Cuban letters offer abundant approaches to defining “Latin American culture.” In Nuestra América (1891), an essay packed with metaphor and allegory, José Martí interprets what he termed “the continental soul.” José Lezama Lima dedicated a complete book to the topic. In his La expresión americana (1957), this author explores the American imaginary and its historical incarnations based on Creole symbology derived from the Baroque and from romanticism. Like Roberto González Echevarría established in a classic book, Alejo Carpentier translated Latin American culture into his poetics of narrative in El reino de este mundo (1949), Los pasos perdidos (1949), El siglo de las luces (1962), Concierto barroco (1974), El recurso del método (1974), as well as in others of his essays and novels. In Calibán (1971) and other essays, Roberto Fernandez Retamar has attempted to prove that Latin American culture exists and that its historical context differs from that of the Occident.

These four authors inscribe Cuban national identity within a larger cultural space, one that corresponds to Latin America in general. However, this has not kept them from devoting significant attention to specifically Cuban culture. In La poesía contemporánea en Cuba (1954), Idea de la estilística (1958), and Ensayo de otro mundo (1967), Fernandez Retamar makes repeated references to the island’s cultural development. Alejo Carpentier’s first work, Ecue-Yamba-O! (1933), was an Afro-Cuban novel. Later he wrote La música en Cuba (1946), the story of what he called the “particular island sound.” He also
penned *El acoso* (1954), a novella set in the 1930s during the revolt against the dictator Gerardo Machado; it portrays the paranoia of the Cuban revolutionary. In addition to various chronicles and essays concerning the literature and art of the island, Carpentier wrote, toward the end of his life, *La consagración de la primavera* (1978), in which Cuban events structure the narrative.

José Lezama Lima, for his part, dedicated some of his best essays to Cuban poetry, painting, and customs. He always sought those moments when national identity—what he called “the certainty of what belongs to us”—became fixed in cultural images. Consider, for example, his *Coloquio con Juan Ramón Jiménez* (1938), *Tratados en la Habana* (1958), the essay “A partir de la poesía” (1960), the prologue to his *Antología de la poesía cubana* (1965), his novels *Paradiso* (1966) and *Oppiano Licario* (1974), or finally, his texts on Ventura Pascual Ferrer, Jose Maria Heredia, Julian del Casal, Juan Clemente Zenea, José Martí, René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodriguez, or Aristides Fernandez. Finally, at the end of the nineteenth century, José Martí wrote innumerable articles affirming Cuban national culture. In his texts regarding race, such as *Basta, Mi Raza, Sobre negros y blancos*, or in his praise of certain Creole intellectuals like José María Heredia, Antonio Bachiller y Morales, and José de la Luz y Caballero, one clearly sees his conviction that Cuba is a nationality, with its own social composition and spiritual genealogy.

As evidenced in these four cases, Cuban literature addresses national identity from within two parallel discourses that resist expressing the tensions one might expect to obtain between them. On one hand, Cuba is a nation that participates in Latin American cultural identity. On the other hand, Cuban national identity stands out from within a general Latin American culture, and yet belongs to it. That is to say, Cuba magically remains Latin American because of its Cuban traits, and it remains Cuban because of its Latin American traits. We are dealing with a comfortable application of set theory to the discourse of insular identity. Cuba would be, then, a cultural subset within Latin America, its area simultaneously proper and