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Ramos, Luis

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Paradoxical Republics:
Tropes of Civic Longing in Postcolonial Caribbean Writing

By

Luis Ramos

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Francine Masiello, Chair

Professor Karl Britto

Professor Dorothy Hale

Professor Richard Rosa

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Abstract

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Luis Ramos

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Professor Francine Masiello, Chair

What can a poetics of longing suggest about unrequited political promises? In my dissertation I demonstrate how postcolonial fiction strategically recovers founding moments of civic awakening and revolutionary consciousness in order to transmit a greater understanding of anti-colonial resistance in the Americas. Focusing on four authors who retrace the transition from colony to nationhood and from royalist to republican rule in the Hispanic new world, I uncover a literary strategy that Spanish American (Martí and Carpentier) and Anglophone writers (Conrad and Naipaul) share in common. I argue that a structure of longing that yearns for a sense of the greater good, which it also mourns as unreachable, informs this subset of new world writing. Offering an image of a republican ideal under siege, this paradoxical mode of longing is also marked by a homosocial desire for male friendship and companionship, a desire increasingly at odds with modern commercial society and its overt reliance on a heterosexual private sphere. This homosocial desire for male friendship and companionship serves as a common structuring device, transforming Hispanic and Anglophone literary traditions into a cohesive body of writing.

At the heart of each work—from Martí's *Versos sencillos* to Naipaul's *A Way in the World*—lies an abiding preoccupation with the meaning of civic virtue and its oft-described opposite: corruption. Faced with realities that exceed North Atlantic republican models, each author reconsiders the relation between virtue and corruption under precarious political conditions. Moving beyond dualist definitions (duty versus self-interest, austerity versus greed, community versus individuality), I argue that postcolonial new world writing offers a more fluid and wide-ranging means of conceiving this relation than political theory has traditionally acknowledged. In its paradoxical formulation, each author reflects a poetics of longing that yearns for correspondence between Caribbean realities and a European civic vocabulary. In striving toward such an aim, however, each author inevitably confronts the painful knowledge of the impossible nature of his task. It is this moment of mournful self-awareness, I argue, that enables all four authors to abandon a project of mimetic correspondence and gesture toward an understanding of the Caribbean as a geography defined less by linguistic and insular categories, and more by a shared paradoxical experience of revolutionary modernity.

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Total Recall:

Republicanism and the Aesthetics of Mourning from Simón Bolívar to José Martí

This chapter examines how the anti-colonial past informs the republican fictions of Bolívar and Martí. Its aim is two-fold: On the one hand, to demonstrate how Simón Bolívar's "Jamaica Letter"—a text likened to Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in terms of its symbolic status as a corresponding statement of Latin American revolution—may be usefully read as a primal scene over which twentieth-century Caribbean fiction about the anti-colonial past unfolds. On the other, to probe how such a primal scene is later mediated by José Martí's political and poetic labor. It is this link between Bolívar's originary declaration and Martí's literary imagination that this chapter will aim to uncover. This chapter (and dissertation as a whole), then, is concerned not only with republican thought, but moreover, with its *aesthetic* dimension.

In Martí's case, as well as in the authors subsequently examined (Conrad, Carpentier and Naipaul), republican political thought in its literary rendition corresponds with an aesthetics of mourning—that is, with an aesthetics that mourns for a politics feared as lost or forgotten. Although this sense of mourning is already present in Bolívar's Jamaica Letter, I argue that it is expanded in Martí's writing, taking a heightened gendered dimension. His is a republican vision most fruitfully understood not simply as a theory about the possibilities of political representation,¹ but perhaps just as crucially, as a window into larger cultural anxieties around gender roles and the status of women under shifting political conditions. This anxiety gives way to a poetics of male bonding in Martí's literary writings.²

The first half of this chapter identifies the dominant narrative modes that typify the Jamaica Letter. By examining the letter's temporal structure, I demonstrate how

¹ My aim, then, is to move beyond commonplace or formal definitions of republicanism (i.e., as a form of government distinct from a monarchy in terms of its emphasis on checks and balances, rule of law, civic participation, etc.). In so doing, this chapter joins a widening body of scholarship that, over the last two decades, has examined its legacies within a transatlantic and comparative frame. Until very recently debates have centered around a North Atlantic conceptualization of its legacies. Needless to say, my object is its South Atlantic variant, and in particular, its possibilities for a broader understanding of postcolonial politics. Until fairly recently, the Latin American variant of republicanism has received little scholarly attention. For an excellent introduction to the debates about republicanism's Latin American incarnation, see *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica: Ensayos de historia intelectual y política*. Eds. José Antonio Aguilar and Rafael Rojas. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002. For a landmark text that examines republicanism within a North Atlantic frame see J.G.A. Pocock's classic, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

² My own definition, then, draws inspiration from feminist engagements with political theory. In particular, Elizabeth Rose Wingrove's *Rousseau's Republican Romance* provides a model of a feminist engagement with political theory that demonstrates how republicanism "engenders political subjects as it engenders men and women." In other words, central to her claim (and mine) is the centrality of sexual difference in the production of political subjectivity. Her examination of Rousseau's sexual politics, moreover, as an elaboration of a mode of political analysis "that attends to the principles and relations of governance inhering in textual, material, and bodily representations" strongly resonate with my own aims here. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. 16-17.

