not think that *Mambo Kings* is demystifying in this sense; rather than dealing with relations between hegemonic and minority cultures, *Mambo Kings* focuses on the transactions between two cultures, each of which asserts its own particular kind of hegemony. Even if the novel's very existence in English seems to tilt the balance in favor of Anglo-American culture, the novel's content, suffused as it is with Hispanic culture, tends to rectify the scales. Indeed, as we have seen, even the text's English betrays a Spanish accent. Hijuelos's own version of the "dialectics of difference" faces off Spanish American culture on one hand and North American culture on the other, but without treating the former as a subaltern or "minority" culture. Their relation is "appositional" rather than "oppositional." It may be, in fact, that Cuban-American literature differs from Chicano literature in conceiving of culture contact as appositional. Apposition may more accurately reflect the nature and history of Cuban-American participation in the AngloAmerican mainstream.

In any event, Hijuelos's considerable achievement is to stage the negotiation between cultures in such a way that the novel neither forsakes nor is enslaved by its family resemblance to things and texts Hispanic. Spanish American culture figures in the novel as a distant relation—much as César and Nestor appear on *I Love Lucy* as Ricky's Cuban cousins. The art of the *Mambo Kings* resides in knowing how to cultivate distant relations, which means also knowing how to put them in their place. By taking distance from its ancestry, the novel is able to occupy an eccentric space somewhere between Havana and Harlem, a kind of make-believe border ballroom where North meets South, where Ricky loves Lucy, and where mambo kings play songs of love forever.

The preceding sentences may sound like a conclusion, but they are not. I would like to end on a more personal note. Most Latino writers of my acquaintance have thoroughly detested this novel, considering that it sacrifices genuine Hispanic flavor in order to cater to the tastes of a North American readership. For them, *Mambo Kings* is a sort of literary Taco Bell: inauthentic and even indigestible. For me, however, the issue is whether authenticity, or a certain kind of authenticity, is really worth pursuing. As one who has feasted more than once on a Double Beef Burrito Supreme, I am less quick to

dismiss fast food, however hyphenated. Hyphens are curious creatures; they connect, they separate, and above all, they are elastic. *Mambo Kings* is a study in the elasticity of hyphens; the novel distends the hyphen inside "Cuban-American" to the breaking point, but without letting it snap. To my mind, this is Hijuelos's most important lesson: he teaches us to stretch the hyphen, to get lost in translation. Sometimes you can even stretch the hyphen so much that it becomes a conga line.

And how about the phrase "lost in translation?" What does *this* phrase evoke? In what kind of a place does one end up if one gets lost "in translation?" When I try to visualize such a commonplace, I imagine myself, on a given Saturday afternoon, in a shopping center in Miami called the Town and Country Mall. Since I'm thirsty, I go into a store called Love Juices, which specializes in nothing more salacious or salubrious than milk shakes made from tropical fruits; having quenched my thirst, I want to buy some Liz Claiborne jeans, and I head for a boutique called Mr. Trapus, whose name—*trapo*—is actually the Spanish word for an old rag; undaunted by the consumerist frenzy that has possessed me, I then purchase a hand-painted Italian tie in another store nearby called Cachi Bachi—a name that, in spite of its chichi sound, is a Spanish slang word for junk, *cachibache*. And then, for dinner, I go to Garcia's Caribbean Grill, where I have something called a Tropical Soup, the American version of the traditional Cuban stew, *ajiaco*. In this way, I spend my entire afternoon lost in translation—and loving every minute. Translation takes you to a place where cultures divide to conga. My effort here has been to show you the way to such a place. Now, enter at your own risk. Who knows, you might end up becoming the missing link in the Desichain.

Source: Gustavo Perez Firmat, "I Came, I Saw, I Conga'd," in *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America*, edited by Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz, Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 239-54.

Adaptations

This novel was adapted to a movie in 1992, starring Armand Assante and Antonio Banderas as the Castillo brothers. It was directed by Arne Glimcher. It was produced by Warner Brothers and is available on videocassette from Warner Home Video.

An audiocassette version of the book was read by E. B. Marshall and released by NewStar Media in 1991.

Although most movie soundtracks have little to do with the novels the movies are adapted from, the soundtrack for *The Mambo Kings* brings to life the music that is so important to the book. It features songs by legendary musicians such as Tito Puente and Celia Cruz, as well as works by contemporary Cuban artists such as Arturo Sandoval. The album includes two versions of the Mambo Kings' signature song "Beautiful María of My Soul": one in English (performed by Los Lobos) and one in Spanish (performed by one of the movie's stars, Antonio Banderas). It is available on cassette and compact disc from Elektra.

Topics for Further Study

Explore the life and career of one of the musicians mentioned in the book, such as Celia Cruz, Pérez Prado, Tito Rodriguez or Machito, and report on the similarities and differences between that person's experiences and those of the fictitious Cesar Castillo.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Cuba was a popular resort destination for American vacationers. After doing some research, design a mock travel brochure for Havana in 1948, describing what tourists could expect to see there and what things cost in the actual prices of the time.

Watch the movie *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story*, about the famed jazz trumpeter who left Cuba in 1990. Based on the movie, explain how the political world and the musical world have changed since the Castillo brothers in the novel emigrated in the 1940s.

A central point in the Castillo brothers' lives is their few minutes on the *I Love Lucy* program. Watch a current sitcom, and write a short story about what you imagine old age will be like for one of the minor actors who is not a regular on the show.

Contact the Congress person representing your district and ask them to explain the current United States policy toward Cuba.

