

# **Fantasies of Independence and Their Latin American Legacies**

by

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*So twice five miles of fertile ground  
with walls and towers were girdled round:  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.*

*But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedern cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon lover!*

–Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*One must surround nature in order to dominate it: if we  
go blindly ahead, trying to divine instead of observe, it  
will escape us completely*

–José Luz y Caballero

*La ciencia, como la naturaleza se alimenta de ruinas, y  
mientras los sistemas nacen y crecen y se marchitan y  
mueren, ella se levanta lozana y florida sobre sus  
despojos, y mantiene una juventud eternal*

–Andrés Bello

*I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall  
conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled  
among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured  
the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?*

–Mary Shelley

*The enslavement to nature of people today cannot be  
separated from social progress*

–Theodor Adorno and Max  
Horkheimer

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*For Cori, Joe, and Lee*

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## INTRODUCTION

This work investigates the claim of cultural autonomy and its relation to the discursive history of nature in Latin American literary and political thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A question of cultural autonomy arose as an essential part of the thinking by which American territories began to establish themselves as nation-states after attaining political independence from Spain. Ever since then, Latin American discourse has been defined by this problem of identity, a question of what makes its nations different, not just politically, but culturally. I contend that the cultural autonomy of Latin America, and its ongoing proclamation over the past 200 years, can best be understood by examining it in relation to the ideology by which it was originally informed, a European romanticism in vogue during the first wave of independence in the early nineteenth century. Specifically, a romantic concept of nature has been particularly instrumental for justifying both national and pan-national claims of difference and cultural autonomy in Latin America.

I argue that a concept of nature introduced by European romanticism was developed by Latin American Creoles in order to help articulate a claim of national cultural autonomy from Spain during the mid-nineteenth century, and that romantic nature constituted the ideological ground in which a belief in the culturally independent nation was cultivated. A vision of the American landscape as nature—the pre-history upon which history is constituted, the *tabula rasa* upon which it is written—supports a view of independence as a moment of definitive rupture

with the past, and the Creoles' claim of having ceased to be culturally Spanish. Rather than forming a true basis of rupture with the past, however, the vision of America as a land of nature really just concealed the underlying continuities between the new Latin American nations and the Catholic Spanish Empire. Even as romantic nature facilitated a transition to a modern political *nomos*, as a concept by which Creoles defined their new, ostensibly egalitarian nation-states, it ended up conserving and maintaining the imperial reason that had guided the Spanish Empire for centuries, contributing to an incomplete and paradoxical nationalization.

Over time, the claim of cultural autonomy, and the foundational ideological operation facilitated by nature of disavowing a connection to the past, evolved into the “tradición de la ruptura” that would define Latin American modernity (Paz 17). A widely-accepted, progressive view of history understands the rise of positivist discourse in the late nineteenth century—manifested by the development and application of social and human sciences—as a “gradual emerging from [...] aberration,” a supersession of the romanticism that had represented “the point of maximum delusion in our recent past” (de Man, *Blindness* 13).<sup>1</sup> Still, even as avowedly modern discourses displaced avowedly romantic ones in Latin America, the proclamation of this displacement as an emergence from the decadent past strongly resembled the original romantic Creole claim of cultural autonomy from Spain. In this manner, discourses promoting Latin American and national modernization appear to perform the deluded gestures that they were supposed to supersede. This, as well as the way in which modern discourses continue to profess

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Latin American Mind* (1949) Leopoldo Zea describes a “transition” from romanticism to positivism in Latin American intellectual history, but remains skeptical that it truly represents a definitive break. Nevertheless, this sense of transition, and an acceptance of all the ostensible differences between romanticism and positivism, would define the way in which the history of Latin American thought is understood. In *Positivism in Latin America* (1971) Ralph Lee Woodward gives voice to a model of history organized around Latin America's transition from romanticism to positivism. In *Hijos del limo* (1974) Octavio Paz characterizes the history of Latin American thought as the dialectical swinging from backward-looking romanticism to forward-looking positivism, understanding the relation between literary *modernismo*, *Arielismo*, and the avant-gardes of the 1920s according to this model.

faith in the autonomous nature that originally facilitated the ideological concealments of romanticism, lead me to read the modern claim of rupture with deep skepticism. Taking into account recent assertions that “we still belong to the era [romanticism] opened up,” nature appears not just to be a random point in common between romantic, positivist, and post-war modern discourses, but a line of continuity, the ideological hinge of a “transition” to modernity in Latin America (Nancy, *Absolute* 15).

This hinging effect is visible in the founding of Latin Americanism itself, when José Martí identified Latin America’s unique “nature” as the basis for its unification against US imperialism, the formulation of new non-European systems of governance, and the invention of an independent Cuba that is culturally autonomous from Spain. After World War II the question of cultural autonomy, cast through a positivist-developmental view of history, would arise again as a question of underdevelopment and dependency. Correspondingly, a sense of the ontological difference between Latin America and US/European modernity would continue to be tied to a vision of America as a site of nature. Thinkers would understand Latin American nature as a space/time alternative to Western modernity altogether, where history might be started anew separate and therefore free from the darkness of the recent war and the threat of ascendant US hegemony. Through its perpetual influence upon Latin American discourse—as the blindness that misinforms so many of culture’s attempts to describe itself—I find that nature is in fact the principle myth of its modernity, and the centerpiece of its political theology.

I trace a genealogy of the claim of cultural autonomy tied to nature in Latin America by reading and analyzing some of its most canonical literary and political texts. I return to these defining works in order to recast the history of Latin American thinking as a history of varying

reiterations and criticisms of this claim of autonomy, and to trace therein a development of the ideology of nature.

Throughout this history of Latin American thought the effectiveness of nature's concealing ideological operation is the condition that facilitates an ongoing repetition of the postulation of rupture as its horizon. Nature perpetuates a belief in the possibility of a total break with the past, and facilitates claims of rupture by helping disavow the knowledge by which such a claim would be revealed as one of many within the history of the Latin American nation-state. Thus, throughout this history, those who call for rupture do not realize how little they do to advance the field.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, each succeeding criticism of the call for rupture seems further convinced that the return to the claim of Latin American difference constitutes a crisis of cultural stagnation. Even as they make this observation, those wishing to criticize the call for cultural autonomy are faced with a serious problem, finding that it is difficult to carry out this critique without articulating it as the very call for rupture with the past they declaim. Thus, the question of cultural autonomy turns into the question of a self-fulfilling prophecy of cultural stagnation—a sense that even acknowledging and criticizing stagnation performs and reinforces it all the more—leading to a feeling of despair at the impossibility of overcoming Latin America's “underdevelopment,” and its founding romanticism. This difficulty of criticizing the claim of autonomy is the main problem that my work seeks to address, within Latin Americanism, and structurally, beyond it.

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<sup>2</sup> In *Blindness and Insight* (1971) Paul de Man describes a “pattern of self-mystification that accompanies the experience of crisis,” through the example of Edmund Husserl, who demonstrated “the urgent philosophical necessity of putting the privileged European standpoint into question, but remained himself entirely blind to this necessity, behaving in the most unphilosophical way possible at the very moment when he rightly understood the primacy of the philosophical over empirical language” (16). This pattern very much describes the ongoing claim of autonomy from the past in Latin America, which is not able to comprehend that making this claim is self-defeating, a performance of the very gestures such a claim seeks to supersede.

The discursive history of cultural autonomy and difference that this investigation describes, and its focus on the difficulty of criticizing the claim of autonomy, is timely, insofar as the fields of Latin American literary and cultural studies continue to wander in the wilderness of these problems. This is most clearly manifested today in the influential scholarship organized around a critique of modernity and the “coloniality of power” carried out by Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and others. In strongly (and rightly) faulting modernity as a consort of colonial systems of exploitation, this decolonization movement continues to maintain the fulfillment of cultural autonomy as the horizon of Latin American thinking, seeking rupture with both a modern West and Western modernity. For this group—which presents itself as such in the important collection *Coloniality at Large* (2008)—past failures to decolonize and autonomize Latin American thought makes “real” decolonization the most pressing project of our time. Mere criticism of modernity, while necessary, is not enough; European thought *in toto* must be expunged from Latin American thinking. Due to the Eurocentrism of philosophical epistemology, “[i]t is no longer possible, or at least it is not unproblematic, to ‘think’ from the canon of Western philosophy, even when part of the canon is critical of modernity” (Mignolo 234).

In the articulation of the post-colonial crisis by today’s decolonial thinkers, as well as their reiteration of the imperative of decolonizing Latin American thought through a disavowal of the Western canon, one finds a clear image of the paradigmatically modern “willful forgetfulness of history, a plunging into the immediacy of the present moment of crisis that is belied by the repetitive—and therefore historical—nature of that act” (Alonso, *Spanish* 17). Even as Carlos Alonso and Santiago Castro-Gómez, among others, describe a Latin American tradition of proclaiming rupture as that which most clearly makes its culture modern, decolonists seek to

stop being modern precisely in this way.<sup>3</sup> They do not heed suggestions that their call to finally, *really* stop being modern and Western would make them all the more modern and Western. Consequently, this trend in Latin Americanism has inspired the corresponding backlash that similar calls for rupture have inspired in the past, a sense of despair and crisis, a feeling that Latin American culture is stagnating, or stuck.<sup>4</sup>

In my view, the call for cultural autonomy currently being championed by the decolonization movement, and the problem of “blindness and insight” it manifests, is ironic not only insofar as it reproduces the defining gestures of the modernity it seeks to distance, as Alonso helps us to see. Even more paradoxical is the extent to which its call for rupture with the West resembles the original Creole program of proclaiming cultural autonomy by disavowing the Spanish past. The scholarship that proclaims the imperative of decolonization seems to reproduce the circumstances of the original failure to decolonize Latin American thought, echoing the claims that concealed and perpetuated the colony behind the façade of culturally

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Spanish American Regional Novel* (1990) Carlos Alonso expresses his belief that “Latin America’s preoccupation with the affirmation of its cultural specificity has constituted the essence of its experience of modernity,” and that the proclamation of difference is modern at heart, even as it seeks to articulate Latin America’s lack of modernity:

the crisis produced by Latin America’s insertion into the modern world historical order—which I have proposed to characterize as a rhetorical predicament—is ‘resolved’ *creatively* by Latin American intellectuals in the continual affirmation of a cultural specificity that is perceived to be, consciously or not, discontinuous with modernity. (31-32)

In *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana* (1996) Santiago Castro-Gómez takes a position similar to that of Alonso by critiquing the many ways in which Latin American culture has defined itself by its lack of pertinence to both modernity and post-modernity. Specifically he responds to the Colombian philosophy of liberation movement led by D. Herrera Restrepo and R. Salazar Ramos, who maintain that Latin American difference is the consequence of the Latin American subject having been less indoctrinated by Greek *logos* than the European subject. Castro-Gómez shows the inconsistency of a belief that modernity and post-modernity are fundamentally at odds with Latin American “razón” by systematically illustrating the ways in which Latin American culture takes part in both of these “periods.” His work calls attention to the lines of thought that are obscured by the conviction that Latin America is fundamentally autonomous from a Western temporality and ontology.

<sup>4</sup> Most recently, in *Thresholds of Literacy* (2014), Abraham Acosta expresses this as the crisis of “resistance” and cultural difference in Latin American literary and cultural studies, criticizing the attempt to resist or escape modernity by embracing popular or indigenous cultural texts. Prior to the rise of the decolonial movement, in *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001), Alberto Moreiras described the crisis of autonomy and criticism by pointing to a discursive rift between U.S. and Latin American academics, citing a desire to maintain cultural difference as the main cause of this unproductive rift.

autonomous nation-state shortly after independence. Especially insofar as decolonial thinking seeks to consolidate autonomy from Western modernity with a call to disavow the European canon, its similarity to Martí's own call to burn the archive (which I discuss in the first chapter of this work) is patent. I cannot help but see such calls as attempts to turn back or escape Creole history itself. Furthermore, they are indicative of the extent to which questions of Latin American modernity have been, and continue to be conditioned and influenced by deeply flawed independence discourses.

My work takes the failure to decolonize thought in Latin America as its starting point, not by reiterating a call for cultural autonomy, but rather, by examining the ideologies conditioning the transition to the modern nation-state after independence from Spain. In so doing, I identify and explore a discursive retention of imperial reason within the concept of nature that Creoles developed in defining the American land as the basis of their cultural autonomy. In this way, I ascribe special significance to observing the historical continuity between the systems of belief guiding the Spanish Empire and those that constitute Latin American modernity, setting out to more fully describe the ways in which an imperial desire lurks within the discourses that defined the modern Latin American nation-state.

My work understands today's crisis in Latin Americanism as one that can be best addressed by acknowledging the long history of the problem, and by looking to the ways in which its thinkers have previously responded to the difficulty of elaborating an emancipatory reason without resorting to the claim of rupture with the past. Through my investigation I show that the literary thinking of Latin America has developed two clear means for addressing the problem of the relation between the call for autonomy and criticism. Literary historiography that accounts for the blurring of strict periodic distinction addresses the effects of the claim of

rupture, challenging a cultivated belief in the possibility of freedom from the past. A self-effacing or parodic mode for criticizing the call for cultural autonomy challenges the underlying motivation of this call, undermining a desire to distance the object of criticism through disavowal for the constitution of the conquering ego as a being that is fundamentally separate from (and untainted by) the decadent past.

I understand the problem of autonomy and criticism as being a transformation of the question of ideology articulated by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), in which they argue that myth is the aporetic horizon of thought in modernity, the delusion of the past from which we wish to liberate ourselves, but cannot. Therefore, in addressing the problem of autonomy and criticism, my study grapples with a problem of myth and ideology.<sup>5</sup> Methodologically, I approach this issue by following the lead of Michel Foucault, whose elaboration of conceptual genealogies in works such as *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) suggests that if it is not possible to “shatter” myth, it may at least be observed and historicized, and thereby challenged. By revealing concepts typically understood as being ahistorical (such as madness and sexuality) to be historical expressions of power, as Foucault did, one can help to cast light on the previously obscure ideology of one’s own time. In this spirit, I present my study of cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Through de Man, the problem of autonomy and criticism can be seen as a problem of language itself, which is closely linked to his understanding that ideology stems from the fact that “the sign and meaning can never coincide,” as well as a “the confusion of linguistic with natural reality,” here manifested in the belief in the performative truth of the claim of autonomy (*Blindness* 17; *Resistance* 11). In *Blindness and Insight* de Man suggests that insofar as literature is a privileged genre for the revelation and demystification of ideology, fiction is a categorically self-critical genre. He writes: “For the statement about language, that sign and meaning can never coincide, is what is precisely taken for granted in the kind of language we call literary. Literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of knowledge; it is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression” (*Blindness* 17). A self-critical approach to the problem of autonomy and criticism developed by Latin American literary thinkers (Borges and Roa Bastos in particular) reflects de Man’s view of ideology and blindness. But for my own approach to this issue I depart from de Man and his focus on the disenchanting function of literature. In Latin America, while literary thinkers develop a self-critical method to counter the problem of autonomy and criticism, they do so in response to another kind of literature, which had served as the main vehicle for a promotion of a claim of cultural autonomy, both as cultural production that seeks to be different from European cultural production, and as the venue in which the American territory is portrayed as being nature.

autonomy discourses in Latin America also as a critical history of nature, which I understand to be a key expression of the modern ideology of autonomy. Insofar as nature has stood for an idea of unchanging timelessness, to historicize nature is to historicize truth, that is, the ideology by which truth continues to be conceived in scientific and romantic literary discourses.<sup>6</sup>

There is a body of work that has obliquely approached, or hovered around a project of historicizing nature and autonomy as ideology or myth without doing so directly. My investigation adds to this body of work, and in so doing works to define it more clearly as a coherent interdisciplinary project by placing its diverse texts into dialogue with one another. Until now, studies concerned with the philosophy of science have contributed most to a critical history of nature: Adorno and Horkheimer, Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Michel Serres, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, and Gilles Deleuze illuminate the question of nature insofar as it is the “object” that science seeks to comprehend. These thinkers account for the legacy of nature in modernity as a concept of universal truth whose origin lies in Enlightenment thinking.<sup>7</sup> Another important line of thinking that seeks to comprehend nature is eco-criticism.<sup>8</sup> Timothy Morton’s *Ecology without Nature* (2007) from the field of English studies is the exemplary work in this vein, framing a critique of nature with a view toward a new articulation of ecology that redefines man’s relationship to the earth and its life forms. Alejandro

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger understands his own project of historicizing truth—manifested in his important distinction between Greek *aletheia* and Roman *veritas*—as being part of a larger project of Western thought. He articulates this in the lecture on *Parmenides* (1942), among other places, which he opens by stating: “Parmenides and Heraclitus—these are the names of two thinkers, contemporaries in the decades between 540 and 460, who at the outset of Western thought uniquely belong together in thinking the true. To think the true means to experience the true in its essence and, in such essential experience, to know the truth of what is true” (1). The fact that their thinking has been able to resist time is not due to “the simple conservation of the thought these thinkers had to think –i.e. conservation somewhere, at some supratemporal place, as the so-called ‘eternal.’ On the contrary, what is thought in this thinking is precisely the historical, the genuinely historical, preceding and thereby anticipating all successive history” (*Parmenides* 1).

<sup>7</sup> The volume *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (2000) edited by Craig and Moreland also challenges and critiques this Enlightenment concept of nature, the “spatio-temporal universe of entities studied by the physical sciences” (xi).

<sup>8</sup> Within the field of Latin American studies *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape* edited by Beatriz Rivera-Barnes and Jerry Hoeg is an example of literary eco-criticism. A brief overview of eco-criticism itself can be found at the beginning of this book.

Quinn's recent dissertation *Taming the Chaos: Nature, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Writing in Modern Latin America* (2011) critiques nature as well, insofar as it has functioned as an important political concept, exploring an idea of natural right intimately linked to Latin America's wilderness spaces. Steven Vogel has shown how critical theory struggled with the concept of nature when formulating its particular line of Marxist thought in *Against Nature* (1996).<sup>9</sup>

Unlike some of the works I have mentioned, the critique of nature I develop here is not explicitly aimed at proving why it would be better if we maintained that nature did not exist, or propose that we move beyond nature. As I have said, in addition to showing it to be the central belief underlying an ongoing claim of historical rupture in Latin America, my critique consists in showing that the concept to which the word "nature" refers, though almost always used to articulate an idea of timelessness, is in fact historical. To historicize nature is to work against its ideological function as a device whose express purpose has tended to be the concealment of a secret, historical content. In part, this task consists in revealing nature's changing content, that which it has been employed to conceal. Historicizing nature also shows the extent to which it has also been extremely effective at concealing its own history and thus reveals the way in which it acts as a kind of conceptual black hole. Finally, because the Latin American claim of cultural autonomy is predicated on a concept of nature that supports a general belief in the possibility of standing outside the flow of history, historicizing nature significantly forwards a critique of cultural autonomy.

I trace the historical unfolding of nature by examining the literature in which it has been articulated. Due to its important status within romantic thinking, literature has historically been a

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to these accounts of nature, J. B. Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy* (1998) is a comprehensive genealogy of the closely related concept of autonomy. He understands the modern idea of autonomy to arrive with Kant's idea of the self-government of the individual in *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

privileged discourse in Latin America, and consequently, I carry out my study of nature primarily through a series of close readings. Perhaps it is the underlying condition of this “privilege” that constitutes the true basis for my approach: the fact that romantic thinking itself described the poem and the novel as spontaneous expressions of a truth reflected in and elaborated by access to autonomous nature. To be sure, the autonomy of art is fundamentally linked to the autonomy of nature according to romantic thought, and on a basic level, reading the history of nature in literature simply heeds this definition. Furthermore, especially in the literary thinking that sought to proclaim, comprehend, and critique Latin American cultural autonomy, nature itself was taken up as an object of inquiry and a field of debate. Works that take nature itself as their object of inquiry, which are the principal focus of this study, are therefore self-reflective considerations of their own annunciative ground. Insofar as the history of nature runs parallel to a history of literature in Latin American thought, differences among the various discursive instantiations of nature are visible as the differences among the texts I analyze.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nature tended to be formulated in literature through the translation, combination, bricolage, and synthesis of previously existing versions of the concept and their adaptation to diverse material circumstances and concerns. While a romantic concept of nature was that which exerted the greatest influence after independence in Latin America, earlier understandings of the concept by which it was conditioned would also find their way into the discussion of national cultural autonomy. In order to fully appreciate literary interpretations of nature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries one must know something about the main discursive events in its preceding history. Especially important is the development of a romantic concept of nature as territory, but other moments in its further-flung

past are also significant. Where I feel it will be helpful—especially in the first chapter—I provide some of this background.

Without question, the most important moment in the modern conceptual history of nature is Spinoza's declaration in *Ethics* (1677) that Nature and God are interchangeable, thus redefining nature's function in modernity as an engine for the secularization of thought. In my view, nearly as important is a lesser-known event (and cause of considerable confusion over the years), the territorialization of nature: the discursive process by which an idea of nature was definitively sutured to the land. I will not be the first to comment on this event, but I have found it productive to emphasize and develop a sense of its importance here, especially because of its importance in the history of Latin American thinking. By accounting for this shift in the meaning of nature, it becomes possible to develop an understanding of its evolving function within Latin American discourse with greater nuance and detail.

While the meaning of nature has been in question for many centuries, forming the basis of much theological, scientific, and political debate during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the concept became even more uncertain in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as it was increasingly imagined in terms of the undeveloped landscape. Today, a colloquial sense of the word “nature” reflects this development: one tends to understand it as an ensemble of plants, animals, water, and topography, the ambit of a rural or wilderness environment. One must realize, however, that only after Rousseau, with the advent of romantic thinking, did a sense of nature as land become primary. Previously, while nature had sometimes been depicted metaphorically as a non-urban landscape, it had predominantly been understood as something else, either as the inborn quality of a thing, or as the atemporal atopia of the scientific thought experiment—the undifferentiated geometrical field by which a concept of universal truth was formulated.

On the one hand I point to this history in order to emphasize how romanticism's confusion of spatiality and temporality in their concept of territorial nature—its mingling of land and ahistorical truth—was useful to Latin American independence discourses. But additionally, I illustrate how Creole independence thinking not only benefitted from, but also contributed to nature's territorialization through its depiction of the American landscape in a romantic mode. Through my reading of independence literature I observe that this territorialization of nature was a messy, decentralized process, not only portraying America strictly through a European romantic framework, but also making its own original, anachronistic ascriptions of Enlightenment-nature properties to the land. Throughout the process of expounding on the genealogy of nature, the critique of Latin American cultural autonomy will in part consist in pointing out the ironies and paradoxes arising from creative applications of the concept.

This work is organized chronologically over four chapters, tracking evolving questions of cultural autonomy and nature in Latin America. Chapter One examines a period spanning from the first wave of independence by Latin American viceroalties from Spain in the early nineteenth century to the second wave of Cuban and Puerto Rican independence at the century's turn, observing the transition between these moments. Chapters Two and Three examine the time between national consolidation in the 1920s and the crisis of modernity after WWII, considering the legacy of romanticism in modern positivist and nationalist discourses. Chapter Four discusses the period of dictatorship starting shortly after WWII and lasting until the late 1980s, considering a return to national consolidation under dictatorship and the period of national decontainment that followed.

In Chapter One I lay the groundwork for the rest of the study, examining the adaption of a European concept of nature to the Latin American context as an ideological operation

facilitating a transition from a framework of Empire to that of the modern nation-state, grounding claims of cultural autonomy and new national identity. By reading foundational literary texts by José María Heredia, Andrés Bello, Esteban Echevarría, and Domingo F. Sarmiento, I show nature serving a duplicitous, double function, acting on the one hand as a *tabula rasa* that legitimizes the erasure of a Spanish past, and on the other as an emptiness that must be filled with a European civilization that will be provided by Creoles. Thus, nature facilitates the retention of an imperialist culture and society bent on conquest in the ostensibly egalitarian nation-state. I then examine José Martí's adoption of a vision of America as nature as it had been developed by the independence thinkers that preceded him for the creation of his anti-imperial Latin Americanism. I examine this translation in order to show how nature continued to define America as a land autonomous from history even after romanticism had fallen into decline, and suggest how this belief would constitute an important flaw in leftist thinking for years to come.

Additionally in this chapter, I briefly historicize the concept of nature itself in order to better understand the ideology guiding the transition from the colony to the independent nation-state. I begin to justify my understanding that nature is the central myth of modernity by showing it to be a "secular" transformation of the concept of God. I also provide an overview of the romantic territorialization of nature—a suturing of the atemporal quality of Enlightenment nature to the land—helping us to understand the paradoxes that arise in Latin American independence thinking. Through this investigation I conclude that the true function of nature is to posit the possibility and conceal the fundamental impossibility of the historical rift desired by Latin American Creoles for the creation of new nations. I thereby show that more than nation-

states, the ex-viceroyalties of the Spanish Empire actually transitioned to a system of nationally mixed territorial-states.

In Chapter Two I turn to the work of Jorge Luis Borges in its engagement with questions of national consolidation and the crisis of modernity, illustrating his critique of a desire to destroy the past. I carry out this investigation by reading two stories, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (1939), which was published as war was breaking out in Europe, and “El sur” (1953), which was published in its aftermath. By comparing them I show the connection between two parallel discourses defined by two ideas of nature: in the former work as the scientific truth of a positivist discourse, and in the latter as the mythical romantic wilderness of an Argentine nationalist discourse. Through this comparison I detail Borges’s consideration of how the romantic Creole desire to displace the Spanish past is perpetuated in the positivism that is supposed to supersede it, portraying the Creole desire to become a part of history as an annihilating or Oedipal return to the site of origin. Through this operation, the past secretly comes to occupy the endpoint of progressive time, as the messianic end of progressive, national history. Importantly, Borges takes up self-effacing parody in order to criticize the claim of autonomy. By refusing to disavow the object he critiques, instead identifying with it, he shows the way in which an eternal return to the claim of historical rupture can be interrupted.

In Chapter Three I continue to examine the legacy of romanticism in modernity through a historical framework similar to the one I use in Chapter Two, comparing José Eustasio Rivera’s *La vorágine* (1924) with Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* (1953). These texts portray the desire for cultural autonomy in the twentieth century—before and after the war—through allegories of a return to the terrestrial space of wilderness. The novels are very similar—the latter being a rewriting of the former—both narrating a search in the wilderness that I interpret as a

search for nature itself, the spatial-temporal concept at the foundation of the Latin American nation-state. Although the texts are very similar, the two authors present very different takes on this search for nature in the wilderness. Rivera disenchant nature; rather than finding pristine ahistorical land at the heart of the jungle, his protagonist finds the transnational rubber industry, technological modernity. If Rivera sought to criticize and debunk the idea of pristine romantic nature, Carpentier rewrites *La vorágine* by “correcting” this view of the wilderness. After WWII Carpentier seeks to recuperate a vision of Latin America as a site of nature that defines it as an ontology alternative to that of decadent Western modernity. Thus, his text serves as an example of how even as some Latin American thinkers seek to criticize the Creole desire for autonomy, others continue to reiterate and return to the call for difference through nature.

In Chapter Four I examine the ways in which the novels of Augusto Roa Bastos articulate and analyze the connections between the political romanticism of independence and the period of dictatorship in Paraguay in the second half of the twentieth century. First I read how *Yo el Supremo* (1974) considers the invention of the nation as a circumscription of nature that ultimately defines Paraguay as a site of detained temporality closely related to a historiographic concept of myth. He critiques the nation-state by showing how its romantic desire to enclose and contain an immanent, total subjectivity is impossible, and tends to ultimately lead to its obliteration. Through *El fiscal* (1993) and *Contravida* (1994) I show how Roa Bastos develops his depiction of the nation as a stillborn or ghostly entity from *Yo el Supremo* into a critique of literature itself—a romantic genre with intimate connections to the modern, romantic Latin American state. In these texts, he defines literature as a kind of afterlife, a specter of utopia and a space of strange dwelling akin to the nation. In his ongoing return to the genre despite his criticism of it, Roa Bastos affirms literature as an effective vehicle for thought, and thus begins

coming to grips with the growing comprehension that Latin American thought will never dispel the specter of romanticism that haunts it. He affirms literature as thinking carried out by the non-professional, the persistence of the original, unrealized democratic potential of romanticism as the productive potential of undisciplined thought. My readings draw particular attention to Roa Bastos's use of a self-critical thinking in order to navigate the question of autonomy, emphasizing his understanding that it is impossible to disavow the legacy of romanticism.

I conclude my study of Latin American cultural autonomy and nature by showing how my thinking might be further developed in the future.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Romantic Nature and the Culture of New Latin American States

*For when we define, we seem in danger of  
circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own  
notions, which we often take up by hazard, or  
embrace on trust, or form out of a limited and  
partial consideration of the object before us...*

–Edmund Burke

*El país es una mano abierta  
Sus líneas  
Signos de un alfabeto roto  
Osamentas de vacas en el llano*

–Octavio Paz

This chapter proposes to investigate discursive ground of Latin American national political experiments, and their basic condition of possibility: an idea of the American land as a historically autonomous state of nature. I show how a romantic concept of nature was essential to the claim of cultural autonomy in Latin America after independence, a claim that served as the theoretical basis for the invention of new national identities and republics. This concept of nature was not the Enlightenment concept by which the French Republic was theorized. It was a concept based on a later philosophical development of European romanticism adapted by Latin American political thinkers to the particularity of their place within the social and economic order of the nineteenth century. Specifically, this *territorialized nature*—a concept that identifies the “nature of things” (a form of universal, atemporal truth) with the pre-industrial landscape—and attendant political romanticism helped to mediate a transition from the Spanish Empire to the

modern political world order of the nation-state. Even though newly independent Creoles saw themselves as being inspired by French Revolution egalitarianism, their political romanticism retained the imperial reason that had defined the Hispanic colonial project up to that point. I show how romantic territorialized nature helped serve a double purpose of rationalizing a Creole claim of cultural independence from Spain aligned with Enlightenment ideals, while at the same time justifying his imperial desire to conquer the “barbarous” Other. Understanding the American land as autonomous nature helped Creoles perform a paradoxical double-erasure in their formulation of Latin American culture; nature as *tabula rasa* facilitated a denial of the Penninsular-European past, and as the barbarous desert it justified an assertion of Creole superiority over the non-European inhabitant of the land.

In retrospect it is clear that Latin American political romanticism did not establish nation-states living up to Enlightenment republican ideals of fraternity and equality. Lester Langley, in his investigation of the social and material conditions in place prior to independence, has shown that a lack of will to equality led to an independence without major shifts in the social or economic structures of the colony, a “revolution declined.” In part, this lack of egalitarianism is reflected in the adoption of romantic political ideology (as opposed to some other form of state organization), which conscientiously diverged from Enlightenment republicanism in its views of equality. Josef Chytry describes how the European romanticism ascendant at the time of Latin American independence had been elaborated in part as a response to the French Revolution, and was motivated by a desire to rethink the modern republic so as to avoid the problems that arose during that tumultuous application of Enlightenment political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> European romantics

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<sup>1</sup> This imperative was articulated in political terms by Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda, who stated: “Two great examples lie before our eyes, the American and the French Revolutions. Let us discreetly imitate the first; let us carefully avoid the disastrous effects of the second” (Langley 167).

deliberately developed a political philosophy breaking with the Enlightenment thinking that preceded it, and therefore, the vision of equality particular to Latin American republicanism is in part a matter of theory, an expression of political romanticism in general.

But additionally, the ongoing social inequality of Latin American states was reflected in the specific way in which European romantic theory was adopted and implemented in America, where a Creole elite used nature to rhetorically justify the consolidation of their own hegemony, undermining what might have been its function as a democratic, commonly held origin—and thus equality—of the people. This chapter seeks to better understand this complex relation between the theory and practice of Latin American political romanticism.

Two historical “moments” serve as a framework for this investigation into how a romantic concept of nature defines American discourse shortly after independence: 1. first-wave independence in the early nineteenth century, and 2. second-wave (Cuban and Puerto Rican) independence at the end of the nineteenth century.

My first task consists in tracing and comparing the shifting definitions and qualifications of nature in Latin American thought after the first wave of independence. Among the crucial works I examine are José María Heredia’s “En el Teocalli de Cholula” (1820) and “Niágara” (1824), Andrés Bello’s “La agricultura de la zona tórrida” (1826), Esteban Echeverría’s *La cautiva* (1837), and Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845). I find that “nature”—in spite of differences in its qualification due to a generally unsystematic adoption and application of European romanticism in Latin American discourse—consistently serves to found claims of cultural autonomy and lettered Creole sovereignty in America. A vision of America as a wilderness landscape untouched by time or history—a territorialized, romantic vision of nature—substantiates the theoretical possibility of a new national origin consisting in a total historical

break with the Spanish past. Then, through readings of “Prólogo al ‘Poema del Niágara’ de Juan A. Pérez Bonalde” (1882) and “Nuestra América” (1891) I illustrate how José Martí revived and mobilized view of America as a realm of nature for a thinking of Cuban independence from Spain and Latin American resistance to US imperialism. Autonomous nature, in its function as a conceptual bridge between post-independence thinking and an anti-imperial, or so-called Bolivarian thinking, would define this very important line in Latin American thought.

Over the length of this dissertation, I find that Martí’s use of nature for the creation of discourse around Cuban independence is but the first in a series of such translations comprising the history of anti-imperial thought in Latin America in its attempt to free itself from a colonial past and an imperialized/dependent present. Through its ongoing return to nature, Latin American thought continues to remain very much caught between the two moments that organize this chapter. Insofar as this concept of nature originally cloaked a Hispanic imperial mentality in the trappings of post-enlightenment political philosophy, it henceforth contaminates Latin American anti-imperial thinking, and remains as one of its greatest flaws.

### Political Autonomy, Cultural Autonomy, and the New American Nation

In outlining the transition to the modern nation-state in Europe in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Hannah Arendt discusses the relation between the state and the nation, describing the nation as the common interest that makes social disagreement within the state productive rather than destructive, the restraining force protecting society from civil war.<sup>2</sup> She

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<sup>2</sup> The relation between the people or nation, and the state, is the subject of unresolved debate. For now I will maintain the nineteenth-century perspective, which holds that nation and state are not necessarily mutually dependent, and that the existence of the nation is an important precondition for the proper functioning of a state. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind arguments by thinkers such Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Benedict Anderson, Michael Hart and Antonio Negri and James C. Scott, among others, who illustrate the processes by which the state creates the people. For a discussion that deals directly with this question refer to Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar*

writes that in modern societies, upon the abrogation of a king, whose task it had been to protect the common interest, the common interest falls into a “constant danger of being replaced by a permanent conflict among class interests and struggle for control of state machinery, that is, by permanent civil war” (230).<sup>3</sup> She goes on to suggest that “the only remaining bond between the citizens of a nation-state without a monarch to symbolize their essential community, seemed to be national, that is, common origin” (230). So it was in the Hispanic territories after the abrogation of Fernando VII in 1808, which soon spiraled into civil war. Later, in newly politically independent Latin American states, it was thus understood that a shared origin or national unity had to be articulated so as to restrain the civil war perpetually ongoing in the absence of the king. Thus, there was a parallel relation between the attainment of national unity and the resolution of two conflicts—the conflict between republicans and monarchists, and conflicts among different economic classes and races.<sup>4</sup> The first conflict would be won outright in 1824 at the Battle of Ayacucho in which republicans decisively defeated the royalist forces in America. It is uncertain that any of the remaining class and race conflicts were ever truly

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*of the Multitude* (2004). Virno argues that the people is only ever constituted through its relation to the state, and thus, cannot precede it.

In *Las repúblicas del aire* (2009) Raphael Rojas writes “El momento republicano posee la especificidad de producirse sin remisiones culturalistas a la “nación” o al “Estado” (32). According to him, the “republican moment” of post-independence—that is, a moment in which the new state is formed—would have little to do with a later “national moment,” the national consolidations of the early twentieth century. There can be no question, however, that the debates about cultural autonomy during this republican moment effectively addressed the issue of how the territory of Hispanic America would be “culturalmente ontologizado,” and thus, as a postulation of the new culture of the people, already represent a thinking of Latin American difference as national difference (33).

<sup>3</sup> While Ernesto Laclau’s work on populism has shown that classes are not simply reducible to relations of production, complicating our sense of the relation between class and the state, Arendt’s appraisal still offers a powerful way of explaining the class and race conflicts that, even today, threaten the stability of the state in the absence of a unified national origin in America.

“The ‘people,’ for Laclau, is a political subject constructed in and through populism, rather than a subject that preexists and expresses itself through populist politics... Thus ‘classes exist at the ideological and political level in a process of articulation and not of reduction’” (Beasley-Murray 45).

<sup>4</sup> Understanding this relation is difficult. It seems that the causal relation between “national” unity and the resolution of these conflicts was mutual; while they are not one in the same, each is dependent upon the other.

resolved, and the initial waves of outright battle would not ebb until many years after new state-territories consolidated independence from Spain.

For a Creole elite embroiled in various civil wars, consideration of cultural (or intellectual) autonomy and the definition of the cultural identity of new Latin American nations arose as the first war was being won, but before class and race conflicts had yet been stemmed. Even as war was fought to attain independence from Spain, it was not evident what exactly this independence would mean. Consequently, the thinking of cultural autonomy from Spain carried out by the lettered Creole classes was in part a negotiation of how to define new national cultures to reflect their break with Spain. But insofar as the act of defining an autonomous Latin American nation would involve determining cultural values still being disputed in class and race conflicts, the debate over cultural autonomy must also be seen as a front in these wars.<sup>5</sup> For the Creole elite, defining the nation meant both theorizing cultural autonomy from Spain, and at the same time asserting its cultural superiority over the masses.<sup>6</sup>

Through his work on Mexico, Claudio Lomnitz affirms that the definition of the nation in Latin America tended not to reflect an attempt to inclusively establish fraternity among all inhabitants of the land, but rather, occurred through “the conflation of Creole national identity with a specific patria, or fatherland” (5). For him, this Creole national identity and cultural superiority was not just a matter of a secular European education. He describes how Creoles were unified insofar as they were Old Christians, who upon the downfall of the Spanish crown, understood themselves to be the last vestiges of a Hispanic Catholic empire, “true keepers of the

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<sup>5</sup> Rather than being an original unity, Julio Ramos understands the nation as a “field of struggle,” a notion whose very definition would determine “hegemonic conditions” of political and social participation (252).

<sup>6</sup> Mary Louise Pratt writes: “Politically and ideologically, the liberal Creole project involved founding an independent, decolonized American society and culture, while retaining European values and white supremacy” (172).

faith” (18).<sup>7</sup> Especially during the period of autonomy prior to independence, national identity was thought of as a Christian spirituality-turned-race, through the Inquisition concept of *limpieza de sangre*. But even though the Christian nation of the Creole elite remained a powerful and important unifying force, as independence from Spain was being attained European Enlightenment and romantic thought would exercise a growing influence, helping inform decisions leading to the formation of national-republics roughly corresponding to Spanish viceroalties (instead of new kingdoms) in the new world.

By linking the political autonomy of their new republics to a claim of national autonomy, Latin American foundational thinkers glossed over the subtle distinction between their political autonomy from Spain and an undeniable genealogical link to a Spanish nation/people. It is possible to speculate that the need to find a correlation between nation and state for the creation of new republics might have led Creole independence thinkers to find a way to recognize their Spanish heritage as a basis of national unity without diminishing their claim of political autonomy. But perhaps because it was the more radical elements of Creole society who called for independence in the first place, few foundational thinkers wished to embrace their Spanish past, much less recognize it as a basis of national identity in America. Instead, along with political autonomy, Creole thinkers found that proclaiming cultural autonomy from Spain was an indispensable step in a larger process of claiming a place in a world order of political nation-states. After independence Andrés Bello was possibly the most willing of these thinkers to admit the importance of Spanish heritage—especially insofar as it descended from Rome—for American

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<sup>7</sup> The title of Jaime E. Rodríguez O.’s new book, “*We Are Now the True Spaniards*” (2012), refers to the proclamation of the Mexican insurgency against France after Napoleon toppled the Spanish crown in 1810. Indeed, most American viceroalties saw themselves as the standard bearers of the Spanish Monarchy after the French invasion of Spain in 1808, the new “true Spaniards.” Nevertheless, in most viceroalties, especially after King Fernando VII returned to power, the radicalization of autonomy movements shifted discourse away from this sense of being the true Spanish, to begin the search for a new Creole national identity.

culture, though he still clearly maintains the necessity of attaining cultural autonomy from Europe in the essay “La autonomía cultural de America” (1848). On the other hand, Domingo F. Sarmiento repudiated his Spanish heritage outright in *Facundo* (1845). In describing the degradation of the Rosas regime, he wrote, “No os riáis, pues, pueblos hispano-americanos al ver tanta degradación. ¡Mirad que sois españoles y la Inquisición educó así a la España! Esta enfermedad la traemos en la sangre” (94). Expressed with reserve or unabashedly, cultural autonomy from Spain came to be understood as a crucial condition for the attainment of national consolidation; independence from Spain needed to be more than mere political autonomy.

The Creole desire not to be culturally Spanish represented a serious problem for the definition of the nation.<sup>8</sup> It was clearly inconsistent with the fact of Creoles’ shared Spanish heritage. It also appeared to downplay their shared Catholicism, which Claudio Lomnitz and Jaime E. Rodríguez O. identify as an important basis of the unity of elite Creole identity. Furthermore, while war made it possible to define American culture in contradistinction to Spain for a time, the “social production of empty signifiers” through negative definition has demonstrated itself historically to be unsustainable as a unifying force (Laclau 34). Thus, while it would be easy for Simón Bolívar, through a definition of the external enemy, to define what the national culture was not, it would not be possible to indefinitely postpone deciding upon what precisely it was.

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Americas in the Age of Revolution* (1996) Lester D. Langley describes development of the Creole sense of difference from the Peninsular Spaniard prior to Latin American independence as one of its important preconditions. More than a difference in culture, Langley describes the Creole identity as an extension of a sense of entitlement to property and trading rights promised for the service of their ancestors in the conquest. He cites John Fisher’s materialist description of the growing tension between Peninsulars and Creoles stemming from the fact that “the very success of free trade encouraged the migration to America of large numbers of peninsular Spaniards, whose privileged positions in both the bureaucracy and commerce, coupled with their dynamism, enabled them to profit at the expense of creole producers and displaced local merchants” (Fisher 126). Such explanations articulate historical precedent for difference between Peninsulars and Creoles, but do not describe cultural autonomy as a *cause* of independence. Such descriptions allow us to see how a caste, or socio-economic difference prior to independence is transmuted into a cultural/national difference after independence.

Rhetorically, the greatest difficulty for the definition of the new Creole nation perhaps lay in a logical discord between the conflicting imperatives of defining the nation against a now “foreign” Spanish enemy, and winning class or race war, that is, consolidating a right to rule, which they saw as being justified in part by their sense of cultural superiority over the masses. By their own account, beyond their status as old Christians, this superiority lay in a European refinement, titles of higher education attained in French and English universities, and a European (but nevertheless not Spanish) understanding of what it meant to be civilized.<sup>9</sup> It is easy enough to see the contradiction this presents: a fairly radical claim of cultural autonomy from Spain is difficult to reconcile with a reactionary claim of cultural superiority rooted in European refinement.

#### A Double Standard

In spite of obvious logical difficulties in simultaneously proclaiming cultural autonomy from Europe against Spain, and European cultural superiority over the rural poor, Javier Lasarte Valcárcel suggests that the Creole elite did just that. In his essay “El XIX estrecho: leer los proyectos fundacionales” (2003), he describes a Latin American “nacionalismo paradójico” as the dissonance between claims of national difference and a Creole admiration for European culture—French especially—during the nineteenth century (58). It is not only nationalism that becomes “paradoxical” as a result, but republicanism as well—the “Enlightened” mode of political representation in the state in which the people is sovereign. Along similar lines but in a different context, Roberto Schwarz’s essay “Misplaced Ideas” (1992) describes Brazil’s attempt to adopt the ideals of the French Revolution while depending on an economy organized around

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<sup>9</sup> In *The Poverty of Progress* (1980) Bradford Burns shows that until end of the nineteenth century (with Martí’s anti-imperialist thought) the horizon of civilization and progress—i.e. the cultural agenda for the new republics—was understood predominantly as Europeanization.

the exploitation of slave labor. Schwarz shows how a selective, self-interested application of universal ideals kept Brazilian republicanism from living up to the egalitarianism by which it was ostensibly informed. This kind of phenomenon occurred not just in Brazil, but throughout Latin America. The claim of cultural autonomy sought to establish the legitimacy of the new nations at the core of new republican states inspired by the French Revolution. Rather than inclusively representing the entire population of the new egalitarian republic, the nation was defined exclusively, for and by a Creole lettered class.

Here one should note Julio Ramos's suggestion that these inconsistencies in the application of egalitarian ideals in the Latin American context stem in part from deficiencies in the scholarly rigor of a "poorly lettered" elite (7). In making this argument in *Divergent Modernities* (2001), Ramos cites Sarmiento's misquotation of Volney in *Facundo*'s opening epigraph, which he interprets as an affirmation of a wilder, perhaps more "barbaric" American scholarship. Still, I cannot ignore Ricardo Piglia's observation suggesting just the opposite: that the French citation opening *Facundo* is meant primarily to exclude the barbarian who cannot read it.<sup>10</sup> If the importance of Sarmiento's reference to Volney in *Facundo* resides primarily in the fact that it is in French ("On ne tue point les idées"), as Piglia's character Marconi suggests, there can be no question that republicanism itself could serve in a similar way, as a shibboleth for the self-recognition of the educated, elite classes. If republicanism, too, were similarly "mistranslated" to the American context, its new meaning would be especially perverse. The liberal ideals of the French revolution—liberty, fraternity, and equality—through their adoption as

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<sup>10</sup> In *Respiración artificial* (1980) Marconi reflects on the foundational Argentine work: "¿Cómo empieza Sarmiento el *Facundo*? Contando cómo en el momento de iniciar su exilio escribe en francés una consigna. El gesto político no está en el contenido de la frase, o no está solamente ahí. Está, sobre todo, en el hecho de escribirla en francés. Los bárbaros llegan, miran esas letras extranjeras escritas por Sarmiento, no las entienden..." (130).

a sign of elite stature, would function in a way antonymous to their denoted meanings, as tools for the enforcement of inequality.

Romantic nature was useful in grounding claims of cultural and political autonomy insofar as it served the implementation of the double standard. And as a concept lifted directly from the romanticism popular in Europe at the time, it embodies the double move of those new nations that defined themselves culturally on the one hand against (as independent from) Europe while on the other hand taking Europe as the horizon of progress against which racially and educationally non-European classes were contrasted. Beyond embodying the double standard, the romantic *tabula rasa* would be also used to rationalize it. Nature would constitute on the one hand the new historical origin by which Creoles understood themselves as a new nation separate from Europe, and on the other, a barbaric void they, as Europeans, would fill with civilization.

#### Nature as a Land Without History

The categorical difference between the Creole and Peninsular in the colony was not a difference in culture or genealogical origin, but rather motherland—the place where one was born. After independence, the description of national difference between Spaniard and American Creole required portraying a difference in land as difference in culture, as the basis for that seemingly impossible radical break with the past maintained in the Creole claim that he was not nationally Spanish. A romantic vision of nature that was first articulated by English poets and German philosophers in the late eighteenth century, as a concept that unifies space and time, would help turn the difference in land into a difference in ontology.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In modernity the first crucial instance in which the landscape serves as a metaphor for “nature” (the colloquial sense of “nature” as trees, animals, lakes, and other elements of the landscape in common use today) can be found in the political writings of Rousseau. I will discuss the romantic identification of nature with land—i.e. the “territorialization” of nature—at length in the following pages. Other important precursors of nineteenth-century

Leopoldo Zea's work is perhaps the most significant attempt to draw out the relation between a romantic concept of nature as a realm autonomous from history and the Latin American claim of cultural autonomy.<sup>12</sup> In the introduction of *The Latin-American Mind* (first published as *Dos etapas del pensamiento en Hispanoamérica* in 1949) Zea writes that "At a certain historical juncture the Hispanic American rebelled against his past, and hence against the responsibilities that it implied. He attempted to make an immediate break with the past. He denied it, by attempting to begin a new history, as if nothing had been accomplished previously" (12). In this way Zea suggests that the Creole desire for cultural autonomy from Spain became intertwined with something more radical, a strange and powerful desire for autonomy from history itself. Therefore, insofar as America was seen by Creoles as "a virgin land, a new country, where man who inhabited it lived in a complete state of nature, that is, without history" Zea suggests that the Creole break with history, which is one in the same as a break with a Spanish origin, is bound up with their imagination of the American land as a state of nature (10).

Today, the word "nature" evokes an image of an undeveloped landscape, as an ensemble of plants, animals, and minerals, but this was not always the case. For Enlightenment thinkers,

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romanticism are Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, two thinkers of the sublime. In his essay "Kant and Schiller" (1996) Paul de Man understands the decisive romantic moment to be Schiller's (mis)interpretation this idea of the sublime from Kant.

<sup>12</sup> Many studies have been made on romanticism in Latin America, but few describe its relation to the claim of cultural autonomy. For example, in *Romanticismo en la América hispánica* (1967), Emilio Carilla shows how the influence of romanticism in Hispanic America operated on many levels, and emphasizes its great importance, but nevertheless dedicates only a very small portion of the two-volume study to a discussion of the question of cultural autonomy, and even less to nature. In regard to the latter he notes only a preponderance of compositions concerned with "el mundo animal," "las ruinas," and "la luna" (33).