Bolívar's conception of the revolutionary present relies, on the one hand, on a suppression of the pre-colonial past and on the other, on an unfolding of the postcolonial future. The Letter's temporal logic of suppression and release, containment and discharge, I argue, characterizes its particular strain of republicanism; one that appears to acknowledge new world racial inequalities, but in fact cloaks them in an ambiguous and ill-defined notion of post-independence freedom. The Jamaica Letter, in that it stages an originary fantasy of resistance and domination, liberation and coercion, thus constitutes the primal scene for subsequent twentieth-century Caribbean fiction about the revolutionary past. Republicanism's repeated failures to unravel the exclusionary legacies that lay at its conceptual core, I argue in subsequent chapters, becomes an underlying object of reflection in twentieth-century Caribbean fiction.

In the second half of Chapter One, I demonstrate how Cuban poet and Independence hero José Martí inaugurates the strain of republican imagination examined in this dissertation. Martí's republicanism, I argue, puts forth a distinct notion of civic virtue³ centered around a cult of foundational figures of the Spanish American Revolutions—a cult wherein Simón Bolívar occupies a central role. Martí's republicanism, however, does not simply inherit Bolívar's unitary vision, but moreover, imbues it with an added dimension. By mourning Bolívar's political vision of a united Spanish America as a loss he wishes to recover in homosocial terms, Martí sets the terms for his own aspirations for Cuban independence. Thus by imagining the Cuban nation as a homosocial pact between founding fathers and patriot sons, he creates a space within his own writing that both mourns and strives to recover a political vision viewed as lost or forgotten. Resembling what Marc Redfield calls "an impossible, ineradicable mourning,"⁴ Martí's own cry of lament gestures toward a republican vision of Spanish American unity. The anxiety this fear produces in Martí's writing as a potentially lost or impossible project, I argue, gives rise to a fantasy of male friendship and companionship in his writing. This longing for bonds of friendship and companionship among male protagonists, I contend, informs a larger body of Caribbean writing, imbuing it with a distinctly tragic quality. A longing to recover what is lost and a desire to replenish what is missing informs the literature of republican imagination from Martí to Carpentier and from Conrad to Naipaul in the greater Caribbean.

I. Bolívar and Republican Revolution

Written with the purpose of inciting support for the Spanish American cause among the English of the neighboring island of Jamaica, Bolívar's Jamaica Letter is considered by many as the foundational manifesto of South American independence—a text likened to Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in that it draws the parameters for subsequent reflection about the meaning of freedom and self-awareness in the emergent new world republics. In contrast to the circumstances surrounding Jefferson's

³ By civic virtue I take the term to mean what José Antonio Aguilar Rivera calls "la capacidad de cada ciudadano para poner los intereses de la comunidad por encima de los suyos." in *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica*, 69. For a more elaborate genealogy of the notion of civic virtue and its central role in republican theory, see J.G.A. Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment*, and in particular, parts one and three.

⁴ "Imagi-Nation: The Imagined Community and the Aesthetics of Mourning" in *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*. London: Routledge, 2003. 75-106.

Declaration, however, the struggle for South American independence had been well underway by the time Bolívar writes the Jamaica Letter.

Bolívar frames the colonial encounter as a violation of territorial sovereignty.⁵ His conception of Spanish American independence in the Jamaica Letter is prompted, on the one hand, by an awareness of a fundamental breach in sovereignty that the colonial encounter signaled for new world societies, and on the other, by the extreme forms of violence that made possible such a breach:

Existe tal diferencia entre la suerte de los reyes españoles y de los reyes americanos, que no admite comparación; *los primeros son tratados con dignidad, conservados, y al fin recobran su libertad y trono; mientras que los últimos sufren tormentos inauditos y los vilipendios más vergonzosos* [...].

And once more:

El suceso de Fernando VII es más semejante al que tuvo lugar en Chile en 1535, con el ulmen de Copiapó, entonces reinante en aquella comarca. El español Almagro pretextó, como Bonaparte, tomar partido por la causa del legítimo soberano y, en consecuencia, llama al usurpador, como Fernando lo era en España; aparenta restituir al legítimo a sus estados, y termina por encadenar y echar a las llamas al infeliz ulmen, sin querer ni aun oír su defensa. Este es el ejemplo de Fernando VII con su usurpador. *Los reyes europeos sólo padecen destierro; el ulmen de Chile termina su vida de un modo atroz.* (“Carta de Jamaica”)

Comparing native and European experiences of foreign invasion thus appears to Bolívar as incommensurate. So extreme does the disparity between the experience of a European and new world sovereign leader before a foreign aggressor seem, that the comparison collapses. It is this difference between maintaining a minimum of dignity (“son tratados con dignidad”) and being subjected to unbearable torment (“mientras que los últimos sufren tormentos inauditos”), between eventual redress (“y al fin recobran su libertad”) and perpetual injury (“y los vilipendios más vergonzosos”)—that is, between the possibility of recovery and the certainty of doom—that distinguishes European from indigenous experiences of foreign aggression. In so doing, Bolívar calls attention to what Achille Mbembe calls “the politics of cruelty” in European imperialist designs—that is, to the ways in which “intimate, lurid, and leisurely forms of cruelty” become central to the subjugation and control of native subjects in Spain’s new world possessions.⁶

⁵ Michel Foucault suggests that “the theory of sovereignty shows, or attempts to show, how a power can be constituted, not exactly in accordance with the law, but in accordance with a certain basic legitimacy that is more basic than any law and allows laws to function as such.” See “*Society Must be Defended:*” *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. 43-64.

