Preface

THIS BOOK COMBINES BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL WITH LITERARY criticism and endeavors to portray the complexity of the character and works of Guillermo Cabrera Infante in their many facets. It is the account of how a man faced many trials and overcame them through the creative act of writing. During his lifetime, Cabrera Infante has moved in a variety of artistic and geographic contexts, enduring the vicissitudes of exile from Cuba. He became a British citizen in 1979 and writes with equal ease in both English and Spanish. He has distinguished himself with daring and innovative novels, essays, short stories, and film scripts written in both languages, and he has won major literary awards in France and Spain as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship in the United States. Cabrera Infante is, in every sense of the word, a multilingual and multicultural author. He is now widely regarded as the most accomplished living Cuban writer and as one of the finest novelists from the Spanish-speaking world.

After directing the most important cultural supplement of the first years of the Cuban revolution, Cabrera Infante, with the journal, fell from grace in 1962. A stint in the Cuban Embassy in Brussels came to an end in June 1965, when he returned to the island to attend his mother's funeral. He then spent four harrowing months dealing with a bureaucratic maze of suspicion before obtaining a nondiplomatic exit visa. When Cabrera Infante abandoned his native land in 1965, he also left behind a family tradition of social activism; both his parents were longtime members of the Communist Party. After being hounded out of Franco's Spain, he took up residence in London in 1966. Moving to England was one of the few options open to him and he was attracted

by the opportunity to work in British films. His first years in England were economically difficult and complicated by persistent visa problems. Disaster struck in 1972 when he was overwhelmed by a lifetime of real and imagined ills and was hospitalized. The road back to health and a productive life was challenging and arduous. These circumstances have tempered his personality and writings and have marked important milestones in his creative odyssey.

The preparation of a literary biography always involves a figurative invasion of privacy and at times a literal one as well. I am indebted to Cabrera Infante and his wife Miriam Gómez for making their home and papers available to me and for providing a constant critical discourse in which to frame my ideas. I also wish to thank their daughters, Ana and Carola, and their grandchildren (particularly the two who showed up one day dressed as Batman and Superman) for allowing me access to their private lives and for providing glimpses of a writer in a number of personal contexts. I recall an evening dinner at the Cabrera Infantes with Ana and Carola and their English husbands, Trevor and Edward. A Cuban meal prepared by Miriam was followed by pastries my wife Martha had purchased at Harrod's. The only threat to the harmony of the evening was the scramble for dessert. After dinner, we were drinking coffee in the living room when Cabrera Infante abandoned his favorite black chair to carry his empty cup and saucer to the kitchen. In a flamboyant gesture of mock surprise, Miriam Gómez, the former actress, placed her right hand on her chest and gasped for air. As he returned to the living room, he was greeted by an unexpected and vigorous round of applause from all the members of the family. Back in his leather chair, he turned to me and confessed: "They said I only did that to look good for you." And after a slight pause, he added with a touch of English detachment: "Evidently, I overplayed my hand." Cubans have always struck me as remarkably candid and forthright, particularly as compared to the polite reserve of someone from a New England town steeped in English tradition. For me, doing research in London was a cultural as well as an academic homecoming.

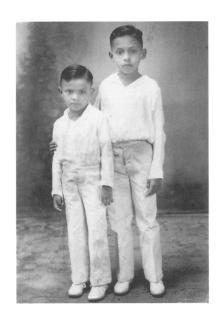
I am also appreciative of other individuals and groups for direct and indirect help in the preparation of this study. These include, among others, John Brushwood, Peter T. Johnson, Herminia Novás Calvo, and Martha Souza as well as the research staffs at the Library of Congress, the firestone Library at Princeton, New Jersey, and the

Library of the University of Miami. I wish to thank the Center for Humanistic Studies at the University of Kansas for travel funds, the Kansas General Research Fund for summer grants, and the University of Kansas for a sabbatical leave. When available, English translations of works originally published in Spanish have been used—unidentified translations are my own.

R.D.S. Lawrence, Kansas December 30, 1994

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Guillermo Cabrera Infante



Sabá and Guillermo, Gibara, 1937. (Family archive. All photos in this section are courtesy of Cabrera Infante.)



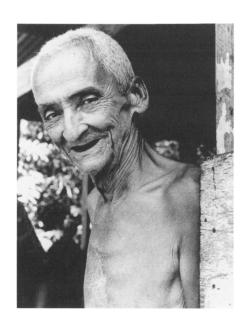
Gibara, 1956. (Photo by Cabrera Infante.)



Guillermo with his maternal uncle "Infante the Kid," Havana, 1941. (Family archive.)



Zoila and Guillermo Sr., Havana 1948. (Photo by Germán Puig.)



The unforgettable Pepe Castro. (Photo by Jesse Fernández.)



Reading Kerouac in a bar in Santiago de Cuba, 1959. (Photo by Jesse Fernández.)



Guillermo, c. 1951. (Photo by Nestor Almendros.)



Guillermo, 1958. (Photo by Martínez Paula.)



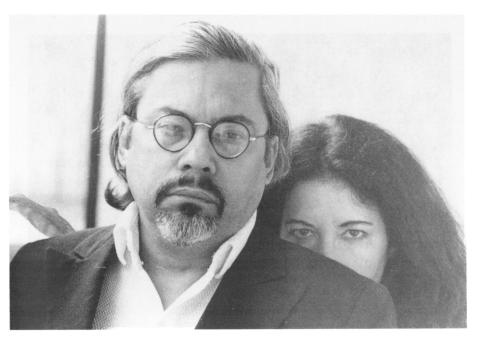
Cain and Leal on television in Havana, c. 1958. (Photographer unknown.)



In the offices of *Lunes de Revolución*, 1961. Among the photos of family members on the wall are pictures of Sartre, Hemingway, and Garbo. (Photo by Mario García Hoyo.)



After the closure of Lunes de Revolución, 1962. (Photo by Anders Ehnmark.)



With Miriam Gómez, New York 1982. (Photo by Nestor Almendros.)



The family in London, 1970. Guillermo and Miriam Gómez; upper left, Ana, with Carola beside her. In the foreground, the regal "Offenbach."

(Photo by Michael Thompson.)



At the Barcelona Film Festival with José Luis Guarnerten, 1989. (Photo by Sam Shaw.)