Other scholars have noted the function of nature in rationalizing the desire for a rift with Spain and the colonial past, but have not emphasized the importance of romanticism in this operation. In his introduction to the collection *Ficciones y silencios fundacionales* (2003), Friedhelm Schmidt-Welle addresses the issue of Latin American difference by writing: "La diferencia se construye aquí no solo como una diferencia histórica o de mentalidades, sino también como ruptura con el propio pasado colonial y como diferencia de la 'naturaleza americana'" (13). Here Schmitt-Welle does not refer specifically to a romantic nature sutured to landscape, but rather a more general sense of the ontological basis of Latin American difference beyond political autonomy. Still, his use of the term is significant insofar as Latin American thinkers would attempt to articulate this basis of ontological difference precisely in terms of the land, as the nature of trees, rocks, hills, etc. I will seek to establish a dialogue between Carilla's sense of the importance of romanticism in Hispanic America to Friedhelm Schmidt-Welle's sense of the Creole's need to claim ontological difference from Europe.

the state of nature was not considered to be an actual or metaphorical terrestrial realm. Rather, it was a hypothetical atopia, a way in which thinking was performed as an imaginary reconstruction of the most basic conditions of being. It was only through the romanticism of the late eighteenth century and its development in the Americas that nature became synonymous with the landscape in modernity.

The novelty of Latin American political romanticism consists primarily in this shift in the concept of nature from that which had founded the republican claim of the sovereignty of the people years earlier during the French Revolution—sovereignty of the people as natural right. This Latin American transformation of the nature grounding Enlightenment theories of sovereignty involved a process of projecting this theoretical atopia—an idea of universal truth—onto the actual landscape of new territories. This difference can be appreciated by noting that while the nature legitimizing the sovereignty of the people during the French Revolution had nothing to do with the particularity of the land itself, in Spanish America, romantic Creole sovereignty and cultural autonomy is repeatedly articulated in terms of landscape.

For the rest of this chapter I will observe the process by which historically autonomous nature, the purely conceptual realm of the Enlightenment thought experiment, was sutured to landscape in early depictions of America by post-independence thinkers. Surely in Latin America “no single elite espousing a uniform doctrine ever existed” and the literary intellectuals of Spanish America’s first wave of independence—Andrés Bello, Francisco Bilbao, Esteban Echeverría, Domingo F. Sarmiento, Simón Bolívar, and José V. Lastarria, among others—defined nature so as to reinforce their own particular ideas and political interests (Burns 5). Consequently, just as European romanticism itself was not a homogenous social/aesthetic

movement, nature did not take one single consistent meaning or definition in America.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless the various takes on nature were uniform in that autonomous nature was repeatedly equated with the American countryside or landscape, the land being understood as empty, a *tabula rasa* grounding the possibility of a new beginning. Land-nature thus becomes the possibility of disavowing the Spanish past, the realm in which a new non-Spanish Creole nation can be postulated as an alternate line of history.

### Humboldt's Travel Narrative and Scientific Territorialization of Nature

The influence of German and English romantic philosophies is an important but underrepresented link in the genealogy of Latin American political romanticism. France, having been the main bastion of culture for Latin America ever since the Bourbon Reforms, is well represented in its cultural influence over Latin American independence.<sup>14</sup> While Hugo, Lamartine, and Chateaubriand doubtless exerted their influence, I will find it productive to explore other lines of romantic thought opened by German and English romantics, especially their considerations of the relation between nature, the land, and the poet.

In recent years, the most significant critical attention given to a specifically German romantic influence in Latin America has been that maintained by Mary Louise Pratt. In *Imperial Eyes* (1992), Pratt discusses a travel narrative by the scientist and explorer Alexander Von Humboldt—*Le voyage aux regions equinoxiales du Nouveau Continent* (1799-1806)—

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<sup>13</sup> In *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) Jerome J. McGann understands a general disagreement about the homogeneity of romanticism through the opposing arguments of René Wellek and A.O. Lovejoy. He writes: “Both argued that Romanticism (whether “intrinsic” or historical) comprised a vast and heterogeneous body of material; but where Wellek saw a basic unity in that diversity, Lovejoy argued that critical rigor permitted nothing less precise than a careful ‘discrimination of Romanticisms’” (17). The heterogeneity of romanticism is complicated in part by its international character, the complex network of influences. In his essay “The Politics of the Sublime: Coleridge and Wordsworth in Germany” (1996) Tim Fulford explores the historical connection between English and German Romanticism in order to better comprehend the romantic concept of the sublime.

<sup>14</sup> For a list of these influences see the section entitled “Political Influences” in Zea’s *The Latin American Mind* (20).

highlighting the influence it exerted on the early writings of Latin American independence, and how his work “became essential raw material for American and Americanist ideologies forged by creole intellectuals in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s” (172). According to Pratt: “His reinvention of America for Europe was transculturated by Euro-American writers into a Creole process of self-invention” (172).

Pratt shows Humboldt’s contribution to the territorialization of nature in America as being defined by the extent to which his scientific search for nature, as the realm of autonomous, universal truth, comes to be effectively equivalent to an engagement with American landscapes. If he does not quite equate America to nature, he nevertheless depicts America as the site in which his own experience of nature was maximal. In reference to nature he writes, “Nowhere does she more deeply impress us with a sense of her greatness, nowhere does she speak to us more forcibly than in the tropical world, beneath the ‘Indian sky [...],’” that is, in America (154). For him, nature is fundamentally tied up with the place that facilitates its study. In conveying the greatness of its impression in America he compares it to Europe, establishing a framework for comparing the difference between two continents as a difference in nature. Even as he maintains a conceptual separation between nature and landscape, he manages to conflate them, referring to elements of landscape—the ocean, forests savannahs, solitudes, and mountains—as “objects of nature” (ix).

Just a few years later, Latin American thinkers of cultural autonomy would also bind nature to the land, instead to emphasize the extent to which nature was autochthonous to it. Even if their appropriation of the European genre inverts its (i.e., Humboldt’s) colonial gaze, it would be less an attempt to subvert a European discourse, as per Roberto González Echevarría’s view of Latin American imitation of European discourses, and more an earnest use of that

discourse, manifesting the desire by a Creole elite for Europeanization, as Pratt suggests. What Pratt does not describe is how their depictions of territorial nature went far beyond the limited scientific scope of Humboldt's project, dialoguing with the extensive and diverse romantic corpus. Finding nature in the land was much more than a means by which "natural history" might be theorized and formulated; it reflected not just the romantic-scientific discourse of Humboldt, but a whole body of romantic thought whose main task consisted in accessing a mythical nature in the undeveloped landscape. In their work one can just as easily read the nature of Shelley and August Schlegel, that origin from which a new Rome could emerge, the fountainhead of genius, civilization, and empire. Even when Latin American thinkers depicted nature as a barbarous state in need of conquest, it retained for them a redeeming romantic potential as a source of poetic and religious sentiment.

In accounting for Humboldt's territorialization of American nature in *Imperial Eyes* Pratt perhaps somewhat overstates his influence, attributing various poetic depictions of the landscape in Latin America exclusively to Humboldt without considering the cultural impact of other foundational romantic thinkers of England and Germany such as Byron, Blake, Wordsworth, Shelly, Schiller, the brothers Schlegel, Goethe, and Novalis, as well as their philosophical predecessors such as Burke and Kant. Although she acknowledges his contemporaneity with a thinker such as Andrés Bello, when Pratt writes, for example, that Esteban Echeverría's "*The Captive* opens with the landscape of Humboldt's 'On Steppes and Deserts,'" she implies a direct line of influence between Humboldt and Echeverría, as if the Argentine is imitating the German scientist's work (180). Rather than imagining that Latin American writers imitated Humboldt, one must understand that they are his contemporaries, parallel romantics, arriving upon similar conclusion by similar means (stimulated by German and English romantic thought). Especially

in the case of Echeverría, it is much more likely that his romantic depiction of the landscape was written in dialogue with thinkers other than Humboldt. His references to the genius in his description of the pampas, and even his choice of the poetic medium, are likely signs of the influence of Byron, Schiller, and Goethe. Indeed, it is documented in his personal diaries that he became fascinated with these writers during his stay in Paris, and he pays heed to this influence, opening *La cautiva* citing Byron in an epigraph.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, one must be sure not to overlook these thinkers when documenting the romanticism of Creole depictions of American nature. While acknowledging the importance of the scientific/colonial discourse, I find it necessary to look beyond Humboldt to recognize the greater influence of the romantic theory of nature as landscape on Latin American claims of cultural autonomy after independence.

The following sections will seek to expand on Pratt's readings of Humboldt's influence on foundational Latin American thinkers. More than imitating a certain style, these thinkers interpreted the romantic concept of nature with a great feeling for its potential application to their particular political and cultural settings.

### The Territorialization of Nature in European Romanticism

Before beginning to discuss depictions of the landscape by Creole thinkers, I will briefly outline the way in which nineteenth-century romanticism redefined the Enlightenment concept of nature they inherited. For European romantic thinkers, territorialized nature tended to be a metaphor for indecisive melancholy; very basically, it represented an idealization of the past that

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<sup>15</sup> See Leonor Fleming's introduction to Catedra edition of *El matadero*. She cites the following entry from Echeverría's journal: "Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe y especialmente Byron me conmovieron profundamente y me revelaron un nuevo mundo" (Echeverría 26).

at the same time betrayed it with a reluctant resignation to the supremacy of the present.<sup>16</sup>

Seeing the history of nature leading up to its translation to America can help us to appreciate

how the paradoxes of romantic melancholy are retained, and then further exacerbated in it.

Getting a grasp on both Enlightenment and romantic concepts of nature and their differences will

help us better understand how in America they become intertwined with alarming results.

In addition to romantic melancholic presentism, this section will also begin to describe the paradoxes arising from a process of secularization by which nature serves as both an alternative to theological concepts, and as a stand in for them. In the shift from the Enlightenment to romanticism, the meaning of nature—as a tool for thinking about history—shifts out of its function as an origin *alternative to* that maintained by the Catholic Church (the God

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<sup>16</sup> The principle concern of the present work is not the definition of European romanticism, or the complex parsing of different lines within this tradition, but rather, it is to present the history of its unsystematic translation to the Latin American context. Beyond the positions of René Wellek and A.O. Lovejoy that Jerome J. McGann discusses in *The Romantic Ideology*, “son innumerables los intentos que les han hecho para definir el Romanticismo e incontables las ocasiones en las que se ha puesto de manifiesto la imposibilidad de circunscribir el término a una serie de manifestaciones culturales...” (Gras Balaguer 13). Here I will briefly introduce the view of romanticism that I will elaborate in the following section.

This work focuses on the false melancholy often produced by the tension between a desire to recuperate the past and an awareness of the impossibility of this task, a problem closely linked to the romantic desire for the immanence of the subject, or self-identity. In an essay on the work of Walter Benjamin, “Benjamin and the ambiguities of Romanticism,” Rebecca Comay explores this issue, focusing her discussion on Benjamin’s revision of Fichte’s attempt to “vindicate the autonomous subject as philosophical first principle” with the self-positing ego, that is, the problem of self-identity and immanence of the subject (136). Comay cites Benjamin’s reading of Novalis to show that the romantics did not believe in the possibility of the self-immanence of the subject, showing Fichte’s subject “revealed to be an unending mirror-play of doubles and negatives, the very grounding of the self revealed to be a vertiginous leap into the abyss” (137). Still, she acknowledges: “This is not to say that the *desire* for self-identity is simply extinguished for the Romantics.” (137).

I will find that the desire for self-identity is inscribed in the concept of nature as a site of origin and unity. If Benjamin would anticipate Derrida’s sense of *differance*, accepting the non-self-identity of the subject, it is not so clear to me that this is characteristic of romanticism in general. Even given Novalis’s comprehension of the impossibility of the self-immanence of the subject—reflected in the melancholic acknowledgement of the impossibility of a return to nature, or Rome—a problem arises in the line of romantic thought he represents, in the collapse of desire for return into a desire for desiring itself, once that return is understood to be impossible. (Indeed, Comay acknowledges this ambiguity, posing the question: “Is there, in another register, a secret return to Fichteanism in the Romantic urge to ‘fulfillment’—a disavowal of the abyssal void opened up by the very process of reflection?” [147]). Furthermore, insofar as nature comes to be seen in the landscape, it appears as something that is both real and present, and thus departs from Benjamin’s reading.

I will move forward by simply and briefly illustrating my sense of romantic territorial nature with a few examples.

who creates the universe in six days) into the modern concept of the divine itself.<sup>17</sup> I will argue that nature's ambiguous position between secular Enlightenment philosophy and anti-secular religious revival of romanticism was central to its function in Latin America, where it helped Creoles make a transition to modern state forms while continuing to maintain the Catholic-imperial culture of the colony.

A tradition of conceptualizing sovereignty through nature began long before the nineteenth century. Even prior to Latin American independence, the concept served as the new origin essential to the foundation of the modern republic. European Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau articulated their political theories in terms of nature, and the differences between their models of the state can be reduced basically to differences in their understandings of this concept. At the time, humanities and sciences were not yet strictly differentiated, and a state of nature functioned for a thinking of history and society just as it was used to think about geometry (for Rene Descartes) or the motion of bodies in space (for Isaac Newton). Hobbes for instance, a political thinker, conceived the state of nature in *Leviathan* (1650) as a kind of mathematical field by which the geometry of social relations could be conceived in a new way.<sup>18</sup> For these thinkers, nature was not a pre-industrial landscape or its elements. Rather, it was a hypothetical atopia, a way in which thinking was performed as an imaginary reconstruction of the most basic conditions of being, as a way of explaining the “nature of things.”

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<sup>17</sup> In his important work *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) M.H. Abrams states: “The title *Natural Supernaturalism* indicates that my recurrent, but far from exclusive, concern will be with the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking” (12). I very much share his view that nature in romanticism helps recast—or is a recasting of—Judeo-Christian concepts in a secular mode.

<sup>18</sup> Later, Kant would define nature in logical terms as well, as a “totality of appearances as regards their existence according to necessary rules, i.e. according to laws.” Josef Chytry contrasts this to “the Goethean view of nature as the inner principle of a thing, ‘the development of things through themselves’” (Chytry 80).

Nature served as a means for effectuating political rupture in the Enlightenment primarily in its function as a basis for thinking beyond the purview of the Church. Rousseau elaborates nature in this way, as a site of autonomous thought as a time or history alternative to that described by scripture. One can observe him subtly but deliberately undermining the authority of the Church with this secular time throughout his oeuvre, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the introduction of his essay on “The Origin of Inequality” (1754). In this work he at first seems to defer to the Church, affirming that the “state of nature” is a hypothetical unreality:

[I]f we give such credit to the writings of Moses as every Christian philosopher ought to give, we must deny that, even before the deluge, men were ever in the pure state of nature [...]

Let us begin then by laying all facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin[...] Religion commands us to believe that God Himself having taken men out of a state of nature immediately after creation, they are unequal only because it is His will they should be so: but it does not forbid us to form conjectures based solely on the nature of man, and the beings around him, concerning what might have become of the human race, if it had been left to itself. (50)

While here he casts his work as an exploration of the hypothetical imagination of man left to his own devices in the world, the following paragraph expresses a very different sentiment.

Rousseau writes: “O man, of whatever country you are, and whatever your opinions may be,

behold your history, such as I have thought to read it, not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. All that comes from her will be true...

(51). Without drawing the conclusion for us, through the close proximity of these two conjectures, Rousseau implies that the belief promoted by scriptural (textual) religion is a lie, and recommends nature as an alternative framework for the thinking of human pre-history.

Although “all that comes from her will be true,” nature remains a hypothetical reasoning. And though Rousseau has been taken as the main precursor of romantic idealization of nature, one must acknowledge that he never takes the step of understanding nature as the romantics did, through elements of a landscape found in the present.<sup>19</sup> If in Rousseau by nature all men are equal, nature refers to a commonly held origin, birth, or inborn quality –the word’s etymological root “nat-” means “born” (like “natal,” or, significantly, “nation”). The nature founding the legitimacy of the new republican state in France after the revolution has nothing to do with the particularity of the land in which France happens to be situated.

The idea of nature as elements of landscape, by it is predominantly understood today, was a development of European romantic thought. We find an inkling of nature as landscape already in Rousseau’s imagination of the solitary man travelling through the world as it existed prior to the rise of cities and agriculture, but the concept is not fully elaborated in this way until the late eighteenth century in Germany and England.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In *Romantic Origins* (1978) Leslie Brisman examines the tension between the influence of Rousseau’s state of nature on romanticism, and the fact that romantic thinkers did not always acknowledge his sense that it never existed.

<sup>20</sup> Insofar as the European encounter with America was a tremendously important event in the development of the history of thought, and given the seminal circulation of ideas between the Old and New Worlds starting in the colonial period, it might be possible to argue that the Enlightenment concept of nature itself was inspired or precipitated by an encounter with the American landscape. If it was the vast expanses of uncultivated land that inspired first the Enlightenment, and then romantic conceptualizations of nature, then their translations and mistranslations back into the American context represent a historical irony. An interesting study might be made of this historical echo or boomerang effect. Until such a study of the concept of nature is carried out, however, for the purpose of simplicity, I will maintain that the concept of nature becomes landscape with the Germans and British.

It will not be possible to comprehensively detail the process by which nature comes to be synonymous with the “fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams, / Ocean and all the living things that dwell / Within the daedel earth” (Shelley 99). Still, it will be necessary to account briefly for this history by looking at several contributions by German philosophers and English Romantic poets. In their work, both deliberately and inadvertently, the allegories by which romantics represent nature—images of the pre-industrial land—overwhelm enlightenment senses of the concept.

When describing the poetic impulse in his essay on *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), Friedrich Schiller writes, “There are moments in our lives when we dedicate a kind of love and tender respect to nature in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as to human nature in children [...] simply *because it is nature*” (83). The gratification of the senses through the contemplation of nature is the feeling one experiences “when he wanders in the open air, when he stays in the country...” (83). In regard to bees, flowers, birds, etc., found there, he writes:

We love in them the tacitly creative life, the serene spontaneity of their activity, existence in accordance with their own laws, the inner necessity, the eternal unity with themselves. *They are what we were; they are what we once again should become.* We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature. (84)

He goes on to explain that it is the job of the poet to find and articulate an ethic of naïveté through his encounter with the beauty of a natural landscape. As the ground of an equation of morality and beauty, the undeveloped land becomes a representation of youth itself, a site of rebirth, and the origin to which we would attempt to return. The inner space of human nature—

especially in childhood—is identified with the outer space of the land—a space uncorrupted by development.

Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1803-1806) precisely performs the task set out by Schiller, depicting a synthesis of nature as “birth,” and as landscape. Indeed, this poem, which opens with praise for a bucolic earth, even defines the naïve poet—the Youth—as “Nature’s Priest,” a motif that I will explore in greater depth elsewhere in this work (53). A slightly different kind of identification of nature to landscape can be found in “Mont Blac” (1816) by Percy Bysshe Shelley, which rather than taking a bucolic pastureland as its subject, seeks the sublime in the severity of the Alps.<sup>21</sup> In Shelley’s poetic evocations of the stark peaks the reader again finds landscape identified with nature, only here more than a reflection on origin as site of birth or childhood—be it of humanity or of the individual—it is a sign of nature as the awesome terror that evokes and stands in for the concept of God.

A transformation of God into nature initiated during the Enlightenment—what could be understood as a Levi-Straussian transformation of myth, most visible in Spinoza’s formulation “God/Nature” in *Ethics* (1677)—is itself transformed into pre-historical landscape during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By now it has been possible to glimpse the divinity that the landscape held for Schiller and Shelley, its totality and self-sufficiency representing the

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<sup>21</sup> In “Kant and Schiller” Paul de Man reads the birth of romanticism in Schiller’s simplifying misinterpretation of Kant’s concept of the sublime, and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy also note the importance of Kant’s influence on the genesis of romanticism in *The Literary Absolute* (1978), stating, “Kant opens up the possibility of romanticism,” or in other words, is the first to make a significant break with an Enlightenment thinking of nature and the subject (29). According to de Man, Schiller “polarizes” Kant, making a totalizing system out of Kant’s more complicated and nuanced system (137). De Man suggests that after Schiller, the work of philosophy is to “de-Schillerize”: “Nietzsche [...] acts critically in relation to Schopenhauer and, I would say, ‘de-Schillerizes’ and ‘re-Kantizes’ what Schopenhauer had been saying” (“Kant” 131). Insofar as romanticism is translated to Latin America in a non-disciplinary, or “savage” manner, Latin American romantics reify Schiller’s “error.” In addition to Kant, one must acknowledge that Edmund Burke’s essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) would also have been an important influence on Schiller and the German romantics.

possibility of the absolutely immanent ego. If nature is a secular expression of God, as thus serves also as a site of man's origin alternative to the Eden of the Judeo-Christian tradition (as it did for Rousseau), the undeveloped land came to function as a mnemonic for the recollection of that origin, both in its beautiful innocence and terrifying sublimity—in mercy and in justice, the two defining attributes of divinity in Judaism. Against any concept of natural history, the rural or wild landscape increasingly came to represent the precondition of history itself: not merely a more ancient time, it was the idea of an ahistorical, timeless realm of divine self-immanence.<sup>22</sup>

Like sovereignty itself, one must understand nature as being one of those concepts Carl Schmitt refers to when, in *Political Theology* (1922), he writes: “Every productive concept in the modern theory of the State is a secularized theological concept” (36). The attribution of divine attributes to nature in Enlightenment thinking appeared to serve primarily for the thinking of politics and sovereignty in a new way, helping to form the basis of a postulation of sovereign legitimacy alternative to the divine right of kings. In this way nature made it possible to imagine the modern republic. Though the example of Hobbes—for whom God played an important role in the right to rule of the sovereign—manifests that secularization remains incomplete during the Enlightenment, nature already began to stand in for God as the basis of sovereign right in Enlightenment theories of the state.

It is clear that in part, romantic thinking continues to take nature as a category for a thinking of the political. In *The Aesthetic State* (1989), Josef Chytrý illustrates how German

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<sup>22</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) Walter Benjamin proposes a concept of “natural history” as a relation of mutual instantiation between nature and history. Eric Santner describes this concept in *On Creaturely Life* (2006): “In Benjamin’s parlance, *Naturgeschichte* has to do with what Pippin referred to as the breakdown and reification of the normative structures of human life and mindedness. It refers, that is, not to the fact that nature also has a history but to the fact that the artifacts of human history tend to acquire an aspect of mute, natural being at the point where they begin to lose their place in a viable form of life (think of the process whereby architectural ruins are reclaimed by nature)” (16). Benjamin himself writes, “The word ‘history’ stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience” indicating the impossibility of truly circumscribing nature as a realm that is autonomous from history (*Origin* 178).

romantic intellectuals responded not only to Kant's philosophical breakthroughs, but also to the implementation of new theories of the state in the French Revolution. The romantics were principally concerned with the problem of social disunity that faced the modern world. Schiller, for one, established his theory of beauty in relation to the field of the political in this way, intending to "overcome social divisions by using the theater to unite all humans in the experience of common values" in order to usher in a new "social and political order, the 'aesthetic state'" (Chytry 74, 76).

Novalis was also concerned with national unity and "the people," as can be seen in his essay "Christendom of Europe" (1799). He lamented the growing disunity of Europe as a whole, which he attributed to the rise of nations and the declining influence of a single centralized Church. In this way, Novalis provides perhaps the most extreme example (outside of Latin America) of the counter-Enlightenment bent of romantic spiritualization; in Novalis a desire to re-enchant a secularizing, modernizing world, became a reactionary, religious stance. Even as he lamented a fall away from the unified sovereignty of the church, and called openly for a return to a Catholic Europe, the concept of nature—i.e. a secularized concept of God—remained the means by which this new spiritualism would be reencountered.

It is interesting to consider Novalis in relation to Hobbes, who according to Edwin Curley "is writing for a world in which the religious divisions introduced by the Reformation have made any serious attempt to base politics on religion futile" (Curley xlv). Hobbes's theorization of civil society responds to the fact that after the Protestant Reformation religion could no longer be relied upon to serve as a basis for social unity for any state, much less all of Europe. Thus, while Hobbes seemed to accept the division of European society as an irremediable fact, and his theory of the state works to show a basis of unity alternative to the church (but which retains a view of

the sovereign as quasi-divine), Novalis continues to hope that religion might still be able to unite Europe. Insofar as he returns to the same problem Hobbes addressed, but then rejects the potential of a civil mediation of difference, one might imagine that Novalis would have also rejected the concept of nature at the foundation of Hobbes's theory of secular sovereignty. Indeed, Hobbes's view of the state of nature as a "war of all men against all" challenged the Church in several ways, as a historico-philosophical alternative to a Judeo-Christian Edenic origin, and was an imagination of sovereignty determined beyond the purview of the Vatican. Nevertheless, rather than dispensing with secular nature, Novalis and the romantic thinkers honed in on the mythical content retained by the secular concept, and mobilized it as a tool for re-enchantment.

While German idealism and romanticism find their origins in a consideration of how to "return" to a unified mankind that had been shattered by a secular and technical modernity, their re-enchantment of nature does not halt the process of modernization.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, by investing the solitary priest of nature with the task of social unification, romanticism articulates a new form of individualism that only furthers the fracturing of European society initiated by the Enlightenment and the Reformation. Against trends of industrialization, the pristine and innocent landscape stood as a realm free from the corruption of society and base everyday needs. Nevertheless, the persistence of this realm represented the possibility of making a return to the divine origin anytime, by any individual with the will and wherewithal to do so. The romantic *bildungsroman* is the story of the solitary individual who, through a communion with nature/act of genius—a return to the divine origin of civilization and empire—makes himself into a demigod, a romantic sovereign. Indeed, it is this Genius who is supposed to provide the social

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<sup>23</sup> In *Romantic Imperialism* (1998) Saree Makdisi argues along similar lines that even as romanticism offers a "privileged site for the exploration of alternatives to modernization," it is also a central and inextricable feature of it, which "emerges with the beginnings of modernization and persists alongside it to the end" (8,10).

glue that defines nations. When Novalis states in his essay “On Goethe” that “one may well say that there were no Greeks but only a Greek genius,” he expresses this sense that the meaning of a civilization can be reduced to its collective genius, visible in the works produced by a handful of individuals (115). Accordingly, he expresses the sentiment that if the unified coherence of society can no longer be maintained by a king, it must be attained through the action of the self-made man. In its belief that civilization is ordered through the individual’s spontaneous act of genius occurring outside the polis (in “nature”), romantic political thought yokes faith in the individual to a hope for a unified humanity. The unity of the social body hinges on the personal development of a few extraordinary individuals. If nature in the Enlightenment was the realm in which all men are equal, in romanticism it is the condition of possibility by which any age may be golden, depending on the action of a messianic elite.

In theory, the clearly defined, divine sovereignty of the king corresponded to a vague, but also divine sovereignty of the poet; he who mediates between God and society is transformed into he who mediates between nature and society. Thus, romantic thought also paradoxically furthered the development of a concept of nature that could stand as a substitute for God in the organization of society, and in so doing, in a sense, furthered so-called secularization. One must wonder if Schlegel, Holderlin and, Goethe, in their calls for the creation of new myths, had not already understood that nature itself was to be the myth of modernity *par excellence*, and that secularization would come to be defined by this very transformation.

The paradoxical retention of a mystified God/Nature—an image of a more spiritual past in the landscape of the present—defines the romantic understanding of time that privileges the present over the past, mirroring its privileging of the individual over the community. This presentism is evident in the way romanticism positioned itself in relation to ancient society, and

its study (i.e. classicism).<sup>24</sup> In *The Literary Absolute* Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy suggest that the romantics of Jena understood themselves as fulfilling the Roman project in modernity, not through the study of ancient texts, but rather through their own spontaneous (bee-like) and original creation of new ones. The new golden age would not be ushered in through an imitation of antiquity, but rather “involved doing better or more than Antiquity” by creating something entirely “new” through spontaneous invention (11).

Insofar as the romantic poet is elevated by nature into a demiurge—the genius, a creator of worlds and a modern Prometheus—the paradoxical relation between romanticism and secularization is deepened. If in *The Disenchantment of the World* (1985) Marcel Gauchet defines secularization in part as mankind’s “stubborn tendency to increase its power and objectify its freedom” through the creation of the world, we must admit that romanticism did little to slow this process (7). Even as romanticism claims to desire a return to a more myth-centered age, which should have pushed back against Enlightenment anthropocentrism, it centers history on man even more radically, elevating him into a God.

Something akin to the belief in this power of the word to create the world that clothes the figure of the poet for romanticism has also been seen as conditioning Latin American thought. In *La ciudad letrada* (1984), Ángel Rama supports a view of a Latin American faith in letters,

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<sup>24</sup> Romanticism is in many ways a dialectical response to, or development of classicism, and thus retains many of its attributes. Karl Phillip Moritz is an important transitional figure between these movements. In *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Phillip Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (2012) Elliott Schreiber argues that his essay “On the Formative Imitation of the Beautiful” is both “among the foundational texts of Weimar classicism and was pivotal for the development of early romanticism” (2). Within this field of Latin Americanism, this issue was considered by Esteban Echeverría in an unpublished essay “Clasicismo y romanticismo” (1840s), which maintains their antinomy. For more on this essay see footnote #32. Robert Conn’s *Politics of Philology* describes the tensions classical and romantic lines of thought in the development of Alfonso Reyes’s thought. Instead of framing the question in terms of a tension between romanticism and classicism, he defines in terms of philological modes, referring to Edward Said’s categorizations of dynastic and anti-dynastic philology. Instead of referring to romanticism, he refers to the “literary tradition itself, based upon the figures of Lessing, Winckelmann, Humboldt, Schiller, and Goethe” which promotes a “heroic developmentalist narrative” organizing “an encyclopedic vision of ‘western culture’” (16). He identifies “Classical Weimar” as the true “Classical philology, the scholarly and academic enterprise centered on the study of Greece that grew out of and later informed the critical enterprise of Hellenic recuperation that, as Josef Chytrý has explained, extends from Winckelmann, Schiller, and Goethe to Nietzsche and Heidegger” (16).

but emphasizes the function of the church and the bureaucratic machinery of the colonial system rather than romanticism in the establishment of this belief. Hugo Achugar opens his collection *La fundación por la palabra* (1998) with a materialist reading of the function of the Gospel According to John (“In the beginning was the Word”) and its effect on America, stating: “En realidad, el privilegiar la palabra por parte de letrados y sacerdotes en determinados períodos históricos bien puede haber sido un modo de autolegitimación de su función social” (6).

Whether or not they really *believed* in it, the rise of the poet–romantic figure *par excellence*—to prominence in Latin American nation-state during the nineteenth century suggests that romantic thought helped mediate a transition out of colonial society precisely through its resonances with that society, as a form of crypto-Catholicism.<sup>25</sup> As a Catholic nation, Creoles in America were uniquely primed for conversion to romantic belief, and thus, romanticism would serve as the bridge between the baroque spirit of the colony and the secular Creole nation-state.<sup>26</sup>

As a concept that had undergone incomplete secularization, romantic nature taken not as an irrecoverable past, but as a real *tabula rasa* in the present, would help give birth to a society made in its image, one that takes a secular form—the nation state—but nevertheless retains the imperial, religious reason of a Catholic Hispanic Empire. Even as nature was helping to found ostensibly secular nation-states harboring egalitarian republics in Latin America, it was at the same time playing on a desire for a unified Catholic empire in America, translating into post-

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<sup>25</sup> See Doris Sommer’s list of Latin American poet/presidents in *Foundational Fictions* (1991).

<sup>26</sup> The belief in the power of language to create the world also takes another form that predates the romantic moment, and which is more difficult to classify. One can see it in Ercilla y Zuñiga’s *La araucana* (1569, 1589), for example, which depicts the establishment of the Spanish Empire in America as a figuration of the founding of Rome through a recasting of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in the territory now known as Chile. Such a work can be read not merely as the expression of a hope for greatness, but perhaps an attempt to make it so through the act of writing itself. Such thinking, of which there could be no rigorous theorization, would have to be understood anthropologically, as magical.

colonial times that fantasy Ercilla y Zuñiga expressed in *La araucana* (1569), an imagination of a Roman Empire in the new world.<sup>27</sup>

Both in Europe and in America, the new golden age was to be found(ed) in nature, being that which is held in common by men of all times, and which unifies modernity and antiquity. As a window into a more spiritual age, it represented means within the present whereby a resistance against the godlessness of modernity might be found. While nature represented the possibility of the radical break with history, facilitating the poet's spontaneous, godlike creation of the new, it also acted as continuity between the present and a more spiritual past as a transformation of the concept of divinity itself.

Today, the brilliance of romantic theorizations of education and intellectual spontaneity tend to be overshadowed by problems in the ethics they proposed. As I have noted, their melancholic presentism is especially problematic. Romantic interest in the past is often half-hearted, not so much a hope to recover traces of a lost paradise as a belief that perhaps paradise is not lost after all, that it might remain intact in the present, and that nature might provide access to the means by which it will be reformulated. The past, it would seem, is accessible in the crumbling side of a mountain, and perhaps in ourselves, through a memory of a time prior to the burdens, responsibilities, and bitterness of adulthood. One senses that romantic melancholy, as a contemplation of what is simultaneously present and lost in nature, secretly desires only its own desiring, does not want the past back so much as it derives pleasure from pining for it. A transformation of this sentiment is clearly expressed than in the epigraph to the poem *Altazor* (1815) in which Percy Bysshe Shelley quotes Augustine's *Confessions*: "Not yet did I love, yet I was in love with loving." Romantic thinkers thus set the stage for an exacerbation of the

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<sup>27</sup> See Craig Kallendorf's "Representing the Other: Ercilla's *La Araucana*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the New World Encounter" (2003).

modernity they sought to oppose; their thinking would give birth to an egoistic individualism reified into society at many levels. As in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the romantics continued to be seduced by the hope that man might raise himself up as a God, even as they recognized the folly of this hubris.

### Heredia and the Question of Cultural Autonomy in Latin America

Before the question of cultural autonomy was openly debated in the 1840s, José María Heredia had already begun to explore the relation between land and American difference in his poetry. Heredia would help suture autonomous nature to the American landscape, introducing a motif that would come to define Latin American political thought. Eventually the American landscape would be understood as a state of nature that could both generate and harbor a new nation free from the burdens of the past.

While his work is known on the one hand for its use of classical forms and meters, the influence of romanticism on Heredia has also been well documented.<sup>28</sup> One can easily observe the romantic qualities of his depiction of the landscape in “Niágara” (1824). Already in the first stanza he invokes the “sublime terror” of the falls, evoking, among other works, Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” (140). Affirming a sense that he translates nature’s romantic function as a stand-in for God, Heredia addresses the falls as “Omnipotente Dios” in the sixth stanza (142). Another of his well-known poems, “Teocalli de Cholula” (1820), reads like a Wordsworth ode, depicting the idyll of the allegorical youth of man filtered through Mexico:

¡Cuánto es bella *la tierra* que habitaban,

Los aztecas valientes [...]

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<sup>28</sup> For more on Heredia’s romanticism see Manuel Pedro González’s *José María Heredia, primogénito del romanticismo hispano* (1955) as well as Ángel Augier’s introduction to the Biblioteca Ayacucho *Niagara y otros textos* (1990).

El naranjo  
Y la piña y el plátano sonante,  
Hijos del suelo equinoccial, se mezclan  
A la frondosa vid, al pino agreste,  
Y de Minerva a árbol majestuoso.  
Nieve eternal corona las cabezas  
De Iztaccihual purísimo [...]  
A torrentes vertió su luz dorada,  
Y vio a *Naturaleza* conmovida,  
Con su dulce calor hervir en vida. (107 my emphasis)

Here, explicitly, Heredia territorializes nature, identifying it with the Mexican landscape.

It is interesting that Heredia is understood to be the first great poet of an independent Latin America, considering that Heredia's own *patria* Cuba would not become independent until 1898. The landmarks "Teocalli de Cholula" and "Niágara" depict do not glorify his own land. In "Niágara," Heredia even seems to criticize the mildness of the Cuban landscape-nature, noting:

La palma, y mirto, y delicada rosa  
Muelle placer inspiren y ocio blando  
En frívolo jardín [...] (142)

Speaking directly to the falls as if with a confessor, he goes on to describe Cuba's "campos inundar en sangre y llanto" and its "mentidos filósofos, que osaban escrutar tus misterios, ultrajarte," perhaps referring to fellow members of the lodge of Caballeros Racionales with whom he participated in the failed conspiracy of "Soles y Rayos de Bolívar" (142). In any case,

the poem associates the weakness of the Cuban landscape—its frivolousness, and the laziness he thinks it promotes—with the failure of its people to attain their independence. In comparison to the weak Cuban landscape the failure of the movement for independence within its bounds, the falls, with sublime terror, come to represent a mythical revolutionary spirit implicitly linked to the Terror of the French Revolution. The poem is a prayer to a God of revolution, as if the spirit of this accident of the landscape had delivered the United States into independence.<sup>29</sup> All the violence of its torrent represents not just the inner state of the poet (“En mi alma estremecida y agitada, Arder la inspiración”), but also a revolutionary force that might irrupt at any moment, the grandness of Cuban independence to come (140).<sup>30</sup>

Heredia appears to engage in an early form of national-essentialist thinking in his comparison between the distinct natures incarnated in Cuban and North American landscapes. Indeed, it seems that national characteristics are produced by the land. Thus, the poem distinctly reflects Heredia’s pessimism in the aftermath of his exile, expressing little hope for Cuban independence insofar as one cannot expect the Cuban landscape to drastically change overnight. One can find a spark of hope in the possibility that Heredia’s revolution might come as a Bolivarian Pan-Americanism, in which case the Niagara could still serve Cuba from afar as a symbol of a distinctly American landscape.

Additionally, perhaps Heredia sings to the Niagara because depicting an American landscape different from that found in Europe was a simple way to lend uniqueness to his literary production. Whether or not it was his intention, by singing the falls—a specifically American landscape—in a romantic mode Heredia took one of the first positions in a developing discussion

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<sup>29</sup> Along these lines, in *De Sarmiento a Dios* (1998) David Viñas suggest reading the Niagara as “un promontorio espejo de las producciones norteamericanas,” a capitalist dream of production (14).

<sup>30</sup> A plaque dedicated to Heredia at the site of the falls performs this interpretation, reading: “José María Heredia (1803-1839) Cuban poet and patriot who sang to Niagara and as Jose Martí said, awakened ‘an ever burning passion for freedom’ in the hearts of all Cubans.”

about the autonomy of Latin American culture (in this case, literature), intuitively mapping the connection between autonomous American nature and autonomous American culture. The famous U.S. landmark helps Heredia to simultaneously define a characteristically American nature and culture; the uniqueness of the falls helps distinguish his work, which might otherwise have been a mere reproduction of European romanticism. Conversely, given the political climate in which Heredia wrote, and his stated goal of promoting Cuban independence, the uniqueness of his work could be read as a sign of Cuban difference from Spain. Even though his romanticism is clearly a sign of his European cultivation, in reproducing, or even imitating European romantic motifs, he draws closer to a non-Iberian Europe.

According to some, his emulation of English motifs would break the most basic rule of a romanticism understood as rejecting imitation in favor of spontaneous invention.<sup>31</sup> The uniqueness of his cultural production appears to function primarily as an extension of the novelty of the landscape as it would appear to European eyes. Heredia's push for Cuban political autonomy through the assertion of its natural cultural autonomy would be tenuously stretched between dependence on European culture and the difference of American land. Still, despite any shortcomings, Heredia's work was productive. The questions it produces for us regarding the relation between land and culture were also produced in other thinkers of Latin American independence. Less than twenty years later, in the 1840s, Domingo F. Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría, José Victorino Lastarria, and Andrés Bello would grapple with a concern that cultural autonomy, unlike sovereignty, could not be reduced merely to a difference in land or

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<sup>31</sup> In his writing on "Clasicismo y romanticismo" (1840s) Esteban Echeverría takes a clear position in regard to imitation, summarizing romanticism in relation to classical culture, as a universal spontaneity that despises any form of imitation, yet which reproduces the greatness of antiquity in its own unique way. He writes: "El romanticismo, pues, es la poesía moderna que fiel a las leyes esenciales del arte no imita, ni copia, sino busca sus tipos y colores, sus pensamientos y formas en sí mismo, en su religión, en el mundo que lo rodea y produce en ellos obras bellos, originales" (*Estética* 49). The basis of America's autonomy from Europe would thus appear to be identical to the basis of romantic autonomy from antiquity (autonomy of the present from the past).

territory. As a result, the question of Latin American imitation of Europe becomes a central concern.

During an address upon his incorporation to a Santiago literary society in 1842, Lastarria emphasized the importance of looking to France for examples of exceptional thinking, even as Americans attempted to develop their own original culture. Lastarria proclaimed:

Debo deciros, pues, que leáis los escritos de los autores franceses de más nota en el día; no para que los copiéis y trasladéis sin tino a vuestras obras, sino para que aprendáis de ellos a pensar, para que os empapáis en ese colorido filosófico que caracteriza su literatura, para que podáis seguir la nueva senda y retratéis al vivo la naturaleza. (172)

Nevertheless, he warns against the danger of maintaining “nuestra literatura con una existencia prestada, pendiente siempre de lo exótico” (172). His mention of “lo exótico” refers to the incorporation of elements that would be unfamiliar and exciting to Europeans into American literature, precisely the gesture one sees performed by Heredia in his poetic portrayals of American landscape. One can read here a backlash against Heredian romanticism, which at the same time begins to comprehend the aporia of defining an original, autonomous culture.

Andrés Bello, in his essay on “La autonomía cultural de América” (1848), addresses the issue of American cultural autonomy in terms similar to those by which Lastarria had defined the issue six years earlier. But if Lastarria highlights the positive when he writes, “señores, fuerza es que seamos originales; tenemos dentro de nuestra sociedad todos los elementos para serlo, para convertir nuestra literatura en la expresión auténtica de nuestra nacionalidad,” Bello focuses on the negative (172-3). He forwards the following hypothesis about what Michelet or Guizot—renowned French historians—would say about the state of American culture:

Dirán: la América no ha sacudido aún sus cadenas; se arrastra sobre nuestras huellas con los ojos vendados; no respira en sus obras un pensamiento propio, nada original, nada característico; remeda las formas de [...] filosofía [francesa] y no se apropia su espíritu. Su civilización es una planta exótica que no ha chupado todavía sus jugos a la tierra que la sostiene. (*Conciencia* 48)

Unlike Lastarria, Bello appears to be little concerned over the exoticizing of American culture, though he does not seem to think this will lend much originality, either. And while the metaphor of the exotic plant is meant to emphasize the delicate state of American civilization, it also reproduces a conceptualization of culture through nature/landscape in a way that is very similar to Heredia's evaluation of Cuban culture, as a sickly garden beside the robust, revolutionary torrent of the Niagara.<sup>32</sup>

#### Bello and the *Tabula Rasa*

Prior to Martí, Andrés Bello was the thinker who most explicitly adopted Heredia's intuition of the potential of American nature/landscape as a site for the cultivation of cultural autonomy, openly professing his admiration for the Cuban in his 1827 essay "Juicio sobre las *Poesías* de José María Heredia." Published the previous year, "La agricultura de la zona tórrida," represents Bello's own consideration of the problem of cultural autonomy after independence.

While the attainment of independence itself was Heredia's focus, Bello was concerned with reconciliation and reconstruction in the aftermath of war. "La agricultura de la zona tórrida" was published in 1826, two years after the Battle of Ayacucho, which consolidated Creole hegemony and the independence of Hispanic American states. Unlike Heredia's

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<sup>32</sup> For more on Sarmiento's position in regard to cultural autonomy see the following section on *Facundo*.

melancholic longings, “La agricultura” is not vague in its attempt to effect social change, clearly elucidating a romantic program of education by which cultural autonomy will be consolidated after independence. In the poem, Bello translates romantic principles into the concrete parameters of a social intervention principally by portraying an opposition between city and countryside as the difference between corruption and virtue. Through this characterization, it becomes clear that for Bello, the natural, rural landscape must serve as the basis for Latin American difference, as that by which the Creole will distinguish himself from the Spaniard.

Shortly after it opens, “La agricultura de la zona tórrida” launches into a critique of the city. First, Bello contrasts the virtue of the country dwelling “labrador sencillo” to indolence of the city dweller (“el ocio pestilente ciudadano”), and wonders why it was the latter who inherited the agricultural gifts of the tropics:

¿Por qué ilusión funesta  
aquellos que fortuna hizo señores  
de tan dichosa tierra y pingüe y varía,  
al cuidado abandonan  
y a la fe mercenaria  
las patrias heredades,  
y en ciego tumulto se aprisionan  
de míseras ciudades,  
do la ambición proterva  
sopla la llama de civiles bandos,  
o al patriotismo la desidia enerva;  
do el lujo las costumbres atosiga,

y combaten los vicios

la incauta edad en poderosa liga? (*Cien* 112)

The Creole city dweller, cut off from the countryside, is not the ideal caretaker of the land.

The pedagogic aim of the poem begins to take shape as he notes that “No allí con varoniles ejercicios se endurece el mancebo a la fatiga” (*Cien* 112). The sense that Bello is setting out a program of education for the inheritors of a new empire is reinforced when he invokes Rome as the proper example to follow when it comes to the education of children. After further describing the corruption of the city, Bello states:

No así trató la triunfadora Roma  
las artes de la paz y de la guerra;  
antes fio las riendas del estado  
a la mano robusta  
que tostó el sol y encalleció el arado;  
y bajo el techo humoso campesino  
los hijos educó, que el conjurado  
mundo allanaron al valor latino. (*Cien* 113)

One important thrust of Creole reeducation would be to show the *ciudadano letrado* the error of his indolent ways, and strengthen him body and soul in the countryside. Additionally, the reference to Rome here finds relation to a larger task of overcoming the inner Spaniard after independence. Not just any casual example, Rome represents a latent Creole identity alternative to Spain. Perhaps here Bello implies that the Creole will uncover his Latin nature upon returning to the land, invoking a shared origin more distant, though through a romantic lens perhaps for that reason all the more true. Thus one finds a materialization of the opposition between

Hispanic America and Latin America as categories of identity. A farther flung imperial Roman cultural heritage provides an alternative to the Hispanic past; for Bello, rather than being Hispanic, America will be Latin.<sup>33</sup>

Bello refers to Spain several times throughout the poem, including the final line (“postrar supieron al león de España”), in such a way that his call for the Creole elite to leave the city becomes indistinguishable from a call to leave the corruption of Spanish colonialism behind (120). The corruption of the city and the Spanish past are cast as being one in the same. In addition to overcoming corruption, or recovering a more distant Roman glory, the return to nature is central to a program of overcoming the past, as a means by which the Spanish origins of Creole society can be forgotten. In this vein Bello writes:

Abrigo den los valles  
a la sedienta caña;  
la manzana y la pera  
en la fresca montaña,  
el cielo olviden de su madre España (*Cien* 116)

Expression of the desire to forget Spain recurs:

el ángel nos envía,  
el ángel de la paz, que al crudo ibero  
haga olvidar la antigua tiranía (*Cien* 118)

Unlike Heredia’s “Niágara,” with its violent revolutionary force, the rural landscape for Bello is a site of peace which will maintain social harmony after the war, and provide a certain “peace of mind” by erasing the memory of Spain and its tyranny. More than just a rhetorical flourish, there

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<sup>33</sup> Bello’s study of Roman law testifies to his interest in recovering not merely a Hispanic tradition, but a Latin one. For more on Bello’s interest in Roman law see the section on Rule of Law in Ivan Jaksic’s *Andrés Bello: Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (2001).

lies a deeper meaning in the relation Bello outlines between peace and forgetting a Spanish past. Throughout the poem Bello dwells on the ambiguous relation between Creole and Spanish identity. In light of the problem of this ambiguity—the very problem of cultural autonomy itself—one can read a suggestion that peace will only be attained if the Creole truly distances himself from Spain, and ceases to perpetuate the injustices characteristic of Spanish rule. The Creole faces the possibility of remaining a “crudo ibero,” of taking the place of the conquistador rather than defeating him. If the old tyranny of the crude Iberian, being perpetuated in the city, is to be “forgotten,” according to Bello, it will be forgotten in the idyllic countryside. In this way, Bello is perhaps the first to imagine the natural countryside as the “*tabula rasa*” of American cultural autonomy that Ángel Rama describes in *La ciudad letrada*, the means by which the Creole could cleanse himself of his Iberian past (Rama 2). Judging from Rama’s description of a Creole view of nature that ignored its special virtues, one must guess that his understanding of American “nature” viewed as *tabula rasa* is informed primarily by the thinkers of Rio de la Plata, who labeled it barbarous.<sup>34</sup> Still, even for Bello, who unlike the *rioplatenses* works to appreciate “nature” as a resource, it begins to take on the function of a clean slate for the foundation of “una nueva época del mundo” (Rama 2). In observing the pristine land’s function as a realm of oblivion in “La agricultura,” I am also reminded of Leopoldo Zea’s thesis about a catastrophic denial of the past in Latin America.<sup>35</sup> It would appear that Bello’s poem is indeed foundational in its inscription of the Creole’s claim of autonomy from history.