⁶ While Mbembe had in mind British and French imperialist designs in Africa (rather than Spanish ones in the Americas), I would contend that the new world experience of colonial domination demonstrates that the cultivation of novel forms of cruelty and punishment that Mbembe references were present much earlier than he suspects. Part of the problem with Mbembe's formulation of the politics of cruelty has to do with the fact that he attributes its rise to the French Revolution. The new world experience of colonial subjugation would suggest that the cultivation of novel forms of cruelty was initiated much sooner than Mbembe claims. For a fascinating recent study that traces the technologies of cruelty and punishment not to

Moreover, Bolívar demonstrates an awareness of the new global order that the conquest signalled, an order whose fullest expression is perhaps best captured in Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth*.⁷ By calling attention to the extreme forms of violence and cruelty that gave way to this gap, then, Bolívar initially gestures toward a poetics of restitution—one that seeks to redress or remedy the originary violation of the colonial encounter. However, the abject script he ascribes to the Chilean ulmen does not merely draw attention to the incommensurability of the comparison, but moreover, risks reducing indigenous realities to an expired and foregone past. That is, by repeatedly offering an image of the Chilean ulmen's death at the hands of his Spanish tormentors, it is as if Bolívar wishes to seal the fate of indigenous cultures as forever lost and destroyed. Indeed, the Jamaica Letters gives one the impression that the only meaning that the colonial encounter holds for indigenous communities is one of perpetual ruin and desolation. In short, Bolívar's vision does not leave open the possibility of indigenous perseverance and continuity *in spite of* conquest. Instead, it forecloses the possibility of renewal and redemption at the very moment it opens up the question of historical memory of the conquest. In so doing, Bolívar pens an aesthetic practice of mourning that bears as its distinctive marker the contrary effect of its avowed purpose: it silences and suppresses a past to which it aims to give voice.

Perhaps nowhere in the letter does Bolívar's desire for a fundamental break with the past become more apparent than in his understanding of the present itself. That is, while he deems pre-colonial past as null and void, Bolívar understands the Latin American present as an originary moment, except that it remains frustrated by a past that never quite disappears:

Yo considero el estado actual de la América, como cuando desplomado el Imperio Romano cada desmembración formó un sistema político, conforme a sus intereses y situación o siguiendo la ambición particular de algunos jefes, familias o corporaciones; con *esta notable diferencia*, que aquellos miembros dispersos volvían a restablecer sus antiguas naciones con las alteraciones que exigían las cosas o los sucesos; *mas nosotros, que apenas conservamos vestigios de lo que en otro tiempo fue, y que por otra parte no somos indios ni europeos, sino una especie media entre los legítimos propietarios del país y los usurpadores españoles*: en suma, siendo nosotros americanos por nacimiento y nuestros derechos los de Europa, tenemos que disputar éstos a los del país y que mantenernos en él contra la invasión de los invasores; así nos hallamos en el *caso más extraordinario y complicado* [...]. (emphasis mine)

Thus while the Latin American present emerges as a version of the European past, it is not so much a prehistoric or abstract past, but rather, what Hannah Arendt calls “a definite, though undefined, period of history.” As she demonstrates in *On Revolution*, the term's meaning as it was conceived by its French and American practitioners originally

Europe but to the new world, and that attributes it not to a universalizing event like the French Revolution, but rather, from our modern perspective, to one more decidedly arcane (the Spanish Inquisition), see Irene Silverblatt's *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

⁷ *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*. New York: Telos, 2006.

carried with it the connotation “of revolving back,” that is, “of restoration to an ‘early period’ when they had been in the possession of rights and liberties of which tyranny and conquest had dispossessed them.” That is why, Thomas Paine, Arendt explains, “could still, true to the spirit of a bygone age, propose in all earnestness to call the American and the French Revolutions by the name of ‘counter-revolutions.’” A return to this past, then, offers not so much a return to a prehistoric moment in time, but rather, the opportunity for a new beginning. Indeed, the origins of the term’s meaning hinges upon an understanding of the past intimately linked to an Enlightenment notion of rebirth and redemption.