Research Latin American dance, then teach your class how to dance the mambo. Use recordings done in the 1950s, or even the soundtrack from the movie *The Mambo Kings* for the music.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Cuba is a popular vacation resort for American tourists, who enjoy the benefits of the strong U.S. dollar and a foreign government that welcomes U.S. businesses.

1980s: Cuba is an ally of the Soviet Union, the communist superpower that rivals America. American citizens are not allowed to travel to Cuba or to do business there.

Today: Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba is still a communist country, and the American travel and trade embargo against Cuba still exists.

1950s: America is undergoing a Mambo craze. Even mainstream orchestras are including works with a Latin flavor into their repertoires.

1980s: America is undergoing alternative music craze to replace Mambo music, among others. Mambo music and dance are relics of the simpler times and are considered old-fashioned.

1950s: Dancing to live music is an ordinary way to spend an evening out.

1980s: The importance of live music is diminishing. Dance clubs rely more and more on recordings, and only feature live bands on special occasions.

Today: Disc jockeys become major entertainment celebrities on the basis of how they choose to mix recorded songs together.

1950s: New York City is considered a city of ethnic neighborhoods, each based upon the population of immigrants that settled there.

1980s: New York City is mostly thought of as an exciting but dangerous place, where crime in the streets runs rampant.

Today: Mambo music is taken seriously by jazz musicians. Some of the old mainstream Latin acts, like Pérez Prado and Xavier Cugot, are appreciated by young listeners as kitsch or "lounge music."

Today: Although it still has the elements that characterized it in the past, New York City's international reputation is mainly built on the strength of character and cooperation shown in the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001.

What Do I Read Next?

Oscar Hijuelos's first novel, *Our House in the Last World* (1982), concerns a New Yorker who is haunted by the stories his parents tell of Oriente province in Cuba, where they emigrated from before his birth. A reissue of this novel with a new afterward by Hijuelos was published in 2002 by Persea Press.

In Hijuelos's novel *A Simple Habana Melody: From When the World Was Good* (2002), Cuban music and nostalgia again are major themes: a Cuban composer, travelling in Europe in the 1940s, ends up mistakenly interred in the concentration camp at Buchenwald.

Jamaica-born poet Claude McKay, who was one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, captured the spirit of exile that is felt in this book in his poem "The Tropics in New York." That poem is now available in *Claude McKay: Selected Poems* (1999).

In 1996, American musician Ry Cooder went to Cuba and made a documentary about a group of traditional Cuban musicians, some of whom have been playing since the 1950s. *The Buena Vista Social Club*, directed by Wim Wenders, had an impressive theatrical run for a documentary, and its soundtrack album was a bestseller. *Buena Vista Social Club: The Companion Book to the Film*, published by te Neures Publishing Company in May of 2000, tells the story of how these musical talents, who were neglected for decades, came to worldwide attention.

Critics have pointed out the debt that Hijuelos's flowing, descriptive style owes to Gabriel García Márquez's 1969 novel *One Hundred Years Of Solitude*. García Márquez's book, which described a century in the history of a fictional South American town, is considered one of the most important and influential books in all of Latin American literature. The most recent edition, by Harper Perennial, was published in 1998.

Like *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Christina Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) concerns a family that emigrated from Cuba to New York, only to find their roots cut off by the Communist revolution that has made it difficult to go back.

Popular Cuban-American author Beatriz Rivera's novel *Playing with Light* (2000) concerns a modern-day reading group of Cubans living in Miami and discussing a novel set in Havana in the 1870s, and a group of Cubans in the 1870s discussing a futuristic novel about Havana in the late 1990s. It was published by Arte Publico Press in 2000.

Further Study

Carpentier, Alejo, *Music in Cuba*, University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Originally published in 1946 (before the time when this novel begins), Carpentier's study of the roots of Cuban music shows how West Indian, European, and African influences came together to form the unique Cuban sound in writing that is intellectual in style and content but accessible to the common reader.

Salazar, Max, *Mambo Kingdom: Latin Music in New York*, Omnibus Press, 2002.

Salazar is a respected historian who has written on several facets of Latin American music. In this new book, he explores the significance of the New York scene in bridging the cultural gap between European and Latin traditions.

Suchlicki, Jaime, *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro and Beyond*, 4th ed., Brasseys Inc., 1997.

This study is one of the most thorough analyses written on Cuban history by an American, updated to reflect the post-Soviet world.

Sweeney, Philip, *The Rough Guide to Cuban Music*, Rough Guides, Inc., 2001.

This in-depth analysis of the country's music traces its development, with hundreds of short biographies of musicians who have had international influence.

Yanow, Scott, *Afro-Cuban Jazz: Third Ear-The Essential Listening Companion*, Backbeat Books, 2000.

This book traces the connection between American jazz and Cuban music back to the early twentieth-century. As part of the "Third Ear" music series, it presents a respected overview, and includes recommendations of important recordings.

Bibliography

Birkerts, Sven, "The Haunted House," in the *New Republic*, March 22, 1993, pp. 38-41.

Hornby, Nick, "Cuban Heels," in the *Listener*, Vol. 123, No. 3158, March 29, 1990, p. 33.

Jefferson, Margo, "Dancing into the Dream," in the *New York Times Book Review*, August 27, 1989, pp. 1, 30.

Kanellos, Nicholas, Review of *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, in the *Americas Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 113-14.

McGuigan, Cathleen, "Fascinatin' Rhythm," in *Newsweek*, August 21, 1989, p. 60.

Sheppard, R. Z., "Hail Cesar," in *Time*, August 14, 1989, p. 68.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535