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<sup>34</sup> Regarding the Creole, Rama states “...dispuso de una oportunidad única en las tierras vírgenes de un enorme continente, cuyos valores propios fueron ignorados con antropológica ceguera, aplicando el principio de ‘*tabula rasa*’. Tal comportamiento permitía negar ingentes culturas —aunque ellas habrían de pervivir e infiltrarse a solapadas maneras en la cultura impuesta—y comenzar *ex-nihilo* el edificio de lo que se pensó era mera transposición del pasado, cuando en verdad fue la realización del sueño que comenzaba a soñar una nueva época del mundo”(Rama 2).

<sup>35</sup> “We have not yet been able to assimilate this past because we still feel it as something foreign to ourselves; we do not feel it in our veins, in our blood, we do not feel it as our own. Or, in other words, our past still has not become a real past; it is still a present which does not choose to become history” (Zea 6).

If in “La agricultura” nature serves as the basis for erasing a Spanish past, it also erases the lower classes—the slaves sustained by an abundance of bananas, and the “labrador sencillo”—thus, as previously noted, killing two birds with one stone, declaring autonomy from Spain while retaining a claim of sovereignty over the masses. While the poem is premised on Bello’s supposition of the danger of reproducing Spanish tyranny, and appears to go out of its way to sympathize with the downtrodden classes, this sympathy is immediately interpellated by the fact of Creole hegemony, which is never really questioned in the text. Perhaps Bello is being subtle in his criticism of the Creole elite’s failure to extend political representation to the lower classes, and a liberal program of land expropriation after independence.<sup>36</sup> But if the goal of the poem is to caution Creoles against reproducing Spanish tyranny, here a less subtle approach is required.

I have shown that in the third stanza Bello wonders aloud why the agricultural riches, or “Naturaleza bondadosa,” is the inheritance of the city folk, calling this occurrence “ill-fated” (see the above cited passage beginning “¿Por qué ilusión funesta...?”) (*Cien* 112, 114). Thus, he rightly takes note of the incongruity of the fact that after independence, the land would be inherited by the Creole elite of the city instead of by those people actually living there. Is this the “old tyranny” to which he refers, the fact that the land did not belong to those who dwelled on it, that independence from Spain had not granted autonomy to all? There are grounds for such a reading. Nevertheless, though he notes this injustice, Bello does not discuss it further. Rather than proposing to make citizens of those men already imbued with the virtue of the countryside, he instead proposes is to cleanse the true rulers of the new empire of the corruption of their past by sending them to this recently “inherited” land.

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<sup>36</sup> In *A History of Latin America* (2004) Peter Bakewell describes how after independence “Disentailment under liberal economic principles [...] contributed to the phenomena of the landless and dependent peasant” (434). See the canonical *Martín Fierro* (1872) by José Hernández for a portrait of this figure.

Bello's passing treatment of the slaves and workers dwelling at the sites of agricultural production, and his resignation to their lack of political agency, reinforce a sense of their status as non-entities, what Lomnitz would call "weak citizens" (12). Indeed, the presence of men in the natural landscape does not appear to make it any viable as a clean slate. "La agricultura," more than as political subjects, these people constitute part of the *tabula rasa* of nature itself, as another element of that bountiful natural resource, through which the American Creole would build his empire. The agricultural workers do not inhabit nature: they help comprise it.

If Bello doesn't himself use the term *tabula rasa* to describe the American land in "La agricultura," the poem's double erasure—of the laborer and slave on the one hand, and a Spanish past on the other—effectively defines it as such. Especially in the former erasure, the true work of the poem is not to simply describe the *tabula rasa*, but rather to make it so—to assert that the slate of the land is clean when one might be inclined to imagine it otherwise.

#### The Generation of '37 and the Barbarous Desert

In his treatment of the lower classes as constitutive elements of the *tabula rasa* of the American landscape (as opposed to denizens of an inhabited land, or citizens of the Republic) Bello prefigures the concept of nature that would be developed in Rio de la Plata by Esteban Echeverría, Domingo F. Sarmiento, and Juan Bautista Alberdi—the Generation of '37. One must note immediately in making this comparison that while Bello decried the corruption of the city and lauded the virtue of the countryside, the Argentines instead equated the metropolis (Buenos Aires) with civilization and the wilderness with barbarism.<sup>37</sup> Given this difference

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<sup>37</sup> In *Facundo* Sarmiento writes, "La ciudad es el centro de la civilización argentina, española, europea ... El desierto las circunda a más o menos distancia, las cerca, las oprime; la naturaleza salvaje las reduce a unas estrechas oasis de civilización enclavados en un llano inculto de centenares de millas cuadradas, apenas interrumpido por una que otra villa de consideración" (21).

between their respective understandings of rural and metropolitan space, it is all the more telling that Bello and the Argentines are in agreement about their imagination of the landscape as empty nature.

The Argentine Creole understanding of nature as landscape is similar to Bello's in that it downplayed the presence of people on the land. Echeverría's description of the Argentine pampas in *La cautiva* as "desierto, inconmensurable, abierto" would become the paradigm by which the occupied land was understood: as a deserted or empty space (Echeverría 125). This definition of the land as barbarous *vacío* must be understood as an expression of the elite Creole position in relation to the federalist campesino or gaucho ("cristianos salvajes"), and autochthonous indigenous peoples, with both of whom they were engaged in war (Sarmiento 20). Alberdi's famous dictum "gobernar es poblar" appears to be based on the concept of Argentine nature as the empty desert first introduced by Echeverría, not only as the importation of civilized people onto the land, but also in the conversion of barbarous non-people (campesinos) into civilized political subjects.

In her essay "En el origen de la cultura argentina: Europa y el desierto" (1986) Beatriz Sarlo explores the foundational Argentine understanding of nature as "desert." She shows how the application of that term to the pampas was an effect of the war between Creoles and indigenous peoples, as a reflection of the former's failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of indigenous culture. According to Sarlo, the countryside for the Argentine Creole was "un espacio ocupado por hombres cuya cultura no es reconocida como cultura" (*Escritos* 25).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The Creole disregard for the Indian could be expressed still more strongly, in a way that acknowledges the fact that they saw indigenous people more as animals than as humans. In "Lastarria, Bello, y Sarmiento en 1844" Alvaro Kaempfer notes one striking remark by Sarmiento referring to the indigenous anti-heroes of Ercilla's epic poem *La araucana* (1569), which in depicting a war between indigenous people and the Spanish in colonial Chile, portrays the indigenous leaders favorably. Though as individuals who had fought against the Spanish indigenous leaders Colocolo, Lautaro, and Caupolican were cast as national heroes by some after independence, Sarmiento

For the Generation of '37 the desert was not “espacio ocupado,” their use of the word “desierto” itself reflecting this (Sarlo, *Escritos* 25). As it appears in a term such as “la conquista del desierto”—the genocidal campaign carried out by General Roca in 1879 against the indigenous people of the pampas— for example, its function as political doublespeak is evident. Here one can see that “desierto” was a term deliberately employed to elide the names of those whose destruction the conquest would bring about. To call it the “conquest of the Tehuelche” or “conquest of the Mapuche” would have been to acknowledge the agency and legitimacy of those peoples as such. They are not named directly, but rather metonymically, as an extension of the land. Indeed, in his description of the pampas in the opening section of *La cautiva*, Echeverría mentions the Indian alongside birds, insects, and grazing animals, as part of the fauna comprising the desert:

a veces la tribu errante,  
sobre el potro rozagante,  
cuyas crines altaneras  
flotan en viento ligeras,  
la cruza cual torbellino  
y pasa[...] (Cautiva 126)

Even more radically than in Bello’s poem, the indigenous people are depicted as being a part of the *emptiness* of nature.

A question of whether the Argentine concept of nature is truly romantic arises for us insofar as the Generation of '37 qualifies the wilderness negatively, as barbarous, departing not only from Bello and Heredia, but also the English and German romantics who venerated it. On

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describes them as nothing but “unos indios asquerosos a quienes habríamos hecho colgar y mandaríamos a colgar ahora si reapariecesen en una guerra de los araucanos contra Chile” (17).

the one hand, in *La cautiva* one finds definitive signs of a romantic influence. Echeverría cites Byron and Hugo in epigraphs, and uses indisputably romantic terminology to describe the pampas, calling their beauty “sublime,” and reserving the possibility that though incomprehensible to most, the Genius might fathom their majesty and grandness.<sup>39</sup> But on the other hand, it is a landscape of blood and violence, of savage cannibals who drive protagonists Brian and Maria to their doom. Argentine nature is a sublimely vast, produces poetry, and is overwhelmingly understood in terms of the land, but nevertheless, it is not Schiller’s naïve landscape.

The ambiguity in the Creole Argentine understanding of the desert can perhaps best be compared to the position James Fennimore Cooper takes in regard to the noble savages he depicts in *Last of the Mohicans* (1826): while in passing Echeverría is capable of admiring nature as Cooper admires the Indian, this admiration is tinged by a melancholic sense of their obsolescence, and an anticipation of the necessity of their extinction for the greater good of mankind.<sup>40</sup> Like Cooper describing the Indians, Sarmiento seems to become melancholy when describing the gaucho (the Indian, for Sarmiento, is an “absolutely negative, amoral being”) (Vivian 809). He describes the Gaucho Cantor—“poeta por carácter, por naturaleza”—as pertaining to an earlier time, analogous to the “trovador de la Edad Media” (Sarmiento 29, 36). While he admits that these gauchos are “dignas de la pluma del romancista,” and that among their improvised songs are “muchas composiciones de mérito, que descubren inspiración y sentimiento,” the fact remains that insofar as they are savage and pertain to an earlier age, they

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<sup>39</sup> Echeverría writes: “¿Qué pincel podrá pintarlas sin deslucir su belleza? ¿Qué lengua humana alabarlas? Sólo el genio su grandeza puede sentir y admirar” (*Cautiva* 126). I can only conclude that Echeverría, in daring to express the grandness of the pampas in verse, must himself be this genius.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Sherman Vivian, in her essay “The Protagonist in the Works of Sarmiento and Cooper” (1965) highlights the difference between Sarmiento and Cooper and their view of nobility, or lack thereof, of the Indian. Vivian’s observations about the differences between Sarmiento and Cooper reinforce a sense of the ambiguity of Sarmiento’s romanticism. Nevertheless, especially when considering Sarmiento’s soft spot for the gaucho, their shared disingenuous melancholy is binding.

live on borrowed time, and will soon have to make way for a modern European civilization understood as naturally superior (27, 38). The Argentine Creole (along with Cooper) brings out the melancholy of European romanticism, and comes very close to admitting that it is half-hearted when affirming the superiority of modern European civilization. Portraying nature as barbaric yet beautiful, Argentine romanticism is a program for destruction that tries to assuage its guilt by imagining that such destruction is inevitable (or even natural). In this way it represents a perfection of the egotism of European romanticism—thereby representing another Latin American development of the dark side of modernity—discursively replacing a cultural (indigenous) “past” with a natural (empty) present, with the goal of filling it with the self-positing ego (of Fichte), the Creole *ipse*. By calling nature barbarous, the Argentine romantics show that the nature of romanticism is always already a system of supersession; nature without agency takes center stage in order to ignore the unwanted elements of human culture.

If the Generation of '37 in general makes the presentism lurking in romantic melancholy patent, Sarmiento in particular radicalizes the romantic suturing of nature to the land. The romantic territorialization of nature serves Sarmiento as a solution to a crisis in the thinking of the relation between sovereignty and culture—state and nation—which since Heredia's time had become a matter of great concern, that is, the fear that a difference in land between America and the Iberian Peninsula it is not enough to assure American cultural autonomy. He does this by claiming that the land is the main binding force between culture and politics, the true unity of the new Creole nation-state, whose integrity might otherwise appear questionable in light of ongoing civil war. The introduction of *Facundo* makes this clear, setting out its work as a tracing of the “metamorphosis” of “naturaleza campestre” into both “arte” and “sistema política” (2). These two terms—art and political system—correspond alternately with culture and sovereignty, nation

and state. For Sarmiento, the land determines the nature of man: both his cultural and political life.

Sarmiento's philosophical claim about the relationship between culture, politics, and land runs parallel to his attempt to show that the barbarism of Facundo Quiroga is a product of the landscape. He writes "en Facundo Quiroga no veo un caudillo simplemente, sino una manifestación de la vida argentina tal como la han hecho la colonización y las peculiaridades del terreno" (9). If Quiroga is barbarous, it is not "por un accidente de su carácter, sino por antecedentes inevitables y ajenos de su voluntad," that is, "la fisonomía de la naturaleza grandiosamente salvaje que prevalece en la inmensa extensión de la República Argentina" (9). The land is so powerful that ethical agency and perhaps even free will are overwhelmed by its influence. According to this vision of territorial determinism, Argentine cultural autonomy from Spain would be a given. The land of Spain being distinct from the land of Argentina settles the issue. Once this fact is established, imitation of Europe can be pursued with a clear conscience, and Creole admiration of French society seems more justifiable.

Though Sarmiento does not draw the conclusion for us precisely, if the land is to be blamed for its determination of one person's character (Quiroga) it must therefore also have the power to define an entire people. He moves from showing land defining the individual to its definition of the multitude in the section about the Gaucho Cantor, who he describes as being representative of a general Argentine "fondo de poesía, que nace de los accidentes naturales del país" (28). In an astonishing passage he locates the origin of Argentine popular poetry in the gaucho's reaction to a gathering storm: the poetic spark comes as an encounter with the sublime, when looming clouds are crossed by "el rayo, en fin, símbolo del poder" showing "la Pampa a distancias infinitas" (29). More than simply imagining the mythical birth of a national

characteristic, in this section, Sarmiento expresses some hope for the redemption of the Argentine nation. If the land is the cause of Quiroga's barbaric character, it is also the cause of the Gaucho Cantor's inspiration and genius, and the territorially defined nation is thus shown to possess positive as well as negative attributes. The autonomous Argentine nation, though barbarous, is also naturally poetic, and is perhaps salvageable after all. Indeed, in *The Gaucho Genre* (2002) Josefina Ludmer shows how the project of gauchesque literature sees the poetic faculty of the savage Creole as a gateway for the creation of a civilized political subject: "a use of the genre to integrate the gauchos into the 'civilized' (liberal and civic) law" (8).

*Facundo's* territorialization of nature, in suturing culture and land, radicalizes the romantic understanding of nature as a gateway to an alternative ethical, artistic, and social origin. The romantic positing of the ego as autonomous from the past, translated through the elite Creole position, becomes something larger: the invention not just of the individual subject, or of a new man, but of an entire nation made in his own image. The nature becomes land as the word was made flesh, representing another step in process of secularization whose purpose is to establish an anthropocentric "reino de este mundo." For the European romantics there was a sense that their art might come to supplant and overshadow the art of the classical golden age; for Sarmiento the goal is to rationalize the integrity of the new Argentine nation as fundamentally autonomous, not Spanish, and yet still capable of participating in European civilization.

In the same way that Heredia's thinking of the power of the land becomes problematic insofar as the Niagara falls will not one day appear in Cuba, like a messiah, to deliver the people from their persecution, it remains difficult to imagine how in Sarmiento's view of the relation between culture and land the Argentine nation could ever be anything but savage. This is but one of many paradoxes in Sarmiento's work. Like Ramos, who observes Sarmiento as a wild

scholar, Carlos Alonso argues in “Reading Sarmiento: Once More, with Passion” (1994) that he creates a “textual universe where contradictions proliferate” and “inconsistencies flourish” (36). The only consistent point of reference in Sarmiento’s writing is Sarmiento himself, his unassailable *ipseity*, whose position may change but which is always right. In the words of Alberto Moreiras, Sarmiento “rules through rule itself” (*Exhaustion* 86).<sup>41</sup>

For us, perhaps the most significant paradox in Sarmiento’s work lies in his inconsistent application of romantic and Enlightenment concepts of nature for a thinking of nation and sovereignty. Insofar as his agenda of suturing land to nature is radically romantic, it is indicative that his view of nature borrows from earlier systems of thought as well: the intermingling and confusion of the various meanings of nature—not to mention the alarming consequences of such thinking—would come to be the norm.

Even as his thought manifests the hallmarks of European romanticism, Sarmiento’s view of nature as a barbarous void where the only political currency is brute force resembles the views of certain Enlightenment thinkers, most notably Hobbes and Grotius, who saw the state of nature as a war of all against all in which natural right is the right of the strongest. In Sarmiento one finds a reification of romantic nature back into Enlightenment systems of political thought, in which the land, as “nature,” becomes the basis for political sovereignty instead of a hypothetical time meant to emphasize the equality of man.

In Hobbes, for example, the social contract by which a nation is constituted is posited as a negation of the state of nature, ending the war of all against all. There is an eerie correlation

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<sup>41</sup> Roberto González Echevarría also observes this mutability in Sarmiento’s position in *Myth and Archive* (1990), when he describes how the future head of state falls into a trap of reproducing the barbarism of the enemy he disavows: just as Quiroga comes to resemble the man-eating tiger he fought in the wild, Sarmiento comes to resemble Quiroga. “Sarmiento’s discourse is like the tiger’s, made up of misnomers, of violence represented as catachreses, motivated by a desire for the object that turns him into the object, as Facundo Quiroga’s and the tiger voice blend on with the other” (*Myth* 124). In his “becoming barbarous” in designating of an absolute enemy to be annihilated—nature itself and its savage aspects, that is, the indigenous peoples subsumed to that supposed emptiness—Sarmiento himself appears to be absorbed into and determined by the barbarous state of nature.

between Sarmiento's vision of the land as nature incarnate and a sense that the civil wars of Rio de la Plata were, if not wars of all against all, a chaos of shifting and uncertain alliances. It is in this capacity that Sarmiento's *Facundo* embodies the spirit of the theory of sovereignty Alejandro Quin calls political naturalism in his dissertation *Taming the Chaos: Nature, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Writing in Modern Latin America* (2011), that takes Hobbes's civil war literally as the *ground* of the republic—a property of the land. For Sarmiento, the land brings “la suspension hipotética de la ley” into reality, which “permite al mismo tiempo el despliegue de la temporalidad estatal [...] en tanto progreso apodíctico e irresistible” (Quin 36). Sarmiento not only acknowledges, but affirms Hobbesian nature, not as an imaginary condition of the past, but as the binding relation between the Argentine landscape and civil war in the present. Though nightmarish and dystopic, this view of the land serves the Creole interest of finding a new historical origin entirely autonomous from the past in the land, which becomes a reification, or making real of what Quin calls “la imagen mítica del origen” of the state in which the people coalesce around a representative sovereign understood as a “mortal God” (36). Insofar as Rosas—the tyrant who the federalists, in victory, chose as their sovereign—was given dictatorial powers, as it had occurred in a limited way in Rome, Hobbes's king-sovereign somehow found his way from a theoretical past into the real Argentine present. But rather than retaining a sense of the equality of man, Sarmiento's nature-made-land affirms and makes real that nature which the Leviathan was supposed to negate, and which in Hobbes's view never existed historically, which was only ever supposed to be taken as a theoretical fiction.

The Desire for Autonomy From History in Martí's Anti-Imperial Stance

As the traditional narrative would have it, in the mid-nineteenth century positivist thought began to supplant romanticism in Latin America, bringing its heyday to a close. In *Positivism in Latin America* (1971) Ralph Lee Woodward observes that after the eighteen fifties a sense of political romanticism's failure had set in, and that "Auguste Comte's 'positive philosophy' which discarded metaphysics and concentrated on the scientific evolution of society, appealed most urgently" (ix). The rising popularity of French positivism might have spelled the end of the lettered Creoles' romantic dream in Latin America. But in fact, the legacy of romanticism has persisted in modernity as its definitive condition of possibility. If the romantic celebration of autonomy from history can be seen as a distillation of the Enlightenment claim of autonomy from the Church, modernity would soon emerge as "la tradición de la ruptura" (Paz 17).

Instead of discarding romanticism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the shifting geo-political landscape made it useful to retain it as a device by which Latin American thinkers could continue to posit their cultural difference. Specifically in response to the growing interventionism of the United States, Latin American states that had already attained independence began to reorient their sense of collective enmity through a romantic framework. With his famous essay *Ariel* (1900) José Enrique Rodó would effectively revive elitist Latin American romanticism—especially in its faith in the nobility of the poet—as a shared identity to counter vulgar North American pragmatism (positivism), recasting the difference between civilization and barbarism as a difference between Latin and Anglo America. A poem such as José Asunción Silva's "Vejece" in *El libro de versos* (1891-1896) reflects this new role of Latin American romanticism, manifesting a major shift in the Creole tendency to deny its links to Spain by romantically (poetically) affirming Spanish heritage as a front of unified identity against the threat of Anglo imperialism.

The most significant thinker of this positional reorientation in response to U.S. imperialism was José Martí. Through the rhetorical labor of seeking Cuban independence from Spain, while at the same time affirming Latin American difference from the United States, he would synthesize and fulfill the gestures of the early thinkers of Latin American independence and their theorizations of American nature in order to consider “las naciones románticas del continente” as a whole –an emergent Latin Americanism that sought to plant “la semilla de la América nueva” (Martí 126).

In *Divergent Modernities* Julio Ramos understands Martí’s canonical essay “Nuestra América” (1891) as one of the important contributions toward the foundation of a Latin Americanism, exploring how it both presupposes and helps create a disciplinary object (i.e. Latin America) understood as being historically transcendental, or “timeless” (251).<sup>42</sup> Insofar as Martí took nature as the basis of Latin American difference, he integrated a romantic desire for autonomy from history into the Latin Americanism he helped to found. Now, not just particular Latin American nations, but Latin America itself would be defined through nature, as an timeless realm.

Martí adeptly manages several modes of Latin American difference in “Nuestra América.” By its title alone, Martí seeks to define the Latin American against the English American; the “nosotros” to which the “nuestra” of “Nuestra América” refers calls attention to the linguistic difference across the Americas, establishing the binary of (nuestra) Spanish America vs. English (our) America. But beyond affirming a sense of Latin American difference within the Americas, it also sets out to define a program for governance, and regarding this goal,

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<sup>42</sup> Ramos works against this sense of timelessness by historicizing the origins of Latin Americanism, and states of this task: “The premise behind such an undertaking has been that Latin America as an organized, demarcated field of identity does not exist prior to the intervention of a gaze that seeks to represent it” (250).

Martí conceives Latin American difference from Europe as the difference in nature-as-land akin to that elaborated by Sarmiento in *Facundo*.

Martí, like Sarmiento, shifts seamlessly between different and opposing meanings of nature. In “Nuestra América” nature serves two contradictory functions, as the basis of Latin American difference, and as the universal truth/identity that will unite it.

Martí emphasizes the necessity of taking “nature”—the country (“país”) and its accidents—into account for the governance of new American nations, writing: “El gobierno ha de nacer del país. El espíritu del gobierno ha de ser del país. La forma del gobierno ha de avenirse a la constitución propia del país. El gobierno no es más que el equilibrio de los elementos naturales del país” (119). He continues by asserting the victory of the natural man in America: “Viene el hombre natural, indignado y fuerte, y derriba la justicia acumulada de los libros...” “Los hombres naturales han vencido a los letrados artificiales” (120, 119). Through the opposition between the potent “hombre natural” and the bookish “letrado artificial” Martí simultaneously positions himself in relation to the civil war between Creole elite and the uneducated masses, and the question of Cuba’s independence from Spain. The cultural stagnation he attributes to antiquated book knowledge applies both to the European (hence, the natural man also defeats “el libro importado”) and the Latin American Creole elite that takes Europeanization as the horizon of progress (119). Martí positions himself against Sarmiento and the previous generation, writing: “El mestizo autóctono ha vencido al criollo exótico. No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie sino entre falsa erudición y la Naturaleza” (119). The victory of the natural man in America, though at times manifesting as *caudillismo* and “tiranías,” is nevertheless an affirmation of the need for the development of an approach to government that conforms to the particularity of Latin American conditions.

Even while opposing Sarmiento in the class conflict, Martí maintains a concept of romantic nature as the autonomous landscape exemplified in the former's work, as a way to call for Cuban independence from Spain. A famous phrase—"El vino, de plátano, si sale agrio ¡es nuestro vino!"—affirms this sense of nature, also akin to Bello's agricultural landscape: the difference between American wine and European wine, and thus, American and European natures, becomes a difference between "elementos naturales del país"—bananas and grapes—the accidents of the landscape (124, 119).

In addition to seeing nature as the basis of Latin American difference, Martí's claim that nature retains "la identidad universal del hombre" appears to invoke an Enlightenment sense of nature as the fount of universal truth (125). Indeed, both in its rejection of book knowledge and adulation of nature's trueness, "Nuestra América" appears to very closely mirror a passage from Rousseau: "O man, of whatever country you are, and whatever your opinions may be, behold your history, such as I have thought to read it, not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. All that comes from her will be true..." (Rousseau 51). Much in the same way that Sarmiento saw Hobbes's state of nature in the pampas, Martí's acceptance of the romantic territorialization of nature incarnates Rousseau's nature in the American land. America, paradoxically, acquires a privileged access to universal truth.<sup>43</sup> Through territorialization, Martí is able to turn that Enlightenment nature which was supposed to be universal into a resource that is especially abundant in Latin America. The abundance of

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<sup>43</sup> In *Latin America and Anti-Universalism* (2013) Charles Hatfield also observes Martí's incorporation of the "universal" into Cuban identity, without focusing on his use of the concept of nature itself. He writes: "The task for Martí's nationalism [...] was dismantling any conception of Cuban difference by positing the universality of *Cubanidad* based on truths" (38). He continues by outlining how such a definition of *Cubanidad* is paradoxical, writing, "If, for example, *Cubanidad* is to be understood in terms of shared beliefs or common commitments to ideas—such as freedom—then *Cubanidad* becomes just another name for the universally true" (39). He concludes that by suturing the universal to a particular identity, Martí "undoes the universalism he envisions and returns to the idea of race he repudiates, although in markedly different terms" (39).

nature is an abundance of truth that prophecies the Latin American global superiority to come. Europe is decadent, left only with false erudition, books written by liars.

The failure of European knowledge is not a mere function of the fact that European book-knowledge doesn't always effectively translate to the American context. Rather, knowledge found in books is generally flawed. It seems that knowledge must instead be reconstituted anew every generation by looking to nature.

In using a concept of territorialized romantic nature developed by his Latin American predecessors as a way of reasserting Latin American difference and superiority, Martí also affirmed their desire for autonomy from history. If Martí appeared to oppose a stodgy culture of books in "Nuestra América," he is merely recasting a position he had already outlined years earlier in his "Prólogo al 'Poema del Niágara' de Juan A. Pérez Bonalde" (1882) in which his adulation of the young poet culminates in a call to destroy the western cultural archive.

In "Prólogo" a call for the destruction of the archive arises through a discussion of the young poet of nature. Martí describes Pérez Bonalde, the bard of the Niagara, as one who "ha escrito un canto extraordinario y resplandeciente del poema inacabable de la naturaleza!" (31). Indeed, in "Ruines tiempos, en que los sacerdotes no merecen ya la alabanza ni la veneración de los poetas, ni los poetas han comenzado todavía a ser sacerdotes" "la batalla está en los talleres; la gloria en la paz; el templo, en toda la tierra; el poema, en la naturaleza" (22, 28). Pérez Bonalde is a poet, perhaps future governor: in "Nuestra América" he wrote "Gobernante, en un pueblo nuevo, quiere decir creador," and this creator, of course, is the poet (120). He is a natural man who, in looking to nature, does away with the past. In conclusion Martí proclaims:

Pon de lado las huecas rimas de uso, ensartadas de perlas y matizadas con flores de artificio, que suelen ser más juego de la mano y divertimento de ocioso ingenio que

llamarada del alma y hazaña digna de los magnates de la mente. Junta en haz alto, y echa al fuego, pesares de contagio, tibiedades latinas, rimas reflejas, dudas ajenas, males de libros, fe prescrita, caliéntate a la llama saludable del frío de estos tiempos dolorosos... (39).

While at first it seems that doing away with the past will be another call for Latin American originality—a simple matter of “putting aside” the old and using a different kind of rhetoric or new kinds of rhymes—the reader soon sees that it will be the active destruction of burning the past in a bonfire. Among the contagious burdens to be set aflame are used up rhymes and foreign doubts... but most notably, the evils of books: those lying vessels of prescribed faith so aptly described by Rousseau.<sup>44</sup>

As the natural man who overturns “la justicia acumulada de los libros,” so Martí assigns the task of burning the library to the poet (120). It is in this capacity, also, that he reads Pérez Bonalde, as a slayer of poems past. Having already seen Heredia’s “Niágara” I cannot help but wonder at the strange redundancy of “Poema del Niágara.” Martí anticipates this protest, the reader’s feeling that another landscape-oriented poem about Niagara Falls is not necessary (Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda also wrote a poem to the falls, “A vista de Niágara” in 1864). He opens the prologue defending the young poet: “¡Éste que traigo de la mano no es zurcidor de rimas, ni repetidor de viejos maestros –que lo son porque nadie repitieron[...] te diré que se midió con un gigante y no salió herido” (21).

The giant against whom Pérez Bonalde measures himself is not only the towering falls, but also that giant in the canon of Latin American literature, Heredia, but it is not clear that Martí

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<sup>44</sup> In her book *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (2004) Alejandra Bronfman also observes Martí’s desire to actively forget the past. Specifically, she describes his hope to overcome the racial tensions dividing a Cuban national society in this way, writing: “Martí’s race transcendent ideology was nonetheless fraught with unresolved tensions between the need to overcome race and the impossibility of that goal: his strategy amounted to an attempt to overcome [race] by forgetting” (187).

appraises correctly when he states that Pérez Bonalde measures up to his predecessor. The poem is not so remarkable and Martí's favorable evaluation of Pérez Bonalde's poem is a little puzzling. I would suggest, however, that Martí's endorsement can be understood as an expression of the romantic spirit of modernism, a sense that the poem is honorable because it seeks to displace the past.

In light of the tradition of thinking cultural autonomy that took Latin American originality as a primary concern, it is significant that Martí doesn't even give a single quote that might show us the original touches Pérez Bonalde brings to the subject matter, or how he moves beyond Heredia's work. He seems more interested in how the poem represents a return to Heredian glory than any originality it might demonstrate. Pérez Bonalde is the poet who, amid the ruins, heralds a return to past glory by way of nature:

De esta manera, lastimados los pies y los ojos de ver y andar por las ruinas que aún humean, reentra en sí el poeta lírico, que siempre fue, en más o menos, poeta personal, y pone los ojos en las batallas y solemnidades de la naturaleza, aquel que hubiera sido en épocas cortesanas, conventuales o sangrientas, poeta de epopeya. (28)

Rather than supplementing, or repeating Heredia's work, it is as if Pérez Bonalde steps into his place, becoming or superseding him. Even as Martí works to canonize Heredia as an original thinker of the Cuban *patria* he appears to be disposable, pertaining to a past that would be burdensome to retain.<sup>45</sup> By supporting Pérez Bonalde as one who basically just reproduces Heredia's poem, Martí too burns the library, vaunting the young poet over the old—destroying the past to make way for the future.

If, as Ramos suggests, Martí sought to establish his own legitimacy as a writer at a time when the role of writing was uncertain, it makes sense that he would find the realization of his

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<sup>45</sup> See Martí's essay "Heredia" (1889).

own desire to participate in the present through an erasure of the past, as the creation of a void he could fill.<sup>46</sup> Ramos writes: “To *invent* tradition, an origin [...]: this will be one of the great strategies of legitimization instituted by modern Latin American literature beginning with Martí” (120). While I must agree with him that the invention of tradition is one of the great strategies of Latin American literature, to me it is clear that this does not start with Martí, but rather, predates him and is filtered through him.

What is unique to Martí is his apparent awareness of the tension residing in the supersessionary logic to which he ascribed. If in Sarmiento one sees the beginning of a romanticism that turns on itself, the origin of a “tradition of rupture,” he does not appear to be aware of its paradoxes (nor its hypocrisy and irony, for that matter). Martí, on the other hand, with his “Prólogo,” seems to consciously embrace the romantic supersessionary logic in which the present eternally displaces the past: a life in the ahistorical state of nature. He distills the essence of Latin American political romanticism as the sense that freedom can only ever be a freedom from the past. While the past is necessarily implicated in such a view of history, it is a past that tends to be looked upon as a ruin undergoing the process of being reabsorbed into nature. In the following chapters it will become clear that while Martí on the one hand pinpoints some of the most distressing conclusions of the romantic legacy in Latin America (the desire to burn the library), he also shows some alluring paths forward, especially in his theory of knowledge rooted in the present.

## Conclusion

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<sup>46</sup> Ramos writes: “[T]he institutions that had until then guaranteed the social weight of writing (i.e., the church and the state) had withdrawn, taking with them the charge and traditional authority once bestowed on writers” (xxxvii).

In *The Poverty of Progress* Bradford Burns describes the outcome of the culture conflict between Creole elites and the masses as a failed “modernization.” Apparent progress, pursued as Europeanization, was really just a sign of the growing wealth of a privileged few. He writes:

In the course of the nineteenth century, Latin America acquired many of the accoutrements of progress: railroads, steamships, electricity, machinery, Parisian fashions, and English textiles. Many a city displayed a European ‘facade.’ Guatemala City boasted that it was the ‘Paris of Central America,’ while Buenos Aires claimed to be the ‘Paris of the South America,’ titles hotly disputed by other Latin American metropolises. But while progress might have materially improved the lot of the elites, whetted the appetites of the emerging middle classes, and won the approval of the European mentors, it plunged Latin America into deeper dependency. (10-11)

The appearance of Europeanization formed a facade concealing an economy based entirely on the export sector. As autonomy was being proclaimed, dependence was being deepened, and whose extent would not be comprehended until after World War II. In the meantime, the discourse around cultural autonomy can be seen as an important element of the facade Burns describes. This investigation of the concept of American nature and its development makes it clear how this economic dependency would have been catalyzed by the paradoxical nationalism of the Creole elite, who proclaimed autonomy from Europe while at the same time taking their European cultivation as the sign of cultural superiority.

Beyond viewing political romanticism merely as a legacy of a program of Europeanization, on a deeper level it reflects the structures underlying the postcolonial condition. Nature is one of the main ideological resources that would help structure and negotiate the

transformation from a Hispano-Roman *imperium* to the modern political state. By accounting for the history of this ideological mechanism, or myth, this work has begun to develop a better understanding of the functioning of ideology itself, and its manner of self-concealment.

Even though depicting the land as a state of nature was guided in part by a desire to disavow a Hispanic imperial past, the states this nature helped produce were not especially secular or egalitarian. The romantic disavowal of the past and the creation of identity through difference resonated all too well with a reason of conquest which had guided the Hispanic empire since the Middle Ages. And as Zea suggests, disavowal, rather than helping Latin American liberals overcome the past, only helped to perpetuate it in the present. As José Carlos Mariátegui would later point out in *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928), these ostensibly progressive, republican states retained the rigidly divided social structure of a feudal society.

Especially through Martí, who renewed a polemic with the elite over the definition of both the nation and Latin America as a whole, it becomes apparent that class conflict was merely suspended upon national consolidation, and thus, discourse on Latin American autonomy still takes the original question of a cultural relation with Europe as its horizon. The nation was never found, and in revisiting history one must recognize that Latin American republics are not, in fact, national. Comprehending the influence of a territorialized concept of nature in the definition of the republic reveals an alternative way of understanding Latin American republics as territorial states instead of nation-states. If the nation was supposed to serve as a restraint or containment of civil war, the territorial state indeed contained it, but more like a crucible would, as a framework of immolation.

As a result of the paradoxical and insufficiently theorized concept nature grounding the original claims of cultural autonomy the question of dependency and identity would continue to recur in modernity, never to be resolved. A major flaw in the implementation of Latin American republicanism continues to reside in a belief in the possibility of freedom from the past preserved by the claim of cultural autonomy transformed into the idea of “difference.” This claim itself is a product of a blurry middle ground between an imperial will to power and unwitting delusion of grandeur, and thus turned the definition of unity into an act of war. Even as Martí begins to recognize the dangers of dependence, he affirms nature’s promise of autonomy from history, renewing a call for cultural autonomy from Europe and the US, and thus retaining what is probably most problematic element of first wave of independence thought. The fantasy of the *tabula rasa*, maintained rather than dispelled, has continued to conceal the truth of dependency and inequality in Latin America, as well as the very history by which this concealment could be recognized. I have noted that the transition to modernity is marked by this perpetuation of romantic “presentism,” the belief in the *tabula rasa* turning into a *perpetuum mobile* of disavowal, “a monstrous mill grinding [only] itself” (Novalis 144). In the following chapters I will investigate the legacy political romanticism in the twentieth century, examining political and literary thought as it continues to grapple with the paradoxes of Latin America’s foundational ideology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Critique of the Desire for the End of History in Borges

*History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I  
am trying to awake* —James Joyce

In the previous chapter I examined the ways in which a romantic concept of territorialized nature—i.e. nature as wilderness landscape—served for the theorization of the cultural autonomy of new Latin American nation-states after independence from Spain. Additionally, I showed how José Martí, for the thinking of Cuban independence at the end of the nineteenth century, synthesized the various concepts of nature developed by the Latin American independence thinkers before him, once again returning to nature in order to posit Latin American autonomy. Now, I jump forward, past the national consolidation of the 1920s and 30s, to discuss the ideology of nature in national discourse immediately before and after World War II. Specifically, I show how Jorge Luis Borges, in considering the crisis of modernity, examined the tensions existing between developmental-modernism and Latin America's founding romanticism within its modern nationalist discourses. I argue that Borges crucially identifies the political and literary legacies of Latin American romanticism during this period by observing and critiquing the way in which a desire for a return to nature as a site that stands outside the flow of history is perpetuated in the modern suturing of positivism with nationalist discourses.

During the first half of the twentieth century positivism and the human sciences rose to prominence, the work of August Comte in particular becoming extremely influential in

determining the direction of Latin American discourse.<sup>1</sup> Positivist developmental thinking understood itself as making a rupture with a decadent past, emerging from the aberration of romanticism that had represented “the point of maximum delusion in our recent past,” thereby transforming the discussion of civilization and barbarism initiated by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in the mid nineteenth century into a discussion of development and underdevelopment (de Man, *Blindness* 13). A sense of Latin American difference from Europe and the United States came to be defined by its pertinence or lack thereof to modernity (i.e. civilization) characterized by a faith in instrumental reason, the banishment of myth, and a teleological view of history as progress. Still, a tension arose when, even as a “catastrophic consciousness of backwardness” (i.e. underdevelopment/barbarism) set in after WWII, populist political currents drew strength from nationalist discourses that defined the Latin American project through universalist modernization (Cándido 37). Even as modernity was seen as an effect of “development” within an ostensibly universalist framework of progressive or social-evolutionary historiography, it was also seen as being particularly embodied by the cultures of the United States and Europe from which Latin American thinkers sought to maintain their cultural, economic, and political independence. In this moment, there arose a perception of an incompatibility between the desire for an ostensibly universal modernity and the desire for cultural autonomy that continues to define the field to this day. This tension, seen also as a crisis of cultural stagnation, would define the crisis of modernity for Latin America.

Along with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Borges one of the first intellectuals to articulate this crisis of modernity culminating in WWII as a sense that something was wrong

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<sup>1</sup> This influence is described by Leopoldo Zea in *The Latin American Mind* (1949), as well as by Ralph Lee Woodward’s *Positivism in Latin America* (1971), though one need look no further than the flag of Brazil, which is emblazoned with Comte’s motto “Order and Progress.”

with the commonly held understanding of history.<sup>2</sup> He observed the failings of a modernist narrative of progress increasingly integrated into nationalist discourses by showing that history was not so much moving forward as it was repeating itself. Borges points to the nationalist desire for identity associated with rupture with the past itself as one of these historical repetitions. Thus, by observing the modern return to desire for autonomy from the past consecrated by discourses elaborating the cultural autonomy of new Latin American nations after independence, he anticipates what Leopoldo Zea would describe as Latin America's cultural stagnation, and what Octavio Paz would call its modern "tradición de la ruptura" (Paz 17).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Especially in Europe, and for theorists such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the two world wars of the twentieth century have been taken to represent a crisis of modernity which boiled down to a revelation that history could no longer be strictly understood through a framework of progress. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the horror of these conflagrations, symbolized by gas warfare in the trenches, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima, precipitated a kind of disenchantment of modernity. Despite this, after the war in the United States especially, but also in Latin America, a belief in the happy union between technology and progress prevailed.

<sup>3</sup>In his important work *The Latin American Mind* (1949), Leopoldo Zea observes the curious resurgence of a question of dependence and independence in Latin America after WWII, echoing national consolidation of the twenties, Rodó's Arielist Latin Americanism, the anti-imperial Latin Americanism of Martí, and more distantly, the original call for cultural autonomy after independence. Thus, along with Borges, he began to account for what was proving to be a tradition in Latin American thought: the return to the question of identity and difference. Zea's book is a study of the transition between romanticism and positivism that shows their difference to consist in a shift in the understanding of how national autonomy would be fulfilled: the romantic call for cultural autonomy turns into a positivist hope of predicating the institutions of the state upon the autonomy of scientific truth. This observation goes directly against another claim of rupture, that which is made by positivist discourse itself against the romanticism that preceded it. While he does not explicitly characterize the rise of positivist discourse as a return to the claim of difference, he frames his study with an observation of cultural stagnation in Latin America in a way that suggests the positivist rupture is less dramatic than it would have us think. He describes this stagnation as a feeling that Latin America is tragically stuck in history, stating, "our past still has not become a real past; it is still a present which does not choose to become history" (6). Zea attributes this "stuckness" to the Creole disavowal of his Spanish/European past. In reference to the Creole he writes: "His history, his past, was considered as something which did not belong to him because it had not been his work [...] He looked upon the history of the Colonial period as something totally alien to him. Spain had created this past and Spain alone could answer for it" (8). Framing his study of the transition to positivism in this way, he suggests that its assertion of rupture with romanticism mirrors the claim of cultural autonomy from Spain after independence, as a denial of the past that does not have the power to move beyond it. Zea is witness to the birth of a vicious cycle in Latin American discourse, as the repeated resurgence of a question of cultural difference, which is now present in assertions of underdevelopment and cultural stagnation, and has come to stand as the very manifestation of that stagnation, the poverty of a discourse that repeats itself over and again, saying nothing new.

Ironically, Zea ascribes to a Hegelian view of history. His desire for the past to become history is a wish for it to be dialectically negated so that it can take its place in a universal narrative of human progress, and open the way to forward movement along this path. Even as I affirm his observation of continuity between romantic and positivist discourses in Latin America, my reading of Borges will ultimately criticize the progressive view of history.

Rather than lamenting this repetition as a “failure to advance,” as it would be understood within a progressive historical framework, Borges criticizes the framework itself, showing the hypocrisy and blindness of the modern claim of novelty, and how it languishes in the romantic thinking it disavows. During a period in which human sciences were increasingly deployed by the state as means of governance, and a vision of modernization became part and parcel of nationalist discourse, Borges critiqued the suturing of positivist and nationalist discourses by identifying the extent to which this union perpetuated the desire for autonomy from the past that characterized the post-independence period. He illustrates the paradoxes latent in developmentalist nationalism’s desire to circumscribe and consolidate an autonomous national subjectivity by arriving at the end of history, showing how the idea of the end of history itself—the messianic telos of progressive time—is necessarily constituted through the past. Thus, Borges shows the arrival at an ideal future to be none other than a destructive return to the past. Furthermore, he demonstrates how self-criticism is the only way to deal with the desire for modernity and cultural autonomy in Latin America, and the feeling of cultural stagnation arising when these goals remain on an ever-distant horizon. By implicating himself as a possessor of the desire he wishes to criticize, he finds one of the few effective means of critiquing national, modern, or totalitarian desire to arrive at the end of history: an attack on one’s own self-positing ego.

“La muralla y los libros” (1950), the essay with which he opens *Otras inquisiciones* (1952), is a good starting point for illustrating my approach to Borges’s consideration of developmentalist nationalism before and after the war. In this essay he provocatively casts the nationalist desire subtending the crisis of modernity in ancient terms, through a recollection of the Chinese Emperor who sought to consolidate his empire by building a great wall and burning

the library. “Leí, días pasados, que el hombre que ordenó la edificación de la casi infinita muralla china fue aquel primer Emperador, Shih Huang Ti, que asimismo dispuso que se quemaran todos los libros anteriores a él” (PC 131). According to Borges, while his wall-building undertaking is astounding and baffling, “lo único singular en Shih Huang Ti fue la escala en que obró” (131). “Cercar un huerto o un jardín es común; no, cercar un imperio” (131).

Significantly, Borges recalls the Chinese Emperor in 1950, in wake of a world war that was spurred on in large part by a fervent German national desire to consolidate its Reich (Poland being its wall, the required *Lebensraum* or “breathing room”) vividly marked by ritual book burnings. In light of the resonances between events recently transpiring in modern Europe and those described in Borges’s evocation of ancient China, it is not difficult to read “La muralla y los libros” a suggestion that “lo único singular en [Hitler] fue la escala en que obró” (131). Significantly, such a reading would conclude that there is nothing particularly new or extraordinary about Hitler’s attempt to circumscribe the nation by burning the library in and of itself, nor in his insistence that “la historia empezara con él”; it is merely the scale of his operation that is remarkable (132).<sup>4</sup> Such an interpretation is arresting insofar as the Nazi desire to burn the archive was not limited to the destruction of books. Here one would read a reference also to the destruction of the Jews, which was not merely an attempt to kill people, but rather an attempt wipe out a “past” –a culture, a body of knowledge, a system of law, and a concept of history.

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<sup>4</sup> One can already observe in “La muralla y los libros” the irony Borges ascribes to the crisis of modernity, in his characterization of a crisis that is supposed to consist in man’s grappling with events that are entirely unprecedented and *new*, as a return to the past, another instantiation of actions carried out by a Chinese Emperor long ago. Rather than spurring on its progress, a desire to disavow the past (i.e. the desire to burn the library) makes moderns appear *ancient*.

Borges was by no means a sympathizer with the German cause (in *Borges y el nazismo: Sur (1937-1946)* (2004) Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones details his extensive involvement in an Argentine anti-Nazi movement) and so if one chooses to read “La muralla y los libros” as a comment on the national impulse embodied by the Nazis, one must read its description of the desire to destroy the past as the beginning of a critique. The outrageousness of comparing the incommensurable destruction of Europe to the simple walling of a garden must be understood as an illustration of what is at stake in this issue, a provocation whose purpose to elicit a question about what the comparison could possibly mean. In observing the coincidence between of the act of walling-in the nation and burning the library, Borges suggests that on a small scale there is something “normal” (like circumscribing a garden) about wanting to destroy the past. It is this enigmatic desire that I wish to explore here. The ethical chasm represented by the acts perpetrated by the Nazis yawns, and one must be worried about what normalcy Borges sees hiding within it. One can ask: If the desire to burn the archive is normal, who’s to say it won’t again be fulfilled on a very large scale? This concern about a common desire to destroy the past is clearly related to observations that I made in the previous chapter of the present work, where I began to observe this desire to begin history anew in Creole definition of new Latin American nation-states through the circumscription of nature, that is, the definition of the land as a realm standing outside the flow of time. Thus, it appears Borges articulates his consideration of the crisis of modernity as a question of that same desire to supersede the past that defined the invention of the Latin American nation-state after independence from Spain.

Thus, it is no trivial coincidence that in “La muralla y los libros” (which can be also approached as an oblique reading of Coleridge’s poem, in which Kubla Khan constructs a pleasure dome at Xanadu) Borges compares the walling of the Empire to the walling of a garden.

And it is not only in this essay that he articulates the modern crisis of nationalism—both in Europe and Argentina—as a question of “nature.” Two of his fictions in particular, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (1939) and “El sur” (1953), can be read as thought experiments specifically designed to comprehend the diverse modalities of this concept at a time when positivism was attempting to displace romanticism as the theory defining the nation. Within these fictions, and their tacit dialogue, I read Borges as attempting to navigate the conceptual dissonances arising when a scientific view of nature as objective truth begins to discursively “compete” with the romantic, territorial nature that had previously defined the national imaginary. On the one hand he documents the differences between a view of nature as a deterritorialized realm of truth, and as the landscape of a romantic past, as well as the ways in which each pertains to the definition of the Argentine national subject. Through close readings I show how differences between these conceptualizations of nature can be found primarily in the different ways in which the protagonists of each tale will arrive at the end of history. On the other hand, even as he accounts for the differences between positivist and romantic views, he maintains that even while positivism believes it has emerged from romantic delusion, it perpetuates its central myth, the nature that conserves and maintains a desire to stand outside the flow of history. For Borges, both scientific and romantic enclosures of “nature” effectively achieve the same thing as burning the library does, defining the national realm as a place free from the past, a *tabla rasa* where the fresh start can be made.

The two texts with which I am primarily concerned both ironically describe attempts to find the end of history—the *telos* of progressive time—through the repetition of history, a destructive return to the past. Each of these fictions also describes a vision of nature, and casts the desire to find the end of history metaphorically as desire to “wall in the garden,” so to speak.