Similar to his French and American forerunners, Bolívar's understanding of the Spanish American past carries with it a trace of its original connotation with one exception. That is, in contrast to his French and American counterparts, for Bolívar the possibility of this restoration is foreclosed from its inception. Critics, however, tend to stress the role of classical republicanism in Bolívar’s conception of Spanish American independence. Luis Castro Leiva and Anthony Pagden, for example, claim that “[h]is concept of liberty... was far closer to the concept of liberty enjoyed within the ancient republics of Athens and Rome than it was to what Constant famously described as ‘modern liberty...’”⁸ While this may hold true for some of his other writings, the Jamaica Letter ultimately offers a more complex and ambivalent relation to those Enlightenment models of antiquity that he references. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the Jamaica Letter is Bolívar’s apparent awareness of the inherent limits of applying classical models to the Americas on the eve of independence. Castro Leiva even goes so far as to suggest that “Bolívar's entire political project can be viewed as a flawed, and ultimately impossible, attempt to transform Book III of the *Contrat social* into a constitution.”⁹ Arendt’s reflections on the American and French Revolutions suggest that this fact alone would not set Bolívar apart from his French and American counterparts. She attributes this tendency, so pronounced in revolutionaries as disparate in strategy and as divergent in vision as Paine and Robespierre, to the fact that the idea of freedom as we understand it today (i.e., of inalienable rights) had no historical antecedents, and hence posed the founders of Enlightenment revolution a formidable conceptual problem. Arendt's insights about the extent of the problem are worth quoting at length:

Paine, we should remember, used the term ‘counter-revolution’ in reply to Burke's forceful defense of the rights of an Englishman, guaranteed by age-old custom and history, against the newfangled idea of the rights of man. But the point is that Paine, no less than Burke felt absolute novelty would be an argument against, not for, the authenticity and legitimacy of such rights. Needless to add that, historically speaking, Burke was right and Paine was wrong. There is no period in history to which the Declaration of the Rights of Man could have harkened back. Former centuries might have recognized that men were equal with respect to God or the gods, for this recognition is not Christian but Roman in origin; Roman slaves could be full-fledged members of religious corporations and, within

⁸“Civil society and the fate of the modern republics of Latin America” in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁹ Quoted in the above mentioned work with reference to his book, *La Gran Colombia, una ilustración ilustrada*. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1985.

the limits of sacred law, their legal status was the same as that of the free man. But inalienable political rights of all men by virtue of birth would have appeared to all ages prior to our own as they appeared to Burke—a contradiction in terms. And it is interesting to note that the Latin word *homo*, the equivalent of ‘man,’ signified originally somebody who was nothing but a man, a rightless person, therefore, and a slave. (46-7)

As Arendt demonstrates, then, Bolívar was not alone in experiencing difficulty in grasping the modern idea of freedom. Indeed, his was a fundamental problem shared not only by his contemporaries in Caracas and Bogotá, but moreover, by his forerunners in Paris and Philadelphia. Because such a concept had no historical antecedents, it risked standing on shaky ground. However, in contrast to French and American revolutionaries, whom, after an initial period recognized the need to abandon classical models altogether and invent new ones, Bolívar never resolves this conceptual conundrum. Instead, he wavers between classical and modern notions of freedom and between past and present understandings of republican rule.¹⁰ Bolívar's notion of freedom is linked to his conception of subjectivity, and his understanding of politics is inherently bound to his conception of new world difference in that both terms function as identity markers whose contents have not yet been fully formed or given definite shape. The distinguishing feature (“la notable diferencia”) between post-Roman Europe and post-conquest America lies in that the subordinated populations of the former return to their former organic unity whereas the newly independent republics of the latter merely “conservan vestigios de lo que en otro tiempo fue.”

Thus for Bolívar, the indigenous past emerges not as a continuous presence but as a past trace. It serves not as a reminder of indigenous restitution but rather as a symbol of historical obsolescence. Bolívar therefore displaces his original preoccupation with the incommensurability of the conquest in favor of a discourse akin to what Mary Louise Pratt calls “creole self-fashioning;” namely, one that deploys Enlightenment discourse for strategic and often self-serving ends.¹¹ Indeed, the Letter's underlying concern shifts from one of restoring to one of *wrestling* sovereignty from its original heir (“tenemos que disputar estos [meaning “derechos”] a los del país”). The proper subject of Spanish American revolution—i.e., the collective “I” of the letter—appears, then, as “neither European nor Indian, but a race halfway between the legitimate owners of the land and the Spanish usurpers,” meaning as neither fully belonging nor fully foreign. Thus the ambiguous terms by which Bolívar defines Spanish American subjectivity—that is, as neither fully belonging nor fully foreign, neither fully victim nor fully victor, neither fully Indian nor fully European—have the effect of displacing the Letter's original object (indigenous restitution) in favor of one of creole self-fashioning. It is a form of self-fashioning, moreover, that conceals its ideological aims under a shroud of ambiguity. In so doing, Bolívar fully abandons his initial preoccupation with indigenous restitution. In other words, it is only because he conceives of Spanish American subjectivity as neither wholly legitimate or wholly illegitimate, that is, as neither predetermined by prior claim

¹⁰This is not to suggest that French and American revolutionaries were better equipped to confront the paradox that racial bondage posed to their utopian visions of democracy. Clearly, if history is any indicator, one must conclude otherwise.

