

Daína Chaviano's *Los Mundos que Amo*: Megalithic Monuments and Extraterrestrial Encounters

by Robin McAllister

Paper read during the XXVII ICFA Convention. Fort Lauderdale, Florida, March 17th, 2006.

Flying in and out of Havana, Cuba, in 2003 to deliver a paper on Daína Chaviano's science fiction was like visiting another planet, though I am only a professor from the United States, not an extraterrestrial from a higher civilization. Like the protagonist, let us call her D, of [*Los mundos que amo*](#), who brings back some artifacts from her encounters with the extraterrestrials, I brought back an artifact which now, years later, becomes the subject of this essay and, in retrospect, a reminder of how much my visit to Cuba had already been prefigured by the fantasies of escape and invasion in this novel, which I did not read until years later.

It is early on the Friday morning I am going to fly back. I'm grateful to the warm February sun as I walk through the book stalls in the Plaza de Armas, asking for Chaviano's fiction. No one has a novel on display, but several vendors tell me to return in a couple hours and they may have something.

The copy of *Los mundos que amo* I acquired that morning is as much an historical artifact and symbol of the Havana of that time as just another used paperback book. A "fotonovela" or comic book using photographs instead of drawings, published by Gente Nueva in 1982, it is deteriorated and grimy, the edges of the pages and jacket rubbed away. The cover represents the night sky from the cosmic perspective of space with a black disk surrounded by flames at the edges, as if a fiery star has been momentarily eclipsed. Inside the mildewed front cover, facing the first page, where a galaxy has replaced the eclipsed star, a former reader has written in pencil a recipe for "salsa agridulce."

The first image that opens the story is a photograph of the steps, portal, and alma mater statue of the University of Havana. A handsome male student approaches



the lovely protagonist of our story and asks what she is reading. Science fiction? He teases her about her interests. No, she replies, historical speculation. The writer has searched ancient traditions and documents for signs of previous contacts with extraterrestrial beings over the centuries. You don't really believe in these contacts from another planet? She replies by telling him a story about what happened to a "friend" who used to go up on the roof of her house and contemplate the night sky for hours.

One night when she was outside with her parents talking about her uncertain plans for a career and future, an unusual meteor crosses the night sky. It seems to change direction as it passes over. Days later a classmate tells a similar story. She realizes she has not seen an ordinary meteor, but a UFO, and she decides to try to communicate with it.

On page eleven, she is taking a break from studying for examinations by taking a book off of the bookshelves in her bedroom. In the photograph we see a table, book, and folding chair, book shelves, dolls, a poster of Lenin pointing to a map of the world, and a portrait of two bearded young men, heroes of the Revolution. She is looking at a book of photographs from the [Nazca](#) civilization in Peru. Lines and figures of birds, fish, and other creatures which can only be seen on the desert floor when flying high above them in an airplane. How could these designs have been created centuries ago in prehistory when they seem designed by a people who used airplanes?

Convinced Havana is being visited by UFO's, D creates a design to communicate with these extraterrestrial visitors from a higher civilization, a schematized logo of North and South America with only one tiny island off the tip of Florida. One night in July, she is awakened by a tapping at her door. She opens the door, sees a small spaceship and then three human-like figures whose faces radiate light. Neda, Mgosh, and Erk. She is only the eighth earthling in a hundred years who has communicated with them. They are telepathic. She enters the space craft with them. Among other things, they explain to her they have no robots to serve them in the ship. This would be "a remnant of feudal mentality," according to Mgosh (23).

With the help of anti-gravitational technology, these astronauts from Toliuh are taking her on a voyage, not to their home planet, but to the ancient megalithic ruins of [Tiahuanaco](#) in South America. They land in the desert, and she faints in the high altitude of this "City of the Gods," as the name signifies. According to pre-Inca legend this place is where the gods came to earth. Why have they come? Neda explains they are revisiting the city of their antecedents. Our protagonist D should not be surprised that the secrets of this archaeological mystery are being revealed



to her. “No person is insignificant; each human being is the universe” (31). The human being is the bearer of the greatest force in the universe, intelligence, and extrasensory experience, paranormal phenomena, are just the first stages of a cosmic intelligence humans are beginning to discover.

Before she leaves the spacecraft, outside the door of her house, to return to interrupted slumbers, she asks for a souvenir to prove the encounter and flight were not just a dream. The astronauts cannot give her anything from their own planet Toliuh, which might contaminate the earth, but they give her a pottery figure and fragments from [Teotihuacan](#)—another ancient city of the gods in Mexico. Neda places them in her hands, they feel a strong bond of love, and the protagonist looks up from the terrace of her house to watch the oval spaceship disappearing in the night sky.