In “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” Borges describes a man’s attempt to circumscribe a concept of nature as a hypothetical realm of universal truth (whose roots can be traced back to the Enlightenment) in order to create a hard literary science; in “El sur” the protagonist makes a fantastic Oedipal return to the pampas, reclaiming the romanticized wilderness landscape of the Argentine national imaginary for himself. “Pierre Menard,” which archives and parodies a fanatical scientific evolutionism, raises questions about the meaning of the repetition of history Menard deliberately seeks to carry out by writing Cervantes’s *Quijote*; “El sur” raises questions about a curious desire for oblivion conditioning political projects that seek social totality. “Pierre Menard” lampoons the understanding of history maintained by a scientific, positivist discourse; “El sur” more clearly contemplates the romantic discourses of Argentine nationalism. Through a comparison of these two stories of return I illustrate an articulation between positivist and nationalist discourses through their shared vision of temporality (nature) in which the past comes to be imagined as the endpoint of a positive teleology, the end of history. I argue that Borges critiques these discourses, showing that the return is not motivated so much by a desire to recuperate or recover the past as it is motivated by a desire to annihilate or displace it. By reading these stories as allegories for the ongoing return to the question of difference in Latin America, I understand that process as being informed by a vision of the end of history, both as future suspension of time, and as the Oedipal return to the past.

Insofar as comprehending this question will entail breaking down modern periodizations based on claims of historical rupture, my investigation produces a clearer picture of the historical relation between romantic and positivist thought in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> As I have already suggested,

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<sup>5</sup> In Latin American history this opposition is nevertheless maintained, most notably by Paz, who describes the historical dialectic swing from backward-looking romanticism to forward-looking positivism to romantic literary *modernismo* and *Arielismo*, and then back to the avant-gardes of the 1920s in which Borges first began to cut his teeth as a writer. Romanticism, understood as a kind of counter-Enlightenment that works against a modernity

the periodization of history that sees positivism as making a fundamental break with romanticism, and that understands these two “periods” or cultural tendencies as being diametrically opposed, obscures their basic continuity. Through Borges I will maintain that the modern “desire to obliterate the past” is part of a romantic tradition, affirming Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe’s suggestion in *The Literary Absolute* (1978) that the interest of romanticism lies in the fact that “we still belong to the era it opened up” (Alonso, *Spanish* 34; Nancy 15). If indeed “[t]he present period continues to deny precisely this belonging [to romanticism], which defines us (despite the inevitable divergence introduced by repetition),” it would appear to be precisely the denial of a pertinence to a previous time that “defines” both the romantics and “us” (Nancy 15).

### Identity, Totalitarianism, and Oblivion

Borges’s thinking was defined by the historical events of his day, and the intellectual climate in which he developed. In the essay “Borges and Politics” (1978) Emir Rodríguez Monegal details much of the history of Borges’s political engagement, discussing his criticism of Argentine nationalism during the “decade of infamy” in the 1930s, and Nazism and Peronismo

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defined as secular disenchantment, would be strictly opposed to the positivism that followed it, which worshipped the instrumental reason and scientific objectivity typically associated with technical modernity. While literary *modernismo* and *Arielismo* represented a return to romanticism, avant-garde writers of the early 1920s such as Guillermo del Torre and Vicente Huidobro repudiated Darío and obsessed over technical modernity, manifesting a positive influence. Through Borges’s reflection on the period of transition to modernity it will become clear that even as positivism replaces explicitly romantic discourse in Latin America, it retains and radicalizes a romantic desire for autonomy from the history. Insofar as this desire desires the sacred, his work can be read as an early consideration of political theology in modernity that observes the Enlightenment’s failure to dispel myth.

An “Ultraist manifesto” (1918) by Borges’s close associate within the Argentine avant-garde Isaac del Vando-Villar, rejects the “literary modernists” of the previous generation (explicitly mentioned are Spanish writers Valle-Inclán, Azorin y Ricardo León) stating, “Porque ellos son unos plagiadores conscientes e inconscientes de nuestros clásicos y ninguna cosa nueva nos han revelado ni podrán revelárnosla. Y nosotros estamos limpios de ese pecado y tenemos imágenes e ideas modernas...” Additionally, he manifests his view of history as a form of machismo: “Triunfaremos porque somos jóvenes y fuertes, y representamos la aspiración evolutiva del más allá. Ante los eunucos novecentistas desnudamos la Belleza apocalíptica del Ultra, seguros de que ellos no podrían romper jamás el himen del Futuro” (*Grecia* 9).

during the 1940s and 50s. Rodríguez Monegal highlights a difficulty in understanding Borges's work that stems from the contrast between his rejection of nationalism and fascism in his early years, and the conservatism of his later years.<sup>6</sup> Though his praise for certain notorious regimes in later years does not cancel out the force of his earlier anti-fascist thinking, it does suggest that the underlying motivation for his criticism of populism might have been conservative. Oscar Cabezas arrives upon a similar conclusion in his discussion of the complexities of Borges's critique of Juan Peron in *Postsoberanía* (2013), citing their shared "deseo patriarcal" as a fundamental similarity between their ostensibly opposing positions (119). Generally, a conservative impulse manifests itself in Borges's early thinking as a fascination with the past, serving in part as a basis for his critique of both modern discourses of nationalism and progress.<sup>7</sup> And yet, his recognition of the vanity of attempts to canonize any particular cultural essence through the preservation of cultural tradition, which he expresses in his essay "El escritor Argentino y la tradición," would appear to go against a desire to merely conserve the past. I argue that in much of Borges's work one can find this tension between "deseo patriarcal" and his awareness that such a desire is deeply problematic reflected in a carefully maintained self-criticism. Borges undertakes his critiques of modernity by grappling with the problematic aspects of his own conservative desire. In this way, as "thought that does violence to itself,"

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<sup>6</sup> Rodríguez Monegal argues that the old division between the popular masses and the Creole elite to which Borges's ancestors pertained did not determine his positioning against fascism. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the possibility that his opposition to populism is in fact a legacy of the class strife dividing Argentina after independence. In *Crítica y ficción* (1990) Piglia notes that Borges and Bioy Casares's antiperonist "La fiesta de monstruo" can be interpreted as a rewriting of *El matadero*, casting Borges as the unitario and Peron as Rosas. The Argentine populist project of national consolidation is undertaken in the shadow of the civil war conditioning its formation as an independent state.

<sup>7</sup> In the essay cited below, Patrick Dove describes Borges as "lamenting the retreat of tradition in the face of modernity" (63).

Borges's thinking attains its force against the myths of a modernity that would understand itself as being autonomous from history (Adorno 2).<sup>8</sup>

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As Rodríguez Monegal's work suggests, Borges's confrontation with the crisis of modernity was carried out in part by confronting his own society's fascination with the National Socialist project.<sup>9</sup> In the essay "Anotación del 23 de agosto de 1944," which he later included in *Otras inquisiciones*, Borges describes an encounter with one of his many compatriots aligned with the Germans during WWII, and his sense of isolation in feeling dismay when learning that France had fallen to the Nazis. In his reading of this essay Rodríguez Monegal points out that in "the Argentina of the 1940s [...] unpopularity had a name: to be an antifascist," casting Borges as a social dissident, in his willingness to publically repudiate Nazism and Germanophilia (63).

While Cabezas argues that Borges's identification of Peron with Hitler, and a generally pervasive tactic of comparing Argentine populism to German Nazism among *antiperonistas*, is overstated and misleading, one must nevertheless acknowledge the resonances between an ongoing Creole nationalist project in Argentina starting in the 1930s and European nationalist projects during the same period. Rodríguez Monegal suggests that Borges sees the Argentine Germanophile's fascination with Hitler as being "centered around only one fact: that Germany was the enemy of England" (62). Whether or not this was Borges's opinion, it is something of an oversimplification. Argentine sympathy for the Nazis was more complex than the sympathy one feels for the enemy of his enemy. In Argentina there existed a particular set of links to Germany, including a common legacy of political romanticism, a late arrival to the global, imperial jockeying attended by the national consolidation of states, and a similar socio-economic

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<sup>8</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer write: "Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths" (2).

<sup>9</sup> In *Borges y el nazismo: Sur (1937-1946)* Antonio Gómez López-Quñones focuses exclusively on Borges's opposition to Nazism through contributions to the pro-Ally journal *Sur*.

climate.<sup>10</sup> Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones affirms that there is a link between Argentine and German nationalisms in *Borges y el nazismo: Sur (1937-1946)*, writing: “[L]a Argentina de los años treinta y cuarenta, sumida en un intenso proceso de definición de identidad, entendió el Nazismo como una fuente de necesario nacionalismo, de asentamiento en los valores patrios y de exaltación de la ‘esencia’ autóctona” (12). The parallels between the rhetoric of Nazism and that of Latin American national consolidation betray their remarkably similar goals. While the Nazis sought to stage the project of establishing a thousand-year reign in part through the spectacle of book burnings, the discourse of Latin American national difference—even leftist, anti-imperial thinking—was rooted in a claim of autonomy from the past (or certain pasts) that formulated similar calls for the destruction of the archive exemplified by José Martí’s rhetorical call for the burning of the library discussed in the previous chapter, and later for example, by the Peronist slogan “alpargatas sí, libros no” (Cabezas 123).<sup>11</sup> Even as certain histories were being renounced, literary expression in the Argentina of the 1930s sought to distill the essence of Argentine culture. This literary *costumbrismo* movement headed by Leopoldo Lugones was directly sponsored by the state, like the nationalist propaganda produced in fascist Europe.<sup>12</sup> Even as one recognizes the marked divergences between Argentine Creole nationalism and European fascism, one senses that “la formación nacional-popular que tomó lugar en la

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<sup>10</sup> In *Nomos of the Earth* (1950) Carl Schmitt outlines the link between the Roman Empire, the Iberian Christian Empire in America, and the German Reich, suggesting a deeper historical unity linking the emergence of Latin American and German nationalisms.

<sup>11</sup> In “Prólogo al ‘Poema del Niágara’ de Juan A. Pérez Bonalde” (1882) he proclaims: “Pon de lado las huecas rimas de uso, ensartadas de perlas y matizadas con flores de artificio, que suelen ser más juego de la mano y divertimento de ocioso ingenio que llamarada del alma y hazaña digna de los magnates de la mente. Junta en haz alto, y echa al fuego, pesares de contagio, tibiedades latinas, rimas reflejas, dudas ajenas, males de libros, fe prescrita, caliéntate a la llama saludable del frío de estos tiempos dolorosos...” (39). For more on Martí’s call to burn the library see Chapter One of the present work.

<sup>12</sup> *La patria fuerte* (1930), a collection of Lugones’s nationalist militarist writings, whose publication was funded by the Uriburu regime, stands as testament to this darker period of his career.

Argentina no está, efectivamente, exento de ser asimilado a las experiencias europeas del fascismo” (Cabezas 115).

Borges’s engagement with the questions raised by modern nationalist discourses in Argentina and Europe appears in his work as an ongoing meditation on the desire to consolidate personal and communal identity. Crucially, Borges links this desire to a repetition of history.

As I have already noted, his position in regard to the matters of national identity and culture is complex. On the one hand, his essay “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (collected in *Discusión* [1932]) powerfully critiques literary attempts to distill an expression of Argentina’s autonomous cultural identity, and is a clear enough indicator of how he felt about the efforts of Lugones and the Argentine Creole nationalists of the time to do so. On the other hand, a later fiction, “El sur” is a more ambiguous reflection on the desire for fusion in the landscape of the national imaginary.

“El sur” is the story of a librarian who ends up getting into a knife fight when traveling to his ancestral *estancia* in the pampas, where he had planned to recover strength after being gravely ill. Unlike most of Borges’s other stories, it voices many Argentine national tropes cultivated in literary *costumbrismo* of Leopoldo Lugones: the pampas, gauchos, a knife fight, etc. In his essay “Visages of the Other: On a Phantasmatic Recurrence in Borges’ ‘El sur’” (2000) Patrick Dove suggests that the mere inclusion and treatment of Argentine cultural themes championed by *costumbrismo* in “El sur” would seem to go against Borges’s earlier essay “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” which argues against precisely these kinds of inclusions.<sup>13</sup> But

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<sup>13</sup> Dove notes: “While the parodic treatment of *criollo* nationalism in the text serves as a measure of Borges’ eventual efforts to dissociate himself from the mythopoetic production of national identity in early twentieth-century Argentina, the text is nonetheless crossed by an array of concerns that do not entirely fit into the critical paradigm of a ‘later Borges’ who had successfully effaced the *topos* of Argentine particularity from his work” (65). He understands the story’s consideration of Argentine particularity through a deconstructive frame, citing it as the tradition Borges works to undo, and which at the same time can never be fully effaced and relegated to oblivion: “And thus, even as the narrative offers a brilliant deconstructive reading of the Nationalist discourse and its

beyond the mere inclusion of national traces, “El sur” depicts nationalism itself in the protagonist’s strange desire for a patriotic death.

In its opening lines the story establishes that the protagonist’s sense of *argentinedad* is defined by the death of his maternal grandfather, who perished romantically (“de muerte romántica”) charging into battle at Junín, where the Creoles consolidated continental victory over Spain in 1824 (*Ficciones* 199). The story ends when the meek and inexperienced protagonist finds himself entering into a knife duel under the stars that he will almost certainly lose, just prior to the moment in which he would be conferred a national death out of the pages of *Martin Fierro*.<sup>14</sup> The strangeness of Dahlmann’s suicidal agreement to accept the duel is perhaps the most important unresolved question of “El sur.” Dove convincingly reads in this death a certain “parodic treatment of *criollo* nationalism,” an exaggerated expression of a national pride that would “seek to identify—and identify with—the unalterable essence of this past” (65, 62). Still, a sense that it is a parody ought not lead one to underestimate the seriousness of this “criollo fantasy” of national death (70).

On the one hand, Dahlmann’s likely death is an important basis upon which Borges’s reading would most patently appear to be a critique of a Creole populist-nationalist sense that the countryside is supposed to contain Argentina’s authentic national culture.<sup>15</sup> Dove notes that his

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invention of an Argentine essence, it also marks the failure within the project of modernization in its attempts to efface and forget the barbaric traces of the past” (65). Here Dove observes an example of the special form of self-criticism in Borges I will elaborate at length.

<sup>14</sup> Ricardo Piglia has somewhat mockingly described meeting one’s end in a duel as the acme of Creole honor and a badge of national identity in Argentina. In *Respiración artificial* (1980) the senator describes the tradition of dueling at the time of independence: “De haber seguido esa costumbre quizás hubieran ido desapareciendo, uno detrás de otro, todos los *gentlemen* que han ayudado a convertir a este país en lo que ahora es. Era una especie de genocidio señorial: cualquier altercado, cualquier palabra cruzada a desgano se convertía de inmediato en duelo. Había que terminar con esa costumbre que obligaba a los señores a matarse entre ellos para probar que eran caballeros argentinos, que sus padres, sus abuelos y sus bisabuelos habían sido caballeros argentinos” (52).

<sup>15</sup> In his reading of *La vorágine* in “‘La Vorágine’: Crisis, populismo y mirada” (1974), David Viñas discusses the way in which populist discourse posited the culture of the countryside as being more authentic, vigorous, and masculine than that of the metropolis. “El sur” mirrors Rivera’s novel as a mock bildungsroman in which the urban

death would not be necessary, but rather ideological, a function of his willingness to be interpellated by his own romantic concept of the South; although he has no dispute with the drunken man who wants to fight him, Dahlmann resigns himself to go along with the customs of the countryside and accedes to the duel. Insofar as he might have simply, and quite reasonably ignored the challenge, in a sense, Dahlmann would be subjected to a death that is both absurd and deserved. In this way, his death would represent the fatality of a romantic nationalist ideology.

At the same time, it seems that there is something more to the “romantic” desire for death and oblivion underlying Dahlmann’s quest for national identity. His suicidal assent to fight knowing that he will probably lose is the mysterious event that makes the story so interesting. This intrigue, as the reader experiences it, must in some way resemble Dahlmann’s own feeling about dying under the stars, suggesting a sense in which his death is not merely absurd. Through a romantic ideological framework, the story might be read as an account of Dahlmann’s liberation from a modernist discourse rooted in the values of positive science, his self-sacrifice being a *successful* return a system of values that modernity and objective science was supposed to dispel. This approach to “El sur” is reinforced by its depiction of another kind of death, the sanitized, scientific hospital death that threatened the protagonist earlier in the story (Dahlmann travels to the South in order to convalesce) to which his romantic fantasy becomes an appealing alternative. The narrator describes his treatment in hospital as a kind of dehumanization:

en cuanto llegó, lo desvistieron; le raparon la cabeza, lo sujetaron con metales a una camilla, lo iluminaron hasta la ceguera y el vértigo, lo auscultaron y un hombre enmascarado le clavó una aguja en el brazo [...] en los días que siguieron

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intellectual is transformed into a man and a popular national figure in nature. I will explore this motif with greater attention in chapter three of the present work.

la operación pudo entender que apenas había estado, hasta entonces, en un arrabal del infierno [...] En esos días, Dahlmann minuciosamente se odió; odió su identidad.” (*Ficciones* 201)

Especially if one reads the entire trip South as nothing but a feverish fantasy, the romantic death seems genuinely conceived as a more dignified and appealing alternative to the death prescribed by modern medicine. Given the negative description of the dehumanizing effort to “make-live” in the hospital, it does not seem possible to fully identify Borges’s critique with the modernist-positivist discourse that claims to supersede national romantic discourse.

In its contrast to a sanitized hospital death, one can understand the death that Dahlmann desires as a return not only to the site of national romantic autonomy—the *tabula rasa* of the Argentine “desert”—but also to the sacred, the vestige of romanticism’s theological content. In the protagonist’s Southern limit experience—that vertigo he first begins to feel in the hospital—one can recognize a depiction of the impulse George Bataille describes in *The Accursed Share* (1967), a helplessness to pursue the oblivion of sacred totality found in erotic fusion and death.<sup>16</sup> By “sacred” here, I refer not to any specific religious concept, but rather to what Bataille describes as an alteration in man’s relationship to the world most readily represented by the practice of sacrifice, human and otherwise.<sup>17</sup> Crucially, Bataille states that the drive toward the sacred culminates in the sacrifice, an erotic fusion between subject and object attended by an experience of oblivion, or suspended time. Thus, the sacrifice and the sacred occur as a

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<sup>16</sup> Bataille writes of Phaedra’s vertigo: “Just as the crime, which horrifies her, secretly raises and fuels Phaedra’s ardor, sexuality’s fragrance of death ensures all its power. This is the meaning of anguish, without which sexuality would be only an animal activity, and would not be *erotic*. If we wish to clearly represent this extraordinary effect, we have to compare it to vertigo, where fear does not paralyze but increases an involuntary desire to fall” (100). Here, the erotic desire of the “totality of Being” or the “totality of the real” into which man is drawn is expressed as a desire for “the definitive emptiness of death” (111; 101).

<sup>17</sup> Sacrifice is man’s deliberate destruction of a useful object to suspend his relation of instrumentality with the world, causing a bracketing of reality that opens him to the true Being of things. This bracketing is the delineation of the sacred.

bracketing of history that consigns the subject to a total present associated with animality, a return to the pre-human state of being. The death Dahlmann seeks out must be understood in this way, as a sacrifice that acts as an aperture to the end of history.

At the moment in which Dahlmann walks out onto the pampas, the story, which until now had been told in the past tense, shifts into the present and concludes precisely as the moment of death is arriving –“Dahlmann empuña con firmeza el cuchillo, que acaso no sabrá manejar, y sale a la llanura” (*Ficciones* 207). This shift reflects his passage into the temporality of the sacred. The suspension of the narrative at this moment represents the suspended time of sacrifice. The reader does not get to see the sacred national moment, because categorically, it must remain shrouded in darkness. This bracketing of the sacred recalls a moment occurring earlier in the story, when, sitting in a café prior to setting off on his travels, the protagonist pets a cat and contemplates its experience of history: “pensó, mientras alisaba el negro pelaje, que aquel contacto era ilusorio y que estaban como separados por un cristal, porque el hombre vive en el tiempo, en la sucesión, y el mágico animal, en la actualidad, en la eternidad del instante” (202). When Dahlmann walks out onto the pampas and the narrative is suspended, he crosses over into the eternal present of the magical animal. Dahlmann’s national death is a communion with a reality he had previously though inaccessible, the cat’s eternity of the instant: the end of history. In this consideration of the national death, Borges shows the way in which a desire for national, communal identity and immanence—even in the Nazism of which he was an ardent critic—reflects a desire for the *sacred* that represents a framework of value that is diametrically opposed to modern instrumentality.

The acute desire for the total immanence of the subject and of the social body can be read as a form of *totalitarianism*, not in its typical definition as a specific system of government, but

rather as the quest for identitarian self-immanence, or totality.<sup>18</sup> Borges depicts a trace of the totalitarian spirit of any nationalism that seeks to collapse the people and the state into a single unified “Uno-Todo” (Cabezas 111). In *The Inoperative Community* (1991), Jean-Luc Nancy describes the motivating desire behind totalitarianism—what he otherwise calls “immanentism”—to be a backlash against a shattered modern community: “What this community has ‘lost’—the immanence and the intimacy of a communion—is lost only in the sense that such a ‘loss’ is constitutive of ‘community’ itself” (12). Throughout his essay Nancy explicates Bataille, for whom totality is the experience of erotic fusion and death, that is, as the loss of the self as the “strictly separate entity” when subject and object can no longer be distinguished (Bataille 116). For Nancy, it is due to the immanence represented by death, “decomposition leading back to nature,” that “political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it” (12).<sup>19</sup>

More than just a reflection of the crisis of modernity, Borges shows that this question of totality and identity is also caught up in questions of history and historiography. In “El sur” the question of history manifests in the motif of the return, the protagonist’s attempt to find himself not only in death, but in the past. Not only does the South represent an earlier time, the mythical site of Argentine culture as it was defined by Sarmiento and Lugones—a past stuck in the present, a barbaric state nature. It is also the site of the ancestral home, the site of his grandfather’s

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<sup>18</sup> And I must clarify here that even under dictatorship, a totalitarian form of government never existed in Argentina.

<sup>19</sup> Given that the story was written shortly after WWII, I also cannot help but notice the intertextuality of Dahlmann’s desire for national death in “El sur” with “Anotación del 23 de agosto de 1944,” in which Borges suggests that Hitler himself secretly longed for his own destruction and defeat. I wonder if “El sur” is not a meditation on Hitler’s own totalitarian will to oblivion, and a would-be prophecy of the downfall of the Hitler-Peron he and Adolfo Bioy Casares describe in “La fiesta del monstruo” (1947). “El sur” was first published in 1953 in *La Nación* and then later included in *Ficciones* in the second edition published in 1956. Were one to assume that it was part of the original edition of *Ficciones* was first published in 1944 a reading of the text as a reflection on Hitler’s downfall would be anachronistic.

*estancia*. Dahlmann imagines he will become more like himself (recover his “mitad ausente”, as David Viñas puts it in regard to different protagonist) by drawing closer to this *abuleo* in physical space, with a trip to his *estancia* in the south (Viñas, “Vorágine” 3). In one sense, by perishing prior to reaching his grandfather’s *estancia*, he seems to fall short of his communion. But in the imminence of demise on the plain of combat, he attains something even better, coming very close to reliving his grandfather’s glorious and honorable death. It is not just the honor here that matters. Through the return to a particular kind of death, by mirroring, or perhaps even displacing his grandfather, Dahlmann finds his identity; by repeating history he is absorbed into it, and affirmed.

Here it is worth mentioning another tale about totality and oblivion, “Funes el memorioso” (1942)—the story of an unfortunate young man who, suffering a blow to the head, suddenly finds himself endowed with a supernaturally prodigious memory—which Alberto Moreiras convincingly reads as a meditation on the question of Nietzsche’s eternal return of the same. After showing the link between identity and memory (a total loss of memory resulting in a loss of individual identity, or self), Moreiras outlines the Funes paradox in the following terms: “Desde este punto de vista Funes lograría absoluta identidad personal en el acceso a la absoluta plenitud del tiempo, en la total memoria” (*Tercer* 128). In another of Borges’s fictions, “La biblioteca de Babel,” the narrator elaborates a dream of the totality of “the real” in his hope that the meaning of life could be found through the eternal traveler’s recognition that the library is “ilimitada y periódica” (*Ficciones* 93). Moreiras finds this desire for totality fulfilled in Funes, who is able to perceive the eternal return through the plenitude of his memory of the present, becoming “maestro del retorno teleológico, maestro del propósito de la existencia” (*Tercer* 138). Funes’s gift of total memory “es el don susceptible de lograr un retorno infinito de lo real, donde

lo azaroso de la multiplicidad de acontecimientos singulares encuentra un orden capaz de producir identidad y así dotar al mundo de estabilidad ontológica” (*Tercer* 138).

But as in “El sur,” “Funes” concludes with the death of the protagonist, who upon receiving the gift of the real gradually withdraws from the present as he is absorbed ever more into his own memory. The narrator describes that if Funes wanted to remember one day, it would take him an entire day to do so; memory becomes useless—becomes *oblivion*—when it is total, just as a perfect map of the empire must cover its entire surface. Thus, Moreiras understands the fable of Funes as Borges’s recognition that “en el límite, la memoria total es indistinguible del total olvido. Si no hay olvido, no puede haber memoria” (*Ficciones* 138). Totality is again attended by oblivion, only this time as the experience of total memory, its ostensible opposite. Of Funes the narrator writes: “Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos” (*Ficciones* 126).

According to Moreiras’s reading, “Funes” is a thought experiment that shows self-immanence to be categorically unattainable. Along similar lines, for Dove, an important function of “El sur” is to show that “the process of mourning, in distinction from nostalgic remembrance, places a limit upon the dream of recovery,” the oblivion of Dahlmann’s death precluding any meaningful recuperation of “the real” (76).

But even as “El sur” critiques the impulse toward national identity, and “Funes” critiques the desire for totality, it is important to note that totality nevertheless remains a horizon of desire in both stories. Even as these stories show totality to be a revelation of what the revelation destroys, one must consider them also as a form of self-criticism, Borges’s critique of his own desire for self-immanence and totality that persists, despite his understanding that its realization

is impossible. Throughout his work, Borges looks to the past with a persistence and yearning, apparently as one who like Dahlmann seeks a means by which to complete himself. Insofar as his desire for identification might be understood as both a totalitarian and modern desire, it appears that Borges formulates the crisis of a modernity that truly pertains to *him*, in the relation between himself and history.

Various scholars have addressed the question of Borges's disposition toward history. In "Ideología y ficción en Borges" (1979) Ricardo Piglia sees Borges's interest in history as being primarily a genealogical formulation of his right to write as an Argentine, a claim to authorial and national legitimacy. Along similar lines, Beatriz Sarlo's *Una modernidad periférica* (1988) reads his interest in the historical past as a concern about his legitimacy as a true Argentine. Kate Jenckes argues against these positions in *Reading Borges After Benjamin* (2007), suggesting that Borges's interest in recovering the past was not so much a project of personal vindication as it was a reflection on the question of history itself. She sees his engagement with the past as being akin to that of the allegorist, who reaches to the past not as a "dead possession," but rather in a "refusal to accept such a conception of the past, or a history that presses forward, rendering the past dead and irrelevant to a present concept of life," as a "holding onto loss *as loss*" (16). The evidence that Borges opposed nationalist and populist discourses leads me to agree with Jenckes that his fascination with repetitions of history is not a matter of affirming his status as a true Argentine. Importantly, she acknowledges that even if Borges understands that no return is possible, he is still driven by a desire for this return.<sup>20</sup> But more than Jenckes, I am interested in focusing on the way in which this desire persists in Borges, and

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<sup>20</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter when outlining the work of Rebecca Comay, a struggle with the desire for the immanence of the subject was also the avowed concern of romantic thinkers. One parallel Jenckes outlines between Borges and Walter Benjamin in her book is the extent to which both succeed in suspending the desire for totality without letting it become a narcissistic, self-desiring melancholy.

the importance of his own accounts of this ongoing desire. Even as Borges opposes totalitarianism abroad, and a sense of its spirit guiding Argentine Creole nationalism, he recognizes that his desire for return is a potentially totalitarian desire.

Even as Borges criticizes the Argentine discourse of national identity, he appears to be possessed by the same desire that guides it, seeking his immanence not in the national identity, but in history, the consequential past. It does not seem that he thinks of himself through the past so much as he thinks of his place in history as Dalhmann did, through his *repetition* of it. It is now necessary to inquire as to the meaning of this impulse to repeat history in order to better understand the self-criticism of totalitarianism he performs in “El sur.”

#### Menard’s Proof

I have argued that the totalitarian desire Nancy describes is a desire to stand outside of the flow of events (history) in the oblivion Bataille’s erotic suspension of time. But as Borges portrays the totalitarian quest for identity as a will to death and oblivion in much of his work he also seems to describe a desire to pertain to, or repeat history. In “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote,” first published in the journal *Sur* in 1939, the reader is faced with both a qualification and a critique of this impulse. This fiction—Borges’s first—suggests that the totalitarian gaze into the past is consumed not by a desire to recuperate it, but rather by the desire to displace or even annihilate it. Understood as annihilating, the repetition or return to the past constitutes an attempt to bring about the end of history, thereby paradoxically establishing the past as the endpoint a messianic historical framework shared by religious and positivist philosophies.

“Pierre Menard” stands out as one of the purest formulations of the problem of history and repetition in Borges’s work. This early fiction takes the form of an essay about a little

known novelist named Pierre Menard. After listing the works of his “obra *visible*,” the narrator goes on to discuss his greatest work, which has heretofore remained “subterránea”: “capítulos IX y XXXVIII de la primera parte del Don Quijote y de un fragmento del capítulo XXII” (*Ficciones* 41). The narrator maintains that Menard wrote these chapters of Cervantes’s famous novel not by copying or paraphrasing, but spontaneously, word for word, from scratch. The narrator emphasizes:

No quería componer otro Quijote—lo cual es fácil—sino *el Quijote*. Inútil agregar que no encaró nunca una transcripción mecánica del original; no se proponía copiarlo. Su admirable ambición era producir unas páginas que coincidieran—palabra por palabra y línea por línea—con las de Miguel de Cervantes. (41)

Perhaps the most spectacular passage of Borges’s fiction comes when the narrator performs a side-by-side close reading of the two *Quijotes*, Cervantes’s and Menard’s, and declares Menard’s to be superior. With an absurd and exaggerated regard for decorum, the author cites the two identical passages separately, one after the other, as two entirely different texts.

The collection *Literary Philosophers* (2002) edited by Jorge Gracia, et. al., contains a number of essays that address the issue of history and repetition in “Pierre Menard.” In her essay “Intersections,” Deborah Knight paraphrases the philosophical interest of the narrator’s close reading, constituting it as the question: “How can we tell the difference between two things that seem identical” (15). Anthony Cascardi in “Mimesis and Modernism” focuses on a similar question, the matter of “repetition and difference” as Derrida elaborates it in his essay “Signature, Event, Context” (Cascardi 117). Both readings consider the greatest philosophical interest of “Pierre Menard” to be its inquiry about the role historical context plays in determining

the meaning of a work, and show one of his most important contributions to be the way in which he understands repetition itself as mark of difference, subverting the specular hierarchy of historical relation between original and copy. But while being of great value, these readings do not account for its most baffling problem—Menard’s belief that it is possible to spontaneously write *Don Quijote* again. I believe that this question is the most important one that the story raises, perhaps because it is also the most difficult to take seriously. I wonder what it could possibly mean to write the *Quijote* again, without copying. Does any precedent for this kind of repetition of history exist in reality? The senselessness of Menard’s claim tempts us to set it aside as irresolvable. And yet, in Menard’s attempt to repeat history one perceives a radicalized image of Juan Dahlmann, or even of Borges himself as he narrates the medieval scholar’s defeat in order to relive it in “La busca de Averroes” (Borges thus coming into specular relation with Averroes); in “Pierre Menard,” however, the repetition is not approximate, as in other stories, but verges on being total.<sup>21</sup> As with Borges’s parodic treatment of Dahlmann’s desire for national death in “El sur,” especially having sensed Borges’s own identification with this desire, I believe one must take Menard’s claim seriously, even as it becomes clear that he is an object of ridicule for Borges—a Quijote of sorts.<sup>22</sup> In order to comprehend Borges’s struggle with the question of the repetition of history, one must try to comprehend Menard’s project, however absurd it may seem.

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<sup>21</sup> Borges describes “La busca de Averroes” as an attempt to *be* Averroes: “Sentí que Averroes, queriendo imaginar lo que es un drama sin haber sospechado lo que es un teatro, no era más absurdo que yo, queriendo imaginar a Averroes, sin otro material que unos adarmes de Renan, de Lane y de Asín Palacios. Sentí, en la última página, que mi narración era un símbolo del hombre que yo fui, mientras la escribía y que, para redactar esa narración, para ser aquel hombre, yo tuve que redactar esa narración, y así hasta lo infinito” (*Aleph* 113).

<sup>22</sup> By reading “Pierre Menard” as a critique, and taking the figure himself as a kind of historical repetition of the buffoonish figure of Don Quijote, I take a somewhat contentious position within the field. I justify this interpretation more directly in relation to readings that hold Menard up as a model further on, in the section entitled “Borges’s Critique: Disavowal of the Past as Self-Deception.”

A good starting point for an attempt to understand Menard's project is a passage that appears toward the end of the fiction in which the narrator quotes Menard in order to illustrate the nobility of his cause. Menard says: "Todo hombre debe ser capaz de todas las ideas y entiendo que en el porvenir lo será" (48). The claim rings with the hope of a teleological utopianism, a conviction in the coming arrival of a golden age, the time when all men are capable of all ideas. As an expression of a belief in the perfectibility of society I suspect that the claim may be influenced by some strain of positivism, and perhaps also the enlightened egalitarianism of the French Revolution. Menard seems to say that in the future, all men will be equal, disclosing a kind of revolutionary ethos akin even to a Marxism that understands history to be a class struggle whose end is a state in which all men are equal. In his focus on the intellect, Menard's revolutionary history—his vision of the struggle of human inequality—is not a consequence of material or class difference but rather *intellectual* difference. History for Menard is a dialectical unfolding of thought, a struggle of ideas in which some have more capital than others. The moment he envisions, in which all men are capable of having all ideas, must therefore be understood as the end of intellectual history.

Even as I read a hopeful idealism in Menard's convictions, there is a hint of something sinister. His application of a teleological view of history to the capacity of man looks like a kind of social evolutionism, and recalls those branches of positivism which were at the height of credibility as Borges wrote but which have since been disgraced: eugenics, and the science of engineering the human race. It is nice to think that men will be intellectually capable of anything in the future, but given a historical context in which attempts to realize eccentric utopian schemes are developing toward another world war, one must pause to wonder: "how will this be possible?"

If one considers how the belief that “todo hombre debe ser capaz de todas las ideas” might serve as the ideological basis for the project of writing the *Quijote* word-for-word, Menard’s status as a fanatical modern appears to be confirmed (48).<sup>23</sup> The reader asks: Is writing the *Quijote* supposed to be an example of what it means to be capable of having any idea? Such a view would reduce a novel, many hundreds of pages long, to the status of an “idea,” an absurd trivialization. Yet, in light of the grandiosity of Menard’s ambition, it appears that this is what he means, which makes his ideological claim look all the more radical. After all, Cervantes’s *Quijote* is not just *any* thought in the typical sense of the word, or even *a* thought. When Menard says “todas las ideas” he might mean not just *any* thought, but *every* thought, truly, “*todas* las ideas.” Such a man would be like Funes, perhaps. Especially if he is able to conjure up “any” idea with ease, his would be the mind of God. As an attempt by man to encompass the totality of *all* ideas, Menard’s project represents a vision of intellectual totalitarianism.

Even with this understanding of the ideology driving Menard’s project, it is still difficult to comprehend how he would go about writing the *Quijote* again. I wondered earlier if there was any precedent for the kind of repetition of history Menard attempts to perform. After some consideration, one finds that there is: the testing of a scientific theory. The universal natural law that science attempts to formulate is founded on observations that can be repeated and reproduced, proof that under controlled conditions, “history” will, in a sense, repeat itself. Hence, one can ask if Menard seeks to reproduce the *Quijote* as one might reproduce the result of a scientific experiment in a laboratory. Without mentioning the scientific method directly, the narrator addresses this question, explaining how Menard’s original plan was indeed to reproduce

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<sup>23</sup> If Menard appears to be an absurd or quixotic figure, a reading in which he is also a fanatic would confirm a sense that this text anticipates the danger of not taking this kind of fanatic seriously enough. Borges publishes “Pierre Menard” in 1939 just as war is breaking out in Europe.

the basic conditions under which Cervantes wrote: “El método inicial que imaginó era relativamente sencillo. Conocer bien el español, recuperar la fe católica, guerrear contra los moros o contra el turco, olvidar la historia de Europa entre los años 1602 y de 1918, *ser Miguel de Cervantes*” (42). But rather than following this path, Menard decided to adopt another method, discarding the recreation of (or return to) the conditions that gave rise to the *Quijote* as being too easy. The narrator clarifies that Menard’s endeavor is not to return to an earlier time in order to write it again as Cervantes, but rather to write it in the present, “seguir siendo Pierre Menard y llegar al Quijote” (42). Taking this section into consideration, I can modify my original speculation and imagine that for Menard the *Quijote* would be akin to the result of a mathematical proof, whose result can be arrived upon in a number of different ways.<sup>24</sup>

By stating that Menard considered reproducing the *Quijote* through a reproduction of the conditions by which it was first made, as a scientist might attempt to reproduce another scientist’s observations, the narrator frames the project as a scientific endeavor. He appears to be convinced of an underlying universal nature governing all events, as a scientist would, and it is only insofar as this project intersects with the humanities that it becomes bizarre. One could say that he was attempting to subsume a fundamentally humanistic field of knowledge to science, to bring literature under the purview of universal reason. As such, Menard’s project reminds us of attempts in the nineteenth century to formulate human sciences such as political science, sociology, psychology, and a scientific philosophy of history. Positivism itself was conceived by August Comte as an attempt to rationalize human society under the banners of order and progress, and Menard’s ideology resonates strongly with that of Comte, whose hierarchy of

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the relation between mathematics and nature as one of wall-building: “Nature, before and after quantum theory, is what can be registered mathematically; even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluble and irrational, is fenced in by mathematical theorems” (18).

science favored social science as its most advanced development—a science that treats man in the way astronomy would treat a celestial body, as following a determinate and predictable course.<sup>25</sup>

While from today's perspective the idea of social science is not so strange, it is still only considered to be a soft science. Menard's attempt to establish a mathematical, hard science of literature through the production of the *Quijote* remains outside of the realm of what one imagines to be possible, due to the difficulty of distilling the universal principles of human action.<sup>26</sup> Making social action the object of a hard science—as the necessary consequence of a set of measurable causes—goes against a traditional definition of mankind that identifies free will as a constitutive human attribute. It is in large part due to the freedom of the will—manifesting as an ability to act in or against one's own interest, arbitrarily or according to principles—that science finds such difficulty in predicting and determining the social future.

If the primary task of science is to arrive upon the determinate objectivity of nature, banishing all that is aleatory or contingent, one of its natural foils would be the indeterminacy of human action. The reasoning behind Menard's decision to select the *Quijote* as the novel he would reproduce is consistent with a positivistic goal of overcoming the contingency of human will, banishing it from history by creating a science of human action. The narrator poses the rhetorical question: “¿Por qué precisamente el *Quijote*? dirá nuestro lector...” “Aclara Menard, ‘...No puedo imaginar el universo sin la interjección de Poe: *Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted!* o sin el *Bateau ivre* o el *Ancient Mariner*, pero me sé capaz de imaginarlo sin el

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<sup>25</sup> Comte writes in the introduction of *The Positive Philosophy* (1830): “Now that the human mind has grasped the celestial and terrestrial physics—mechanical and chemical; organic physics, both vegetable and animal— there remains one science to fill up the series of sciences of observation—social physics” (7).

Menard's project also resonates with that of James Mill, author of *History of British India* (1817-36), as he is described by Saree Makdisi in *Romantic Imperialism* (1998). She writes: “Mill's project entails, then, the retroactive rewriting of all previous histories in terms of the narrative of the universal world history to which he claims to belong, as well as the projection of that narrative into his own time and on into the future (a future of his own making)” (2).

<sup>26</sup> For more on this challenge at the origin of social science in Latin America see the section titled “Is a Science of Politics Possible?” in Leopoldo Zea's *The Latin American Mind* (1967).

*Quijote*... El *Quijote* es un libro contingente, el *Quijote* es innecesario” (*Ficciones* 43).

Romantic works of Poe and Coleridge represent literary universals for Menard. The *Quijote*, on the other hand, is contingent, and it is for precisely this reason he elects to write it.<sup>27</sup> One can only conclude that his goal of writing the *Quijote* again is to build a wall against the contingency the original represents. If the *Quijote* is a symbol of the contingency introduced into history by human will—perhaps one of its most powerful instantiations—by writing the *Quijote* again he seeks to found the literary science through which he will prove that even the most aleatory work/event is an expression of a rational universal order.

I can now return to the question that initiated this discussion of “Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*” and see that Menard looks to the past not in order to commune with an admired hero, but rather to assert the supremacy of the present over it. By rewriting a single book, Menard in a sense rewrites all books—“*todas las ideas*”—subsuming literature itself to a natural order, demonstrating that any supposedly random and inexplicable event of the past is contained by the present. The only reason he returns to the past is to make it part of a rational order indifferent to the contingencies of history, a *natural* order; he writes the *Quijote* in order to abolish it, to fulfill its obsolescence. Thus, he will break the spell of authorial genius, debase its value, and in turn, the value of all literary authorship. Once the contingent knowledge of literature becomes obsolete, the archive becomes superfluous. In the future every man will derive his own *Quijote*.

The coming obsolescence of the archive indicates the extent to which Menard’s project is an attempt to make history itself obsolescent, to bring it to an end. He writes: ““El término final de una demostración teológica o metafísica—el mundo eterno, Dios, la causalidad, las formas universales—no es menos anterior y común que mi divulgada novela” (41-42). With this claim

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<sup>27</sup> While his intimation of the contingency of the *Quijote* is a kind of joke, Edwin Williamson relates in his biography *Borges: A Life* (2004) that Borges first read this book in English, and when met with the original, he preferred the English version.

he suggests that his goal is to prove historical anteriority itself to be an illusion, and to reduce history—which has always been a history of contingency as much as a history of necessity—to the absolute present of the mathematical proof (the magical animal). The state he seeks is the total memory-total oblivion of the clean slate, the undifferentiated and singular beginning and end of history. Doing this, he says, will be easy: “Me bastaría ser inmortal para llevarla a cabo” (42).

It is now clear how “El sur” reflects “Pierre Menard” by showing the return to the past as an annihilating act, and act of displacement. Dahlmann displaces his grandfather, ending his own history and finding oblivion just as Menard seeks to displace Cervantes in order to end intellectual history. Through their comparison, it seems that modern ideology, with its view of history as progress, must paradoxically maintain the past as its *telos*, as the horizon and future endpoint of history. In modernity messianic and Oedipal desires become intermingled, and the end of history comes to represent a return not *by* God, but rather by the subject *to* the past, so as to become indistinguishable from this originating deities.

#### Borges’s Critique: Disavowal of the Past as Self-Deception

“Pierre Menard” has provided a direct way in which to observe the strange possibility that the desire to repeat history is not so much a desire to make a return to origins as it is a desire to displace or destroy the past, and escape history altogether. Very basically, Borges observes the translation of what I have defined as a romantic desire for autonomy from the past to the modern period. Against a binary understanding of romanticism and positivism as two fundamentally opposing historical forces, one looking back and the other looking forward,

Borges anticipates Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's suggestion that we belong to the era romanticism opened up.

Admittedly, one does not need "Pierre Menard" to see that positivism (as a devotion to scientific rationalism) and romanticism interpenetrate one another. As early as 1818 a book like *Frankenstein* critiques the way in which science was envisioned by romantics as one of the means by which they would make themselves into Gods. Borges's particular contribution consists in his observations about the systems of thought that facilitate the perpetuation of a theology of ideas, even as modernity ostensibly expunges myth from its midst—the supersessionary logic of a scientific, universal history in "Pierre Menard," the persistence of the call to burn the archive in "La muralla y los libros," the erotic totalitarianism of Dahlmann's national identity in "El sur." Through Borges one can see that it is the secular claim itself that perpetuates myth. After all, what is the modern secular claim if not a claim that the past has been destroyed, that the falsehoods clouding the human mind have been dispelled, and that free of these burdens man can enter a new phase of history?

Borges shows that the attempt to abolish the past merely facilitates its irruption into the present. This can be observed by further analyzing the parodic elements of "Pierre Menard" I have already noted. While it should be clear by now that I believe "Pierre Menard" is meant as a critique, I must more carefully justify this reading. It will then be possible to begin to understand the relation between Borges and Menard, in terms of their voices, their beliefs, and their desires.

It is important to acknowledge that "Pierre Menard" has not always been read as a criticism. In *Borges, un escritor de las orillas* (1993) Beatriz Sarlo reads it as an affirmation of Latin America as periphery, a geographical zone whose inhabitants have seen themselves as pertaining to a civilization secondary to a historically previous, and thus more "original,"

European civilization. In reference to the pages of Menard's *Quijote* she writes: "*Borges* afirma que 'son infinitamente más ricos' que los de Cervantes, aunque, al mismo tiempo, sean idénticos" (Sarlo, *Borges* 78, my emphasis). For Sarlo, Menard is a direct extension of Borges, a mouthpiece. She concludes:

Ultima consecuencia de esta hipótesis, la productividad estética e ideológica de la lectura hace imposible la repetición [...] Todos los textos son absolutamente originales [...] Esto, en el margen del Río de la Plata, equivale a reivindicar un nuevo tipo de colocación para el escritor y la literatura argentina, cuyas operaciones de mezcla, de libre elección sin 'devociones' (para repetir la palabra que usa Borges) no tienen que respetar el orden de prelación jerárquica atribuida a los originales [...] la inferioridad de 'las orillas' se desvanece... (*Borges* 80-81)

Sarlo observes that if the narrator is right—if Cervantes's *Quijote* is really no more original than Menard's—it would mean that the relation of temporal anteriority between Europe and Creole America could be turned on its head. She concludes: "el escritor periférico tiene las mismas prerrogativas que sus predecesores o sus contemporáneos europeos" (*Borges* 81). In this way Sarlo maintains that Borges justifies a Latin American project as one that continues to seek to proclaim and articulate its cultural autonomy from Europe in the twentieth century by annulling the history that these civilizations share. An anxiety that Argentine literature would be secondary or peripheral in relation to Europe is assuaged by the narrator's claim that Menard's *Quijote* is actually *more* rich than the original, or beyond this, that originality does not exist ("Todos los textos son absolutamente originales").

Having already read Menard's repetition of history in order to better understand other similar repetitions in Borges's fictions, Sarlo's reading is perhaps confirmed in a suspicion that

Borges identifies in some way with Menard. “La rosa” from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) is quite self-consciously yet another poem about a rose, which reiterates the cliché so as to be drawn into a tiresome totality, the eternal return of history; Borges appears to be like Menard, seeking equivalence with all those poets of the rose just as Menard seeks equivalence with Cervantes. For this reason Borges calls the rose “la rosa de los persas y de Ariosto,” casting it as a gateway to a golden past, or as a metonym of its beauty (47).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, despite the fact that Borges really might not believe in “originality,” and seeks fusion with the past, there is reason to believe he writes “Pierre Menard” as a criticism of the eponymous subject, and by extension, any program of national or Latin American cultural autonomy grounded in the claim of autonomy from history.

Sarlo’s reading of “Pierre Menard” as a sign of Borges’s support of a program of cultural autonomy is grounded in her sense that Borges is identical to the narrator. I cannot agree with this ground. It is true that Borges first published “Pierre Menard” in the journal *Sur*, which regularly printed non-fictional essays. The journal did not announce it as a fiction, despite the fact that its content is not genuine. Seemingly in accordance with Sarlo’s reading, Borges appears to have deliberately cultivated the reader’s expectation that he was not only the author, but also the narrator, that the essay was a real essay. But even if the essay presents itself as if it were real, it is almost immediately possible to know that it is not. In the narrator’s passing disparagement of the Jewish and Protestant readers of a certain newspaper expresses opinions that are antithetical to Borges’s own, alerting those familiar with his opinions as to the fictional

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<sup>28</sup> In the collectively signed “Proclama” of the journal *Prisma* in 1921 roses are among those objects condemned as the kind of “cachivaches ornamentales” that preoccupy the “rubenianos” (Costa 70). In light of this invective against poems about roses, it is funny that Borges includes “La rosa” in *Fervor*.

nature of the essay.<sup>29</sup> It is precisely the incongruity of Borges's and the narrator's opinions that functions as a shibboleth to let certain readers know the essay is false. In voicing opinions so clearly against his own, and imitating a standard academic discourse, the knowing reader senses that Borges embodies the narrator in order to poke fun at him, and that the essay must be read as a spoof.

I have suggested that the reminiscence of Menard's philosophy to that of Comte, Hill, or European fascists and the pedantic gravity of the narrator, with this side-by-side citation of the identical texts, cast the story as a parody of a certain philosophy of history to which these figures ascribed. I can now observe the precise nature of this criticism.