¹¹ *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

(indigeneity) nor by overt coercion (conquest), that Bolívar understands it as unencumbered by neither and thus capable of breaking with its colonial master (Spain). For this reason it is more useful to think of the identitarian terms of the Jamaica Letter as ambiguous markers rather than as hybrid or synchronic as the familiar tropes of hybridity and mestizaje may lead one to believe. In contrast to the concepts of hybridity and mestizaje that tend to dominate contemporary discourses on identity in Latin American critical studies, the idea of ambiguity does not presuppose a primal scene of mixture or contamination, but rather, implies a more uncertain notion of identity formation. It recalls a moment before the lines are drawn and the terms of debate have yet to be fixed. In short, it is one that recalls Raymond William's notion of a "structure of feeling" as an ideological formation except that it remains at its emergent (rather than at its congealed) stage.¹² In this sense, it is not so much a precursor to a mestizo-consciousness discourse, but rather, a prior (and at times) co-existing or parallel discourse. Moreover, in so far as the Jamaica Letter cloaks its own racial biases under a shroud of ambiguity, its conception of Spanish American subjectivity is one wholly in keeping with creole emancipatory ends.¹³ Thus when Bolívar evokes a "race halfway between the legitimate owners" and "the Spanish usurpers," he is not so much sowing the seeds of a mestizo nationalist discourse *avant la lettre*, but rather, concealing his own subject position as a privileged creole in a society characterized by deep racial divisions. Thus Bolívar's two-part definition of Spanish American subjectivity ("being Americans by birth," on the one hand, "and endowed with rights from Europe," on the other) corresponds with an early—rather than late—nineteenth century discourse of the self; one based not in biology, but rather, on a combined understanding of mind and environment. Bolívar's aesthetic practice, then, gives rise to a creole discourse of republican subjectivity; one that, once having evacuated the pre-conquest past, presents the revolutionary present as an alternate past—that is, one capable of giving birth to a new beginning. In the process, he evacuates from his critical purview present pasts and future presents that part ways with a creole vision of republican revolution; namely, those of the overwhelming indigenous, black, and mixed race majorities whose terms and aims of resistance so often clashed with his own.

While I have demonstrated how both the colonial past and the revolutionary present are structured by a notion of Spanish American subjectivity that shifts from a discourse of indigenous restitution to one of creole self-fashioning, I now wish to demonstrate how Bolívar's vision of its future, in turn, is structured by a similar scene of ambiguity; that is, one that he strategically opens up to an uncertain moment of political possibility:

¹² See *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

¹³ John Lynch in his *Spanish American Revolutions* cautions historians not to overestimate the influence of Enlightenment thought in the revolutions that ensued on the South American continent. Without assigning it a causal role, it would seem equally important not to completely overlook its importance. Hence when Lynch suggests that "in the final reckoning Americans received from the Enlightenment not so much new information and ideas as a new approach to knowledge, a preference for reason and experiment as opposed to authority and tradition", it seems to me that in the final analysis, this very fact better approximates the true meaning of Enlightenment (as understood by Kant) above and beyond the spread of new information and ideas.

Todavía es más difícil presentir *la suerte futura* del Nuevo Mundo, establecer principios sobre su política y casi profetizar *la naturaleza* del gobierno que *llegará a adoptar*. Toda idea relativa *al porvenir de este país* me parece *aventurada*. Se pudo prever cuando el género humano se hallaba en *su infancia*, rodeado de tanta incertidumbre, ignorancia y error, cuál sería el régimen que abrazaría su conservación? Quién se habría atrevido a decir: tal nación será república o monarquía, ésta será pequeña, aquella grande? *En mi concepto, ésta es la imagen de nuestra situación*. Nosotros somos un pequeño género humano; poseemos un mundo aparte, cercado por dilatados mares, nuevo en casi todas artes y ciencias aunque en cierto modo viejo en los usos de la sociedad civil. (emphasis mine)

Thus one of the Jamaica Letter's distinguishing features is the way that the passage from liberation from Spanish rule to the founding of republican freedom is imagined in ambiguous terms. Indeed, Bolívar's post-independence future emerges as an undetermined space that wavers between monarchical and republican forms of government and between small- versus large-scale models of nationhood. The passage from liberation to freedom, then, does not entail the foundation and maintenance of political institutions as in the case of the American Revolution, or an attempt to solve the "social question" (i.e., surmounting poverty and achieving equality in a society that remained feudal in its fabric) as in the case of the French Revolution as Arendt argued about the two¹⁴, but rather, one capable of assuring a smooth and stable transition between colonial and postcolonial modes of sovereign authority in societies characterized by deep racial tension and frequent social unrest.¹⁵ What is striking about the Jamaica Letter's conception of future freedom, then, is the way in which its rhetoric ("la suerte futura", "la naturaleza del gobierno que llegara a adoptar", "el porvenir de este país", etc.) resembles the language of present revolution in that both temporal categories are emptied of their original content, thus leaving the course and outcome of revolution open to a wide range of interpretations. The Letter's continuous wavering between foregone past and originary present, and in turn, between an originary present and an uncertain future, further sediments an aesthetic practice that mourns the present as past and the future as present, and in so doing, defines the former as origin and the latter as emergent. In the process, Bolívar construes the present as a fiction of origins and the future as its uncertain, corresponding form. This aesthetic practice, moreover, is made possible by a narrative logic that, on the one hand, suppresses the pre-colonial past, and on the other, discharges the post-colonial future in order for the revolutionary present to emerge as an originary scene of rebirth and redemption.