We are back at the beginning of the photo comic. The student is walking across the campus while her boyfriend scoffs at her story. He is jealous. He does not understand how she could call the extraterrestrials beautiful. They have white skin and red eyes. He thinks they were cold and distant because they did not embrace when they said good-bye. She replies that they are able to feel and love more intensely than humans because they have evolved further from their animal state. They have intellectualized, spiritualized their feelings and emotions. The students part, and she goes into her room. She looks at the pottery remnants of her encounter and realizes the extraterrestrials will not respond to earthly efforts to contact them until we overcome the barbarity that exists on earth and the true intelligence of humans awakens that makes us worthy to be brothers of the higher civilization of Toliuh.

The comic ends with a scholarly addendum of inscriptions, legends, and objects that seem to document a history of encounters with space ships. There is a full page photograph of a Saturn missile taking off from Cape Canaveral. The last page is missing, torn out of the comic for some reason, perhaps scrap paper for another recipe or message.

There are many anticipations of Chaviano’s classic science fiction novel, ***Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre***, here. The protagonist as a young woman—alienated socially by her interest in mental powers, science fiction, and writing. Whatever love story is faintly delineated serves the function of emphasizing that an encounter with a higher extraterrestrial civilization is more important to her than a romantic date with a boy friend. The boy friends retire, somewhat baffled. These protagonists have to make contact not only with extraterrestrials from future civilizations, but, uniquely important to Chaviano, renew contact with the ruins



and stone circles of Megalithic culture. This connection between megalithic monuments and encounters with extraterrestrial civilizations of the future is how Daína Chaviano unites both the pre-modern and post-modern in her fiction. To encounter one is to encounter the other. To journey to the future world of expanded consciousness and love, we must journey back to the forgotten world of the past. There we will find a literally tangible means, embodied in the energy of the stone monoliths themselves, which will allow us to find our true identity and learn to cross the boundaries of time and space. To show this unique connection, I must turn from the photo comic to the novel itself, re-published outside of Cuba in 2004.

The underlying archetype of *Los mundos que amo* is the transformative journey of quest romance. The naïve protagonist of quest romance journeys to strange lands, endure trials and temptations, until a crucial life and death encounter in an underworld or land of the dead. Perhaps an encounter with the spirit of the Ancestor, who will reveal the truths of life and reality to them, and send them back transformed and enlightened to their mission in life. Our protagonist's journey begins when the space ship takes her from Havana to Tiahuanaco, a journey full of adventures that test and tempt her. Tiahuanaco is an underworld or land of the dead where the ancestors live. Neda is the wise woman, the spirit ancestor—like Tiresias or Anchises—who initiates the protagonist into the secrets of the universe. Like many quest protagonists, D undergoes a symbolic death and rebirth—she faints on leaving the spaceship, then experiences the memory of the womb and birth. She survives her crucial encounter and returns transformed to her ordinary world, secure in her new identity and mission.

To make contact with the future world of cosmic consciousness, D must first renew contact with the forgotten megalithic world of the past. And in renewing contact with the past, she is already making contact with the future. After D recovers from her fainting spell, her loss of consciousness, Neda affirms that the first human civilizations already possessed the knowledge necessary to create the megalithic monuments: “When the first extraterrestrial explorers arrived on our planet, they were able to verify that the ancient inhabitants had already discovered on their own the method of manipulating psychic energy in order to erect monoliths of crudely worked stone...” (62). Neda adds that the astronauts shared a “common language” (63) with the prehistoric builders, “the way of utilizing the energy enclosed within stones” (63). Indeed, the Neolithic builders possessed the same knowledge as the extraterrestrials, a knowledge that has since been forgotten: “The features that distinguish contemporary culture from Neolithic culture have nothing to do with our supposed superiority as a civilization. On the contrary, the men of the past



explored regions so far removed from our conception of the world that not even scientists dare to recognize that such attempts were possible. Every indication points to the idea that certain ancient civilizations discovered a method of crossing the boundaries of space and time..." (90). The higher consciousness of the megalithic is the same as that of the extraterrestrial Toliuhians.

Our heroine D resembles the protagonist of a quest romance. To speak with the Ancestor (in the form of Neda here in the spirit world of Tiahuanaco), the protagonist must symbolically die and be born again as a transformed person with a new identity and mission. The extraterrestrials invite D to perform a ceremony with them. They form a semi-circle around a monolith and lay their hands on it. She feels a faint beating or pulse within the stone: "Suddenly my memory seemed to open like a flower. I was in the belly of my mother: that was the memory that played through the recesses of my mind and which that piece of inanimate rock seemed to extract from my subconscious in order to overcome me with pleasure" (70). By renewing contact with the megalithic past, the protagonist also renews contact with the sources of consciousness in childhood memory, myth, and magic. I do not use the word "contact" casually. That contact takes place in *Los mundos que amo* literally as a laying on of hands on the stone monolith.