The sharpest ironies that "Pierre Menard" produces appear through its intertextuality with the work Menard apes, the *Quijote*. Though Menard seeks to reproduce the text of the *Quijote* word-for-word, he seems contemptuous of this novel, which he has called contingent. It is therefore ironic that Menard bears a striking resemblance to that character upon which Cervantes's novel centers. Don Quijote (the character) also seeks to reproduce a text from another time, the historically imprecise chivalric novel. Like Menard, Don Quijote expresses a desire for independence from a rigid, linear history in his attempts to live out the past in the present. Both characters, in their belief that they resurrect the past, do so as a kind of conquest, not with hospitality, but as an imposition of the ego.

The fact that Menard does not appear to detect his resemblance to the character his writing reproduces casts him as fool, which in turn deepens that resemblance further. By trying to write the *Quijote* Menard is being quixotic, reinforcing a sense he has not learned its lessons, and that he would do better to *just read the book* instead of trying to write it.

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<sup>29</sup> "Son, por lo tanto imperdonables las omisiones y adiciones perpetradas por Madame Henri Bachelier en un catálogo falaz que cierto diario cuya tendencia *protestante* no es un secreto ha tenido la desconsideración de inferir a sus deplorables lectores –si bien éstos son pocos y calvinistas, cuando no masones y circuncisos" (*Ficciones* 37).

In attempting to abolish the past and bring an end to history, Menard only further perpetuates it. For one, quite simply, he must return to the past, write a text again, in order to prove that history has been fulfilled.<sup>30</sup> While perhaps Menard would imagine that the repetition of the *Quijote* would represent the arrival of a total present, there is evidence that Borges sees this kind of repetition as the material of history itself—the history of the desire to abolish history, and an eternal return of the same. In “Nathaniel Hawthorne” from *Otras inquisiciones*, he writes: “El pasado es indestructible; tarde o temprano vuelven todas las cosas, y una de las cosas que vuelven es el proyecto de abolir el pasado” (PC 188). So long as men attempt to abolish the past, they will merely reiterate all those other similar attempts by those who came before them, and affirm the impossibility of overcoming this past all the more.

Beyond the basic irony of the fact that Menard must return to the past in order to abolish it is the deeper irony of his unwittingly coming to resemble Don Quijote, the subject of the book he writes. He writes the *Quijote* precisely in order not to see it, and it is this blindness to the past that causes him to fall back into the old forms, not consciously or deliberately, but in an oblivious manner. The scientist who would invalidate literature does not appreciate it, cannot read it, or understand it, and thus, does not know why it is that he has failed to abolish it. The attempt to establish historical autonomy is a self-perpetuating cycle of ignorance begetting ignorance. Burning the library will help prevent others from knowing that it had been burned previously. But also, those who burn it could not have read it in the first place, and would not know how such projects had failed in the past. “La muralla y los libros” can thus be read as a kind of warning to those future Menards, from the Chinese Emperor who built the great wall and burned the archive, as he imagines the possibility of there being another like himself in the future

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<sup>30</sup> This, in itself, is no small problem. Christianity was faced with the same difficulty in its supersession of Jewish scripture, insofar as it must retain the Jewish text as the prophecy Jesus fulfills, and consequently, invalidates.

who would seek autonomy from history: “alguna vez habrá un hombre que sienta como yo, y ése destruirá mi muralla, como yo he destruido los libros, y ése borrará mi memoria y será mi sombra y mi espejo y no lo sabrá” (*PC* 133).

If Menard is a modern man of La Mancha, one can now ask: what then is Borges? I would argue that the unresolved tension between a desire to escape history through an annihilating fusion with the past, and a realization that “no such return is possible” is the greatest force of Borges’s vision (Jenckes 4). It is through this retention of two disparate forces without letting either attain definitive victory that Borges carries out his critique. After WWII especially (when he writes “El Sur”), it would be tempting and easy to disavow a desire for totality, and to proclaim his difference from the Nazis and the total nationalizing projects he saw them to represent. Even so, Borges’s work documents a struggle with a desire for self-immanence and its attendant philosophy of history without disavowing them, instead, as Jenckes argues, exploring the impossibility of their realization.

One important difference between Borges and Menard is that of self-recognition and self-knowledge, but even this doesn’t entirely stop Borges from being a Quijote of sorts. The parodic mode he adopts—his imitation of an official scientific-historical discourse and the confusion between himself and the narrator—necessarily draw him into a certain intimacy with the subject he ridicules. If in “La busca de Averroes” he deliberately narrates his own defeat, then perhaps in “Pierre Menard” he does the same in criticizing the desire for identification or absorption into the totality of history that drives much of his work. By subjecting himself to his own parody, Borges helps us to recognize the totalitarian desire lurking within us all.<sup>31</sup> Such a capacity for

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<sup>31</sup> Italian director Roberto Fellini describes a universal fascism: “I consider Fascism to be a degeneration at a historical level of an individual reason—that of adolescence—which corrupts and rots itself while proliferating in a monstrous fashion without the ability to evolve and become adult... the Fascist exists in us all. We cannot fight against it without identifying it with our ignorant, petty, impulsive ‘self’” (Bondanella 129).

self-criticism stands against the system of disavowal and supersession by which myth is perpetuated in modernity. Borges shows that it is not so easy to move forward, and that claiming to have left the unwanted past behind is precisely the kind of self-deception or self-imposed blindness by which the unwanted past will continue to draw its irruptive force.

By presenting the “fiction” in the style of non-fiction Borges suggests that the positive/scientific claim of objectivity itself is one these forms of self-deception. While its content is entirely fabricated, “Pierre Menard” mimics the style of an academic essay, a discursive mode organized around bolstering claims of objectivity and truth. By publishing this “fiction” in *Sur* under the guise of a legitimate essay, Borges becomes like one of the members of the cult he describes in “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (1941), that clothes an invented history in the discourse of objective truth—in their case, an encyclopedia entry. But unlike these cult members, he doesn’t pull a fast one on the public in order to reify a false history into existence. Borges writes “Pierre Menard” to show that a scientific philosophy of history, and the discursive modes stemming from it, are modes of deception.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the science of history was formulated in close relation to the scientific racist discourses reaching their peak in the late 1930s, which have since been revealed as fictions. In addition to Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* (1837), Hannah Arendt observes the significance of Count Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1854), a “kind of standard work for race theories in history” (170). She notes that:

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<sup>32</sup> “Pierre Menard” can be read as an example of an intermingling of fiction and official discourse that Roberto González Echevarría discusses in *Myth and Archive* (1990) as a paradigmatic Latin American mode of expression. For González Echevarría however, the authority that makes a discourse official tends to fall along those lines drawn by Creole Latin Americanism, making Latin American mimicry of these discourses a matter of gaining leverage in a colonial relation to Europe. It does not seem that Borges seeks legitimacy here. Instead, he reveals the legitimizing function of official discourse as the form of myth.

Without Darwinism or any other evolutionist theory to influence him, this historian boasted of having introduced history into the family of natural sciences, detected the natural law of all courses of events, reduced all spiritual utterances or cultural phenomena to something ‘that by virtue of exact science our eyes can see, our ears can hear, our hands can touch.’ (171)

The discourse of History as science in modernity cannot be easily disentangled from disgraced racist discourses.

In imitating and exaggerating the tropes of a historical discourse that fronts its own objectivity, Borges performs the parody “Pierre Menard” otherwise describes. The discourse he utilizes has itself claimed to absorb a “human” art–storytelling—into the rational sciences, as History. The publication of his fiction in the form of an essay demonstrates that any charlatan can pass myths off as objective or scientific truth. But more importantly, it shows that a belief in the objectivity bestowed by scientific discourse is itself a form of totalitarianism, which seduces its purveyor as much as his audience.

### The Sovereignty of Nature

The transition to positivism in Latin America came with a sense that it was turning its poets into scientists, and that exiting romanticism meant exiting a *fiction*. Borges suggests that the theological placeholder (or myth) of nature, and a desire for autonomy from history, are in fact the main historical continuities tying the positive “rupture” to the era it disavowed. Still, romanticism and positivism are not one in the same, and if one is to distinguish their true difference, one must look beyond the positive claim that the distinction between the two is established by a banishment of fiction—turning the poet out of the city—and a shift to science. In

fact, many romantic thinkers were scientists as well as men of letters, Andrés Bello and José Luz y Caballero being among the most distinguished of these polymaths within the Latin American tradition. It is necessary to find another way of understanding the difference between romanticism and positivism.

Pierre Menard's system of belief is a hybrid of romanticism and positivism. While on the one hand his attempt to invalidate literature through science represented a belief in a positive philosophy of history favoring the objectivity of science, if his attempt to integrate science and literature is understood as an attempt to unify knowledge, it would seem to be guided by a romantic impulse.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, a thinker like Comte, more than unifying knowledge, sought to divide it into a proper taxonomy. The taxonomic drive is by no means new –indeed, Borges also wrote about this matter in “The Analytic Language of John Wilkins” much as he discussed the burning of the library in “La muralla y los libros”: as an ancient tradition. But the taxonomy and division of intellectual labor occurring at this time is perhaps the main event that the claim of secularization obscures. In *Divergent Modernities* (2001) Julio Ramos defines this division of labor as the true basis of modernity, that by which assumptions about the ostensible difference between poetry and science hold water today. The myth of objectivity, and the scientific discourse by which it is promulgated, appear to result not only from secularization, but also from the becoming autonomous of science itself through a positivist division of labor informed by a sense that in expelling poetry they were expelling myth. A brief appraisal of the repercussions of the transition Borges sought to understand shows that positivism's division of intellectual labor,

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<sup>33</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe write: “The whole history of modern poetry is a running commentary on the following brief philosophical text: ‘all art should become science, all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one’” (13). It is interesting to note that if modernity represents taxonomy and division of intellectual labor, even for the romantics science and art were already differentiated. It appears that their goal was to bring the two closer together, while the goal of positivists was to drive them further apart.

by separating science from the arts, autonomizes the idea of autonomy itself, and the ahistorical nature whose laws science seeks to define.

The irony of the romantic desire for autonomy from history that manifest in a story like “Pierre Menard” in a sense predicts the fact that projects of national consolidation in the early twentieth century would create the conditions by which national sovereignty would become eclipsed by the forces of global capital. Menard’s circumscription of nature in rewriting the Quijote; the scientific romantic Jose Luz y Caballero’s call to surround nature through objective observation; the romantic walling-in of nature for the creation of the new, autonomous state that Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes in the poem “Kubla Khan”: all are different takes on the same project of modernity rooted in romanticism (1797; 1816).<sup>34</sup> Through this analogy, it appears that universal history and the nation-state are at bottom walls enclosing a (territorialized) nature that later becomes the deanthropomorphized divine sovereign power of the post-national era, a conduit for the unrestricted flow of deterritorialized capital.

### Conclusion

After reading Borges closely, it seems that it will be impossible to avoid future returns to the question of cultural autonomy in Latin America, which has become an integral and important part of its history and tradition. Nevertheless, one must be aware that the way in which a desire for autonomy from history has manifested itself in Latin American discourse has not always been productive, in particular, when stemming from a belief that the desired rupture is truly possible. Through his critiques, Borges shows the futility of such projects, which include both national and Latin Americanist wall building and library burning.

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<sup>34</sup> In *The Latin American Mind* (1949) Leopoldo Zea cites José Luz y Caballero as stating: “One must surround nature in order to dominate it: if we go blindly ahead, trying to divine instead of observe, it will escape us completely” (Zea 119).

The prospect/prophecy of the inevitable return of colonial, romantic, and modern pasts can lead to a feeling of despair. While in his time it was not clear how it would be possible to come to terms with the irremediably romantic foundation of Latin American states, by teaching Latin American intellectuals to think twice before rushing to burn the library, Borges facilitated the examination of the question, whereas previously it had been ignored. He helps one to recognize that regarding this past must take the form of self-criticism. Only through a willingness to explore the history one might prefer to disavow will it begin to be possible to come to terms with Latin American modernity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Expeditions to the Modern Wilderness

In the previous chapter I investigated a desire for national subjectivity in Latin America during the early twentieth century, identifying it as a transformation of the romantic desire for autonomy from history expressed by Latin American intellectuals when positing their independence from Spain. I showed how Jorge Luis Borges identified the desire for national immanence as a form of totalitarianism that returns to the past only in order to annihilate and displace it. Borges critiques the desire for autonomy from history—which is at the same time the “end” of history—through parodic depictions of Dahlmann’s journey South and Pierre Menard’s attempt to rewrite Cervantes’s *Quijote*. In the former he reflects on the romantic/erotic desire for destructive fusion with the past preserved in the national landscape, and in the latter, on the positivistic desire to extend the purview of pure reason to the arts in the hope of subduing the contingency introduced into history by human action. By articulating a comparison between Menard’s scientific desire to “enclose” the *Quijote* and Dahlmann’s romantic desire for national death in Argentine pampas as a comparison between two corresponding concepts of nature, I described how these ostensibly opposed discourses share in a desire to arrive at end of history and to destroy it. As impossible attempts to attain the totality of self-identity by circumscribing

their autonomy from the past, both reflect the legacy of the original claim of cultural autonomy, and the discursive territorialization of nature grounding the nation-state.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I will compare works by José Eustasio Rivera and Alejo Carpentier in order to continue historicizing a literary engagement with the legacy of romanticism in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century. I continue to historicize the intersection of romanticism and positivism within national discourses of the period by examining literary meditations on nature. Thus, both in terms of timeframe and focus, the chapter can be read as an extension of the previous one. Still, the authors I examine here approach the questions that concerned Borges—questions about nature’s role within the constitution national identity, and its definition of the relation between Latin America’s romantic past and its modern future—somewhat differently, through a more direct engagement with the romantic concept of nature as a space of wilderness.

One goal of this chapter is to define an important literary phenomenon stemming from the legacy of romantic Latin American national autonomy: a myth centering on a hero’s allegorical search in a wilderness understood as territorialized nature, ending in failure or destruction. I have already discussed one instantiation of this *search myth*, in the previous chapter, with Juan Dahlmann’s sojourn to the pampas in search of his patria—the land belonging to his paternal grandfather.<sup>2</sup> Borges’s “El sur” (1953) is but one of many examples of the search myth. Here I will examine two more versions of this story: *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustasio Rivera and *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) by Alejo Carpentier. With a comparative reading it will be possible to establish the coherence of the myth these novels instantiate, and then use it to

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<sup>1</sup> The territorialization of nature is the process by which a scientific Enlightenment concept of nature as a timeless realm of truth is sutured to the wilderness landscape of the present-day. For an in-depth discussion of this process, refer to chapter one of the present work.

<sup>2</sup> David Viñas mentions a “mito de ‘la búsqueda’” in passing at the end of his 1974 essay “‘La Vorágine’: Crisis, populismo y mirada” without further elaboration (19). I will adopt and elaborate on the term.

expand our understanding of the relation between modernity, nation, identity, and nature that I began to develop in the previous chapters.

The entrenchment within Latin American letters of a story about the hero's attempt to find something, most often a woman, in the ambit of the natural landscape, is noteworthy. Esteban Echeverría's *La cautiva* (1837) is an early instantiation of this search myth, a foundational text of Latin American romanticism that recounts a doomed trip into the wilderness beginning with Brian's attempt to rescue María from Indians in the Argentine pampas.<sup>3</sup> Many other notable Latin American literary texts incorporate transformations of this structure, including *Martín Fierro* (1872-79) by José Hernández, "Tabaré" (1888) by Juan Zorilla de San Martín, *Tomochic* (1892) by Heriberto Frías, *Os sertoes* (1902) by Euclides da Cunha, *La vorágine* (1924) by Rivera, *Los desterrados* (1928) by Horacio Quiroga, *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos, *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) by Carpentier, "El Sur" (1953) by Borges, *Hijo de hombre* (1960), *El fiscal* (1993), and *Contravida* (1994) by Augusto Roa Bastos, *Lituma en los Andes* (1993) by Mario Vargas Llosa, *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) by Roberto Bolaño, and perhaps even Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963).<sup>4</sup> The number and importance of the works is striking, and the precedent in Latin American letters of modeling literature on the Greek and Roman epic struggles of Odysseus or Aeneas—tales of heroes who must make a terrible journey and surmount great obstacles in pursuit of their

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that this first instantiation of this myth in post-independence literature confuses the traditional gender roles predominating in the vast majority of its transformations; the title of the work—*La cautiva*—belies this reversal, insofar as after Brian is also taken captive it is María who frees him, precipitating their subsequent escape.

<sup>4</sup> Important examples from beyond Latin America can be found in *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, *Moby Dick* (1851) by Herman Melville, and *Heart of Darkness* (1902) by Joseph Conrad, not to mention several of Werner Herzog's films including *Grizzly Man*. For more on the intersection of Conrad and Carpentier in particular see an essay by Auturo Echevarría called "La confluencia de las aguas: la geografía como configuración del tiempo en *Los pasos perdidos* de Carpentier y *Heart of Darkness* de Conrad" in *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, as well as Frances Wyers's "Carpentier's "Los pasos perdidos": Heart of Lightness, Heart of Darkness" in *Revista Hispánica Moderna*.

desires—cannot adequately explain it.<sup>5</sup> The journey these works describe isn't a series of trials culminating in heroic victory. It is a failure to find a home in an imagined or idealized state of nature. The attempted homecoming, unlike Odysseus's return from the "colony" to the metropole, is a return to the periphery, and, as in *Pedro Páramo* and *Rayuela*, one that is always *unheimlich*. I will inquire both as to the reason for the recurrence of this tale about a hunt at the margin, and its meaning in relation to the broader historical context it spans.

Focusing on two novels in particular—*La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos*—I find that the protagonists' attempts to find a woman in nature reflects the author's own searching inquiry into the meaning nationalism and the origins of the nation-state in Latin America. Both of these texts, along with their protagonists, perform a search for origins through a return to nature. The fact that in these novels the object of desire is a woman resonates with a sense that an erotic desire for totality underlies projects of national consolidation that we developed in the previous chapter in our study of Borges, in particular "El sur." Going further in this chapter, I will consider how insofar as nature is strongly linked to femininity in the tradition of Western thought, the search for woman in nature is none other than the search for nature itself, that is, the search for the mythical founding principle of the Latin American nation, an origin that would provide ontological stability to identity.

The decision to read these two particular texts is guided in part by the interest of their diverging understandings of the relation between nature and modernity. Although the novels share similar structural methodologies—indeed Carpentier effectively rewrites *La vorágine*—their

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<sup>5</sup> For a reading of Latin American boom literature through Odysseus's return to Ithaca see José Donoso's essay "Ithaca: The Impossible Return" (1982).

conclusions are different.<sup>6</sup> I find that *Los pasos perdidos* manifests a problematic return to a belief in the strict opposition between nature and modernity that Rivera had sought to challenge.

### The Search Myth

This chapter elaborates the defining characteristics of “search myth,” and a sense that what is really at stake in the fictional wilderness is the legacy of political romanticism in Latin America, by examining a few key texts from the corpus of work by which the myth is constituted. In these and other texts, the protagonist’s ongoing search in the state of nature constitutes a search for those romantic promises that have remained unfulfilled since independence. In effect, the author and the protagonist are one in seeking to discover the secret of the Latin American national origin at its site of conceptual foundation.

In *Mythologies* (1972) Roland Barthes helps define the important pejorative qualification of myth as false consciousness, or ideology.<sup>7</sup> The difference between the concepts of myth and

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<sup>6</sup> In “La vorágine y Los pasos perdidos” Ramon Felipe Medina explores the “relación bastante directa” between the two texts in comparing their representations of “nature” (118). In his prologue to the Lectorum edition of *Los pasos perdidos* Salvador Arias elaborates upon this relation of direct influence, writing “Carpentier reconocía en ‘la admirable *Vorágine*, un libro clásico de nuestra literatura,’” but which fell short of making its main character Arturo Cova, into an archetype (16). According to Arias, in writing *Los pasos perdidos* Carpentier sought to fulfill what he saw as the unrealized potential of Rivera’s work, and turn Cova into the “personaje gigantesco” he envisioned (16). The manner in which Carpentier rewrites Rivera’s novel presents another interesting intertextuality with Borges in its resonances with the story of Pierre Menard. Although Carpentier knows that he rewrites *La vorágine*—albeit more respectfully than Menard rewrites the *Quijote* in Borges’s fiction—he does not appear to appreciate some of the most important lessons we can take away from Rivera’s work. In this way, there is a tension between what he sees as his superior rewriting of Rivera’s text, and the message of that text.

Additionally, the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* recalls Dahlmann of “El sur” not only in his expedition to the periphery, but also in their coincidence as possessors of a Hispanic mother and Germanic, Lutheran (the author makes explicit reference to his “biblia luterana”) father (Carpentier 87).

<sup>7</sup> This common understanding of the term, while seeking to be critical, like all systems of disavowal, creates a false sense of intellectual security. The danger represented by this aspect of the term is explored in chapter two of *The Inoperative Community* (1991) by Jean-Luc Nancy, who suggests how the designation “myth” always signals a revelation that has been destroyed. If a myth is called “myth,” and recognized as such, its true force would have already expired. We must retain a sense of true myth as that which has not yet been revealed, the ideology that still (right now) exerts its influence surreptitiously, unbeknownst to us. True myth is always already believed and unrecognized whereas myths arise only as a residue of the obsolescence of true myth.

Among the more important theorists of ideology are Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Claude Levi-Strauss, Adorno and Horkheimer, Louis Althusser, Michelle Foucault, and Paul de Man. The framework of the present study owes much

ideology, as they are commonly taken, can be identified as the particular way in which myth communicates a complex temporal paradox as part of its basic definition. A myth is a story that casts ostensibly ahistorical or “eternal” forms in historical terms, often as a narrative that relates the unfolding of true historical events (e.g. the experiences of Oedipus or Jesus). Nevertheless, insofar as it is a story that recurs, transformed or recast throughout the generations, myth is historical, despite its claim of seeking to communicate ahistorical content.

It is this powerful tension between history and the claim of historical transcendence within the structure of myth itself that maps onto the historical repetitions I have been observing in Latin America: the return to difference, as well as the historical recurrence of a particular narrative structure in Latin American letters effectively raises a question very similar to my question about the meaning of Menard’s rewriting of the *Quijote* in chapter two, and the recurring (historical) claim of rupture or autonomy from history in Latin America. Additionally, the foundation of the Latin American nation, as a historical invention of a supposedly historically (and ontologically) transcendent unity, significantly reflects the tension of myth, and can be understood through it.

If, through Borges’s fiction, I was able to conclude that nihilistic repetitions of history often stem from an attempt to disavow the past, we must ask whether the search myth is one of these repetitions that signals or contemplates such a disavowal. The fact that territorialized nature is the realm in which the mythical search takes place is intriguing insofar as nature is itself a kind of myth—a transformation of God and a modern concept of that which is not historical.

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to Foucault in particular. His work is especially successful in navigating the question of whether ideological or material force is the true engine of history, reconciling the traditionally opposing views of materialism and idealism. For Foucault ideology is a form of disembodied power without agency, a kind of historical conduit, if not cause. While ideology (i.e. myth) is always impossible to observe in one’s own time, his archeological and genealogical accounts of madness and sexuality show ideology to be historical. I believe Foucault reveals the present imperative for scholarship to be the task of historicizing ideology so that the structures of power might be sketched and better comprehended.

Taking place in territorial nature, the story of the search looks as if it could be a myth about myth, a meta-reflection on the ahistorical nature justifying new nationalisms autonomous not only from Spain, but from the Spanish past (i.e. cultural heritage and history). It is also possible that the repetition represents not a self-conscious reflection on the disavowal of history, but a symptom of a renewed or ongoing desire to disavow, to redeem the romantic concept of nature. As it turns out, both of these are true, some instantiations of the repetition being a conscientious meditation on the myth of nature (e.g. *La vorágine*), and others repeating the myth as a symptom of the desire to redeem the space of nature as a mythical source of Latin American autonomy (e.g. *Los pasos perdidos*).

Although the search myth has not been rigorously defined as such in reference to the particular corpus of works listed above, it can be framed among a number of relevant critical tools and paradigms of Latin American literary scholarship. Work by Mary Louise Pratt, Jean Franco, and Roberto González Echevarría which treats the influence of scientific travel narrative on the Latin American novel will bear heavily on this discussion, insofar as the expedition sets a historical precedent for the search on the margin. In addition to this scholarship, Doris Sommer's reading of eroticism in the Latin American national foundational novel anticipates our interest in the symbolic value of woman as both nation and nature, the object of desire of so many protagonists. It will also be necessary to remain conscious of generic designations such as "novela de la tierra"—understood as a return to the project of national territorialization in the twentieth century—when discussing texts like *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos*.<sup>8</sup> By

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Spanish American Regional Novel* (1990) Carlos Alonso provides a useful historical and aesthetic overview of the "novela de la tierra," a genre whose value and function he questions. Alonso argues that this generic category introduced by Arturo Torres Rioseco and taken up by scholars such as Pedro Henríquez Ureña has served principally to make claims about the primitive nature of Latin American literary origins that would ultimately be superseded by the boom writers. He writes that "undertaking to impose generic coherence on the *novela de la tierra* is a temptation that must be questioned and ultimately resisted" (43). According to Alonso, the project that would give birth to the category "resulted from a profound anxiety experienced by Latin American intellectuals in their

examining the advantages and shortcomings of using these three frameworks for understanding *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos*, especially by observing the ways in which these paradigms fail to sufficiently explain our texts, I will demonstrate the heuristic utility of the search myth.

### Search Myth as Legacy of Scientific Exploration Discourses

The preponderance of the search myth bears witness to the historical importance of scientific and anthropological exploration in the territory of America, and the discourses it produced. There can be no question that *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* both directly reflect this legacy. In Rivera, the depiction of an expedition to the wilderness reflects his own experiences as a government land surveyor in the Amazon; and additionally, he invokes the specter of a scientist such as Aimé Bonpland with the appearance of a French naturalist (“el sabio francés”), for whom the more central character Clemente Silva serves as a guide (Rivera 282).<sup>9</sup> In *Los pasos perdidos*, the narrator himself is an ethnomusicologist, and the ostensible purpose of his expedition into the jungle is to recover an Indian flute that will help prove his scientific theory about the origin of music. Consequently, these novels have been mobilized by scholarly work dedicated to showing and understanding the influence of European scientific expeditions deployed to America’s jungles starting in the mid-eighteenth century.

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consideration of the United States,” a consolidation of unifying identity in the face of north American political ascendancy (47).

The “novela de la selva” is another genre that partially coincides with the search myth, and is considered to be a sub-category of the “novela de la tierra.” In her essay “Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks” (2006) Leslie Wylie traces a genealogy akin to that which informs our reading, and her work is valuable in showing the continuity between the work of Andrés Bello and the “novela de la selva.” She too pinpoints the influence of romanticism in the early nineteenth hundreds. Here I will support her assertion that “many descriptions of the jungle in these novels seem to draw on tropes of the sublime, they do so in a way that destabilizes the Romantic tradition, and reveals it as both egocentric and idealizing” (734).

<sup>9</sup> Alejandro Quin identifies the historical figure on which the character of the French explorer is based as “Eugenio Robuchon, un oscuro miembro de la *Sociedad Geográfica de París* que había sido contratado por los empresarios de la PAC [...] para que llevara a cabo la exploración de los territorios ocupados por la empresa” (178). In his essay “Locus terribilis” Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot cites John Loveluck’s introduction to the Ayacucho edition of the novel, suggesting that the protagonist Arturo Cova was modeled on another kind of detective, Luis Franco Zapata, who was instrumental in exposing the abuses of the rubber industry.

In *Myth and Archive* (1990) Roberto González Echevarría discusses the influence of scientific expeditionary discourse on Latin American letters in relation to an “Archive myth,” using *Los pasos perdidos* as a primary text for his reading, describing it as “the founding archival fiction,” a master story, or repeated function of the novel as archive (3). Within the framework of the Archive myth, the bearing of the scientific expedition in Latin American letters occurs mainly through its production of an official discourse that literature would later assimilate and imitate. *Myth and Archive* views the Latin American novel as an archive that assimilates and mimicks official European discourses in order to secure and subvert concepts of legitimacy determined by European colonial power. “[N]ovels are never content with fiction; they must pretend to deal with the truth, a truth that lies behind the discourse of the ideology that gives them form” (18). The discourses of the scientific expedition or travel narrative are examples of these formational ideologies, so if Carpentier’s novel takes the form of a memoir describing a first-hand account of a scientific expedition it must be attributed to the precedent of legitimacy and truth that these discourses had already established for themselves.

Through the framework of the Archive myth, González Echevarría makes a number of observations that are pertinent to the question of Latin American cultural autonomy as it concerns us. He describes the narrator’s desire to penetrate “a place outside the flow of history,” reflecting a more general Latin American desire to “wipe the slate clean to make a fresh start” (*Myth* 1, 3). González Echevarría shows how the narrator’s loss of paradise at the end of the novel—which results from his need to write—points to the impossibility of attaining autonomy from history in the jungle: that writing always occurs in “the city,” that is, within history. “[T]he new start is always already history writing in the city” (*Myth* 1). Writing, and thus the new start, cannot occur in the vacuum of autonomous nature, and thus, “the book, in searching for a new,

original narrative, must contain all previous ones, becoming an Archive” of those earlier texts (*Myth 4*).

Still, González Echevarría does not take the important step of relating the desire for autonomy from history to the structure of the expedition itself. The Archive myth takes the narrative structure of the expedition as a mere historical contingency, one of several colonial discourses whose legitimacy literature appropriates. He stops short of exploring the particularity of the expedition *per se* as it has been employed to symbolize the search for autonomy from history.

The return to the structure of the expedition in literature suggests that it is a rhetorical trope that is useful to the authors who employ it, a means by which certain questions can be productively explored. It seems that what is decidedly impossible in the Archive myth (i.e. the new start in nature) is the central unresolved question of the search myth, which has not yet figured out whether that fabled autonomy of the unsettled terrain really exists or not. It would appear that it is precisely for this reason that the protagonist must go to nature, in order to see it for himself. Thus, the trope provides an opportunity for an exploration of the concept of nature itself, and the questions it fosters as the ground upon which romantic and positivist philosophies of autonomy collide.

Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* (1992) mirrors and validates González Echevarría’s reading in that her treatment of the scientific expedition and travel writing—in particular that of the naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt—focuses mainly on the way in which these discourses reflect the tension between colonial Europe and a colonized America. Through her discussion of the romantic scientist Humboldt, Pratt helps to prove the influence of the expedition as a territorializing force, showing how the scientists’ voyage to the foreign land in

search of nature reifies a sense of nature as land itself.<sup>10</sup> If, through Humboldt, she shows the importance of the romantic/scientific discourse in post-independence letters (the influence archived by Carpentier, according to González Echevarría), comparing his *Views of Nature* (1850) to the writings of post-independence Latin American thinkers, she nevertheless does not explore the meaning of that influence in terms of the relation between a more general European romantic literary movement and the question of Latin American cultural autonomy.

Both González Echevarría and Pratt observe a relation between romanticism and the scientific travel discourse, but do not articulate this relation as a question in and of itself. González Echevarría frames his discussion of the Archive myth noting a Creole desire for autonomy from history, but he does not identify it as a romantic impulse, or explain how the structure of the expedition might reflect this romantic desire. Pratt emphasizes the influence of the romantic scientist in order to show that Creoles are imagining their land through European eyes, but restricts her discussion to the influence of a specifically scientific discourse. A question that neither articulate explicitly, but whose nagging presence can be felt throughout their work, is a question about the relation between romantic and scientific/positive discourses in Latin America which we began to explore in the previous chapter, where I understood the concept of nature as a conceptual hinge between these two historical “moments.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Elba R. David’s essay “El Pictorialismo Tropical de ‘La Vorágine’ y ‘El Viaje’ de Alexander von Humboldt” (1964) also finds Humboldt’s influence in Rivera’s work. Her comparison between the two works does not hold up well today, focusing mainly on the ways in which both authors describe similar places and things: mosquitoes, a rainstorm, the river...

<sup>11</sup> At one point in chapter ten of *Imperial Eyes* Pratt articulates the crisis of Creole identity after independence by way of Horacio Quiroga’s *Los desterrados*—taken as a transformation of scientific “travel literature”—posing the question: “How do you make a destination for others into a home for the self” (227). While Quiroga’s work most certainly addresses the feeling of being an alien in one’s own land, it is at the same time manifestly concerned with a question of the relation between positivism and romanticism. Even as Quiroga favors rationalistic explanations for the mysterious horrors he describes (it is not a vampire or some other supernatural creature, but a hideous bug that afflicts the ill-fated wife in “El almohadón de plumas” [1907]) the disenchanting force of the jungle extends to the positivist belief in the power of man over his environment. The protagonist Gabriel Benincasa is devoured by carnivorous ants in Quiroga’s early tale “La miel silvestre” (1912) in order to illustrate the folly of a scientific romanticism (or romantic positivism) symbolized by his pride in the modern resilience of his Europe-made

In her essay “Un viaje poco romántico: Viajeros británicos hacia Sudamérica, 1818-1828” (1979) Jean Franco orients her discussion of another kind of expedition—the travel narratives written by aspiring foreign capitalists seeking to develop the markets of new Latin American nation-states—in relation to the question of this historical transition between romanticism and positivism in America, arguing that these narratives of penetration into the wilderness are consciously opposed to romantic imaginations of nature and the exotic. The English “misioneros del capitalismo” are compelled to “demostrar que el paisaje [...] no era de los que inspiran placer estético o emociones sublimes” in order to suppress any poetic distraction that might interfere with the instrumental goal of exploiting the earth (132).

Through Franco, it appears that the natural landscape brings capitalist and positive scientific rationalist discourses into a kind of collision with romantic ones.<sup>12</sup> Even as Latin American foundational thinkers are using romantic techniques to depict the American landscape in order to proclaim their cultural autonomy, European colonizers seek to do just the opposite, portraying the land as valuable precisely insofar as it does not need to be conserved. In this way, the nature-landscape appears to be a post-colonial battlefield that vying parties sought to mobilize discursively and conquer through depiction.

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“stromboot” (25). A story such as this does not merely archive the influence of a scientific discourse in Latin American letters as a discourse dividing Europe and America. It raises fundamental questions about the relation between scientific/positivist discourse and the romanticism that dominated Latin American discourse in the nineteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> This discursive battle appears to reflect larger questions of ideological history in Latin America. By the early twentieth century in Latin America a concept of modernity had been strongly influenced by August Comte, who helped popularize a view of history as progress in which science (made autonomous from the humanities through a division of labor) in collaboration with capital was seen as the primary messianic force. While Arielism and *modernismo* would represent a neo-romantic backlash against this rationalist pragmatism, after WWII a concept of “modern” *development* (against backwards underdevelopment) has become firmly entrenched, replacing the paradigm of Europeanization—i.e. Frenchification—that had guided nineteenth century Latin American thought. Oscar Cabezas has shown that Latin American populism developed in tandem with this sense of modern, progressive history, as a technique for the growth of a workforce stemming from an increasing intimacy between capital and mechanisms of the state.

If, on the one hand, the search myth can help us to comprehend the importance of nature in the national imaginary of Latin American states, it can also be useful as a historicizing tool, a means by which to better comprehend the complex relation between romanticism and positivism in Latin American discourse. The collision between discourses in the field of nature is one of the questions that these texts seek to contemplate, and which they inevitably depict. *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* do not simply archive the scientific expedition and the discourses that stem from it; they are fundamentally concerned with their tension and collision with discourses of romanticism, clearly manifest in a text like *Los pasos perdidos* in the figure of the poet/scientist protagonist.

In addition to their pertinence to modern scientific or capitalist discourses, the protagonists of these novels bear traits that strongly identify them with a romantic past. Arturo Cova is a poet, whose romanticism is demonstrated at length by Otto Olivera in his essay “El romanticismo de *La vorágine*” (1952), and duly noted by other scholars, including David Viñas, Sylvia Molloy, and Jean Franco.<sup>13</sup> In *Los pasos perdidos* Carpentier recasts Cova as a dissolute graduate student/musical composer who so deeply admires Beethoven—the paradigmatically romantic composer—that he expounds on the Ninth Symphony for an entire chapter.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to being romantic (or, as another aspect of their romanticism), the characterization of the protagonists in these novels forces one to consider their expeditions as

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<sup>13</sup> Viñas argues that Rivera’s novel describes the transformation of romanticism into populism. In this scheme Cova represents romanticism through his status as “intelectual inútil” which Rivera contrasts to the “pueblo vigoroso” (5). In her essay “Imagen y experiencia en *La vorágine*” Jean Franco states “Basta leer *Altasor* de Shelley para darse cuenta de la relación tan estrecha entre el tema de *La vorágine* y el mito romántico,” highlighting Cova’s status as “héroe romántico” (Franco 136).

<sup>14</sup> Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is a particularly significant romantic work due in part to the incorporation in the fourth movement of a poem by the German romantic thinker Friedrich Schiller. The narrator of Carpentier’s novel returns to this work first in part II, and then later in part IX, as a sign of his identification with a romantic past. In “The Lost Steps: Goodbye Rousseau and into the Funhouse!” Lois Marie Jaeck claims that the narrator “denounces” the symphony, but I would argue that the narrator’s relation to the symphony and the romanticism it metonymically represents is more complex than this (534). We see in this section of the novel a mix between a patently fascinated “disillusion” and the “self hatred” identified by Eduardo González (Jaeck 534; González 425).

fundamentally erotic affairs, whose driving motivations are far from objective; the erotic romanticism of the protagonists seems to be at odds with any scientific pretence their expeditions might maintain. The jealous poet Cova chases after Alicia, his ex-lover, and the nameless narrator of Carpentier's novel—ostensibly a representative of modern science—is not really interested in completing his thesis, but instead uses his research (and his funding) as an excuse to go on vacation with his mistress Mouche, who he eventually abandons for the more natural Rosario. In these texts, the expedition into the jungle is motivated not by a positivist, scientific desire for objective truth, but rather, by spontaneous emotional and sexual desire. The search is for a biological origin in the land (the nation-state within the territorial state), a fusion resulting in the *engendering* and *birth* of a nation.

Insofar as the poets manifest the desire for fusion and a will to power, these texts also introduce a fundamental ambiguity between a search for origins and the desire to displace that origin: a confusion between the desire to visit the patria—land of the founding father—and the desire to become the father in that land.

### Search Myth as Erotic Fiction of National Foundation

Allegorically read, the sexual motivation of the adventuring artists in *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* recalls the previous chapter, where I observed an erotic, if not sexual drive in the protagonist of “El sur.” Through George Bataille, I understood Dahlmann's desire for a national death as an erotic desire for totality and fusion.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, more than in “El sur”, the protagonists' pursuit of women in *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* cast the erotic desire as

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<sup>15</sup> For Bataille (in dialogue with Freud), concepts of the erotic and the sacred unite sexual desire and a desire for death, identifying both as expressions of a more fundamental desire for fusion with the all-encompassing Oneness of Being. In chapter two of the present work, I read the ways in which the protagonist of “El sur” seeks to enter into this atemporal unity during a sojourn to his grandfather's *estancia* in the country by entering into a knife-fight he will almost certainly lose.

one related to the amorous heterosexual relationship between a man and woman. If in the former work the protagonist's desire for a national death belies a will to oblivion concordant with political projects of social totality—i.e. nationalist projects—the latter works manifest the kind of “romance” Doris Sommer addresses in her treatment of Latin American novels after independence in *Foundational Fictions* (1991). Up to this point, my understanding of the “romantic” desire has not been identical to a colloquial sense of “romance” as chivalry, or the excitement accompanying a love affair. Now, Sommer's work can help to draw a connection between Bataille's concept of erotic fusion and the “romance” of romanticism as they represent projects of national reconciliation in the works we discuss, allowing me to clarify how the search myth is a meditation on Latin American nation-building projects.

Sommer's main argument is that national “romances” written after independence were designed to portray, and thus, help bring about the reconciliation of different social groups, classes, and races estranged after years of civil war. She writes: “Whether the plots end happily or not, the romances are invariably about desire in young chaste heroes for equally young and chaste heroines, the nations' hope for productive unions” (24).<sup>16</sup> The “productive union” is both allegorical or actual, a yearning dream of national unity or a concrete program of *mestizaje* designed to eradicate racial difference and create a homogenous national stock.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Though not exactly a “romance,” Echeverría's enigmatic romantic poem *La cautiva* (which predates post-independence romances) is one manifestation of the desire for union Sommer describes, which ends not in unification but rather in tragedy and dissolution. Especially fascinating is the fact that the female protagonist has lost her virginity, and yet, remains the protagonist. The acceptable transgression of traditional social mores is reproduced in many versions of the search myth. The realm of nature repeatedly appears as a site for the consolidation of sovereignty through originary transgression or violence, which leads Alejandro Quin to call it a juridical vacuum. There is also a sense that even prior to independence nature is conceived of as a realm not only lacking human jurisdiction, but also divine jurisdiction (see Alberto Moreiras's article “Theologico-political militancy in Ignacio de Loyola's *Ejercicios espirituales*” in *The Politics of Culture* [2010]). As a place hidden from God's sight, the wilderness is where historical and ontological memory perish, a site of secularization.

<sup>17</sup> Sommer writes: “Miscegenation was the road to racial perdition in Europe, but it was the way of redemption in Latin America, a way of annihilating difference and constructing a deeply horizontal, fraternal dream of national identity” (39). A scholar such as Javier Sanjinés, author of *El espejismo del mestizaje* (2005) would dispute the deep fraternity of the dream mestizaje dreamed.

Sommer goes on to discuss how “the rhetorical relationship between heterosexual passion and hegemonic states functions as a mutual allegory” (31). She understands the relation between text and nation to be foundational, ascribing to Benedict Anderson’s neo-romantic argument, even though she acknowledges the failure of the national romance to suture state to nation, or to reconcile the social differences dividing Latin American states.<sup>18</sup> Even if, in light of Claudio Lomnitz’s critique of Anderson, we doubt the relation of cause and effect between text and nation—i.e. “the incredible measure of [the romance’s] success” in unifying the nation—there can be no question of the historical importance of the national allegory, and the political eroticism articulated by the early romances of America (51). It is the failure of texts to bind the nation, not their success, that forms the overriding legacy of romantic idealism in America. Texts such as *La cautiva*, *Tomochic*, *La vorágine*, *Los pasos perdidos*, and *Los detectives salvajes*—written before and after the Boom—archive and contemplate the disunity of states after independence.

In any case, the paradigm of reading that Sommer lays out is indispensable for understanding *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos*. Through Sommer, it becomes clear how the desired women in these texts can be read as allegorical representations of the nation, embodying a hope for unified social totality. The quest for the woman is a quest to recover, unify, or invent the nation. The inability of Cova and his Carpentierian double to attain their object of desire represents a failure to fulfill the promise of that “productive union.” As the unified social body escapes the protagonist’s grasp, the novels illustrate the failure of the romantic vision of the poet as the rhetorical demiurge, creator ex-nihilo of the “aesthetic state.”

### The Female Body of Territorialized Nature

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<sup>18</sup> Sommer acknowledges the failure of romance in consolidating the state, writing: “The great Boom novels rewrite, or un-write, foundational fiction as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers, much less the *gente decente* to emerging middle and popular sectors” (27).

The national erotic drive for totality we read in “El sur” by way of Bataille is manifest in *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* as the desire for the allegorical woman-nation described by Doris Sommer. Hypothetically, sexual fusion with the female object of desire would be analogous to the fusion sought by Dahlmann, by which the subject would be made complete in a suspended erotic state of oblivion. In this way, too, Cova’s vertiginous trajectory toward his own death is explained in the same way Dahlmann’s was, as representing both the desire for total fusion conditioned by the impossibility of that desire’s productive realization.

Reading the woman as an allegorical placeholder for the nation in these novels, as the object of desire for fusion, deepens the complexity of the question here. One must account for a whole new set of meanings that are not present in Borges’s expression of political eroticism, especially the deeply established precedent for reading woman as an allegory for both land and nature.<sup>19</sup> Further complicating matters, the allegorical function of the amorous relationship harbors a whole set of meanings linked to gender and sexuality.

In “Textualidad y sexualidad en la construcción de la selva” (2006) Alejandro Mejías-López explores both the symbolic intersection between woman, land, nation, and nature in *La vorágine*, and the questions it raises regarding the heteronormative male fantasy of nation building, developing a sense of the sexual ambiguity already inscribed in the name of the jungle: Amazons. In showing how Rivera depicts the failure of a nation-building project through a parallel breakdown of gender binaries and the nation in the state of nature, he draws out the connections that can help us understand the implications of understanding Cova’s search for Alicia as a search for the nation.

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the relation between woman and nature in *La vorágine* see Sharon Magnarelli’s essay “La mujer y la naturaleza en *La vorágine*” (1985).

According to Mejías-López, the masculine attributes of the Amazon—the mythical warrior woman—confuse traditional categories of sex, predicting a breakdown in the romantic worldview of the protagonist who confronts her. This confusion of gender roles is reflected in the text insofar as the jungle is depicted as a zone of sexual violence in which men and women are equally subject to abuse. Mejías-López extrapolates that “la novela de Rivera muestra hasta qué punto la razón patriarcal puede llegar a ser también víctima de si misma” (380). In the jungle, the love story gives way to a fog of Hobbesian war of all against all. The blurring of typical gender roles reflects this confusion, as part of a more general disintegration of the distinctions by which “civilization” is enforced. For good reason, much critical attention in the analysis of *La vorágine* has focused on the figure of Zoraida, the madam/queen who personifies the jungle insofar as she is a “mujer fatal, de la ‘loba insaciable,’ [...] devoradora de hombres” (Mejías-López 385).<sup>20</sup> We can certainly see how she helps represent the undoing of the romantic ideal: if woman is also nature, Zoraida herself is the eponymous vortex, whose attraction leads to sexual oblivion not “productively,” but rather with the inevitable outcome of dissolution and death.

The undoing of normative gender that is exemplified by Zoraida, an Amazon woman, is also an undoing of the state. Mejías-López describes the jungle as a deterritorialized zone, “un espacio borroso poblado de gente de diversas nacionalidades...” (374). “La selva es el espacio fronterizo por excelencia, lugar de convergencia de varias naciones-estado en el que, no obstante, la soberanía parece ser siempre imprecisa, borrosa, dominada más por el poder del capital que por los aparatos administrativos y políticos de dichos estados” (375). Arising amid the confusion of the sexually and nationally ambiguous Amazon is a question about the existence of the nation-

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<sup>20</sup> Here Mejías-López appropriately uses the phrase famously introduced by Gallegos in describing the eponymous villain of *Doña Bárbara*, a “devoradora de hombres.”

state itself, and its relation to the territorial state, which we began to discuss in previous chapters of this work. While the jungle's disenchantment of the romantic vision is manifold, it appears to be organized primarily around the transformation or disenchantment of woman as territory, as well as nation. As woman and man become indistinguishable, and the meaningful violence of romantic love dissolves into "total" violence, territorial boundaries become irrelevant. The undoing of "woman" as a heteronormative gender category mirrors an undoing of the territorial state.

Even as Sommer acknowledges how the Latin American boom novel has attempted to flip the national romance on its head, her reading of *La vorágine* describes a far milder "flipping" than Mejías-López's does. Especially in her understanding of the land of the nation as woman summarized by her statement that "the jungle was a tropical analogue to Sarmiento's hermetic desert, an unredeemed feminine space," Sommer suggests that *La vorágine* retains an ongoing hope for the redemption of the ordered nation through the conquest of the jungle (263). In contrast to Sommer's self-declared "utopian reading" of Rivera's work, Mejías-López points to something else, a reading of the woman/land not as a figure that might be redeemed, but rather as an incorrigible femme fatale; she is not the virgin shrew, who might be deflowered and tamed, but rather an unconquerable Machiavellian madam. Through this reading, the expedition in search of the woman/land of Colombia is a journey of disenchantment, in which the romantic poet is smothered, along with those ideals upon which the Latin American state was founded.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Given the sense that *La vorágine* describes the undoing of the foundational romance, and a romantic political eroticism that defined the period of post-independence, it is ironic that the text is often read as a *bildungsroman*. Sommer reads Rivera's novel optimistically as the triumph of Cova's own felicitous demoralization. She states, "Cova's possible *Bildung* may therefore amount to nothing more or less than a liberating disintegration of patriarchy" (271). In "La Vorágine: Crisis, populismo y mirada" (1974) David Viñas calls the general trajectory of the novel a "viaje-aventura-penetración-aprendizaje," and describes the *Bildung* as the becoming popular of the elitist intellectual, Cova's fondness for rustic coffee growing in proportion to a virile decisionism (16). On another level it is the *Bildung* of history itself, as romanticism is transformed into populism by way of a shared worship of passionate spontaneity and irreverence toward official knowledge. Still, Viñas reads *La vorágine* also as a criticism

If in *La vorágine* the violence of the jungle is in large part sexual, as Mejías-López observes, it reflects a popular vision of the New World as a virgin woman that Annette Kolodny investigates at length in *The Lay of the Land* (1975). Kolodny's work would suggest that the aspirant founding father's (Cova's) intention to violate the jungle is par for the course.<sup>22</sup> Besides supporting a sense that the national foundation act entails the violence of a rape or deflowering, Kolodny's reading highlights the view of telluric virginity as an aporia, or irony that did not escape the founding fathers themselves:

Colonization brought with it an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation. As a result, those who had initially responded to the promise inherent in a feminine landscape were now faced with the consequences of the response. (Kolodny 7)

Ironically, the settlers began “accusing each other of “raping and deflowering the ‘natural fertility and comeliness’” of the land (7). In the poet's desire to penetrate a jungle already violated by the *caucheros*, Rivera too describes the paradox of the virgin land, a structure held in

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of the pretense behind the transformation, and of populism itself, which he reveals as a dressed-down (elitist) romantic egotism. Indeed, we can just as well read it as an anti-*bildungsroman*, Rousseau's romantic education in nature devolving into a Hobbesian nightmare, a school of hard knocks. As the poet (d)evolves into the tyrant, the nation disappears in every sense, as a unified people, as a demarcated territory, and as a romantic ideal. The only coherence or order to be found is dictated by capital, the rubber industry.