In the following section I wish to demonstrate how Bolívar's early nineteenth-century preoccupation with the anti-colonial past translates into a late nineteenth-century anxiety about the status of revolutionary politics in the poetry and prose of José Martí.

¹⁴ See Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

¹⁵ As John Lynch demonstrates in his classic, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*, creoles "had to seize the opportunity of independence not only to take power from Spain but above all, to prevent the pardos from taking it. Bolívar was appalled by the dilemma, aware that it survived independence: 'A great volcano lies at our feet. Who shall restrain the oppressed classes? Slavery will break its yoke, each shade of complexion will seek mastery.'" 24.

The central place that founding fathers of Spanish American revolution hold in Martí's poetic and political project, I contend, reflects not only an individual desire for aesthetic and political cohesion, but moreover, announces an emergent collective anxiety about the meaning of resistance and domination in a late nineteenth-century colonial context—an anxiety wherein both terms take on heightened gendered forms. In what follows, however, I do not mean to suggest that Martí's own aesthetic practice directly inherits Bolívar's exclusionary logic, but rather, that he reinvents it in the language of civic virtue. In so doing, my aim is to uncover what Rafael Rojas has called the central role of neoclassical republicanism in Martí's literary and political thought.¹⁶

II. Martí and Republican Revolution

Whereas in *Specters of Marx* Derrida is exclusively concerned with Marx's obsession with ghosts ("he thinks of nothing else"¹⁷), a similar preoccupation could be said to overcome Martí. And yet while Derrida's Marx maintains an uncomfortable relation to his ghosts (he seeks to exorcise them), Martí summons them, recognizing in them an emancipatory potential worth tapping into. For Martí, the return of the dead is a theme inextricably linked to anti-colonial resistance, and in particular, to those thwarted insurrections of the past. Those past figures of anti-colonial resistance dwell in a space of non-fulfillment, seeking their restitution in Bolívar himself:

La independencia de América venía de un siglo atrás sangrando;--¡ni de Rousseau ni de Washington viene nuestra América, sino de si misma! Así, en las noches aromosas de su jardín solariego de San Jacinto, o por las riberas de aquel pintado Anauco por donde guió tal vez los pies menudos de la esposa que se le murió en flor, vería Bolívar, con el puño al corazón, *la procesión terrible de los precursores de la independencia de América: ¡van y vienen los muertos por el aire, y no reposan hasta que no está su obra satisfecha! El vió, sin duda, en el crepusculo del Avila, el séquito cruento...*¹⁸ (emphasis mine)

While the rousseauian influence in Bolívar's republicanism that Martí faults him for has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, perhaps less acknowledged is the extent to which Martí's own conception of democracy remains wholly in keeping with Enlightenment notions of political obligation. That is, even as it attempts to hold itself as a mirror before a verifiable Latin American reality, Martí's argument for an autochthonous conception of a Latin American culture derives its logic from Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*.¹⁹ Thus even as he faults Bolívar for overly relying on

¹⁶ See his illuminating essay "Otro Gallo Cantaría:" Essay on the First Cuban Republicanism" in *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*, ed. Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz. Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2006. Also see his book-length study of Martí's republicanism, *José Martí: La invención de Cuba*. Madrid: Colibrí, 2000.

¹⁷ "...Marx does not like ghosts any more than his adversaries do. He does not want to believe in them. But he thinks of nothing else. He believes rather in what is supposed to distinguish them from actual reality, living effectivity." New York: Routledge, 1994. 47.

¹⁸ In "Simón Bolívar", from *Obras Completas de Martí*. La Habana: Editorial Nueva Gente, 1992.

¹⁹ Luis Castro Leiva and Anthony Pagden offer a more critical account of republican nation-building projects that purport to depart from Enlightenment-derived notions of democracy and freedom (i.e., Martí's). In "Civil society and the fate of the modern republics of Latin America" they suggest that

French and American models of democratic thought (“ni de Rousseau ni de Washington viene nuestra America”), Martí’s call for an indigenous revolutionary tradition (“sino de si misma!”) ought to be seen not so much as an argument against Enlightenment revolution, but rather against a particular version thereof. The logic of Martí’s republicanism, however, is such that it must disavow its extraneous origins for it to ring true. In other words, because his argument relies on metaphors of indigeneity, nativism, and autochthony, it derives its explanatory power precisely from its sense of being wholly proper to its site of enunciation. In short, Martí’s discourse derives its effectiveness by presenting itself as homegrown even when its origins lie elsewhere. It is this fundamental fiction at the heart of Martí’s discourse of autochthony—i.e., its need to gloss over its own origins in order to garner its ideological appeal—that at once structures and animates his conception of Latin American identity. This fiction is all the more important to guard as it makes possible the link between those ghosts of the past that await their restitution and the task he views Bolívar as uniquely qualified to undertake. Thus the anti-colonial past and the revolutionary present are joined in an act of retroactive restitution, one wherein he ascribes to Bolívar the role of protagonist in a drama of revolutionary redemption. Bolívar emerges, then, as protagonist-redeemer because Martí views him as forging affective bonds with those fallen heroes of the past. It is his retrospective capacity to *feel* for the past’s fallen heroes which places Bolívar in the privileged position to conjure their spirits and redeem their thwarted struggles. Perhaps more pertinent, Martí’s portrait of Bolívar as a feeling male hero serves a strategic purpose: it allows him to align the divergent aims of prior anti-colonial struggles with an ideology of affective unity, and in the process, suppress the question of racial difference as it pertains to Cuba’s colonial setting. This vision of Bolívar, moreover, allows Martí to put forth a novel concept of revolutionary masculinity that leaves open the space for *emotion* in a sphere traditionally understood as the province of reason (politics).²⁰ As we shall later see, this concept becomes central to his vision of democratic freedom. Emotion and reason are thus reconciled in the figure of the feeling male revolutionary; the excesses of European reason are tempered with emotions considered more genuine because they are understood as deriving from an intimate relation to new world soil. In other words, it is in part because he imagines Bolívar from “su jardín solariego de San Jacinto” and “las riberas de aquel pintado Anauco” that he deems him in a suitable position to perceive the ghosts of the past and hear their agonizing cries. Martí associates Bolívar’s capacity to communicate with the dead, moreover, with his first wife’s death (“por donde guió tal vez

