PREFACE

This study proposes to show the unity, coherence, and continuity of the theme of slavery in Cuban narrative. Although there have been works published in and outside of Cuba pertaining to slavery, they are either limited to the early antislavery narrative or focus on one particular nineteenth- or twentieth-century author such as Cirilo Villaverde, Juan Francisco Manzano, Miguel Barnet, or Alejo Carpentier. There are other studies which treat the theme of blacks in Cuban, Caribbean, and Latin American literatures, but none has attempted to trace the theme of slavery from its inception to the contemporary period and understand it as a past and present literary concern.

From a broader perspective, this study strives to redefine the canon of Spanish American literature which has systematically relegated themes related to blacks to the margins of literary discourse. Leading scholars have successfully identified and classified important movements, trends, and authors and included them in the canon, but few have paid attention to slavery and blacks as a fundamental component of literature, history, and culture. For example, Villaverde's Cecilia Valdés, which I consider to be one of the most important, if not the most important, novel in nineteenth-century Spanish American literature, continues to receive little attention outside of Cuba. Cecilia Valdés should be read alongside José Mármol's Amalia and Jorge Isaacs's María, thus forming a nineteenth-century literary triangle between Cuba, Colombia, and Argentina and a trilogy of works whose titles contain the names of women.

Now that we are well into the postboom period or approaching the boundaries of a new Latin American discourse, other types of narratives and genres will gain the attention of readers. The novel of the boom period and the circumstances associated with its development fulfilled an important mission; that is, to bring Spanish America and its literature to the attention of the world, particularly the x Preface

works of writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Julio Cortázar. As we enter a new period in Spanish American literature, we can look forward to exploring other writers and aspects of the literature which I believe are as important as those of the boom period. I am referring. for example, to feminist literature and the theme of blacks. From my perspective, Cecilia Valdés as well as Anselmo Suárez y Romero's Francisco, Alejo Carpentier's The Kingdom of This World, and Miguel Barnet's The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, among others, and the themes they represent should be familiar to students of Spanish and Latin American literatures. Other works such as Lino Novás Calvo's El negrero and Manzano's Autobiografía are essential for the study of slavery but also for understanding the strategies of writing biography and autobiography, respectively. I hope this study will raise questions about canon and canon formation in general and blacks and slavery in particular and inspire a fruitful dialogue among scholars regarding the value of the themes addressed in this book. Ultimately, I hope it will serve as an example for the study of slavery and blacks in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish American literature.

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Literary Bondage Slavery in Cuban Narrative

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