<sup>22</sup> A noteworthy modernist transformation of the motif of paradoxical desire to violate nature can be found in the *Manifiesto ultraísta* by the “Ultra-romantic” Isaac Vando-Villar (a close associate of Jorge Luis Borges) who professes a desire to deflower the future. He writes: “Triunfaremos porque somos jóvenes y fuertes, y representamos la aspiración evolutiva del más allá. Ante los eunucos novecentistas desnudamos la Belleza apocalíptica del Ultra, seguros de que ellos no podrían romper jamás el himen del Futuro” (*Grecia* 9).

common with “El sur” and “Funes el memorioso” of Borges (or Sor Juana’s “Redondillas”), which describe a “revelación de lo que la revelación destruye” (Moreiras, *Tercer* 157).<sup>23</sup>

In addition to understanding the jungle as a body that has been raped by capital—“Hombre, árbol, selva y mujer son víctimas en una cadena de violaciones por la pluma del capital”—Mejías-López also refers to it as a body violated by *history itself* in the section entitled “el cuerpo andrógino de la selva violado por la historia” (370; 379). He is right to note the important relation between history and the violation of nature as virgin woman, but in a sense, the latter observation is redundant. Through Kolodny one sees that not just any body, but specifically the body of a virgin woman stands at the articulation between landscape and nature, as an allegory of the romantic outlook that sutures nature to the earth. The industrialization (or cultivation) of the land is tantamount to its being historicized, and ceasing to be the virgin, ahistorical realm of nature. History itself begins with the mark of rupture, the corporeal writing of deflowering. Insofar as the jungle is understood as a state of nature, a violation of the jungle *by* history would be no different than a cultivating act that suddenly makes the jungle a site *of* history (or of the event, for example the *escandalo de Putamayo*); it is the membrane between non-history and history which is broken, the mark like writing itself as that which constitutes history and ruins romantic nature, the mark made by the first man venturing onto the land. Just as much as nature is violated by history in *La vorágine*, the novel reflects the way in which history is understood in romanticism as being constituted by the violation of nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Sommer too when describing Domingo F. Sarmiento’s view of the land in *Facundo* writes: “More specifically, [the land] mocks him in the figure of an overwhelming tease, a taunting and tempting virgin who doesn’t quite have the shape of a woman, because no one has yet been able to make a woman out of her” (61). She goes on to describe Rivera’s text in these terms: “the jungle was a tropical analogue to Sarmiento’s hermetic desert, an unredeemed feminine space” (263).

I have now observed a number of overlapping hermeneutical approaches that map onto the search myth. For one, I have shown the significance of nature as a battlefield between discourses vying for power in America, as well as the opposing discourses of romanticism and positivism, literature and science. Furthermore, the searching action of the protagonist in “nature” appears to be fundamentally concerned with the discovery or recovery of the nation. Insofar as I have shown that nature is the mythical ground for Latin American claims of national cultural autonomy from Spain, the important relation between nature and nation recorded in these texts, and the greater historical importance of the story of a poet who goes into nature to discover the nation become clear. For Rivera and Carpentier, however, it appears that the poet is not the founding father, but rather a son seeking to redeem the promise of a nation in the place he was told it could be found (a line most clearly drawn out in *Pedro Páramo*). In addition to a sense that the desire for national unity is an erotic impulse allegorized through the figure of the female lover in these texts, observations about the traditional link between the female object of desire and both land and nature leave us with the possibility of a synthesis that can bring a significant interpretive step forward—the synthesis reflected in the new category of “search myth” itself. Namely, that the protagonists’ search for the allegorical woman in the wilderness is not only a search happening *in* nature, but more significantly, is a search *for* nature, the mythical ground of the culturally autonomous nation.<sup>24</sup> Another way of putting it would be to say that in light of a tension between concepts of nation-state and territorial-state, the poet-scientist’s expedition casts the search for nation as a search for nature in the ahistorical, inviolate land.

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<sup>24</sup> In *The Ends of Literature* (2001) Brett Levinson obliquely highlights Carpentier’s protagonist’s sense that the truth he seeks is identical to a concept of territorialized nature as the ahistorical realm. He writes: “The only authentic text, the only site where genuine knowledge is inscribed and stores, is the text of nature” (116). “What he beholds in the jungle, in other words, is not another history, but the Other of history: an atemporal, primordial *topos* that, from the Greeks through the Christian era through postmodernity has had perhaps only one constant name – Truth” (114). Levinson concludes by drawing an analogy between the protagonist’s search for truth as the Other to a Eurocentric worldview which merely reinforces that worldview, and the modus operandi of de-orientalist—and by extension, decolonial—thought.

## The Modern Jungle of *La vorágine*

Insofar as nation and nature are mutually implicated in the history of Latin American thought—the latter being the basis for the creation *ex nihilo* of the former—Cova's expedition must be read allegorically as a search for both. For José Eustasio Rivera, as a government official charged with the task of mapping the border between Colombia and Venezuela, the jungle was Mejías-López's "espacio borroso" where a clearer definition of the nation's territorial boundary would need to be made.<sup>25</sup> Through Cova, he reflects on another valence of this experience of the jungle expedition, its status as a pilgrimage to the site of the romantic nature through which the cultural autonomy of the nation-state was proclaimed in the nineteenth century. In *La vorágine*, the transformation of the naïve, romantic poet into the jaded tyrant runs parallel to the disenchantment of the protagonist's romantic vision of nature.

Through Cova's experience of the Amazon rainforest it becomes apparent that Latin American nature is not Schiller's "nature" of alluring virginal pre-history. He instead finds the booming heart of a modern, transnational rubber industry. The mystery of the jungle that loomed during the first section of the novel, the secret concealed amid the fronds, is that the Amazon isn't a mythical state of nature at all, but rather, an industrial zone in which workers are brutally and systematically exploited by the Peruvian Amazon Company. It only becomes clear in retrospect that the romantic identification between the landscape and nature is essential to the jungle's obfuscating function. The jungle does not withhold nature, but rather, the guise of nature masks the jungle in its actuality, that is, the exploitive operations of global industry. Thus, one can read the text as a narrative in which this ideological subterfuge is dispelled

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<sup>25</sup> In her essay "Contagio narrativo y gesticulación retórica en *La vorágine*" Sylvia Molloy draws the comparison between Rivera and Cova, referring to the latter as the same "poeta artificiosa de *Tierra de promisión*, primer volumen poético de Rivera" (493).

through a confrontation with material truths, which represents a crisis of disenchantment not only for the romantic poet, but also for the nation in Latin America. If Rivera's difficulty in mapping an arbitrary territorial border posed a challenge to the integrity of a Colombian state, finding cutting-edge modernity where romantic nature was supposed to reside poses a crisis for the nation in general, insofar as this discovery undermines the ground of autonomy by which it was historically defined, the only stable ground left in the deterritorialized borderlands of the Amazon.

The poet's disenchantment occurs as a deconstruction of romantic myth and ideology, the confusion between "nature" and its ostensible opposite, modernity. In the land that exceeds man's power to control, the malicious sublime of carnivorous ants, stinging nettles, and river vortexes, man himself becomes one of these "natural" forces, the wolf of the *homo homini lupus*.<sup>26</sup> As we saw in chapter one, a romantic equation of nature to the pristine landscape was first historically instantiated as a negative reaction against technical modernity and secularization in the late eighteenth century. The "natural" landscape became a metaphor by which modernization was negatively understood, a serene innocence countering ingenious but oppressive artifice.<sup>27</sup> The discovery of modernity in the jungle where the poet expected to find "nature" recalls all that is originally paradoxical in the romantic recourse to "nature" in its opposition of technical modernity. It is not that the poet fails to find nature in the jungle so much

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<sup>26</sup> In the lecture series published as *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009) Jacques Derrida embarks on a discussion of sovereignty by way of Pluatus's phrase *Lupus es homo homini...* ("When one does not know him, man is not a man but a wolf for man") as a sense of human nature opposed by Rousseau, and "as the proverbial nucleus of which was taken up, reinterpreted, reinvested, and mediated by so many others: Rabelais, Montaigne, Bacon, especially Hobbes" (11). This debate about man as wolf at the heart of the question of political sovereignty is clearly inscribed into Rivera's novel, which can be read as a Bildungsroman of the sovereign.

<sup>27</sup> The nature-modernity opposition is at bottom a transformation of the old opposition between nature and culture. Visually, the contrast between a rolling feudal farmland and the calculated repetition of modern city blocks in a sense speaks for itself, and from Borges to the contemporary scholar James C. Scott, Martí to Sarmiento—with both positive and negative overtones—the difference between the artificial and natural landscape is invoked when describing the process of modernization. It is certainly easy to see a sign of a scientific, technical modernity in the difference between the woodland and the metropolis, but such appearances can be misleading. In *La vorágine*, it is precisely this sense of the strict opposition between nature and modernity that Rivera challenges.

as he fails to find nature as he expected it would be. I have already shown in the previous chapters how prior to the rise of romanticism the concept of nature had been central to Enlightenment thought, and in this way constitutes the main intellectual condition of possibility for the technological development symbolized by the rubber starved automotive industry. If, since Schiller, the romantic has repeatedly sought to disavow history through the vision of the unsettled landscape, in finding modernity on the Orinoco, where Enlightenment nature haunts with a vengeance, he gets his comeuppance. If any nature is to be found in the jungle, it is not the landscape of Shelley or Wordsworth, but rather, Hobbes's war or Newton's objective calculation, the simplified geometrical field which unites these thinkers (as Bruno Latour describes in *We Have Never Been Modern* [1993]) whose purpose is to allow the scientist to reduce the world to elemental relations of cause and effect.

Rivera's Amazon is indeed a brutally simple field of cause and effect, a realm in which force is law, but which lacks the progressive teleology that eventually leads to the order of the state. Ironically (and not insignificantly) in this "novela de la tierra," it is as if the land vanishes, giving way to a *post-national* Hobbesian vision of a deterritorialized space of pure game theory, the eidetic forms of competition comprising the capitalist global market as the state of nature later to be promoted by the neoclassical economists of the Chicago School.<sup>28</sup> Rivera's description inverts the romantic fixation on land, describing events that seem to float in the

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<sup>28</sup> In his introduction to the Hackett edition of *The Leviathan* Edwin Curley uses game theory to explain Hobbes's description of the individual's behavior in a state of nature through "the Prisoner's Dilemma." In *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (2011) C.B. Macpherson makes a stronger reading of economic game theory in Hobbes, arguing that "only one kind of society, which I call possessive market society, does meet the requirement of Hobbes's argument, and I argue that Hobbes was more or less consciously taking that society as his model of society as such" (46). Hobbes does not invent a model of society that could later serve as a thought experiment for markets, but rather, is already a thought experiment based on a market society. Therefore, it is not surprising that Friedrich Hayek appears to maintain a Hobbesian individualism as the horizon for human evolution, as an end point rather than a starting point of history (he says that Hobbes was mistaken in holding that man finds himself as an individual in the state of nature). In *The Fatal Conceit* (1988) he argues that the error of socialism lies in "an atavistic longing after the life of the noble savage," that is, the error of setting the horizon of development as an idealized vision of nature based on the organizing social structure of the tribe (19). For Hayek, altruism and "extended order" is not only inefficient but also "unnatural" (19).

homogenous space of undifferentiated jungle, conveying a feeling that even if there is history in nature, it is not really a place, per se.

On the one hand we can interpret the violent outcome of the collision of differing visions of nature in *La vorágine* as a sign of an ongoing struggle between opposing ideological forces of romanticism and capitalism/positivism in America, a representation of the discursive battle Jean Franco observes in her article “Un viaje poco romántico.” In such a reading Cova’s discovery of modernity at the heart of the jungle could be taken as a sign of the historical victory of the pragmatic North over the romantic South, perhaps even casting *La vorágine* as a national Arelolist lament. Surely, one can read in Rivera’s text a strikingly astute prediction of post-national time to come, the jungle coming to stand as a representation of an indefinite time/space in which territorial boundaries would become blurred and irrelevant, where global capital could act with impunity as a disembodied sovereignty superior to that of the nation-state. Thus, Cova (a priest of nature) would serve as an allegorical stand in for the loser in the struggle for history, akin to the godforsaken priest in P.T. Anderson’s film *There Will Be Blood* (2006) (based on another extraction narrative, *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair) who discovers the “milkshake” of nature has already been drunk by the industrialists.

Still, Rivera’s work also offers another view of the relationship between romanticism and positive-capitalist modernity –a sense of their underlying continuity or symbiosis, which we saw through Borges in chapter two of the present work. This continuity is suggested by David Viñas in “‘La Vorágine’: Crisis, populismo y mirada,” who reads *La vorágine* not as a description of romanticism’s decisive defeat, but rather, of its transformation into modern populist discourse. Against its categorization as a “novela de la tierra,” by which it would be understood as literature meant to bolster an ascendant populist nationalism, Viñas reads the work as a critique of

populism insofar as it paradoxically retains a romantic conceit, suggesting that through Cova's trajectory from urban poet to popular tyrant, Rivera allegorizes the manner in which populism conceals nineteenth-century Creole elitism. Beneath the show of a popular kind of virile, masculine spontaneity (picked up after hanging around with the roughshod *campesinso* of the llanos for a few weeks) Cova is still the Creole poet of the city whose egotism manifests the spontaneity informed by a romantic education and afforded by privilege. The criticism of Viñas is apt: even as Europe ceases to act as the explicit horizon of development in Latin America after Martí's "Nuestra America," a romantic idealization of the countryside continues to pervade the "new" national populist discourse, an unmistakable sign of the persistence of European romanticism in an ostensibly de-colonialized discourse.

Building on Viñas, one can observe how Cova's transformation from urban (cosmopolitan) poet to popular (natural) tyrant is characterized not just as a populist *Bildung*, but an entrepreneurial one as well, marking the growing intimacy between capital interest and institutions of the state during this period.<sup>29</sup> *La vorágine* not only depicts the transformation of romantic egoism into populist egoism, but also the transformation of romantic desire into the desire of modern capitalism, an appetite for material acquisition.

Cova at the beginning of the novel embodies the Latin American subject in transit between two distinct temporal/spatial zones. He occupies neither the modern city nor the theoretically pristine nature of the jungle, biding his time in the Colombian llanos, a site of cultural, natural, and temporal hybridity. As a poet he bears the mark of romanticism, a discourse that was deeply influential in Latin America during the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>29</sup> Gareth Williams writes "Popular integration was deemed to be fundamental for the consolidation of state hegemony, for the formation of disciplined national industrial labor forces (for *homo laborans*), for capitalist/socialist development, for the successful nationalization of society and, ultimately, for the end of Latin America's socioeconomic and cultural backwardness" (5).

century, and resurgent in Rubén Darío's *modernismo* and Rodó's *Arielismo* in the twentieth. Nevertheless, a shift in the quality of his daydreams suggests Cova's potential willingness to make the leap into "modernity" not just as a populist (as per Viñas), but as a materialist as well, that is, in a way that would seem to decisively abandon his idealist, romantic origins.<sup>30</sup>

While Franco shows the wilderness landscape, or "nature," to be the ground of a discursive battle between vying historico-ideological forces, it is the Latin American subject himself who constitutes this ground in Rivera's text; Cova's heart is up for grabs in a struggle of various forces to determine how Latin American history will proceed. This struggle is manifested in his shifting view of nature, by which we observe the protagonist's vacillation between romantic/idealist and materialist/modernist dispositions. An invisible battle plays out through Cova's experimental application of different paradigms of nature for his speculative imagination of the unknown jungle—a separate world whose mystery nags the narrator during the first section of the novel.

As one might expect of the Latin American poet, Cova at times imagines the jungle romantically as a state of nature. The well-known description of the jungle at the opening of book two is a clear example of this romantic thinking, but we see it in book one as well, as he considers settling down somewhere with Alicia. Here, in one of his characteristic daydreams, he wonders: "¿Para qué las ciudades? Quizá mi fuente de poesía estaba en el secreto de los bosques intactos, en la caricia de las auras, en el idioma desconocido de las cosas; en cantar lo que dice al peñón la onda que se despide, el arrebol a la ciénaga, la estrella a las inmensidades que guardan el silencio de Dios" (161). Cova equates nature both with the incommensurable deity, and the

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<sup>30</sup> In "Contagio narrativo y gesticulación retórica en *La vorágine*" Sylvia Molloy comments on the how the text records the importance of the poet in Latin America especially through the deference shown by many characters upon learning that Cova is a poet.

virgin who remains “intact,” two of the frameworks by which romanticism considered nature as a realm autonomous from history.

In contradistinction to his imagination of the jungle through the paradigms of divinity and virginal purity, we find the episode in which Cova’s imagination of the jungle is colored by postcards belonging to Griselda, his host in the llanos. “Eran unas postales en colores. Se veían en ellos, a la orilla montuosa de un río, casas de dos pisos, en cuyos barandales se agrupaba la gente. Lanchas de vapor humeaban en el puertecito” (103). Rather than a vision of inviolate nature that one might expect them to depict, the postcards present a portrait of progress, the steamships and two-story houses of modernity afforded by the rubber boom.<sup>31</sup> Through the postcards Griselda imagines the jungle as a land of opportunity, where workers earn “una libra diaria” (103). She dreams of profiting from this fantastic wage herself by opening a restaurant for the *seringal* (rubber harvesting area) workers in the imaginary landscape of the postcard.

Dreams of jungle wealth soon consume Cova as well (“el pensamiento de la riqueza se convirtió en esos días en mi dominante obsesión”), confusing his view of the jungle, which alternates between a paradisiacal pre-history and a rosy modernity (126). I see this ambiguity expressed clearly with a joke in which Cova metonymically uses the word “Europe” to signify prosperity and class –“se me antojó conocer Arauca, bajar el Orinoco, y salir a Europa” (126). In part, the joke here lies in the understatement, the ease with which the ocean voyage is cast as an easy continuation of the river journey. But it also lies in a sense that, in the prosperity he will attain Europe itself is already waiting for him at the heart of the jungle, like an opera house in Manaus. The route he charts reinforces our sense that Cova is mixed up between the nineteenth

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<sup>31</sup> Alejandro Quin helps us understand how, at the time in which Rivera wrote, romantic and scientific discourses intersected in their imagination of the jungle as a realm of purity, noting that images originally deriving from ethnographic studies came to be circulated as postcards “que evocaban para turistas, curiosos y coleccionistas la alteridad y pretendida pureza cultural del objeto antropológico” (180). Griselda’s postcards surprisingly function differently, as fantasies of development.

century logic—here represented by the Creole vision of progress as Europeanization—and the emerging twentieth century neo-colonial logic of development tied to global capitalism. Cova turns his sights to the heart of the jungle in the hope of finding Europe, not yet understanding the alterations in the geopolitical landscape that will deliver him instead unto Ford and the deterritorialized body of global industry, the new metonym of prosperity.

If the Latin American travel narrative had previously been defined alternately by the romantic nature poem and the scientific expedition, the fictional postcard suggests a new phase in its development, a synthesis of a modern teleology of progress (steamships on the Orinoco) and a romantic sensibility that holds the landscape vista as a travel destination.<sup>32</sup> If Cova fantasizes about becoming a rubber tycoon, he does so as one dreams of inhabiting a postcard, quixotically. Insofar as the postcard appropriates and employs the romantic ethos for the actualization of a capitalist project (to sell), it stands as a sign that nature is not merely the site of discursive opposition between mutually exclusive forces of the past and the future, romanticism and modernity. Rather, it is a concept by which these forces begin to run through one another, intermingling in way that is similar to the way in which Alejandro Mejías-López describes the blurring of gender norms and national borders in the Amazon.

Cova too, in representing the Latin American subject, is like the postcard, not only caught between romanticism and modernity, but also embodying their synthesis and continuity. As I have observed, Cova's mission to find Alicia in the jungle and rescue her is, on many levels, a search dictated by a romantic desire for immanence of the subject, the female object of desire

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<sup>32</sup> Tourism, as a mindset and as an “industry,” finds its origins in the exoticism that flourished at the intersection of imperialism and romanticism during the nineteenth century. For more on the romantic origins of tourism see James Buzard's book, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (1993). There appears to be a continuity between early romantic discussions of the landscape as tourist destination and the much older tradition of the religious pilgrimage, Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* (1810) perhaps being a foundational work in this “secularization.” Cova's expedition might also be read as a kind of religious pilgrimage/romantic tourism.

representing both the nation and the concept of nature upon whose autonomy it was based. Although Cova's disenchantment entails casting idealism aside in favor of pragmatic materialism once he is faced with the brutal reality of the jungle, he nevertheless retains the romantic desire that prompted his expedition. Rather than recognizing the futility of his mission and abandoning it, he pursues Alicia with increasing ardor, his romantic desire turning into a raw will to acquisition and possession. The impossibility of ever obtaining the object of desire that we previously observed in the work of Borges with the Funes paradox appears again, becoming a new vision of history without telos, the logic of a consumerist desire which, by definition, cannot ever be satisfied. In Cova's maturation, a romantic desire for immanence is transformed into the engine of capitalist accumulation.

This blurring between romantic/idealist and consumptive/materialist desire affects not only Cova, but also the *seringal* workers, characters who spend the majority of their free time in the haze of alcoholic oblivion. The workers purchase bottles directly from the rubber company, regularly investing the sum of their earnings back into liquor. The daily cycle of rubber extraction and drinking is both the capitalist apotheosis and its ritual of daily worship. The Peruvian Amazon Company wields the power of the bacchanal—the religious will to oblivion—as an engine of accumulation; the horizon of history becomes consumption without limits; the ritual, Saturnalia without Saturn. Thus “nature” remains a site of secularization, in which “obsolete” myth is renewed, transformed back into ideology, where the names that would belie its presence are shed, leaving the pure, invisible, nameless structure.

The insatiable thirst, though seemingly an effect of the backbreaking labor, is secretly its cause. The quest for autonomous self-sufficiency (transformed into a concept of financial integrity) in the jungle harbors a will to oblivion far greater than any desire for caña-induced

inebriation, the latter merely serving as a temporary stand-in for the former.<sup>33</sup> If the figure of Cova might be taken as a “mere” allegory or fictional construct, the historically accurate passages describing the indentured servitude of the *seringal* can impress us with the gravity of the transformation the novel describes, the appropriation of romantic desire for totality by the corporation, and the religious origins of consumerism.

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With *La vorágine* Rivera deconstructs the concept of romantic nature insofar as it is supposed to stand against modernity. Nature and modernity are instead shown to be chiasmic and interchangeable. In the revelation of the closeness between nature and modernity, Cova’s romantic worldview is sunk. From the ruins of his ideology arises a new vision of the jungle as the realm in which history is revealed as the history of violence. Cova and the reader become privy to the story that the jungle was supposed to devour but did not, a history of so-called primitive accumulation.

In addition to collapsing the nature-modernity binary, Rivera’s text describes a transition to modernity in Latin America not as it tended to be done—with a story of the city—but through a description of the supposedly pre-modern periphery. In so doing, he subtly historicizes a complex period of transition, the mingling of the romanticism of the early nineteenth century, positivism of the late nineteenth century, populist/nationalism discourse of the early twentieth, and the beginnings of globalization. His work provides a valuable glimpse into this transitional period, especially as an allegory of the continuity between the romantic desire for totality in nature, a populist desire for totality in nation, and a modern, nihilistic desire for totality turned

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<sup>33</sup> The connection between the oblivion of alcohol and the desire for totality also bears on the protagonist. At the end of the novel, upon the expectation of finally reaching Alicia, Cova (now greatly reduced by the ravages of the jungle, and beginning to come down with the first symptoms of the beriberi sickness) writes “¡Bebí, bebí, bebí, y no me embriagué!” as if nearing the unattainable object of desire increased his resistance to other forms of oblivion (367).

into an end unto itself—a teleology of consumption—once those other objects of desire prove to be illusory.

### Carpentier's Return to Romantic Nature

In the previous chapter I read “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (1939) and “El sur” (1953) together as a critique of any attempt to proclaim autonomy from history for the consolidation of national identity. While Alejo Carpentier's rewriting of *La vorágine* cannot be equated with Menard's attempt to destroy the *Quijote* by writing it again (González Echevarría reads Carpentier's text as a powerful argument that the archive can never be successfully burned), nevertheless, as a supersessionary rewriting that doesn't seem to appreciate the central lessons of the text it seeks to surpass, it falls into a trap similar to that which Borges describes. Rather than retaining Rivera's critique of romantic nature at the heart of Latin Americanist thought, the main contribution of *Los pasos perdidos* is to record the impossibility of holding on to the origin, or dwelling in the romantic state of nature. Even as the protagonist's failure to remain in the state of nature appears to perform a criticism of the Latin American position or portray a sense of the bind it faces, it also affirms the concept of nature as that which might provide an alternative to the teleology of modernity, in crisis after WWII.

To historicize the relation between *La vorágine* and Carpentier's rewriting of it in *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), the work of Antonio Cándido provides a useful point of ingress. The historical difference between Rivera and Carpentier ought to map schematically onto the literary framework he developed in his essay “Literature and Underdevelopment” (1973), Rivera's text corresponding to a pre-war period in which “backwardness” had not yet been diagnosed as a chronic condition in Latin America, and Carpentier's text corresponding to the post-war period

in which a deeper pessimism had set in, i.e. the “catastrophic consciousness of backwardness” (37). And indeed, *Los pasos perdidos* manifests a consciousness of underdevelopment repeatedly through descriptions of the nameless Latin American capital, the enigmatic malaise that affects it, and the coup d’état that unfolds there.<sup>34</sup> Still, I will argue that Rivera’s text performs a more profound and pessimistic observation of the crisis of modernity. In the difference between their takes on the search myth we can observe an unspoken irony and complexity behind Cándido’s observation: while the disastrous effects of the war led many thinkers to question the modernist teleology of progress, reading in them a crisis of modernity, a Latin American consciousness of underdevelopment appears to actually go against this trend. Even as thinkers such as Borges and Adorno question the modernist horizon of progress, the catastrophic consciousness of underdevelopment betrays a desire to cling even more tightly to it, to worship development and lament its absence. If Rivera anticipates a philosophical reflection on the faulty bases of modernity itself, Carpentier reflects more on the complexities and tensions within the Latin American sense of its relation to modernity after the war, and resuscitates a hope that nature might still serve as ontology that is alternative to the ills of Western culture.

The sudden consciousness of underdevelopment during the crisis of modernity must be considered also as an effect of Latin America’s shifting geopolitical position in relation to the United States. The focus on development and underdevelopment in Latin America seems to be both precipitated by, and at the same time oriented against the US, perhaps as a kind of Oedipal

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<sup>34</sup> Carpentier already begins to contrast modernity with nature in his description of the mysterious Latin American ill, “el gusano” (48). We writes: “Sin embargo, había algo como un polen maligno en el aire—polen duende, carcoma impalpable, moho volante—que se ponía a actuar, de pronto, con misteriosos designios, para abrir lo cerrado y cerrar lo abierto, embrollar los cálculos, trastocar el peso de los objetos, malear lo garantizado. Una mañana, las ampollitas de suero de un hospital amanecían llenas de hongos; los aparatos de precisión se desajustaban; ciertos licores empezaban a burbujear dentro de las botellas; el Rubens del Museo Nacional era mordido por un parásito desconocido que desafiaba los ácidos; la gente se lanzaba a las ventanillas de un banco en que nada había ocurrido, llevada al pánico por los decires de una negra vieja que la policía buscaba en vano” (47-48). The calculations and scientific apparatuses of modernity are ruined by a creeping irrationality, by the “nature” that inexorably seeps into the city.

or Hegelian/Nietzschean desire to displace the master.<sup>35</sup> Latin American nations could no longer attribute inequality, poverty, and cultural stagnation to its relatively recent political/national origins, now that this neighbor with similarly recent origins had ascended to the height of global power. In the midst of a crisis of modernity, as a crisis of a Hegelian view of history in which nations dialectically progress through a series of developmental stages, Latin America would have little recourse for addressing its ills besides speculating about the mysterious cause of its marginality, or becoming resigned to the displacement of progress by a view of history as game of power with a zero-sum outcome. Carpentier shows that the catastrophic consciousness of backwardness in Latin America is in a sense the specular inversion of the crisis of modernity, its darker side: if, in Europe, history could no longer be viewed as progress, what would the future hold for a Latin America that had always aspired to European civilization?

In *Los pasos perdidos*, shuttling between New York City and the Amazon jungle, the protagonist embodies the new key geopolitical relation for Latin America after WWII. Carpentier portrays this relation as the difference between a hypermodern but morally dissolute metropolis and an underdeveloped but enchanting backwater. Even as the “gusano” afflicts the southern capital, the protagonist is quickly convinced he will never leave the state of nature that he finds beyond its borders, which he experiences as a unmediated, non-alienated life entirely different from his experience of New York. The vision of nature the narrator describes suggests its role as the redemptive potential hidden in the Latin American nation, the rejuvenating power of the un(der)developed land, and its capacity to facilitate autopoietic self-invention.

Chapter XXXV is in an invective against New York City by the narrator upon his return from the jungle, and can be read straightforwardly as a post-war critique of modernity,

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the complexities of Latin America’s relation to modernity, and the scholarship that has sought to understand this problem, refer to chapter two of the present work.

describing the alienation of modern society in a way that evokes the second chapter of Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), "Enlightenment as Mass Deception." I will read this section at length. From the very start the narrator begins to develop a comparison between what is and is not "natural" with a comment on the gait of the men around him, characterized by its "ritmo ajeno a sus voluntades orgánicas" (222). In order to escape the zombie-like hordes teeming in the streets he slips into a church, but finds little respite:

Miro las caras vueltas hacia el oficiante, en las que se refleja el amarillo de los cirios; nadie de los que aquí ha congregado el fervor en este oficio nocturno entiende nada de lo que dice el sacerdote. La belleza de la prosa les es ajena... Entre el altar y sus fieles se ensancha, de año en año, un foso repleto de palabras muertas. (222)

The ill of the city is cast as Socrates's philosophical crisis: the people have forgotten the original meanings of the words. This forgetfulness is not a symptom of a lack of study (or wont for Latin classes) but rather the alienation of man from the wellspring of his being: nature. "Los hombres de acá ponen su orgullo en conservar tradiciones de origen olvidado, reducidas, las más de las veces, al automatismo de un reflejo colectivo –a recoger objetos de un uso desconocido, cubiertos de inscripciones que dejaron de hablar hace cuarenta siglos" (223). The men of the city are automatons not due to a cybernetic mingling of body and futuristic technology, but through their incorporation of alien cultural technology from the past, traditions that they are unable to comprehend.

Strikingly, Carpentier appears to prefigure to Levi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* (1962) in his mention of a spontaneous use of objects whose purpose is unknown; the men of the city perform the *bricolage* metaphorically employed by the anthropologist to describe the

rudimentary “science of the concrete” of jungle tribes. As in Martí’s inversion in “Nuestra América” where the American of European descent is cast as the “criollo exótico”—a motif mirrored elsewhere in *Los pasos perdidos* when the urban lady Mouche becomes exotic upon entering the jungle—Carpentier seems to make the people of the city tribesmen. The city they occupy is not a message from the future, or a sign of the utopia to come, but instead a massive accumulation of ruins: “A mi regreso encuentro la ciudad cubierta de más ruinas que las ruinas tenidas por tales. En todas partes veo columnas enfermas y edificios agonizantes...” (223).

Carpentier extends the metaphor of the city dwellers’ resemblance to tribesmen dwelling in the heart of darkness, with all possible racial implications: “El la pista de baile es un intrínquis de cuerpos metidos los unos en los otros, encajados, confundidos de piernas y de brazos, que se malaxan en la oscuridad como los ingredientes de una especie de magma, de lava movida desde dentro, al compás de un *blues* reducido a sus meros valores rítmicos” (225). “Ahora se apagan las luces” but in the darkness “comunica una nueva tristeza a ese movimiento colectivo que tiene algo de ritual subterráneo, de danza para apisonar la tierra –sin tierra que apisonar...” (225). The city is a blind, chaotic labyrinth of forgotten origins, a state of total alienation from the past.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to this description of the city that represents the decadence of modernity, the protagonist discovers territorialized nature as a gateway to lost purity, and a means by which to recover the glory of the past, and ultimately, a state altogether outside the flow of time and history. Akin to the traveler in Shelley’s *Altazor*, who sails back through the history of Western civilization, the protagonist describes a revelation that comes to him while attending mass in a jungle church, stating: “Yo me había divertido ayer en figurarme que éramos Conquistadores en busca de Manoa. Pero de súbito me deslumbra la revelación de que ninguna diferencia hay entre

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<sup>36</sup> For more on alienation in *Los pasos perdidos* see “Alejo Carpentier: Alienation Culture, and Myth” by M. Ian Adams and “La Alienación Marxista en ‘Los pasos perdidos’ de Carpentier” by Jorge Rodrigo Ayora.

esta misa y las misas que escucharon los Conquistadores del Dorado en semejantes lejanías. El tiempo ha retrocedido cuatro siglos” (162).<sup>37</sup> This section is a striking contrast to his experience in the New York church: in the jungle, the service connects him to the conquistador of his fancy, while in the city it is only a sign of his alienation. The protagonist continues on his imaginary trip through time, passing through the Middle Ages, “hasta que alcanzamos el tiempo en que el hombre, cansado de errar sobre la tierra, inventó la agricultura al fijar sus primeras aldeas en las orillas de los ríos... Estamos en la Era Paleolítica” (163-4). Soon, observing the indigenous people of the region, he goes even further “retrocediendo hacia los compases del *Génesis*”: “esas gentes que aun no han cobrado el pudor primordial de ocultar los órganos de la generación, que *están desnudos sin saberlo*, como Adán y Eva antes del pecado” (166).<sup>38</sup> Thus, he arrives at the origin of history, its constitutive and autonomous exterior.

The narrator is not indifferent to this state of autonomous nature, but rather, finds it unequivocally superior to the temporal world, and decides to settle down with Rosario in the heart of the jungle.<sup>39</sup> He repeatedly compares his experience in Santa Mónica de los Venados—the jungle commune where he and Adelantado seek to found a new civilization—to his old life in the city, or “*allá*,” as he refers to it. A description of bathing in the river is characteristic:

Aquí es donde nos bañamos desnudos, los de la Pareja, en agua que bulle y corre,  
brotando de cimas ya encendidas por el sol, para caer en blanco verde, y

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<sup>37</sup> In “Pasos perdidos, identidad encontrada. La edad del paisaje en Alejo Carpentier” (2004) Fernando Aínsa observes a phenomenon related a concept of territorial of nature in a discussion of a leitmotif repeated in Latin American letters, the journey through space as a journey through time.

<sup>38</sup> In biblical terms Aínsa describes the realm of the jungle in *Los pasos perdidos* as a realm at the interstices of history: “un mundo del *Génesis* anterior al Paraíso y no posterior a su creación. Puede ser también un mundo <<diabólico que rodeaba el Paraíso Terrenal antes de la Culpa>>, es decir, un mundo de <<lo prenatal, de lo que existía cuando no había ojos>>...” (204).

<sup>39</sup> Aínsa suggests that for the protagonist “el tiempo pasado no es... necesariamente mejor,” citing Klaus Muller Bergh’s argument in “Alejo Carpentier: Estudio biográfico crítico” (1972) that the protagonist nevertheless faces challenges during each stage of his journey (206). While it is true that nature is not a post-messianic utopia in which all conflict has been resolved, there can be no question that the protagonist nevertheless idealizes the past, especially in comparison with the modern city.

derramarse, más abajo, en cauces que las raíces de tanino tiñen de ocre. No hay alarde, no hay fingimiento edénico, en esta limpia desnudez, muy distinta de la que jadea y se vence en las noches de nuestra choza, y que aquí liberamos con una suerte de travesura, asombrados de que sea tan grato sentir la brisa y la luz en partes del cuerpo que la gente de allá muere sin haber expuesto alguna vez al aire libre. (178)

For the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos*, the jungle is everything promised by romantic nature: a space of childlike innocence, purity, rebirth, and beauty.

We must now inquire as to what Carpentier achieves by once again contrasting the decadence of the city to the purity of “nature.” Is his return to this canonical motif an earnest attempt to articulate an alternative to Western modernity for Latin America? In “Oswald Spengler’s ‘The Decline of the West’ and Alejo Carpentier’s ‘Los pasos perdidos’” (2000) Galen Brokaw reads in *Los pasos perdidos* an affirmation of America as a site of nature that might replace a decadent West. He attributes the impossibility of a return to a state of non-alienation to the protagonist’s European roots and pertinence to North American modernity, arguing that it reflects Carpentier’s Spenglerian view of civilization’s inevitable decline.<sup>40</sup> Brokaw interprets this to be an affirmation of Latin American potential, a reading of nature as a repository of culture that might serve Latin American nations’ rise to power. “This doomed society, of course, does not include all of humanity. The vibrant culture of Latin America, to which the protagonist does not belong, occupies a position poised to replace the decadent West and begin its own

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<sup>40</sup> In *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (1977) Roberto González Echevarría emphasizes Spengler’s influence on Carpentier’s work, writing: “Spengler provided the philosophical ground on which to stake the autonomy of Latin American culture and deny its filial relation to Europe” (56). Spengler’s understanding of history, expressed in terms of natural cycles, too is clearly a transformation of the romantic thinking that preceded it.

progression toward civilization” (109). If Brokaw’s reading is correct, one would have to read Carpentier as uncritically affirming the concept of nature that Rivera attempted to undo.

Although this reading is persuasive, one must not overlook the possibility that the protagonist might represent not the declining West, but the Latin American Creole drawn away from his patria by the lures of modernity. In such a reading, the prominent flaws of the protagonist and narrator—whose egotism, like that of Cova, brings a ring of satire to the text—would reflect on the Latin American subject.<sup>41</sup> As in *La vorágine*, his many unconscious betrayals of an underlying megalomania lead the reader to sense that *Los pasos perdidos* can be read as a critical allegory of the romantic Latin American subject who deals with the crisis of modernity by running away from it. His abandonment of Rosario and the jungle to get the paper on which he will write his romantic operatic masterpiece *Treno*, and his subsequent inability to find his way back to the jungle utopia Santa Mónica de los Venados, can be read as a fable about how romantic egotism and hubris stood in the way of any permanent recuperation of the potential of an American paradise as a counter-ontology to Western modernity. The protagonist is too driven by a vain desire for posterity as a musical composer to stick it out in a utopian social experiment; a Latin American political experiment is betrayed by a fascination with Western modernity, by a desire for status within the circuits of civilization.

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<sup>41</sup> These flaws cannot be denied, his perfidy no more outrageously manifest than when, while making love with his new girlfriend Rosario beneath the hammock of Mouche, his soon to be ex-mistress who has accompanied him through the jungle and is now delirious with yellow fever, he is completely indifferent when Rosario vindictively kicks the ailing woman. He writes:

Habíamos rodado bajo la hamaca, olvidados de la que tan cerca gemía. Y la cabeza de Mouche estaba asomada sobre nosotros, crispada, sardónica, de boca babeante, con algo de cabeza de Gorgona en el desorden de las greñas caídas sobre la frente. ‘¡Cochinos! –grita- ¡Cochinos!’ Desde el suelo, Rosario dispara golpes a la hamaca con los pies, para hacerla callar. Pronto la voz de arriba se extravía en divagaciones de delirio. Los cuerpos desunidos vuelven a encontrarse... (Carpentier 141).

See Brett Levinson’s reading of this scene as an extension of the problem of the duplicitous narrator in *The Ends of Literature* (on page 113). He reinforces a sense that “the authorial voice of *The Lost Steps* is not the narrator’s. Rather, it is that of a detached author invisibly folded into the text (the implied author) who, overseeing his often pathetic alter ego (the narrator-protagonist), secretly derides his words” (111).

For a biographical investigation of the ironic relation between the author and the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* see Roberto González Echevarría’s *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*.

By reinscribing the opposition between nature and the decadent city into *Los pasos perdidos*, Carpentier calls attention to the resonance between the post-war crisis of modernity—to which he alludes explicitly—and the post-independence crisis of identity.<sup>42</sup> Regardless of interpretation, he not only echoes Rivera’s text, but also Andrés Bello’s “La agricultura de la zona tórrida” (1826), and Martí’s “Nuestra América” (1891) insofar as they too dealt with a geopolitical crisis of Latin Americanism by contrasting the decadence of the foreign metropole to the redemptive potential of America’s natural landscape. Parallels between *Los pasos perdidos* and the works of these independence thinkers reinforce a sense that the crisis of modernity in Latin America after WWII is a crisis of geopolitical relations more than a recognition of the shortcomings of a certain view of progressive history. The nature that previously would help America “olvidar la antigua tiranía” of Spain now appears to be a recourse by which the looming tyranny of the United States might also be resisted in the present and future (Bello, *Cien* 118).<sup>43</sup> Looking back a little further, to the extent that nature retains its original function as defined by the English and German romantics, as an exit from the Godless modernity of the industrial metropolis, Carpentier triumphs in producing a disquieting sense that it is not only his book which is a repetition of history. The post-war crisis of modernity itself, as articulated by Adorno and Borges with seminal observations about myth’s indestructibility begins to look like a return to the crisis of industrialization faced by the romantics in the eighteenth century.

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<sup>42</sup> A European sense of the crisis of modernity frames Carpentier’s novel and his protagonist’s jungle adventure. We see this especially in Chapter IX, which contemplates the paradoxical contrast between German cultural refinement and the atrocities committed during the war. In a kaleidoscopic reading of Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup>, coupled with a consideration of his own Germanic roots, he recalls being at the University of Heidelberg, thinking: “A dos pasos de aquí, una humanidad sensible y cultivada –sin hacer caso del humo abyecto de ciertas chimeneas, por las que habían brotado un poco antes, plegarias aulladas en yiddish—seguía coleccionando sellos, estudiando las glorias de la raza, tocando pequeñas músicas nocturnas de Mozart leyendo *La Sirenita* de Anderson a los niños” (93).

<sup>43</sup> Rubén Darío articulates a sense of the danger posed by an ascendant United States in his poem “A Roosevelt” (1904).

Nevertheless, it is notable that after *La vorágine* (especially insofar as he rewrites it) Carpentier would depend so heavily on the opposition between modernity and nature that Rivera had sought to critique. It might not be necessary to read too deeply into his retention of this binary: as González Echevarría argues in *Myth and Archive*, Carpentier is guided by an archiving mission, overdetermining nature to represent all possible meanings and valences of the concept.<sup>44</sup> And independently of his definition of nature, Carpentier even obliquely alludes to *La vorágine*'s sense of the crisis of modernity in the jungle, referring to “manos enguantadas de caucho” and the war's mountains of bones in the same breath (93).

Still, in reading *Los pasos perdidos* as an allegory for the search for a redemptive Latin American difference, it is hard to get around the fact that the protagonist's inability to definitively return to and dwell a romantic state of nature is not portrayed as the inevitable consequence of his quixotic delusion, but rather, as a missed opportunity; his failure is less a matter of the impossibility of the dream than his lack of grit in pursuing it.

It seems that for Carpentier, Santa Mónica de los Venados is out there. Unlike Rivera, he does not deny that this nature exists, or that it might stand as Latin America's untapped potential, a redemptive ontology autonomous from imperial Western modernity which will remain eternally as the potential for a new origin, a fountain of youth. Perhaps, once the rainy season ends, and the waters recede, it will be possible to return there.

Furthermore, Carpentier appears to share with his protagonist a sense that nature is a double edged sword, on the one hand a hidden resource for redemption, and on the other, a curse like that which afflicted Funes... the Latin American experience of modernity as the revelation of what the revelation destroys. Even before he abandons the jungle, the protagonist predicts

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<sup>44</sup> Ian McDonald also reflects on this overdetermination in the essay “Magical Eclecticism: *Los pasos perdidos* and Jean Paul Sartre” (1979).

how his story will end, imagining it will be like his experience of smoking opium, alluding to the tale of Coleridge's composition of "Kubla Kahn" described by Borges in "El sueño de Coleridge." He imagines:

Cuando saliera de la droga, no tendría más que tomar el papel pautado y en algunas horas nacería de mi pluma, sin dolor ni vacilaciones, un concierto que entonces proyectaba, con molestia incertidumbre acerca del tipo de escritura por adoptar. Pero al día siguiente, cuando salí del sueño lúcido y quise de verdad tomar la pluma, tuve la mortificante revelación de que nada de lo pensado, imaginado, resuelto, bajo los efectos del Benares fumado, tenía el menor valor...

(191)

He predicts that his experience in the state of nature, like the opium dream, will vanish and become nothing once he returns to that other more alienated state. Its timelessness is a non-productivity, the revelation that cannot be made into anything useful, a visit to a totality which is at the same time a total oblivion. Thus, precisely through the protagonist's failure, he affirms the temporal autonomy of nature, a sense that history does not pass in the jungle.

If one reads the protagonist as an allegorical representation of the Latin American Creole subject, Carpentier would appear to mobilize the Latin American enclosure of nature much in the way that Sarmiento did, who saw it as both an obstacle and ground for the redemption of the Latin American nation. After WWII, Carpentier's reading acts as both an apology for why Latin America is not modern, and a celebration of the fact that it is not modern, ignoring Rivera's demonstrations of how Colombia *is* modern, precisely to the extent that the jungle is *not* autonomous from Western systems of production, *is not nature*. Thus, I am forced to read in *Los pasos perdidos* not just the protagonist's failure to return, but also the failure *of* return in

Carpentier's rewriting, which renews the vision of Latin America that Rivera had sought to challenge and criticize.

### Conclusions

In the two novels we have analyzed, the protagonists' searches were means by which the authors themselves searchingly contemplated the nature of the national origin, and the claim of autonomy at its heart. In so doing these authors not only depicted a mythical attempt to displace the origin, but performed it; the protagonists' activity of searching in the jungle itself became not just a search for the nation, but its staging in the present. The novels, exemplified by their function as canonical works of Colombian and Cuban literature, reify a sense of the nation, even as they describe the nation's undoing. The idea of Latin American difference is staged through a story about the Creole's failure to truly belong to it.

Such fiascos in the wilderness will surely only heighten the desire for fulfillment in the totality of nature, consequently precipitating more expeditions, and more discoveries that this stable immanence cannot be attained, for whatever reason. Indeed, one need only return to these texts in order to return to the search they describe. One can see in these two novels that a repetition of history—the repetition of the literary representation of the search as the staging of the nation—has displaced the foundation, and is in fact the eternal foundation of the state (i.e. creation of the people) in the present that Ernst Cassirer describes as necessary and inevitable in *The Myth of the State* (1946). The desire for the nation continues to be a desire that desires only desiring, a state of being “in love with loving”: a romantic state. If the concept of the search myth can serve as a hermeneutical or analytical tool, it is as a sign of the irresistible pull of

nature in the Latin American imaginary, a sign that can serve as a form of Latin American self-knowledge, but not identity.

Insofar as these instantiations of the search myth describe a desire to find that which transcends, or stands outside of history, it is recursive and self-referential: the myth of the will to myth, the desire to exchange history for eternity, or to simply escape the nightmare of history. In any case, through the comparison of two works it becomes clear that not all repetitions (mythical returns) are the same. It can occur in at least two ways: as a contemplation of disavowal, and as a performance of it. Even after Rivera tries to shed light on this process, show the myth of nature as such, Carpentier seeks to restore nature's mythical force, turning it back into a mechanism of disavowal and the claim of autonomy from history. In this way, the relationship between Rivera and Carpentier is Menardian, manifesting the insight of Cassirer's statement (which strongly echoes one that would later be articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer): "We cannot hope to 'rationalize' myth by an arbitrary transformation and re-interpretation of the old legends of the deeds of gods or heroes. All this remains vain and futile. In order to overcome the power of myth we must find and develop the new positive power of 'self-knowledge'" (60).<sup>45</sup> The move to self-knowledge describes a desire that is the opposite of the desire for autonomy from history. Thus, finally, perhaps Rivera and Carpentier's works may be able to be distinguished along this axis, as the difference between a work that seeks self-knowledge, and one that seeks identity.