“republicanism [as it was experienced in Latin America] was itself divided not merely into the now familiar distinction between ancient and modern, but also over the scope, method, and content of the relationship between political identity and political obligation. Could a true republic possess universal and epistemologically conceived practices, or, historically and culturally conditioned ones? Should, that is, the political obligation within a republic derive, as Montesquieu had argued, from the nature of things as determined by the particularities of each culture, or, should they, as Rousseau and the ancients had claimed, be a reflection of a supposedly unchanging human nature inscribed in the consciousness of the natural law?” in *Civil Society: Histories and Possibilities*, edited by Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

²⁰See Jurgen Habermas’ classic, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* for an Enlightenment-derived account of the role of reason in the emergence of the modern public sphere. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991. My impression is that Martí’s conception of public culture is more indebted to romanticism’s critique of the Enlightenment, rather than to the Enlightenment itself.

los pies menudos de la esposa que se le murió en flor”). Bolívar's privileged bond with the spirits of the past is thus inextricably linked to a notion of heterosexual romance based on mourning.²¹ Thus Bolívar's capacity to *mourn* for a wife whose untimely death further underscores his mournful disposition (“que se le murió en flor”) secures his position as favored interlocutor of the dead. And yet even in mourning, Martí imagines Bolívar as ordering his wife (“por donde guió talvez los pies menudos de la esposa”). In other words, in so far as Martí's concept of mourning is based on notions of mastery and control, it remains in harmony with established gender norms. It is because for Martí, mourning implies *seeing* (and in so doing, ordering) his wife in death that Bolívar is capable of speaking with the ghosts of the past.²² Bolívar's innate capacity to speak to the dead, moreover, gives him the capacity to cross the temporal divide between the anti-colonial past and the revolutionary present so as to abandon his position of passive observer for one of full-fledged historical actor. In other words, Bolívar's heightened capacity to at once see *and* feel his new world surroundings, both mourn and hear its ghosts (“vería Bolívar, con el puño al corazón”), makes him a model of messianic redemption capable of upsetting the Cuban colonial order. Martí's messianic resurrection of Bolívar thus serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it enables him to create a fiction of origins necessary for his particular brand of Enlightenment revolution—one that foregoes a sustained reflection about the relation between racial difference and democracy in favor of a universalizing discourse of affective unity. On the other, it helps plant the seeds for a novel concept of revolutionary masculinity; one that carves a space for emotion within a sphere of politics that at the same time does not disrupt established gender norms. In so doing, Martí paves the road for a novel concept of civic virtue; one defined in terms of an investment in a cult of foundational figures of Spanish American revolution—a cult, as we have seen, wherein Bolívar occupies a central role. Not unlike his British and American contemporaries Carlyle and Emerson, then, Martí's political

²¹ For the idea of heterosexual romance as a structuring principle in Latin American fiction, and in particular, in the nineteenth century novel, see Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. My reading, however, somewhat differs from Sommer's in that I am not so much concerned in heterosexual romance a mode that always coheres or achieves its aims (e.g., marriage), but rather, with its contradictions and moments of failure.

²² For an incisive and nuanced account of the role of gender as a structuring device in Rousseau, see Elizabeth Rose Wingrove's *Rousseau's Republican Romance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. In particular, Wingrove's claim that her subject “is not sexuality per se but the political work gender does for republican theory” resonates strongly with my own aims here. Moreover, the shift in gender ideals that she locates in Rousseau's republicanism as distinct from renaissance civic humanism bears a striking resemblance to my own claim about Martí's masculine ideal. “This shift in gender ideals provokes questions about the political ideals they embody. Both the civic humanist and Romantic versions of republicanism champion self-rule, but the former figures it as the fruit of masculine reason divorced from pathos, while the latter imagines a political virility born of servile desire.” Along a similar lines, Sylvia Molloy calls literary *modernismo*—a vein of literary thought of which Martí forms a part—as “[p]ossibly the most strikingly homosocial movement in Latin American literature.” Its propensity toward envisioning itself as a “tightly bonded literary *brotherhood*,” as Molloy puts it, serves as a structuring device in much of Martí's writing. See her seminal and illuminating essay “Too Wilde for Comfort: Desire and Ideology in Fin-de-Siècle Spanish America” in *Social Text*. 10.2 (1992): 187-201. Finally, see Oscar Montero's reflections on the ambiguity and contradictions of Martí's gender politics in the chapter entitled “The New Woman and the Anxieties of Gender” in his recent book, *José Martí: An Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

thought is one concerned with the notion of hero and hero-worship as offering a desirable model of fostering civic duty and responsibility among an emergent citizen population. Unlike Carlyle and Emerson, however, Martí is more concerned with finding autochthonous or local models of heroism rather than the more universal aspirations they sought.²³ As we will later see, it is a notion that increasingly pervades both his poetry and prose.