She opens her eyes to see the stone efflorescing with a bluish light like a quartz crystal. The energy in the stone has transported her across the boundaries of time and space. She now finds herself in [Carnac](#) or [Stonehenge](#). As she gazes upon rows of monoliths and dolmens, another childhood memory occurs to her—playing with blocks. But these would be blocks for giant children (72). The extraterrestrials lead her under the lintel of a dolmen. She steps back out, opens her eyes and finds herself breathing the unpolluted air of the Neolithic: "Thousands of years ago, the forests and plains of our planet must have smelled like that paradise that now penetrated in streams through my hungering lungs. On breathing that air I had no doubts that the first humans were happy. And I suspected that the legendary memory of a mythic Age of Gold, when men and beasts understood each other and lived together in peace, had its origin in a world saturated by essences like those: balsamic and tranquilizing, loving and pure"(76).

A further ceremony follows as she and the extraterrestrials stick their left hands into an opening in the rock, and she sees tiny, winged creatures, like fairies, appearing. The astronauts present D to them as an example of a human being who can make an evolutionary leap forward in mental development because she has a very strong genetic memory (Ch 78). When a "fairy queen" touches her, D feels absolute love for the planet and universe. She floats (Ch 79). Now, as she



experiences the recovery of her genetic memory, in the form of a vision she participates in that seems to include all times and places—even Ana and Merlin, who have yet to reappear in Chaviano’s most famous novel, *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*—her memories are overwhelming: “Confused images that belong to remote epochs and places also remain in my memory. I was present at births, battles, weddings...I also saw scenes with no specific or concrete importance: a young person who bent over some pages on which he wrote by the light of a candle, an old man who mixed together liquids of different textures in what seemed a primitive laboratory, children playing, people in a market, sails crossing an ocean, a girl who secretly painted a canvas” (80).

Neda and the other extraterrestrials have contacted her in the first place because she is able to tap into her genetic memory. The result is that we readers witness the birth of a writer: “Only one thing leaves no room for doubt: from that experience my memory came out enriched with memories of many lives which before I did not possess. And the most extraordinary thing is that those memories are not only visual, but livable. It is as if I myself had participated in all those battles, in all those deaths...Now they form a part of me, and make me feel strangely ancient”(81). Neda confirms her calling: “...You like to write, don’t you?... Yes... Then write. Write as much as you are able to remember, and the experience will reappear through you alone. You have no idea what has remained within you. Your entire life will not be sufficient to tell the world these stories” (83). D, like the protagonist of the transformative journey, has emerges from her crucial encounter with the extraterrestrials of Toliuh, with a transformed consciousness of her identity and mission in life. Was it only a day or so before that her parents had questioned her about what she wanted to study in the future?

In retrospect I discover I have already lived out the fantasies I find in *Los mundos que amo*. Like this young college girl, I not only fly to a country existing in a different time and space than my own reality, but I also encounter and bring back an artifact from that planet, which is the book I am writing about today. Reading the book I am both the aliens from Toliuh who arrives in a space ship or airplane and D, the college girl who crosses boundaries of space and time to visit, only temporarily, a different world before returning to my own. I participate in a fantasy of being able to leave behind my ordinary world, like an astronaut flying in and out, exempt from the restrictions and obligations of the planet I visit temporarily, a privileged messenger of secrets and powers from a higher civilization. Returned back to my ordinary reality, I can fantasize that just under the surface of appearances is the encounter with something or someone who allows me an escape from a restrictive, boring, repetitive reality. The encounter can happen in any



moment and in unexpected places. There is much in this fiction of escape from one reality and encounter with another that would appeal to those readers living in Cuba at the time Chaviano wrote this novel (1979), especially if they resemble those isolated, alienated characters, desperate to escape the reality of Cuba, in a later novel, ***El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*** (1998). Those readers constantly reminded they are living in an island isolated and threatened by invasion, by nuclear missiles from the United States.

On the surface of my conscious mind as I read, the traditional elements of science fiction lull me with innocent fantasies of escaping momentarily a dull, restrictive normal reality in order to travel to remote, exotic places where my mental powers make contact, through the stone monoliths and dolmens with cosmic forces that allow me insight into the secrets of the universe. The encounter is benevolent, optimistic. I return to my ordinary world refreshed, renewed. But below the surface there fantasies of invasion, penetration, and sexual encounter, that appeal to other longings and fears for the reader able to enter the dreaming world of fiction. As in a dream, I am both the invaders and the natives who encounter them. Unlike the Spanish conquistadores who invade the island of Cuba after Colombus encounters them for the first time, Chaviano's invaders are always benevolent bearers of love and insight, dedicated to developing the capacity of the human consciousness to communicate across boundaries.

WORKS

Chaviano, Daína. *Los mundos que amo*. Fotonovela. La Habana: Gente Nueva, 1982.

Chaviano, Daína. *Los mundos que amo*. Bogota, Colombia: Editora Aguilar, Altea, Taurus, Alfaguara, 2004.

Robin McAllister. Associate Professor in English. Sacred Heart University.