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<sup>45</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer write: "Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths" (2).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Specters of Utopia in Augusto Roa Bastos

*The vegetation of the fields never looks repugnant.  
But it signifies nature to us: could we not say that  
the orgy reduces us to that nature with which it  
invites us to emerge, whose womb it suggests we  
reenter?*  
–Georges Bataille

*Toda huida es siempre una fuga hacia el pasado.  
El último refugio de perseguido es la lengua  
materna, el útero materno, la placenta inmemorial  
donde se nace y se muere*  
–Augusto Roa Bastos

*Pero mientras buscamos el antídoto o la medicina  
para curarnos, lo nuevo, aquello que sólo se puede  
encontrar en lo ignoto, hay que seguir transitando  
por el sexo, los libros y los viajes, aun a sabiendas  
de que nos llevan al abismo, que es, casualmente, el  
único sitio donde uno puede encontrar el antídoto*  
–Roberto Bolaño

Defined by a positivist, developmental view of history, the modernity of the early twentieth century cast romanticism as another myth that progress and enlightenment would dispel, and understood itself in part as a historical negation of the romantic age. In the last two chapters I explored the ways in which literature has reflected that far from being negated, the political romanticism of independence remained an integral part of the modern discourse of the early twentieth century in Latin America –especially in efforts to articulate difference from Europe and the US as the ground of national identity and anti-imperialist, “Bolivarian” Latin

Americanism. Through Borges, Carpentier, and Rivera I observed the ways in which a concept of nature, imagined as a historically autonomous realm, has served as the main ideological hinge between ostensibly opposed discourses of romanticism and positivism in Latin America. My examination of the intertwining of these discourses supported my claim that nature is the predominating myth of modernity, and in the previous chapter I observed how an anxiety about the status of nature as myth has become a powerful question in its own right. In this chapter I continue to develop the history of political romanticism in Latin American thought by turning to Augusto Roa Bastos's consideration of nation and literature in Paraguay after 1954.

Roa Bastos thought about the status of political romanticism in Latin America during the emergence of a so-called post-national global order in which the sovereignty of nation-states is increasingly contested by trans-national corporations, financial institutions, paramilitary groups, and illegal capitalist enterprises. Writing in exile, a state of migratory nomadism he experienced as a political exile during one of Latin America's first (and longest) post-war dictatorships, his work depicts the ways in which nation-state has failed to act as a shelter for man. In thinking about the nation-state in the age of exile Roa Bastos meditates at length on its origins. In three novels, *Yo el Supremo* (1974), *El fiscal* (1993), and its mirror text *Contravida* (1994), he explores the links and resonances between the nineteenth century political-romantic origins of the nation-state and the state of Paraguay under the dictator Alfredo Stroessner (in power from 1954—just after Carpentier published *Los pasos perdidos*—to 1989).<sup>1</sup> Through these novels, Roa Bastos develops a devastating critique of the entire history of the nation-state in Latin America,

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<sup>1</sup> Roa Bastos's effort to understand the Paraguayan political-social reality during the Stroessner era is closely linked to questions relating to the topic of a more general trend of Latin American dictatorship during this period. Readily apparent is a basic question of the relation between dictatorship and the dictator novel, a topic that has been discussed at length in the field. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría presents a valuable overview of questions relating to the emergence of dictatorships in Latin America and their treatment in the dictator novel in the extensive third footnote of his essay "Dictatorship of Rhetoric/the Rhetoric of Dictatorship: Carpentier, Garcia Marquez, and Roa Bastos" (1980). See also *Hacia el otoño de la patriarca: la novela del dictador en Hispanoamérica* (1983) by Juan Antonio Ramos, and *La novela del dictador en hispanoamérica* (1985) by Julio Calviño Iglesias.

and the political romanticism by which it was conceived. Focusing on the Paraguayan situation in particular, Roa Bastos shows the claim of autonomy, conceived as autonomy from the past and rooted in a state of nature, turning into the afterlife of the nation-state, its self-revelation as a ghostly non-place, a spectral utopia.

Roa Bastos's powerful critique of the nation-state focuses on its rootedness in the egoistic will to power. He carries out his thinking most patently in *Yo el Supremo*, by portraying Paraguay's founding father as a brilliant but deluded megalomaniac. This parody is a development of the self-critical thinking I read in Borges insofar as Roa Bastos both assumes and critiques the voice of the dictator, and by extension, the authority of the author. In later novels, his self-critical thinking shifts its focus to the vehicle by which he portrays the flaws of national autonomy, the novel itself, as an important part of the ongoing legacy of romanticism in Latin America. He contemplates this romantic genre, considering it to be akin to the nation-state, and the state of nature, as a kind of romantic non-place, or *utopia*. Especially in the latter two novels, the parallel utopias of literature and the nation-state are cast both as spaces of myth, and as a persisting romantic life in death.

In the ostensibly post-national era he eventually came to occupy, both the nation and literature have been conceived of as potentially redemptive spaces. As logics of the past alternative to those that take the irrepressible objectivity of the market as their axiom, they come to be seen as means by which the transnational sovereignty of capital might be resisted.<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger is especially important in reconsidering and renewing certain lines of romantic thinking after WWII in his identification of poetry as the primary means by which to resist

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<sup>2</sup> In *Nations Matter* (2007) Craig Calhoun articulates this sense of the redemptive potential of the nation-state.

modern technicity and instrumental reason.<sup>3</sup> We can detect traces of Heidegger's position today in considerations of Latin America within the framework of a post-national, neoliberal order that renew the redemptive potential of romantic national and literary realms. For example, insofar as Brett Levinson understands that the "Latin American consenso neoliberal [...] hinges on the total eradication of both language and knowledge [and] hence also of the literary that exposes that *there is language*," the contemporary value of literature continues to be conceived through its function of recalling the thinking of language, and the challenge this poses to shelter-building instrumentality of capitalist-scientific thought and the market's desire to impose itself as a total present (Levinson 29). Roa Bastos addresses this question of the redemptive potential of romantic thought in our time by casting this dream of redemption itself as a ghost or spectral utopia, the placeless no-place of non-time.

In the work of Roa Bastos it is very difficult to find any sense in which the utopia of the nation-state might serve as a locus of resistance to the destructive forces of modernity. Nevertheless, his position on literature is less decisively pessimistic. Even though for him it appears to be impossible to formulate a concept of literature divorced from a desire for national subjectivity, he remains dedicated to literature to the end. Through his consideration of the persistence of his literary writing practice in *El fiscal* and *Contravida* he suggests that it is possible to find something valuable to hold on to in Latin America's romantic inheritance. In his adherence to literature as a ghost of the ongoing promise of thinking carried out by the non-

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<sup>3</sup> Along the evolving trajectory of his essays—"The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935-36), "Why Poets?" (1946), and "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953)—it becomes clear that for Heidegger poetry, and the thinking/remembering of language it performs, will act as a force to counter the modern advent of destructive technification. A return to the truth of language will serve to resist modernity's narrative of positive progress through technical-scientific development, and constitute a knowledge counter to the supposed "objectivity" of the market.

professional, he maintains the original democratic potential of romanticism as the potential of undisciplined thought.

### Paraguay and the Definition of Utopia

For my investigation into the legacy of thinking about autonomy through nature, Paraguay provides a special case. Even in the colony, long before national independence in the nineteenth century, this viceroyalty had been viewed as an atemporal non-place, a cross between utopia and a paradisiacal state of nature. It is said to have served as the basis for Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), thus acting as the inspiration for an early modern political concept of the ideal, autonomous political entity. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), in its satirical consideration of the meaning of Leibnitz's "best of all possible worlds" registers this influence when the protagonists make a brief sojourn to the no-place of Paraguay's Jesuit reductions, which Carl Schmitt defined in *Nomos of the Earth* (1950) as the Catholic utopian experiment.<sup>4</sup> In *La tentación de la utopía: las misiones jesuíticas del Paraguay* (1991) Jean-Paul Duviol and Rubén Bareiro Saguier explore the ways in which the Jesuit Missions in Paraguay have been related to a concept of utopia since its inception. Roa Bastos introduces the volume, writing: "Las Misiones jesuíticas del Paraguay configuraron sin duda el experimento más original de la llamada <<conquista espiritual>> en el Nuevo Mundo... Algo de eso ocurrió, aunque en otra dirección, con las corrientes del pensamiento filosófico, jurídico, antropológico, político o sociológico que, a partir del siglo XVII y basados en los modelos del utopismo clásico, renacentista e iluminista, tomaron las Misiones como centro de sus teorías y especulaciones... la leyenda de un hipotético <<Reino

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<sup>4</sup> In "The Eldorado Episodes of Voltaire's *Candide* as an Intertext of Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo El Supremo*: A Utopia/Dystopia Relationship" (2009) Henry Cohen explores intertextuality between Voltaire and Roa Bastos.

de Dios sobre la tierra>>” (9).<sup>5</sup> For this reason, a study of Paraguay’s history itself facilitates an exposition of the theological basis of nature’s application to Enlightenment political thought. Roa Bastos helps us to see that apart from constituting an early affinity between the thinking of autonomy and the wilderness landscape, this history would help support the ongoing imagination of Paraguay as an autonomous state of nature after independence, perpetuating a theological thinking just below its Enlightenment facade. He conveys this in large part through an inquiry into the many possible meanings of the word utopia, and the way in which it has been applied toward thinking about Paraguay. By making ironic use of a tension between its etymological definition as “nowhere” (*ou topos*) and the definition that refers to the Enlightenment thought experiment that sought to imagine a perfect society—the redemption waiting at the end of a history of positive progress—he criticizes a utopian vision of Paraguay past and present.

In addition to forming a part of his criticism of the modern nation-state, the concept of utopia helps Roa Bastos register the parallel between literature and nation. In *El fiscal* the “no-place, no-time” of the nation-state is reflected in a vision of literature that is also a “no-place, no-time.” For Roa Bastos, utopia, nature, and myth are the shared content of nation and literature.

I address utopia’s ironic function in describing the links between nation and literature during the Stroessner period more in my analysis of *El fiscal* and *Contravida*. First I must show how in *Yo el Supremo* Roa Bastos portrays and critiques the original nationalization of the Paraguay as a circumscription of nature meant to create a utopia.

### The Paraguayan Nation-State as a Circumscription of Nature

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<sup>5</sup> *A Spiritual Conquest, the Jesuit Reductions of Paraguay, 1610-1767* (1942) (anonymously authored, but clearly written by the members of the clergy) elaborates a view of this rustic Catholic society comprised of Jesuit priests and the Guarani through comparisons with Plato’s Republic, More’s Utopia, Sidnet’s Arcadia, Campanella’s City of the Sun, and Bacon’s New Atlantis.

Along the lines laid out in Borges's essay "La muralla y los libros," which describes the creation of an Empire through the building of a wall and a burning of the library, Roa Bastos describes the invention of Paraguay as a circumscription of the nation both in space and time.<sup>6</sup> As I have shown, in Latin America this doubled enclosure becomes synonymous with a circumscription of the space/time of nature, and in his second novel *Yo el Supremo*, Roa Bastos reflects this understanding of the origin of the nation-state and elaborates it at length.

*Yo el Supremo* presents itself as the lost manuscripts of the Supreme Dictator Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, who first proclaimed Paraguayan national autonomy against both Argentina and Spain in 1811. It is a novel with little by way of plot. Much of the text takes the form of the dictator's recollections of founding the nation. He writes mainly in response to the defamatory pasquinades that circulate the country and challenge his authority, as well as historiographic accounts that depict him in a negative light. Consequently many of his recollections spiral into rambling tirades. The book is a compilation of these fictional musings, taken from three separate incomplete documents, or "lost" manuscripts: notes redacted for Francia's unpublished autobiography, the dictator's personal notes, and the "circular perpetua" – an ongoing communiqué from the dictator to the people. The novel is humorous, its outrageous depiction of Francia being manifestly parodic. Insofar as the reader finds Francia continually giving voice to concerns about his legacy, and his dissatisfaction with the existing (and prophetically, the soon to be existing) historical record—not to mention assertions made by the defamatory pasquinades—the novel takes its own "historiographic" depiction of Francia as an explicit subject for contemplation. Along these lines, scholars have cited the main contribution

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<sup>6</sup> In the prologue to a collection of the work by Raphael Barrett, Roa Bastos alludes to Borges by referring to the natural land by which Paraguay is isolated as "una muralla china en Paraguay." He writes: "Una isla, sí, pero rodeada de tierra por la inmensidad de las selvas, de los desiertos infranqueables. 'La inmensidad nos tiene prisioneros', reconoció muy pronto Barrett (28).

of the text to be its simultaneous recuperation of the history of national independence and deconstruction of historiographic discourse.<sup>7</sup> Beyond these important functions, in its fictional formulation of the dictator's thoughts on independence, *Yo el Supremo* also revisits, reconsiders, and lampoons the philosophical ground of the claim of national autonomy 160 years after it began to be elaborated. As such, *Yo el Supremo* is a critique of the creation of Paraguay as a circumscription of nature.

Exile from the brutally repressive dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner is the basic conditioning circumstance of Roa Bastos's inquiry into national integrity and autonomy, and the fictional Francia must be read as a stand-in for Stroessner.<sup>8</sup> Despite important differences

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<sup>7</sup> In *Literature and Subjection* (2008) Horacio Legras maintains that the crucial characteristic of Roa Bastos's work is the way in which it relates to historical discourse, arguing that he performs a "popular subjectification of history" (161). With the word "subjectification," Legras refers to the way in which Roa Bastos depicts the development of a personal relationship with the past, liberally (often against the official record) incorporating it into the present. Legras understands Roa Bastos's approach as a response to the many traumatic events that have brought about a "collapse of national memory" and caused Paraguay to be, a "country without literature" (161; 160). He observes that even as Roa Bastos deconstructs literature and authors in their role as "intermediaries between a modernizing state and a disenfranchised people," for him literature remains national (161).

Jean Franco notes a similar feature of Roa Bastos's approach to history, and casting it explicitly in terms of positivism, she writes: "lo que resulta de interés para nosotros aquí es que la relación entre el presente y el pasado aparece siendo radicalmente distinta de la concebida desde las etapas positivistas del progreso humano y la ilustración, en las que inevitablemente se empuja al pasado a una posición subordinada..." (193).

In "Verba Volant, Scripta Manent: Orality and Literacy in *I the Supreme*" (2010) Gustavo Verdesio states that a "deconstruction of historiographic discourse" is among the primary objectives of *Yo el Supremo*, perhaps Roa Bastos's most important work (147).

Just as Roa Bastos seeks to recover and incarnate past events in his writing, he also invents, creating confusion about what is and is not part of the fiction. Even as his novels incorporate real scholarship of the history of Paraguay (often without any formal citation, a kind of mild plagiarism), they also misquote the official record and recount events that never occurred. Often, these liberties take on symbolic meaning (as in the crucifixion of Solano López), or display a desacralizing irreverence toward historical figures (when, for example, he describes the only living relative of Solano López as a sinister doppelganger of Stephen Hawkins known as "El Bastardo" in *El fiscal*). For an investigation of the use of archival sources in *Yo el Supremo* see Daniel Balderston's "Roa's *Julio César*: Commentaries and Reflections" (1990). For a discussion of Roa's fabrication of event, refer to the section of *Literature and Subjection* in which Legras discusses the fabled destruction of Sapukai in the early novel *Hijo de hombre* (1960). "Rewriting in Roa Bastos's Late Fiction" (2010) by Jorge Carlos Guerrero reflects on this motif in *El fiscal*. See also *La verdad y la mentira en Augusto Roa Bastos* (2007) by Rodrigo Colmán Llano.

<sup>8</sup> The validity of a comparison between Francia and Stroessner, and the possibility reading the comparison in *Yo el Supremo*, were important questions around the time of the book's publication. In "La *dictadura* del Dr. Francia en *Yo el Supremo* de Augusto Roa Bastos" (1976) Carlos Luis Casabianca takes issue with an interpretation that reads the text as a commentary on the 20<sup>th</sup> century dictatorship, criticizing the way in which another scholar, Artur Lundkvist, draws a connection between the "encierro y estancamiento" of Paraguay under Stroessner and the closing of the borders by Dr. Francia as it is depicted by Roa Bastos in his novel. He writes, "Lundkvist no distingue que la *dictadura* de Stroessner es la negación completa de la *dictadura* del doctor Francia, su opuesto absoluto" (52). He

between their economic policies, Roa Bastos emphasizes their shared adherence to a theological, feudal concept of sovereignty as divine right to stand outside the law, and their shared claim of being the indispensable catalyst of Paraguayan national consolidation. In this way, he casts Stroessner as a historical return to Francia's founding dictatorship.

This comparison between the dictators is not merely the fancy of the left-leaning novelist. The Colorado Party itself, ideological engine of the Stroessner regime, sought to cultivate a popular imagination of Stroessner as Francia.<sup>9</sup> In a straightforward piece of party propaganda such as "The Revolutionary Spirit of the Colorado Party" (1983), the future vice-president Luís María Argaña (assassinated in 1999) compares the dictators directly, writing: "in moments of need the nation produced men such as Francia, the Lópezes and today the figure of General Stroessner" (246). In light this comparison between Francia and Stroessner it becomes clear that *Yo el Supremo* can also be read as a spoof of Colorado propaganda. Additional parallels between the texts reinforce this reading. For example, in this particular piece Argaña complains about "the lies told about José Gaspar de Francia and Francisco Solano López," and describes Paraguayan national heroes as "superhuman figures" (245). Such complaints are echoed in the fictional Francia's autobiographical attempt to right the historical record in *Yo el Supremo*, and his manifold claims of God-like power.

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then proceeds to list the various differences between Stroessner and de Francia as proof that Roa Bastos does not suggest a parallel between the leaders, articulating the most important of these differences in his observation that "Mientras el doctor Francia estuvo al frente de un Estado ejemplar por la defensa intransigente de la soberanía nacional, Stroessner es el Jefe de una dictadura entregada por completo a una potencia imperialista y neo-colonial" (53). In "Augusto Roa Bastos's Trilogy as Postmodern Practice" (1998) Helene Carol Weldt-Basson, too, observes the stark difference in the international economic policies of Stroessner and de Francia, writing that if *Yo el Supremo* "repeatedly show's Dr. Francia's attempts to fight off British, Brazilian, and Argentine imperialism during the nineteenth century" it would constitute a contrast to "imperialistic events sanctioned by Stroessner, such as the Brazilian construction of the dams in Itaipú" (342). Retrospectively, considering the explicit discussion of Stroessner in *El fiscal*, it is easier to read *Yo el Supremo* as an allegorical imagination of Stroessner.

<sup>9</sup> In "A Decade of Electoral Democracy: Continuity, Change, and Crisis in Paraguay" (2000) Peter Lambert writes: "Although Alfredo Stroessner may have wielded immense personal power in what has been termed a sultanistic regime [...], the *stronato* was based upon a triangular relationship of power between the armed forces, the government and the Colorado Party, with Stroessner as the unifying axis in his role as President, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and Honorary President of the Colorado Party" (381).

Insofar as the fictional dictator is obsessed with Enlightenment thinkers and fetishizes the French Revolution, his despotism emphasizes the ironic sense in which “Enlightenment is totalitarian,” and points to the failure of modern thought to banish myth and become truly secular (Adorno 4).<sup>10</sup> Thus, the identity between Stroessner and Francia indicates not only a “poverty of progress,” but also a return to *the same* that casts Paraguay as a place of myth in which time is an illusion. The novel articulates the way in which the secularization of the Enlightenment and its view of progressive history conceal a mythical history of repetition. In so doing, Roa Bastos builds a sense that the original dream of utopia, founded on a claim of autonomy from the past in the circumscription of nation both in time and space becomes a curse, the basis of its languishing stagnation.

In *Yo el Supremo*, the dictator understands his most important legacy to be his single-handed creation of Paraguay as an autonomous nation-state. The novel altogether—as a compilation of his manuscripts—appears mainly dedicated to this articulation of a belief in the profound importance of Paraguay’s attainment of self-determination and autonomy (from Argentina in particular). In reference to this autonomy from Buenos Aires, he proclaims:

Abolida la dominación colonial [...] la representación del poder supremo vuelve a la Nación en su plenitud. Cada pueblo se considera entonces libre y tiene derecho de gobernarse por sí mismo libremente [...] Se engañaría cualquiera que llegase a imaginar que la intención de Paraguay es entregarse al arbitrio ajeno y hacer dependiente su suerte de otra voluntad. (323)

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<sup>10</sup> In his denunciation of his rivals—“embusteros” and “bribones”—he repeatedly cites their ignorance of Enlightenment thinkers of the French Revolution as the basis of their incompetence, writing, for example: “En cuanto los oligarcones ninguno de ellos ha leído una sola línea de Solón, Rousseau, Raynal, Montesquieu, Rollin, Voltaire, Condorcet, Diderot” (135).

For more on the Supremo’s obsession with Enlightenment see the essay by Horacio Legras “Tomas Moro, Rousseau, y el Marquis de Sade en la biblioteca de *Yo el Supremo*” (1994).

While this proclamation of the national right to self-determination sounds reasonable, and perhaps run of the mill, it soon turns into something more radical, and we find the Supremo grappling with a vague awareness that his efforts to bring about Paraguayan autonomy are informed by an unrealistic utopian thinking. The Supremo intimates that he sees the invention of Paraguay as a revolution: “Lo bueno, lo cierto a pesar de todo, es que aquí la Revolución no se ha perdido” (445).<sup>11</sup> To what other lost revolution he refers is hard to say, but the reader finds it difficult to trust his arrogant assessment.<sup>12</sup> The reader becomes even more dubious when he elaborates by saying that “El país entero está rebosando riquezas” (445). Such a claim could perhaps be construed metaphorically so as to sound reasonable, but soon the Supremo begins to articulate his sense of the revolution’s success in unabashedly fantastic terms: “Vendrá el día en que los paraguayos no podrán dar un paso sin pisar sobre montones de onzas de oro” (445). Interestingly, this claim that the Paraguayan streets will soon be paved with gold refers to a sarcastic, jesting remark made by Antonio Manuel Correia de Cámara, the Brazilian ambassador, in mocking the Supremo’s own feeling for his revolution. The Supremo affirms Cámara’s mock prediction, either unaware of the fact that it was a joke, or not caring. He frames Cámara’s insult

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<sup>11</sup> In *Paraguay’s Autonomous Revolution 1810-1840*. Richard Alan White argues that Francia’s reforms can indeed be understood as a populist revolution, noting his remarkable success in reducing corruption, maintaining balanced and self-sustaining budgets, and establishing state-run industries such as the manufacture of firearms to reduce dependence on outside suppliers. Taxes were radically reduced, the loss in income offset through the confiscation of lands formerly held by the Spanish crown, the Spanish and criollo oligarchy, and the Church. “Francia distributed much of this land in a radical agrarian reform, while converting the remainder into numerous state-owned and operated estancias, which became a major source of national production and revenue for the government” (110).

<sup>12</sup> We can wonder if the failure of other revolutions refers only to revolutions that might have occurred by the 1830s, such as the US, Haitian, French Revolutions, or if he refers to future revolutions as well, prophetically commenting on the Soviet Union, or Cuba. One can certainly read a comparison between Paraguay’s revolution to the French Revolution, by which the former becomes the true expression of the latter, superseding it, becoming more legitimate than the model of revolutionary legitimacy itself, much as Menard seeks to supersede Cervantes. The Supremo, suggests the primacy of Paraguayan liberalism over the French while lambasting the writer of the anonymous pasquinade, casting his revolution as a continuation of the Comunero Revolution led by José de Antequera starting in 1721. He writes: “Les quema la sangre que haya restaurado el poder del Común en la ciudad, en las villas, en los pueblos; que haya continuado aquel movimiento, el primero verdaderamente revolucionario que estalló en estos Continentes, antes aún que en la inmensa patria de Washington, de Franklin, de Jefferson; inclusive antes que la Revolución Francesa” (126).

in terms of a vision of Paraguay as utopia, writing: “Por tiempos, los vaticinios de taimados farsantes aciertan más que las predicciones de los visionarios que sólo visionan elementos inverosímiles producidos por la ilusión crónica de la Utopía” (445). Evidently, Correia de Cámara’s vision of a future in which the streets are paved with gold does not contain the “elementos inverosímiles” of a utopian vision. Francia orders his amanuensis to write: “Pon: los paraguayos estamos a punto de caminar sobre el oráculo empedrado de onzas de oro que nos predijo aquel portugués-brasileiro” (446). But soon, with increasingly vertiginous incoherence, he goes back on his seemingly critical awareness of the existence of a chronic dream of utopia, appearing to approvingly affirm the words of another set of enemies who characterized Paraguay through this dream. He remarks that the brothers Robertson, English capitalists who wanted to open Paraguay to European markets, had indeed understood the Paraguayan revolution: “El Paraguay es una Utopía real y Su excelencia el Solón de los tiempos modernos, me adulaban los hermanos Robertson, en la mala época de los comienzos” (later after being released by the dictator, they would go on to write the account of their captivity in Paraguay entitled *Francia’s Reign of Terror: being a sequel to Letters on Paraguay* [1839]) (457). Later, he ascribes to yet another utopian framework that would appear to go against his stated allegiances, Paul’s idea of the spiritual Jerusalem as the unifying utopia of the Christian nation, re-territorializing it in Paraguay: “Vamos por las calles de Asunción, no entre una multitud de judezno, sino de un pueblo de fervorosos adeptos; los hijos de esta roja Jerusalén sudamericana: nuestra Jerusalén Terrenal de Asunción” (347).<sup>13</sup> Even when the dictator tries, he cannot prevent his thinking about Paraguay’s autonomy from turning into a dream of utopia.

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<sup>13</sup> Roa Bastos invokes Paul’s exegesis of Genesis, his Allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians, in which he inverts the Jewish reading of their own text. This part of Genesis concerns the two wives of Abraham. In Genesis the child of Hagar, Ishmael, is said to be the origin of a “great nation,” this being interpreted as the Arab people (Genesis 21:18). The descendents of Sara’s son Isaac on the other hand become, another great nation, the Jews. This

The dictator makes it clear that the success of the Paraguayan revolution and its subsequent attainment of the long dreamed for utopia is a consequence of a walling-in of the nation both spatially and temporally. If there is a policy for which the real Francia is most famous, it was the way in which his enforcement of national boundaries (in response to Argentine aggression in particular, including an invasion attempt led by Manuel Belgrano) isolated the country, effectively shutting down international trade, and causing Paraguay to be seen as an entirely closed state, “una isla rodeada de tierra, [...] un país completamente cerrado a las nocivas y permisivas influencias foráneas” (*Fiscal* 279). Additionally, his imprisonment of the above-mentioned brothers Robertson, as well as the French botanist Aimé Bonpland (who decided to stay once released) –not to mention the ambiguous asylum/exile of Uruguayan revolutionary José Artigas—only furthers an imagination of Paraguay as ambiguous prison-paradise.<sup>14</sup> Roa Bastos focuses on this peculiarity of Francia’s rule, depicting it as an attempt to create the national entity as an impenetrable fortress. In so doing, he recalls the crisis of subjectivity that I have already discussed in the previous chapters of this work. The Supreme dictator is driven to formulate the self-sufficient and absolutely immanent subject so desired by

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description serves as a form of genealogical record keeping, a very important function in that the “authority” granted to the Jews passed down and reaffirmed through history by a series of covenants. In order to extend this status to those who do not fall into this lineage, Paul overturns this sense of physical genealogy, replacing it with a spiritual one through allegorical reading. For Paul, because Hagar is a slave, and her child was conceived in the typical way—of “the flesh”—her descendents, allegorically interpreted, are the Jews, who perform literal readings of fleshly genealogy. Sara, on the other hand, because she was free and conceived through a divine intervention—an act of the spirit—is the mother of a Christian nation that is not defined by blood, and which “corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother” (Galatians 4:25). The Jerusalem above is the no-place, or utopia of the Christian national essence.

<sup>14</sup> Roa Bastos develops a deeper sense of Paraguay as a prison—a view of the “people” as being constituted not just through their will, but through their imprisonment within the boundary of the state—when Supremo describes preventing mass emigration: “Si no hubiera sido por mi Gobierno habrían emigrado en masa. Se iban en legiones, hasta que fulminé la prohibición: ¡Se quedan, culebras migratorias, o les hago dejar el cuero a las hormigas!” (448).

In his introduction to *El dolor Paraguayo* Roa Bastos describes this state after the War of the Triple Alliance as well, describing that when Raphael Barrett arrived in Paraguay at the turn of the century, “supo muy bien a qué isla llegaba: no a un Paraíso terrestre sino a un vasto penal en el sentido de un vasto terrenal de penas en el que crecía lozana la cotidiana reforestación del sufrimiento, y también en el sentido de tierra penitenciaria” (27).

More recently, Graham Green’s description of Paraguay under Stroessner entitled “The Worm Inside the Lotus Blossom” (1969) also depicts the country as prison-paradise.

the romantics, and in various ways the dictator defines himself—and by extension, the nation—as being autonomous both in space and time. Just as his description of Paraguay’s utopian revolution became delirious, Francia’s attempt to articulate his application of secular Enlightenment ideals in circumscribing the autonomous national republic only moves him further into the depths of religion, myth, and the occult.

Here, it is useful to examine a very complicated section in which the Supremo attempts to describe the various ways in which he will circumscribe the nation as an autonomous, integral, and impenetrable space. The section can be read as another instantiation of the *search myth* that I discussed at length in the previous chapter, describing a disastrous expedition into the northern wilderness of Paraguay known as the Chaco in order to search out and retrieve a meteorite that crashed there. It becomes necessary to make this trip to the wilderness not as a searching return to origins (though the “aerolith” can be read as the elemental material of an ancient, cosmic origin), but in order to hunt down and capture that body which would dare challenge the integrity of the nation-state by violating its sovereign borders.

The Supremo describes his thoughts when seeing the falling meteor streak across the sky on the eve of the Revolution:

comprendí entonces que sólo arrancando esta especie de hilo del azar de la trama de los acontecimientos es como puede hacerse posible lo imposible [...] En alguna parte había leído que las estrellas errantes, los meteoros, los aerolitos, son la representación del azar en el universo. La fuerza del poder consiste entonces, pensé, en cazar el azar; *re-tenerlo* atrapado. (206)

For the Supremo, the meteor represents an element of randomness in the universe, the unforeseeable object-event that falls from the sky, which would seem to operate beyond the

purview of man's influence. At the very least, this object disputes the sovereignty of the nation's borders, challenging the enforcer of Paraguayan national integrity (the Supremo) by calling his power into question. In addition to its challenge to Paraguayan sovereignty, Francia senses how this meteor is problematic on a deeper level, as the representation of a universal contingency whose suppression is necessary for man's attainment of true power over nature. Like Pierre Menard, who seeks to banish contingency from history by replicating Cervantes's profoundly contingent act of writing the *Quijote*, the Supremo understands that the force of true power consists in precluding the unforeseeable event. Otherwise, the integrity both of the nation and the autonomous subject remains illusory, a mirage that might any time be dispelled by that thing which one day, unexpectedly, falls from the sky.

The Supremo addresses the problem of universal contingency by sending out an expedition to hunt down the meteor. But prior to relating the details of this fiasco, through a fantastical dialogue between himself and seventeenth century philosopher, scientist, and contemplator of nature Blaise Pascal, the Supremo intimates another manner in which he seeks to attain the integrity of the nation, which we must read as running parallel to his attempt to take control of contingency in Paraguay. He will nationalize the church and impose a forced secularization by replacing the Catholic God with a concept of nature.

As Borges suggests in his essay "La esfera de Pascal," Pascal's importance in the history of secularization is comparable to that of Baruch Spinoza, who understood God and Nature to be one in the same.<sup>15</sup> If Pascal saw only Nature where he sought to see God, it makes sense that the

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<sup>15</sup> "La esfera de Pascal" accounts for the many instances in the history of thought when God is metaphorically described as being akin to "una esfera bien redondeada, cuya fuerza es constante desde el centro en cualquier dirección" (PC 134). While it appears at first that the sphere is a metaphor, something rhetorically employed to provide a better sense of the primary concept being described—God—Borges is interested in the constancy of the metaphor of the sphere itself, in its historical transcendence. First the metaphor is employed by Xenophanes to describe a Greek God. Later, with the advent of Christianity, the metaphor is employed to describe the Christian God. But most striking of all is when the concept of the infinite sphere becomes so transformed that it starts to

Supremo would confer with him about the nature-based political theology of his new nation-state. He compares himself to the French thinker also along the lines of a mutual enmity toward the Jesuits, and then asks him about the concept of nature he formulated:<sup>16</sup>

Dime, compadre Blas, tú que fuiste el primero en desjesuitar la Orden sin provinciales temores, dime, contéstame a esto: Lo que te espantaba en la esfera infinita cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna [i.e. Nature-God, my comment] ¿no fue acaso la infinita memoria de que está armada?  
(207)

We find this question about the memory of nature intimating the Supremo's own preoccupations, insofar as the purpose of replacing God with nature is to *forget* the past. He wishes to use nature in order to secure a rift with Spain and the Church, and so its definition as total memory would conflict with the Supremo's aim. Furthermore, building on the analysis of the second chapter in which we read "Funes el memorioso" as a fable about the equivalence of total memory to total oblivion, the Supremo seems to imply some awareness of the dangers represented by the totality desired in his invention of the national subject.

Blaise responds:

Tal vez, tal vez [...] te sientes como extraviado en este remoto cantón de la naturaleza [...] ¿Qué es un hombre en lo infinito? ¿Qué es pues al fin el hombre en la naturaleza? Nada, comparado con el infinito; todo, comparado con la nada:

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function, for Pascal, as a metaphor for the *absence* of God. Of Pascal Borges writes: "El espacio absoluto que había sido una liberación para Bruno, fue un laberinto y un abismo para Pascal. Este aborrecía el universo y hubiera querido adorar a Dios, pero Dios, para él, era menos real que el aborrecido universo" (*PC* 136). Once God's negation is inscribed into the sphere, the sphere itself, as the unifying, transcendent concept, seems to displace God. Pascal's dictum is as follows: "La *naturaleza* es una esfera infinita, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna" (Borges, *PC* 137 my emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> For the fictional Francia, the Jesuits embody the meddling of the Church in state affairs, while for Pascal, they are purveyors of casuistry, the faulty ethical thinking he opposed in *Lettres provinciales* (1656).

Un término medio entre nada y todo. El principio y el fin de todas la cosas están ocultos para él en un secreto impenetrable. (208)

Naturally, the Supremo is not satisfied with this response. In expressing the limitation of man's power to comprehend the universe, and the persistence of that which is incommensurable, he detects in Blaise's view the ongoing presence of God in the nature that was supposed to be free of the European religious past, not to mention Catholic influence. It seems that he had hoped Pascal would affirm that Nature forgets God, and so he responds brusquely: "Por ahora Dios no me ocupa. Me preocupa dominar el azar" (208). Of course, the Supremo is in denial, the desire to dominate chance being none other than the desire to attain the power of God.

A section that appears later in the novel, in which he distills a national (political) theology into a concept of the land with a new national catechism, can be read as a continuation of this section. He describes the new God of Paraguay as the territory circumscribed by the borders of the state. In reference to the new national religion, he writes of Paraguay's youth:

La educación que reciben es nacional. La iglesia, la religión, también lo son. Los niños aprenden en el Catecismo Patrio que Dios no es un fantasma ni los santos una tribu de negras supersticiones con corona de latón dorado. Sienten que si Dios es algo más que una palabra muy corta está en la tierra que pisan, en el aire que respiran [...] Dios por atrios, calles, mercados, pueblos, villas, ciudades y desiertos. Formados en el seno de la tierra la consideran su verdadera madre...

(446)

The Supremo identifies the land as the new national God, and describes it further in terms of its "natural" elements: "[n]ubes, pájaros, animales, hasta las criaturas inanimadas [que] nos predicán su lealtad al terruño" (447). In nationalizing "natural" elements of the land—taking possession of

them for their economic exploitation—he territorializes nature as the basis of that which is national. “Aquí he nacionalizado todo para todos. Árboles, plantas tintóreas, medicinales, maderas preciosas, minerales. Hasta los arbustos de yerbamate he nacionalizado...” (446). Through his conversation with Pascal, we can read the nationalizing enclosure as the act of taking possession not just of the land, but of nature/God, the gesture that has been iterated time and again so as to become paradigmatic of Latin American independence thinking.

As we have begun to see, the act of taking ownership of the incommensurable is also allegorized in the capture of the meteor. Through this allegory, Francia continues to depict himself as the despotic warden of a massive prison. He does not merely order the capture of the meteor, but rather writes: “Ordené que lo trajeran *prisionero*” (209 my emphasis). But freedom from contingency is secured only at great expense. Over five years, and at the cost of over 200 lives, the 250,000-pound meteorite is found, dug up (“tuvieron que cavar más de cien varas hasta encontrarlo”), and elaborately transported to the capital (209). Due to its temperament (the meteor has a will of its own) the only way it can be propelled over the last portion of the river journey is with the help of champion swimmers: “Al cabo, la mayor bajante del río Paraguay de cien años a esta parte, permitió a los efectivos de línea arrastrarlo sobre cureñas especialmente fabricadas, tiradas por mil yuntas de bueyes y por más de mil soldados elegidos entre los mejores nadadores del ejército” (210, 211). Once it is in his possession, the Supremo chains the stone to his chair. “Está ahí. Meteoro-azar engrillado, amarrado a mi silla” (211). It is as if by capturing this emissary of chance, he asserts his authority over it. He believes that by locking up the violating agent, he will immunize the nation against further incursion from without. In addition to taking the stone hostage, he circumcises it (“Circuncidé el aerolito”), further submitting it to a kind of divine domination (212). Not without a certain magical alchemy, he trades circumcision

for circumscription, placing upon the stone the mark of the covenant between God and his nation, the sacrificial sign by which the chosen manifest their belonging to the Lord. By circumcising the stone, he seeks to bend it to his will, and thereby make it into the talisman that will help the nation attain true autonomy.

Beyond the capture of the “aerolith,” nationalization of the Church, and the substitution of territorial Nature for God in the national religion, the Supremo posits a mystical basis of Paraguayan national integrity, describing his own status as a semi-divine being through an autopoetic claim of self-birth, to which he refers throughout the novel. At times his claim of having given birth to himself appears to be rhetorical, an exaggerated expression of his Enlightenment principles. For example, he philosophizes, “¿No puede uno acaso nacer de uno mismo? La única maternidad seria es la del hombre. La única maternidad real y posible. Yo he podido ser concebido sin mujer por la sola fuerza de mi pensamiento” (250). Here, the claim of self-birth casts the Supremo’s intellectualism as a base celebration of a male prowess. But over the course of the novel it becomes clear that this denial of his mother, more than mere chauvinism, reflects a deeper claim of existential immanence and self-sufficiency. He soon describes his motherlessness radically, as a divine historical transcendence, claiming that rather than being born, he formulated himself alchemically inside a skull—his “casa-matriz”—*ex nihilo* (274).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> An even deeper exaggeration of the Supremo’s sense that he stands outside of time and space is expressed in his understanding that he is “el Arca de Paraguay,” the transcendental, total *container* of Paraguay’s self-sufficient immanence (591). Like Noah’s Ark, which hermetically bore living Creation through the flood for the foundation of a new historical epoch completely divorced from the past, in death the Supremo will transcend the coming historical catastrophe—a “Tercer Diluvio,” probably referring to the War of the Triple Alliance—and mythically bear the essence of the nation across time (490). Here Roa Bastos appears to allude to Colorado Party propaganda, which portrayed Stroessner as a mythical reincarnation, or metempsychosis of Francia.

Roa Bastos develops the motif of self-birth in subsequent novels *El fiscal* and *Contravida* with the figure of Gaspar Cristaldo, the narrator’s schoolteacher, who also claims not to have been born. Borges, too, makes observations regarding a similar motif explored at length in *El fiscal*, belly button worship, and belly button absence.

This assertion of self-birth expresses the very clear sense in which the Supremo sees himself as the embodiment of the autonomous nation. Akin to Hobbes's Leviathan, he is a semi-divine stand-in for God who incarnates both the nation and the state, thereby suturing them. His understanding of his birth as a self-creative act of will reinforces the sense in which he *is* Paraguay—the self-originating nation-state, autonomous from both Argentina and Spain.

While the claim of self-birth expresses how Francia understands his sovereignty through a Hobbesian political theology, we must also read it here as a straightforward parody of the Creole's romantic claim of autonomy from the motherland, Spain. The absurdity of Francia's characterization of his origins indicates Roa Bastos's critical view of the Creole claim of cultural autonomy after independence. Articulated at the level of the individual, the claim of freedom from origins is shown to be an outrageous, patently insane belief of literal self-birth. Embodied by the Supremo in this way, Roa Bastos emphasizes all that is specious about an idea of the nation that claims to create itself through a total rupture. Furthermore, the description of self-birth in a skull—an alchemical maneuver—suggests the Supremo's proclaimed adherence to Enlightenment values to be a lie, a façade of clean rationality concealing something old, dark, and weird. Roa Bastos suggests that more than Enlightenment political science, magical, mythical, and occult forms of thought undergird the claim of autonomy and the circumscription of the national subjectivity. If there is magical realism in America, it is not a product of an encounter with indigenous irrationality, but rather stems from the original equivocal claim made by Creoles in proclaiming their national autonomy. In these ways *Yo el Supremo* sharply critiques the origin of the Latin American nation-state, casting the Creole claim of autonomy

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In *Otras inquisiciones* he quotes Sir Thomas Brown as having stated, “*The man without a navel yet lives in me*” (PC 151).

supposed to be an expression of egalitarian Enlightenment values as a form of crackpot mysticism.

Roa Bastos defines the Supremo as one who seeks to invent Paraguayan autonomy by walling himself in to the utopian no-place, no-time of nature, and we have seen the extent to which this involved disavowing history, contingency, and the past. I will soon show how in the subsequent novels he elaborates on his criticism of Paraguay by casting it also as a site of mythical time where progressive history is suspended. Before moving on to examine these novels I will show how in *Yo el Supremo* Roa Bastos is already developing an idea of Paraguay as a site of mythical time.

### Mythical Time in Paraguay

In *Yo el Supremo* Roa Bastos begins to elaborate a view of Paraguay as site of myth and a corresponding view of history that conflicts with a progressive, positivist perspective.

Albeit obliquely, *Yo el Supremo* draws a comparison between Francia and Stroessner whereby Paraguay would appear to stagnate in a framework of progressive history. Artur Lundkvist reads the novel in this way, taking Stroessner and Francia to be comparable insofar as they both turn Paraguay into a site of “encierro y estancamiento” (Casabianca 52). It is easy enough to see how Stroessner’s “sultanate”—a term applied by Marcial Riquelme—embodies a feudal model of social organization, and could thus be construed through certain historiographic models as being stuck in the past.<sup>18</sup> Such a view strongly resonates with the modernist thinking

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<sup>18</sup> In “Toward a Weberian Characterization of the Stroessner Regime” Marcial Riquelme quotes Weber as follows: “Stroessner’s regime was closer to what Max Weber (1978: 232) called sultanism: ‘Where domination is primarily traditional, even though it is exercised by virtue of the ruler’s personal autonomy, it will be called *patrimonial authority*; where it indeed operates primarily on the basis of discretion, it will be called *sultanism*’ ... incentive to loyalty lies not in the ruler’s personal charisma, but in his ability to dispense and suspend material rewards and privileges” (239). In *The Stroessner Era* (1990) Carlos Miranda details the way in which this sultanism was perpetuated by a cooptation in which “military officers became heavily involved in the thriving contraband trade”

laid out by José Carlos Mariátegui in *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928), in which he identifies the “subsistencia y de tenaces y extensos residuos de feudalidad” as a serious impediment to progress in Latin America (12). And indeed, insofar as the present work understands nature and the claim of cultural autonomy as the ideology that helped translate the logic of empire (a fundamentally feudal logic) into the modern political *nomos* of the nation-state, the *caudillismo* of the Stroessner regime can be interpreted as an expression of the perpetuation of feudalism in Latin America.

But rather than simply leaving it to the reader to make this interpretation through the framework of a positivist view of history, Roa Bastos complicates the matter, developing through his characters an alternative historical framework by which to understand the relation between Stroessner and Francia: the understanding of history maintained in mythical thinking. He does not develop this view of history uncritically. In *Yo el Supremo*, it is expressed in a semi-coherent manner, through the raving of the dictator. Still, it is significant that Roa Bastos goes out of his way to develop a perspective by which Stroessner’s “repetition” of history in his embodiment of Francia is not stagnation, but rather, a reflection of the basic structure of history. This gesture is a manifestation of the parodic method that Roa Bastos employs, by which he implicates himself in the very phenomena he seeks to critique.<sup>19</sup> In *El fiscal* and *Contravida*, he illustrates the connection between the mythical view of history he ascribes to the dictator in *Yo el Supremo* and the literary discourse he himself uses to deliver his critique. In this way, he shows that the stagnation of Paraguay is not just a matter of its failure to successfully move forward in

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114). See also *Paraguay under Stroessner* (1980) by Paul H. Lewis, *Stroessner y el stronismo* (2004) by Roberto Paredes, and *The Transition to Democracy in Paraguay* (1997) the collection of essays edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson.

<sup>19</sup> For a better understanding of the philosophical ground of Roa Bastos’s self-critical method—his ongoing portrayal of similarities and identities between ostensible enemies—refer to *The Politics of Friendship* (1994) by Jacques Derrida. In this work, Derrida deconstructs the difference between friends and enemies, expanding on a passage from *Human All Too Human* (1878) in which Nietzsche appropriates and inverts the meaning of Aristotle’s phrase, “Friends, there are no friends!” by responding, “Enemies, there are no enemies!”

history, but rather, an effect of a much deeper problem related to the structure/ideology of modernity rooted in a belief in rupture.

Unsystematically, the fictional Francia professes a mythical view of history that is not compatible with a positivist understanding of progress. The view is suggested most readily through his perception of affinities and similarities between himself and historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon, Jesus, and Moses, to which he refers throughout the text. Rather than simply noting a shared attribute or similar experience, his affinity with these figures represents something deeper than mere resemblance. Supremo sees his relation to these figures as one of repetition, embodiment, or metempsychosis, as a figural or mythical relation.

The mythical relation is a metaphysical affinity reflected in allegorical, figural, or typological correlation.<sup>20</sup> In a secular mode, we can see that the story of Oedipus is a myth insofar his story is historically transcendent, repeated and embodied by others throughout time; Freud used Oedipus to describe the relationship between male children and their parents, as a narrative embodied not just by one man, but by countless men throughout history. Clearly, behind Freud's technique is a much older theological practice. In Christian allegorical reading, for example, the transhistorical relation perceived by way of *figura* attained a status of truth.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Through Foucault, we see the romanticism-positivism binary expressed in epistemological terms as a difference between knowing through similarity and knowing through difference—myth being thought that seeks only to recognize similarities and affinities, and modern science being thought seeks to create taxonomies based on difference. Of similitude he writes: “Up unto the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them” (17). In the third chapter of *The Order of Things* Foucault identifies the *Quijote* as a spoof of this mode of thought, describing his mad journey as a “quest for similitudes” (47). In contradistinction to this mode of thought, “*taxonomia*” establishes the table of visible differences” and along with *mathesis* and *genesis* forms the basis of modern science (74).

<sup>21</sup> For more on the concept of *figura* informing my sense of Roa Bastos's vision of mythical time see Eric Auerbach's essay “Figura” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959). Auerbach traces the many meanings of the word and its uses throughout history, describing the transformation of its meaning, from something's plastic shape, to eidetic correlation, the relationship between a model and a copy, and prophetic (pre)figuration... He attributes its original use as a word for prophecy to Tertullian when he reads Joshua as a (pre)figuration of Jesus. “Just as Joshua and not Moses led the people of Israel into the promised land of Palestine,

Indeed, Catholicism maintains that the figural similarities between individuals across time is not a superficial coincidence, but rather the sign of an underlying metaphysical or spiritual identity between them. It is through such allegorical reading that the logic of prophecy becomes possible. In *Daybreak* (1881) Nietzsche describes how Paul and other Christian exegetes read Jewish scripture allegorically as a prophecy of Jesus's crucifixion: [...]

[H]owever much Jewish scholars protested, the Old Testament was supposed to speak of Christ and only Christ, and especially of his Cross; wherever a piece of wood, a rod, a ladder, a twig, a tree, a willow, a staff is mentioned, it is supposed to be a prophetic allusion to the wood of the Cross. (50)<sup>22</sup>

While *Yo el Supremo* presents Francia's haphazard reading of his own mythical figuration in men of the past, *El fiscal* focuses on a modern figuration of the crucifixion in the death of the Paraguayan president and field marshal Francisco Solano López at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance. The protagonist's reading of Solano López's death as crucifixion definitively casts the manner in which Roa Bastos presents these echoes across history as a vision of Christian allegory or *figura*.

The notion of history implied by a belief in the truth of *figura*—the real underlying connection between diverse instantiations of similar things—is quite different from a linear, progressive view of history. Unlike a progressive view, in a mythical view of history the past is never definitively put to rest, but rather finds its way into the present all the time. Progress is in fact an illusion, its perception being a symptom of a failure to recognize the echoing of the past in the present; history is merely the cyclical revelation and concealment of an underlying, total

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so the grace of Jesus, and not the Jewish law, leads the 'second people' into the promised land of eternal beatitude" (29). Auerbach reads Origen as having been the most powerful formulator of allegorical *figura* as a true sign of secret identity across time.

<sup>22</sup> Refer also to footnote #13 on Paul's allegorical reading of Genesis for the formulation of an idea of the "Jerusalem above," the Christian national utopia.

truth. At the end of the novel, as the Supremo contemplates the imminence of his own demise, he articulates this understanding:

Nadie puede pensar lo impensado; solamente recordar lo pensado o lo obrado [...] Toda la humanidad pertenece a un solo autor. Es un solo volumen. Cuando un hombre muere, no significa que este capítulo es arrancado del Libro. Significa que ha sido traducido a un idioma mejor. (585)<sup>23</sup>

When the Supremo decides to immolate himself in a suicide pyre, it seems he believes that he does not really die, but rather, like Dahlmann, reunites with the underlying totality of Being, to be translated into another better version of himself.<sup>24</sup>

The Supremo's perspective becomes complicated, though, as one perceives a tension in the contrast between this view of history and the claim of self-birth grounding Paraguay's total autonomy as a site of nature, its rupture with the past. A vision of Paraguay as a space of myth sets it outside of progressive history, casting it as nature, a universal, timeless truth. But a mythical view of history perceives not nature, but rather its temporal metaphorization, and therein definitively maintains the importance of finding connections between the present and the past. *Yo el Supremo* depicts this tension in Francia's own vacillation, highlighted in his previously noted conversation with Blaise Pascal. It is as if the Supremo's confusion on this very point—a confusion between the difference between Paraguay as a timeless space free from the past, and a space of myth that doesn't differentiate between present and past—constitutes the

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<sup>23</sup> An idea of "universal history" that Borges describes in *Otras inquisiciones* is similar to the Supremo's view. He outlines this idea predominantly through comparative readings of the romantic thinkers of the nineteenth century. In "Magias parciales del Quijote," Borges writes: "En 1833, Carlyle le observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben" (*PC* 175). A similar sense of the underlying unity of history is expressed in "La flor de Coleridge," where he notes: "Shelley dictaminó que todos los poemas del pasado, del presente y del porvenir, son episodios o fragmentos de un solo poema infinito, erigido por todos los poetas del orbe" (*PC* 138).

<sup>24</sup> Refer to footnote #17 for more on the Supremo's belief that he will continue to exert his influence mythically from beyond the grave as the Ark of Paraguay.

original error of Paraguay's national constitution. Indeed, with a mythical view of time Roa Bastos affirms that the desire for autonomy from the past conceals a desire to eternally return to that past, just as we saw in Borges and Carpentier. Mythical history takes the past as the horizon of the future, by which further repetition of the same constitutes the fulfillment of prophecy.

The Supremo's decision to burn himself alive at the end of the novel is closely tied to the tension in his understanding of his (and Paraguayan) autonomy. Although the Supremo spends much of the novel describing his attempts to formulate himself as an absolutely integral subject, in the end he sets himself and his manuscript on fire, and is subsumed into the totality of undifferentiated Being. The attempt to define the ego absolutely culminates in its annihilation. Just as Pascal suggests, there is little difference between totality and nothingness: in order to exist, man must remain suspended as the middle ground between these two extremes. Paradoxically, like Dahmann, the Supremo finally attains his sought for integrity in death. Very basically, this is the critique of power Roa Bastos introduces in *Yo el Supremo*, his sense that power desires its own destruction. The ego desires the total integrity by which it is dissolved and becomes nothing.

In *El fiscal* Roa Bastos takes the War of the Triple Alliance to be an expression of this structure (or myth) of the desire for destruction, and the impossibility of even attaining the self-contained immanence of the national subject.<sup>25</sup> This war, occurring between 1864 and 1870, understood in Paraguay as a fight for the right to self-determination, and driven by the fanatical nationalism of field marshal Francisco Solano López, caused the near extermination of Paraguay's male population.<sup>26</sup> Without a doubt, few events in modern history have been so

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<sup>25</sup> The historiography itself, especially Burton's *Letters from the Battlefields of Paraguay*, can be read as a key instantiation of the search myth.

<sup>26</sup> John Kraniauskas summarizes the causes of this war as follows: "The combined forces of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay invaded Paraguay after Paraguayan troops attempted to put a halt to Brazilian intervention in the internal

powerful in showing how the desire for national integrity opens a path to total destruction, or have so fully fulfilled the national will to oblivion on the stage of history. Through a thinking of this event, Roa Bastos understands that the attempt to enclose the nation and guard it from incursion is identical to its annihilating exposure and deliverance into the hand of foreign powers.

#### Literature and Utopia in *El fiscal* and *Contravida*

*El fiscal* (1993) is Roa Bastos's third novel, and the first published after the fall of the Stroessner regime. In this book he continues to maintain a vision of Paraguay as a realm of detained time, and develops its connection to a concept of utopia defined ambiguously as "el espacio imaginario del no-lugar y del no-tiempo" (*Fiscal* 9). The mythical thinking presented as the semi-coherent raving of the unhinged dictator in *Yo el Supremo* becomes the primary theoretical engine of *El fiscal*. The novel is in large part an exposition of the protagonist's obsession with Paraguayan history, and the resonances and affinities between present and past that he perceives therein. Insofar as the portrayal of this mythical view of history comprises much of the novel, it performs a suturing between mythical thinking and Roa Bastos's own writing practice. Resonances and affinities between Roa Bastos and his protagonist emphasize a sense that the portrayal of this mythical thinking is perhaps the main work of the novel. The concept of utopia, as the imaginary space of nowhere and nowhen, links mythical thought,

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politics of Uruguay and thereby, like *El Supremo*, try to ensure access down the river to external markets for local products. To do so, the dictator of Paraguay, Marshall Francisco Solano López, ordered his troops across Argentine territory after permission had been refused by Mitre's government in Buenos Aires. This proved to be the opportunity to definitively settle scores with an independent Paraguay" (Reflections 45). Kraniauskas defends Paraguayan indignation about the war, noting how the triple alliance itself was revealed to be an act of colonial aggression and revenge: "a secret treaty signed by these nations was made public by *The Times* revealing their intention to exact huge amounts of war damages –including a considerable part of Paraguayan territory" (Reflections 46). He goes on to examine how Paraguay, during its prosperity between 1813 and 1865, was perceived as a threat to Argentine unification. The pact is reprinted in *The Paraguay Reader*.

literature, and nation, and suggests a more general connection between them. Through these connections, the book begins to consider the romantic practice of literary writing in the post-national age, raising the question of what happens to this literature so strongly identified with national projects when the nation is “in decline,” or, when it is finally understood (by a book like *Yo el Supremo*) that the nation never really existed as such in the first place.

One year after *El fiscal*, Roa Bastos published *Contravida* (1994), whose direct engagement with tropes of doubling and repetition—a theme we already began to see in *Yo el Supremo*—casts it as a twin to the former novel, its doppelganger. Through its characterization of the double as a being intimately connected to death, *Contravida* further develops a view of literature as being akin to a national afterlife once the nation is considered to be something that is not really “living.”

*El fiscal* is divided into three parts, but its general trajectory describes a variation of the *search myth* that we explored in the previous chapter of the present work: it is a story of return, a search for the nation culminating in the hero’s destruction in the wilderness. The novel is presented as a long epistolary, the first two parts being written by the protagonist Félix Moral, who bears a striking number of telling similarities to Roa Bastos himself, and can readily be read as his textual double. Like Roa Bastos, Félix Moral is a Paraguayan political exile living in France, an academic, literary man who also writes screenplays.<sup>27</sup> The first part of the epistolary is directed to his girlfriend Jimena. It is written in France, and describes important details of his life, as well as the circumstances by which he is granted the opportunity to attend a cultural symposium in Paraguay organized by the Stroessner regime, in a kind of ceremonial opening of

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<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to imagine that the narrator’s reflections on exile at the beginning of the novel do not directly reflect Roa Bastos’s own opinions. Thus, one must think that on some level, Moral is Roa Bastos’s fictional (or utopic) imagination of himself.

Paraguay to the outside world. In this section Moral describes his intent to use this symposium as a pretext to return to Paraguay incognito and assassinate the dictator with a poisoned handshake. He writes the second letter to Jimena (the second part of the novel) in his hotel room in Asunción, describing his thoughts and experiences while on the airplane in transit to Paraguay and the events leading up to the much anticipated handshake with Stroessner. The third section is a letter from Jimena to Moral's mother, describing the details of his capture and torture by the Paraguayan secret police (a.k.a. la Técnica) after his assassination attempt fails, his escape and flight to the Chaco wilderness, and his subsequent murder by Técnica agents at Cerro Corá, where years earlier Francisco Solano López was killed at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance.

With a few key differences, the basic narrative of *Contravida* is almost identical to the story Jimena tells at the end of *El fiscal*, recounting the narrator's return to a site of origin after escaping from a prison where he was being tortured by la Técnica.<sup>28</sup> One difference is that in *El fiscal* Jimena assists the escape and in *Contravida* the narrator is on his own. More importantly, in *Contravida* the origin to which the narrator returns is not Cerro Corá, the site of the national death as in *El fiscal*, but rather his hometown. Upon arriving there he is killed, by a set of twins, enemies from his childhood. While this text clearly deals with Paraguayan social issues such as political repression during the Stroessner era, it is less overtly concerned with the issue of nationalism than the previous novels. As a take on the return from exile, it represents not a return to the nation-state (as in *El fiscal*) but rather an escape from it, a flight from the center (the capital) to the periphery. In *Contravida* the return is a return to the utopic locality of childhood.

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<sup>28</sup> In *Contralectura de la obra de Roa Bastos* (2012) Milagros Ezquerro reads this return through the trope of "anábasis" defined as "viaje hacia atrás" (180). Colmán Llano reads this journey through the Guaraní myth of the search for la "Tierra sin Mal," which he describes as a "Segundo paraíso," the world to which the people must travel once the first world has been corrupted and lost (43). We will read it within the larger framework of the Latin American *search myth*.

It seems that with this text Roa Bastos explores what *El fiscal* would be for a narrator who was less obsessed with nationalist ideology.

Between these two texts, Roa Bastos's searches the common ground held among nation, literature, utopia, myth, doppelganger, and afterlife –various versions of nowhere and no one. *El fiscal* is most clearly concerned with nation, utopia, and myth; *Contravida*, with literature, doubling, and death. But because these texts are themselves twins, it is not easy to make clear cut distinctions, and the concepts intermingle and reflect one another.

It seems to me that Roa Bastos is struggling in these books, grappling with doubts about the function and value of his own literary practice. He is using literature to think about literature, and even about this he is conflicted. By resorting to a genre about which he is uncertain to depict an endless proliferation of literary doubles; imaginary realms that are perhaps false; whose ethical and philosophical status is never certain, which are perhaps evil; lying somewhere between life and death; he pushes the parodic mode to its limit.

In *El fiscal* we experience Roa Bastos's uncertainty about literature most forcefully as a tension between a memo that precedes and introduces the novel, and the novel's content. The introductory note articulates a strong confidence in the redemptive potential of the romantic genre, referring to literature as a "utopia." But then the novel goes on to describe the nightmarish downfall of Roa Bastos's textual double, Félix Moral, portraying Paraguay as anything but a utopia in the colloquial sense of the word. The reader is left to reconcile the view expressed in the introductory note that casts literature as a "good" utopia, and its depiction of Paraguay as a "bad" utopia. In *Contravida* these ethical labels become destabilized as the brothers in utopia, literature and nation, intertwine and reflect one another.

At the beginning of *El fiscal*, even before reaching the epigraph introducing the “Primera Parte,” the reader finds an unsigned note announcing that the novel was actually preceded by another work, one that the writer was forced to destroy due to the fact that it would have been out of place in a post-Stroessner Paraguay. Thus, the novel opens by announcing that it has a dead twin, and that this destroyed work along with the fallen dictatorship constituted the fertile ashes from which it arose (“Esas cenizas resultaron fértiles. En cuatro meses, de abril a julio, una versión totalmente nuevo surgió”) (9). This death is not portrayed negatively, but rather, it is proclaimed with resounding affirmation. According to the writer, as a secondary work that displaces the original, *El fiscal* represents “el acto de fe de un escritor no profesional en la *utopía de la escritura novelesca*” (9 my emphasis). The novel is a literary utopia, and the writer avows his adherence to the religion by which it is to be produced, the destruction of the previous text and the writing of the new one being an act of faith. By now, it is clear that the religion of the novel to which he refers is the romanticism by which the Latin American nation was founded.<sup>29</sup> The writer concludes his memo by stating that he seeks to formulate a historically transcendental truth through literature (i.e., Rousseau’s “land of chimera”): “Sólo el espacio imaginario del no-lugar y del no-tiempo permite bucear en los enigmas del universo humano de todo tiempo y lugar” (Rousseau, *Ouvres* 236; *Fiscal* 9).

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<sup>29</sup> As such, the writer’s proclamation is highly reminiscent of Julie’s proto-romantic proclamation in Rousseau’s *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) that articulates a relation between the fictional no-place of the novel and the self-positing ego. Rousseau writes: “Le pays des chimères est en ce monde le seul digne d’être habité, et tel est le néant des choses humaines qu’hors l’Être existant par lui-même, il n’y a rien de beau que ce qui n’est pas” (*Ouvres* 236). John Morley translates as follows: “The land of chimera is the only one in this world that is worth dwelling in, and such is the nothingness of the human lot, that except the being who exists in and by himself, there is nothing beautiful except that which does not exist” (Morley 45). I will cite Rousseau using the Morley translation.

In *Blindness and Insight* (1971) Paul de Man quotes this section of Rousseau’s novel in order to help elaborate his sense that fiction, as a self-consciously false genre, can help unveil the ideological structures of language. In a similar vein, Roa Bastos investigates the value of literature as language that understands itself to be false in *El fiscal* and *Contravida*.

It is difficult to know what to make of this little note. One must wonder: is Roa Bastos really avowing his faith in romanticism? Is he really advocating for literature as a genre by which universal truth can be formulated? Did he really just celebrate book burning as a form of creative destruction? In light of *Yo el Supremo*, which strongly critiques Latin American political romanticism, this note is both confusing and alarming.

More doubts arise upon a closer inspection of its internal structure. For one, there is dissonance between the writer's proclamation of faith in the utopia of the novel—the non-place of romantic autonomy—and his suggestion that he destroyed the previous novel due to the fact that it was out of place, “fuera de lugar” in the new political context of the post-Stroessner period (9). It does not make sense that a novel would be both autonomous and then out of place in any particular context. How can the novel be out of place if it is supposed to be a no-place, the “no-lugar” of the literary utopia?

A reader who has read *Yo el Supremo* senses that this memo might be a fake, or a parody of some sort. Indeed, the first words of that novel are a redaction of a false memo, the self-effacing circular in which the dictator calls for the desecration and immolation of his corpse upon his death.<sup>30</sup> Is this memo like the one that opens *Yo el Supremo*, written by someone pretending to be Roa Bastos, but deliberately undermining his intent? Is it written by an evil double? The reader must suspend disbelief, and continue on with the text, bearing in mind that the stakes of what follows lie in a question of literature itself, a view of the novel as a “good” utopia, the autonomous space of art that romanticism extols.

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<sup>30</sup> *Yo el Supremo* opens with a redaction of one of this circular, stating: “Ordeno que al acaecer mi muerte mi cadáver sea decapitado; la cabeza puesta en una pica por tres días en la Plaza de la República donde se convocará al pueblo al son de las campanas echadas a vuelo. Todos mis servidores civiles y militares sufrirán pena de horca. Sus cadáveres serán enterrados en potreros de extramuros sin cruz ni marca que memore sus nombres. Al termino del dicho plazo, mando que mis restos sean quemados y las cenizas arrojadas al río...” (93).

While the autonomous space of the novel was not originally conceived as being a place in which good things always happen—young Werther commits suicide, after all—it is still confusing that Roa Bastos’s novel, which he calls a “utopia,” describes a *state*, that by all measures looks like the opposite of a utopia, a dystopia. The novel’s contemplation of a national realm leads one to consider whether its status as “utopia” can be applied to the state it describes. It is precisely this comparison between the literary and national realm that the word is meant to cultivate—a comparison that is not simply rhetorical, but which in fact points to the romantic articulation of literature and the state as parallel realms that are at once autonomous from each other and not, co-independent.<sup>31</sup> The reader experiences strong feelings of dissonance as she tries to reconcile an idealized faith in literature and the horrifying depiction of the state.

Indeed, in *El fiscal* Roa Bastos goes out of his way to apply to the nation-state the same words with which he characterized the utopia of literature as “el espacio imaginario del no-lugar y del no-tiempo”; at various points characters describe Paraguay itself as a place that does not exist in time and space (9). The narrator bitterly relays his awareness of a view that Paraguay is a place where time is detained when looking down from the airplane as it arrives in Asunción. He imagines the capital in mythical relation to the ancient city of Ilion (i.e. Troy) writing, “Aquí, en Paraguay, en Ilión-Asunción, lo sagrado no va a confundirse con la antigüedad sino con la ausencia del tiempo” (272). Later, at the inauguration ceremony of the cultural symposium that serves as the pretext for the narrator’s return, Paraguay is described as a non-place. The recently

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<sup>31</sup> In *Reconstituting the Body Politic* (1999) Jonathan Hess argues that the aesthetic autonomy of art was not meant as a shelter from politics, but rather as a way to influence it. He writes: “Kant envisions a public forum where powerless subjects would have the right to enter into critical debate about political matters, and to do so in such a way as to make the absolutist state accountable to its enlightened public. In this schema, the enlightenment does much more than encourage individuals to think for themselves. The process of enlightenment aspires to negotiate political agency, to grant a public of politically powerless enlightenment intellectuals influence in the process of government. Enlightenment is not just about rational-critical debate. It also aspires to some model of political action. As Kant defined it, enlightenment always attempts to politicize itself” (21). By putting pressure on the strange relation between art and the state Kant describes, here, as in *Yo el Supremo*, Roa Bastos challenges the way in which Enlightenment understands itself.

named President of the Assembly strangely confesses “su satisfacción de conocer un país que él creía inexistente y que, según todas las apariencias, seguía siendo para él inexistente” (335).

Truly, it is difficult to know what to make of these words.

More than any specific reference to a view of Paraguay as a non-place, non-time, the novel ultimately paints a picture of the country in these terms through its development of the trope of myth. Through his depiction of affinities and similitudes between different figures in Paraguayan history (including himself), the country becomes a place a myth, that is, a place in which history does not flow in a progressive manner. The narrator begins to elaborate this mythical view of history when he describes his experience of writing a movie script about Paraguay’s War of the Triple Alliance. Through his film (which was never completed) he had sought to depict the national death of Solano López as a figuration of the crucifixion of Jesus, a vision of “el cadáver del mariscal clavado en una cruz de ramas” (*Fiscal* 31). While this crucifixion is a fancy of the narrator, and never literally occurred, Roa Bastos’s novel is largely dedicated to detailing this vision of Solano López as the “Cristo de Cerro Corá, sin aureola, sin nimbo, sin enmarañada corona de espinas,” recounting the history of the final days of the war through a fantastic embellishment of Richard Burton’s *Letters from the Battlefields of Paraguay* (1870) (*Fiscal* 33). The narrator understands the martyrdom of the marshal as the fulfillment of a prophecy foretold by a famous priest, padre Fidel Maíz, who in “una famosa homilía-arenga” had “ensalzado al jefe supremo llamándole el Cristo paraguayo” (*Fiscal* 32).<sup>32</sup> While the priest

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<sup>32</sup> The title of *El fiscal* itself refers to this historical figure Padre Fidel Maíz—a priest who, having been jailed for denouncing Solano López, was released so as to preside over “los tribunales de sangre” during the War of Triple Alliance. Mythically, the figure of this fiscal de sangre—a “judge and executioner” of enemies of the nation, who has himself been an enemy of the nation—is incarnated and reflected in the other characters in the novel (Guerrero 198). Stroessner too, the narrator’s enemy, is a self-made prosecutor of communists and subversives. And of course the narrator Félix Moral is also the “fiscal,” an “executor of justice” who will kill Stroessner and thus act both as friend and enemy of the (nation) state (Weldt-Basson 344).

Given that *El fiscal* does not center on the life of Fidel Maíz, the real, historical “fiscal de la tiranía, but rather that of Félix Moral (their initials also point to a certain affinity) its title refers also to the mythical logic of correlation

had meant to highlight the marshal's status as savior or messiah of Paraguay, his characterization also foretells the President's demise and eventual status as national martyr. We must read the narrator's vision of the death of Solano López, as the fulfillment of a prophecy, to represent his application of Catholic exegesis to modern Paraguayan history, and the act of making "scripture" out of literal historiography by reading figurations of the cross.

The prophetic force of the narrator's allegorical reading does not end with the death of Solano López, but attains further significance at the end of the novel as the reader's perception of Moral's own mythical relation to both the president and the Christian God. As a result of his attempt to save the nation from Stroessner, the narrator is ultimately killed for his political beliefs at Cerro Corá, the exact same site at which Solano López was killed at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance. Given the novel's propensity to find meaning in affinities and correlations across time, Félix Moral's martyrdom for the nation at Cerro Corá makes him a figuration of the fabled marshal. Having already detailed his fascination with Solano López at length, and his sense that this leader who fought to defend Francia's legacy dies as a hero and a martyr for the national cause, there can be little question that Moral, too, would read a figuration of the cross in his own death, and take himself as another "Cristo de Cerro Corá" (33).

Insofar as the reader is led to interpret the narrator's death at Cerro Corá as a figuration of the marshal's crucifixion through the mythical logic that the text has elaborated at length, she is led to see Paraguay as a place in which progressive history is suspended. In "Retorno, melancolía y crisis futuro: *El fiscal* de Augusto Roa Bastos" John Kraniuskas reads the death of

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among the various "fiscales." In his plan to regenerate the nation with violence, defining himself as its savior, Moral—and consequently, our sense of the mythical "fiscal"—is identified not only with Stroessner, but also to the scores of protagonists throughout a long and painful history of national civil war defined by a tradition of bypassing the mediating function of representative government in favor of direct action. Paraguay's eternal return to the *coup d'état* was instantiated as recently as 2012, in the "juicio político" of Fernando Lugo.

Félix Moral at Cerro Corá along these lines, as a return to “*lo mismo*” that delivers the protagonist “al tiempo [...] estancado paraguayo” (216). Cerro Corá—the terminus of the doomed pilgrimage to the heart of nature—comes to metonymically stand for Paraguay as a whole, the protagonist’s death reproducing a vision of this nation-state as a site in which history does not move in a forward direction, as the realm of “encierro y estancamiento” Lundkvist describes in his reading of *Yo el Supremo* (Casabianca 52).

It is said that upon meeting his fate Solano López proclaimed “¡Muero con mi patria!” suggesting that Paraguay itself died at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance (*Fiscal* 292). It would appear that insofar as Cerro Corá becomes a metonym of Paraguay as a whole, the narrator relives the national death both in the manner of Dahlmann in *El sur*, and as the death of Paraguay itself. If the narrator’s assassination, as a figuration of the crucifixion of Solano López, is an eternal return to “lo mismo,” by extension it must also be read as an eternal return to the demise of the nation. Through its figural logic *El fiscal* seems to say that Paraguay lingers in a state of perennial extinction. According to Kraniauskas, this dwelling in death would be a spectrality akin to that which befalls Comala in *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Paraguay’s lack of future being the detained temporality of purgatory that is perpetuated by a desire for redemption that can never be fulfilled. For him these figurations of the cross have no power to redeem, and consequently the dead body of Paraguay is merely “un cuerpo torturado y hecho ruinas sin futuro. Un cuerpo en que se ha resaltado la subjetividad solamente para abolirla” (217). Paraguay is not merely dead: its ongoing murder in the infinite present of myth is the ground of Paraguayan subjectivity itself.

But as in “El sur,” it seems that the question of redemption is not entirely resolved at the end of *El fiscal*. At least according to a mythical logic that does not see death as a permanent

affair, perhaps the narrator *has* attained some form of validation in his mythical fusion with the founder of his non-nation's doom. Perhaps his absorption into the perpetual murder of the nation really does represent the attainment of a "good" utopia.

Generally, it is hard to know how to feel about the narrator Félix Moral or the mythical logic he develops. Although he is Roa Bastos's textual double—which might lead one to judge him favorably—the author persistently draws attention to the problematic nature of Moral's mission. As Jorge Carlos Guerrero notes in pointing to Moral's growing "authoritarian tendency," Roa Bastos highlights the ways in which he comes to resemble the man he seeks to destroy. But the narrator becomes monstrous not only in his plot to murder the dictator (perpetuating an eternal return to the *coup d'état* in Paraguay) but also otherwise, for example, through an episode in which he seems to sexually assault and murder his female graduate student. Though neither the reader nor the narrator really know what happens here, Roa Bastos makes it impossible to whole-heartedly sympathize with Moral.

Through the uneasiness, I sense that with *El fiscal* Roa Bastos is radicalizing his parodic style, showing not only the mythical identity between Moral and his hero, Solano López, but also his enemy, Stroessner. Insofar as Moral is Roa Bastos's own textual double, these resemblances apply to him as well. It is as if through the text he observes the tenuousness of his own moral and political positions, those which he wishes to support through the narrative. Roa Bastos uses Moral as a textual double in order to describe his own experience of being interpellated as a national subject, and navigate the tension between a feeling of outrage for the outcome of the War of the Triple Alliance and critical position toward Paraguayan national subjectivity. Moral is Roa Bastos's own fantasy of righteousness (lo Moral), and *El fiscal* as a whole, the perverse fantasy of the redemption of death in political martyrdom. At the same time, it is a depiction of

the disintegration of this fantasy. While we can see how literature would constitute a utopia for Roa Bastos in the freedom it affords as a venue for self-discovery, and for the expression of an Oedipal desire to displace the patriarch, we also see that ultimately, the fantasy is a nightmare culminating in torture, horror, and death. The narrator seems to anticipate this conclusion early in the text when he observes of the Christian God: “No redimió a los seres humanos. No evitó ni purificó los horrores de la vida. No en vano el místico Tomás de Kempis, como copiando el Eclesiastés y el Libro de Job, escribió en su *Imitación de Cristo* con espíritu transido: <<Vivir en esta tierra es la peor de las desgracias>>” (29). Still, believing this doesn’t stop the narrator from seeking out his redemption, though perhaps he did not realize he was the one to be sacrificed. Even as Roa Bastos describes the narrator’s mythical apotheosis, as Kraniauskas observes, it is difficult to find any kind of affirmation in it. We see only the fulfillment of a narcissistic wish to be absolved of responsibility akin to that which Patrick Dove notes when describing Dahlmann’s final encounter in “El sur,” a clinging to the resentment by which death itself justifies his folly.<sup>33</sup>

In *El fiscal*, Roa Bastos develops a vision of parallel realms of nation and literature as sinister utopias—non-places—in which a mythical time reigns, and where the past constantly irrupts into the present. He pushes a self-critical mode of thought that avoids distancing its object of criticism, creating a protagonist who represents the double of various historical figures: Solano López, Stroessner, Jesus, and even Roa Bastos himself. In his next novel, *Contravida* Roa Bastos consolidates his vision of the literary utopia/dystopia as a realm of both death and doubling.

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<sup>33</sup> Dove writes: “What the Althusserian critique of ideology would term the ‘interpellation’ of the national subject is constituted here as a disavowal of the decision as such (or in its groundless quality), and the responsibility for the act is instead deferred to the Other. What is disavowed in this way is the imprint of the subject’s own desire in this sublimation of morality” (70). While the first sentence unquestionably holds, we must continue to wonder about Dove’s following assertion, insofar as the repetition of the fantasy of death in Latin American letters suggests that the protagonist truly desires it on some level.

The link between the utopia of literature, death, and the figure of the doppelganger is explored in *Contravida* through the strange doubled existence of Iturbe-Manorá, the narrator's hometown. In escaping from a prison in the capital, the narrator resigns himself to return to this tiny town in the middle of the jungle, despite an intuition that his pursuers would likely look for him there. His decision to return is passive, as if he is pulled by some invisible force.<sup>34</sup> On the train ride by which he makes his return, the narrator thinks about his childhood, and among other memories recalls the momentous arrival of the schoolteacher Gaspar Cristaldo to Iturbe (a man who, like the Supremo, claims never to have been born). His arrival would change the town forever, causing it to become doubled. “[S]in que nadie se apercibiera de ello, el maestro Cristaldo fundó la misteriosa aldea de Manorá en el mismo corazón del pueblo de Iturbe. Una aldea invisible como el aire entra en el cuerpo de una persona y sale de ella permitiéndole respirar, vivir” (199).

At first it is not clear what the narrator means when he refers to the foundation of the invisible Manorá in the heart of Iturbe, and he spends much of chapter nine struggling to explain the relation between the two towns. “[H]ay dos pueblos que están metidos uno dentro de otro” (207). “Los que venían de afuera se podían notar que Manorá e Iturbe eran un solo y único pueblo, pero no el mismo” (204). “Iturbe y Manorá no se distinguían en verdad uno de otro, aunque no eran idénticos ni en el clima, ni en el tiempo natural de los días y las estaciones” (201). In their near identity, the relation between the two towns mirrors the parodic relation Roa

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<sup>34</sup> The narrator justifies this non-decision in the following way: “Toda huida es siempre una fuga hacia el pasado. El último refugio de perseguido es la lengua materna, el útero materno, la placenta inmemorial donde se nace y se muere” (73). Clearly, Roa Bastos continues to think about the status of exile in modernity, reflecting on the parallels between the desire for return and a desire for death. We find him echoing certain observations made by his contemporary, the Chilean writer José Donoso. In the essay “Ithaca: the impossible return” Donoso describes a confrontation with the national vernacular in his imagination of the *unheimlich* homecoming.

Bastos has explored throughout his work, especially the relation between the “real” Roa Bastos and his textual doubles.

Now, Iturbe’s inexplicable double becomes an allegory for the “utopía de la escritura novelesca” cited in *El fiscal*’s strange prologue, a “land of chimera” that is “the only one in this world that is worth dwelling in” (*Fiscal* 9; *Heliose* 45). The appearance of Manorá corresponds to the arrival of a Library to the town—a space for imagination and thought—and is portrayed explicitly as both a literary realm and a limbo. “El limbo del Maestro Cristaldo era exactamente *eso*: un lugar parecido a los sueños, *fuera del espacio y del tiempo*, donde moraban los personajes de las historias inventadas” (217 my emphasis). Once founded, it becomes a site of resistance against those who would burn the library. Not only the utopia of literature, it is a utopia *for* it.<sup>35</sup> The town even allegorizes its own literary nature when the town priest and mayor order Cristaldo to desist in his literary activities, which they characterize as being satanic. In response, a parade of fictional characters from the canon of Latin American letters gathers to protest in Manorá: El Supremo Francia, Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, El Caballero del Verde Gabán, los personajes de Santa María, “la aldea fundada por el uruguayo Juan Carlos Onetti,” Rulfo’s Juan Preciado y Susana San Juan (221).

Although this “magical” event is perhaps similar to those transpiring in Gabriel García Márquez’s Macondo, in the literary utopia of Manorá what happens is not necessarily “real.” It is true that Manorá’s foundation attends the introduction of “un hecho imposible en la realidad,” for example, the time when the schoolteacher becomes a circus horse (“ninguno de nosotros había visto un circo menos un maestro que fuera caballo de circo”) (197-198). Nevertheless, the doubled, allegorical space of literature is also shown to be a realm of falsehood; the double is fundamentally *duplicitous*. This is made clear through a parable in which the narrator reveals the

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<sup>35</sup> Cristaldo warns: “Hay muchos que odian los libros [...] Serían capaces de quemarlos” (218).

origin of his own literary practice, describing his childhood experience of writing a short story called “Lucha hasta el alba” (which happens to be one of the author Roa Bastos’s most well known tales). He relates that after reading the story of Jacob’s struggle with the angel in Genesis, he decided to write it again, casting it as a fight between himself and an imaginary Siamese twin brother. When his father discovers that he has written this story, the young narrator is severely punished for falsifying the sacred scripture. Interestingly, the symbolism of “Lucha hasta el alba” reinforces his father’s interpretation of his literary act as the creation of a doppelganger, a false double. In the story, the fight concludes when the twins, joined at the heel, are separated by a “machetazo.” Once separated, the evil twin escapes into the jungle. Thus, this story within a story allegorizes writing as act of releasing an evil double into the world who thereafter threatens to return to displace his twin.

Later, after becoming a political prisoner, writing for the narrator continues to act as a form of falsehood, but one that helps him resist subjection –an alternate world that shelters him from an unbearable reality. It is through writing that the narrator gains emotional leverage against his tormentors. He describes: “Inventé una escritura críptica, acaso un nuevo idioma, para burlar el escrutinio diario que los carceleros hacían de los papeles, efectos y hasta de los trozos diarios viejos que usábamos en el excusado los reclusos de máxima peligrosidad” (150).<sup>36</sup> Within this cryptic writing he deliberately includes pornographic passages he knows the prison guards will read aloud and which they will enjoy with “alegría bestial” (150). This form of manipulation comes to constitute “la pequeña revancha que yo me tomaba sobre la realidad del poder a través de la irrealidad de la escritura” (150). If he takes revenge against the reality of power, the power that “irreality” spites is the power of reality itself.

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<sup>36</sup> The narrator of *El fiscal* also describes the creation of new language in reference to the autobiographical mode of writing: “Quien pretende <<retratar>> su vida tendría que inventarse un lenguaje propio, distinto del lo que se entiende por literatura, esa actividad ilusoria de monederos falsos” (26).

It would thus appear that in *Contravida* the narrator formulates the power of the literary utopia as the power of the lie against the truth, reproducing the logic by which positivism characterizes its relation to romanticism and literature in the late nineteenth century, that thinking by which science and the market understand themselves as the only true forms of “realism.” Yet while maintaining this structure, *Contravida* questions its ethical claims, finding a strange virtue in falsehood. Such a view also seems different from that elaborated in a text such as *Yo el Supremo*, which shows the basic impossibility of distinguishing discourses of truth—positive historiography, Enlightenment science and political philosophy—from myth. Still, *Contravida* does not reproduce the original conceit of romanticism (so strongly articulated at the beginning of *El fiscal*) by positing that the realm of literature is a hyper-reality by which the genius might encounter a universal truth. Instead, literature remains a hyper-reality of the lie, and the place to which one retreats after almost being tortured to death, a place of post-traumatic shock. The half-dead narrator’s flight to Manorá itself iterates this idea.

The title of *Contravida* can be read as “antilife,” “against life,” “counter-life,” or “other life,” and refers in part to the narrator’s trajectory toward death held in common with the narrator of both *El fiscal* and *Yo el Supremo*, the pull of a desire for immanence and totality reflected in an obsession with belly buttons, and his schoolmaster’s dream of departing this world by way of the womb: the return to nothingness. It is the impulse driving the “fuga hacia el pasado” that seeks refuge in “la lengua materna, el útero materno, la placenta inmemorial donde se nace y se muere” (73). But additionally, the title refers to the space of literature as a space for a different form of existence that dwells in the ambiguous realm between life and death. Because Manorá—the duplicitous realm of literature—is also portrayed as a realm closely tied to death, this “other” life can be read as a spectral afterlife or persistence in death like that which meets the narrator at

the end of *El fiscal*. The name Manorá itself in Guaraní means “El-lugar-para-la-muerte,” and (in addition to the teacher becoming a horse, and the arrival of the Library) its foundation is attended by the construction of a columbarium, “mausoleo donde los romanos colocaban urnas y vasijas funerarias” (199, 211). If Manorá is depicted in this way as “un columbarium para la gente viva,” the novel too, as a literary utopia, can be read in the same way (211). *Contravida* commemorates the persistence of a desire to live towards death, and the wish of the living to die, with a mourning for that which has not yet perished: the novel becomes the space in which Roa Bastos proleptically mourns both for literature and for himself before either has yet passed. The persistence of the no-place of literature maintains the national impulse as one that remains beyond a utilitarian proliferation of life or post-modern biopolitics, as Dahlmann’s desire to return to the totality of Being in the national death, that which is potentially redemptive in Roa Bastos’s destruction of his double at the end of *El fiscal*.

Insofar as *Contravida* articulates the novel (the romantic genre) as a spectral utopia—the nowhere of a ghost world—and as an evil double, one can read it as a manifestation of what it describes. Not just any double of *El fiscal*, *Contravida* is a ghostly twin, the haunting return of the book romanticism burns and displaces. It is the novel “fuera de lugar” that “tuvo que ser destruida”: the ghost of the book the author burns in making *El fiscal* (9). Read in this way, *Contravida* is the persistence of that which romanticism disavows, including romanticism’s desire to disavow romanticism, and to disavow disavowal itself. As such, it represents the impossibility of emptying the novel of its romantic past. Furthermore, concurrent to describing the novel as a utopia of falsehood, it performs romanticism’s foundational lies, the original duplicity that it cannot successfully hide and inadvertently reiterates: a rift between romanticism and positivism as a difference between subjectivity and objectivity, falsehood and truth.

The dynamic between these doubled texts demonstrates that redemption can only find expression through a framework set out by a past that can neither be left behind nor recuperated. *Contravida* understands that the possibility of redemption remains tied to a project of arriving in the “el espacio imaginario del no-lugar y del no-tiempo” (9). Both Paraguay and literature find themselves to be places that do not exist in the way they were supposed to, but exist nonetheless. They dwell in *contravida*, the monstrous romantic experiment of autonomy that is simultaneously living and dead, the Being of the foundational lie that cannot be rescinded or surpassed.

### Conclusion

I have characterized the romanticism of the nineteenth century through its equivocal, or duplicitous relation to the past, which on the one hand idealizes the classical age and the bucolic and sublime states of nature, and on the other seeks to efface and displace the past by radically affirming an ego rooted in the present. In the political romanticism of Latin America, this relation to the past was held up through the claim of cultural autonomy by which the spontaneous invention of a new autochthonous culture was justified and understood. Both thematically and rhetorically, Roa Bastos’s work evolves through a critical engagement with this political romantic claim of autonomy.

In *Yo el Supremo* Roa Bastos posits the connection between the national consolidation ostensibly being effectuated by the Stroessner regime in Paraguay and the founding political romanticism of the Latin American nation-state, and exposes the basic impossibility of their shared dream of autonomy rooted in a mythical view of history. In so doing, he shows the theoretical ground of a return to nationalism as the circumscription of nature for the creation of a

mythical utopia, and criticizes this ground, outlining the paradoxical exposure brought about by the attempt at national closure.

In *El fiscal* and *Contravida*, novels that in many ways mirror and haunt one another, Roa Bastos explores the unresolved uneasiness in the Latin American writer's relationship to the past, the undead utopias of literature and nation. Both of these books focus on the ongoing force of a romantic desire for a return to origins. Be it through nostalgia for national being as in *El fiscal*, or nostalgia for literature and local truth divorced of its national situation as in *Contravida*, the narrators are driven by a need to return. A writer such as Jose Donoso can help us understand this interest biographically, as a matter of Roa Bastos's personal struggle with exile, an issue that constitutes "one of those knots of live-wires, a shared, a collective experience, from which [he thinks] the greater part of Latin American contemporary fiction derives its strength" (307). But more important is the way in which Roa Bastos shows the desire for return as an ongoing expression of the political romanticism of independence, whose influence was also the concern of thinkers like Borges and Zea. Even as the perpetual force of this desire appears as a kind of eternal return to the same, a vortex of "tiempo estancado," Roa Bastos resists disavowing his romantic melancholy. Instead, through his self-critical mode of thinking, he modifies it.

In this act of modifying romanticism in an age of exile, we can situate Roa Bastos beside thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. Both of these thinkers attempted to reconstitute the redemptive potential of romanticism in modernity. Benjamin did this by recuperating a romantic consciousness of the incompleteness of the subject prior to its plunge into false melancholy, precluding the plunge by positing that one's relation to the future must be elaborated as a project of gazing into the past.<sup>37</sup> Heidegger sought to define a relation to the past

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<sup>37</sup> Nowhere is his articulation of this orientation toward the past more clearly embodied than in the example of his famous "Angelus Novus" or angel of history in part IX of "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (257). But we can

that could counter a technical modernity found in the romantic feeling for the force of art, literature, and in particular, poetry. More than as a fundamentally autonomous realm, he saw the purpose of poetry to be its function in recalling the thinking of language itself, which would serve as the house of Being after the nation lay in ruins.<sup>38</sup> Roa Bastos is in some ways more pessimistic than these thinkers, but nevertheless, helps find a way to deal with the legacy of romanticism that Latin America undeniably inherits, a claim of autonomy from the past concealing a desire for the annihilating return.

Just as he shows the impossibility of autonomy in *Yo el Supremo*, the way in which the defining circumscription of the subject must always be attended by a corresponding exposure, in *El fiscal* and *Contravida* he shows that a desire to return to the redemptive immanence of mythical fusion with the patriarch or pre-natal self-sufficiency is similarly paradoxical, instantiating the Catholic myth of the identity between catastrophe (the death of God) and redemption. Perhaps the greatest mystery produced by these last two works is the apparent identity between the desire for redemptive return and a suicidal impulse toward death. It is interesting how in these texts Roa Bastos relates the *search myth* to his development of a concept of literature as a space of mourning for the living. Herein lies Roa Bastos's modification of the romantic fantasy. A romantic will to oblivion has tended to present a problematic relation to the past, the (Oedipal) desire to displace or annihilate it (the patriarch) through return, establishing a

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also see in Roa Bastos's description of Paraguay as a dead, mythical enclosure of nature, a figuration of Benjamin's description of allegory itself, as the face of the dead landscape. He writes: "Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with a *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, in expressed in a face – or rather in a death's head" (*Origin* 166).

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (1947) addresses the problem of a post-national(ist) crisis in the wake of WWII and its disastrous outcome for Europe. For Heidegger, the imperative of humanism, as a study of language, is never greater than during the post-war decline of the nation-state, which he casts as an existential crisis, the catastrophe of man's exile from Being. With messianic overtones, he describes language as a "house of being," the deterritorialized home (place of belonging) to which man can return upon the destruction of the territorial home (territorial nation-state) (193).

new imperative of thinking beyond a historiography of supersession, or the positivism that merely reproduces and radicalizes this romantic impulse. Roa Bastos approaches the problem by recognizing the key role of the self-positing, or imperial ego in this process, “the being who exists in and by himself” (Rousseau, *Ouvres* 236). Rather than disavowing the desire to return, Roa Bastos deconstructs the ego through his ongoing parodic identification with his enemy, and the self-effacing content of his fantasies. Even so, he holds on to his desire, using the utopia of literature to imagine the return, but as one in which, rather than displacing the past, or laying claim to it as property, the ego is absorbed and annihilated by it. Especially insofar as he imagines it twice—nationally in *El fiscal* and locally in *Contravida*—Roa Bastos affirms a fantasy of the ego’s dissolution into the past, which he describes as a mourning not for the dead, but for the living. However nightmarish it might appear, we can discern here the appeal of a fantasy in which the return no longer constitutes a conquest.

Unable to leave literature behind, his novels work to make good on the promise of the romantic thinking whose ground was supposed to be the subject rather than the object. Roa Bastos takes pains to ensure that the subject does not become objectified or ossified, destabilizing and doubling the ego at every turn. While retaining the desire for the return to immanence—self-contained autonomy—he continues to report on a subjectivity shattered across time and space. He shows that the condition required to affirm the thinking produced by the romantic desire for an immanent subject is a recognition that this subject can be only ever be a ruined one. Thinking becomes the act of salvaging this ruined subject.

What, then, does Roa Bastos salvage from the depths of his own romantic desire? What can we affirm about his decision not to stop writing novels in an age of exile? In the note at the beginning of *El fiscal* he describes his writing practice as “el acto de fe de un escritor no

profesional en la utopía de la escritura novelesca” (9). I think there is something here that might set a path for the Latin American romanticism to come, in his reference to the “escritor no profesional.” It is curious that Roa Bastos—an *accomplished* writer if there ever was one—would describe himself as a non-professional writer. We could read this as a reference to the idea of professionalism as the pursuit of monetary compensation, and therefore, find another transformation of the false dichotomy between romanticism and modernity, here understood as the sovereignty of the market. We could return to this problematic opposition also if we read his being “non-professional” as a reference to his status as a *national* author.

I propose that instead we read the task of the non-professional writer as the unrealized potential of romanticism, its democratic affirmation of thinking itself, as the task of thinking under the sky, in the middle of nowhere. While very quickly the idea of Genius turned “non-professional” thinking into the prerogative of the elite few, Roa Bastos seems to recall that the novel was also conceived as a fundamentally undisciplined form of expression, the spontaneous thinking that does not ask authority to first grant it legitimacy before embarking on its task. Even though it soon served for the foundation of authority, it nevertheless remains a testament to the possibility of thinking in spite of it, or perhaps, in its absence. Roa Bastos’s work makes it readily apparent that even as the genre seems to enter a state of spectral limbo, thinking is present in these works. Moreover, he shows how romantic thinking can pass through the claim of rupture with the past—the ruin of nature itself—into a spontaneous thinking through the past. Even as it desires rupture and oblivion the haphazard *bricolage* uses whatever conceptual material happens to be at hand, cobbles together thinking with remnants. Even as we wonder what will become of literature after the nation-state has been proven to be nothing other than the

ghostly haunting of its imperfect foundation, Roa Bastos shows the ongoing potential of thinking performed by the non-professional.

## CONCLUSION

I can develop the work I have carried out in this investigation by further elaborating discussions about the influence of Marxism and *indigenismo* in Latin America, and their relation to the discursive history of nature. I will also consider making recourse to a more explicitly materialist framework for my discussion of nature ideology in Latin America.

Rhetorically, the expropriation of communal agricultural lands referred to as “enclosure” in the section on “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” in Marx’s *Capital* (1867) strongly resonates with my own description of the territorialization of nature, the ideological enclosure or walling of the wilderness for the creation of the nation-state. It is no coincidence that the history I have described is a history of the violent expropriation of land, i.e. so-called primitive accumulation. Especially in Bello, Sarmiento, Rivera, and Roa Bastos, I have described nature as a concept that works to erase human history on the land, not only in order to posit Latin American cultural autonomy, but also in order to facilitate its repossession from the people inhabiting it. I might employ a Marxian understanding of primitive accumulation and enclosure as a way to draw out the nuances of nature as an ideological concept, and to develop a more complete understanding of its material function of laying claim to land as property. I might also further develop a connection between an erotic desire to destroy the past that I have related to a positing of the ego, and a “materialist” desire to acquire and possess the earth.

It will also be necessary to discuss Marxist discourses in Latin America, which have been influential even since the 1920s. One clear point of entry would be the work of José Carlos Mariátegui and his connections to Andean *indigenismo*. Another would be the thinking and events surrounding the Mexican revolution, especially the implementation of a system of *ejidos* and land repartition. In both the Andean and Mexican contexts, there are clear connections between indigenous thinking and a concept of nature. Because this work is still incomplete, and I have yet to fully flesh out my ideas, here I will outline how I might begin to investigate these matters.

I foresee two major problems for any investigation into Andean and Mexican thinking about revolution, *indigenismo*, and nature.

The first problem is a question of the function of an idealized imagination of nature as the time prior to inequality that would serve as a messianic *telos* in a Marxist view of history. I have critiqued other developmentalist views of history through a concept of nature they maintain, most notably those propounded by positivist thinking. It would seem that even if a materialist framework would serve as a powerful tool for understanding how nature served in the process of land appropriation in America, my reading of nature would cast many Marxist views of history as being detrimentally affected by an idealized imagination of a paradisiacal past/future. In other words, the challenge consists in negotiating a contamination between the colonial use of a concept of nature in order to repossess the land, and an anti-colonial formulation of nature as an idealized, egalitarian space to which we might return.

Another problem is the difficulty of engaging with an indigenous thinking of “nature,” or a use of this word to refer to a pre-colonial habitus. Subaltern studies has already made it clear that it is impossible for Western thinking to know the Other without interpellating and thereby

altering her. The work I have done here most directly opens upon the possibility of critiquing *indigenismos* that maintain a romanticized, European view of nature as the content of the indigenous past.

The work of Mariátegui straddles the two above-mentioned problems. His desire to move beyond the feudal structures of the colony are caught up with a thinking of a revolution cast in terms of a mythical revolutionary spirit of the indigenous people. In future work, it will be necessary to explore this intersection of indigenous and European thinking. In such an investigation, I would also discuss—and possibly critique—the work of José María Arguedas. César Aira’s novels on encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples on the Argentine pampas might also be a helpful tool for the thinking I would carry out here.

I see these issues at work in Mexico as well. I can work toward developing a chapter by considering the intertextualities in the thinking of Juan Rulfo, Alfonso Reyes, and Roberto Bolaño.

Rulfo most clearly deals with questions of land appropriation after the Mexican Revolution and the failure of the pseudo-indigenous revolutionary *ejido* system in his collection of short stories *Llano en llamas* (1953). I would be interested in doing research on the implementation of this system and its relation to indigenous thought so as to historicize Rulfo’s thinking.

I would also consider discussing the work of Alfonso Reyes, another Creole thinker who appropriates an imagination of indigenous society for the consolidation of national identity. His “Visión de Anáhuac” strongly resonates with the foundational romantic thinking of José María Heredia, and it is very interesting how toward the end of this essay he reads a classical Nahuatl poem as a romantic ode to nature. I could further investigate Reyes’s work to better understand

how a concept of nature fits into his thinking of the indigenous past. Additionally, Roberto Bolaño's novel *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) draws a connection between a Mexican romanticism represented by Reyes (a writer who fascinates the poet-protagonist García Madero) and the global configurations of national space and territory in the late twentieth century. I would like to develop a deeper understanding of how Bolaño sees Reyes's importance in an ostensibly post-national era.

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