First, however, I wish to demonstrate how such a concept of civic virtue relies on a particular narrative structure, one wherein past and present (and by extension, and life and death) are collapsed. This collapsing, in turn, makes possible a republican fiction of retroactive restitution, one wherein Bolívar redeems those fallen figures of the anti-colonial past. Similar to Bolívar's suppression of the anti-colonial past, then, Martí's messianic time carries with it an exclusionary logic of its own. This explains in part why Bolívar's ghosts appear so frequently next to verb of motion *pasar*:

Pasa Antequera, el rey de Paraguay, el primero de todos, alzando de sobre su cuello rebanando la cabeza; la familia entera del pobre inca *pasa*, muerta a los ojos de su padre atado, y recogiendo los cuartos de su cuerpo; *pasa* Tupac Amaru; el rey de los mestizos de Venezuela viene luego; *desvanecido por el aire, como un fantasma*; dormido en su sangre *va* después Salinas, y Quiroga muerto sobre su plato de comer, y Morales como viva carnicería, porque en la cárcel de Quito amaban a su patria; sin casa a donde volver, porque se la regaron de sal, *sigue* León, moribundo en la cueva; en garfios *van* los miembros de José España, que murió sonriendo en la horca, y *va* humeando el tronco de Galán, quemado ante el patíbulo; y Berbeo *pasa*, más muerto que ninguno—aunque de miedo a sus comuneros lo dejó el verdugo vivo—porque, para quien conoció la dicha de pelear por el honor de su país, no hay muerte mayor que estar en pie mientras dura la vergüenza patria; ¡y de esta alma india y mestiza y blanca, hecha una llama sola, se envolvió en ella el héroe, y en la constancia y la intrepidez ella; en la hermandad de la aspiración común juntó, al calor de la gloria, los compuestos desemejantes; anuló o enfrenó émulo, *pasó* el páramo... (emphasis mine)

Thus by bringing the dead back to the reader's purview, Martí inscribes the violence of the past within the fabric of the present. Through a strategy of repetition, Martí forges a poetics of time that dwells on the persistence of every past rather than on the ephemerality of each present. The verb *pasar* thus serves a crucial function. On the one hand, it designates a break down in a spatio-temporal succession of time and place. On the other, it hints at another possibility; namely, that of time and space bearing a more dynamic relation to historical time. This point is all the more pertinent in the original since in Spanish, the verb *pasar* at once designates action (i.e., "to occur") and motion (i.e., to cross a particular unit of space in time), at once passivity and activity, at once agency and contingency. Paradoxically, however, by inscribing those fallen heroes as passing (or occurring) in a continuous *present* rather than as having passed in a completed *past*, Martí resurrects them only to underscore further their death-like status. But in so doing, Martí restages "The Jamaica Letter's" originary scene of exclusion, only this time he

²³ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Representative Men*. New York: Random House, 2004. Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

gives it a new script. This time its martyrs no longer remain frozen in the past, but rather, continuously re-experience the violence of their death in the present. Martí restages their deaths, moreover, so as to give his appeal a sense of urgency. Revolution's precursors, he seems to imply, await their redemption in Bolívar himself. The distinctly nationalist terms that frame his appeal, however, give rise to a spectral doubling. That is, in so far as his version of republicanism needs its martyrs to remain dead in order for it to garner its affective appeal, his ghosts end up dead—not once—but twice. The poignancy of their deaths derives not so much from the sense of moral outrage that they provoke, but rather, from the feeling of *national* longing they instill in readers. Its underlying concern, then, is not so much past injustice (i.e., redress or reparation), but rather, present struggle (national liberation). Its motivating force, not so much subaltern demands, but creole desires. In the process, the specific aims of prior anti-colonial moments—from the Tupac Amaru rebellion to the Berbero insurrection—are surrendered in favor of a more narrow notion of liberation that turns the focus away from the racial inequalities that lie at the heart of colonial Cuba in favor of the presumably more immediate concern of national liberation. Thus both past and the present blur together only to return to their respective place: the living remain standing whereas the dead are asked to return to their grave. Similar to Bolívar's suppression of the anti-colonial past, Martí's messianic time carries with it an exclusionary logic of its own. In Martí's temporal scheme, Bolívar emerges as an allegorical embodiment ("se envolvió en ella el heroe") of a collective whole ("hecha una llama sola") that reflects a racially mixed cultural essence ("de esta alma india y mestiza y blanca"), except that it omits from its inclusion one crucial element (black Cubans). In so doing, Martí unwittingly prepares the ideological work for a discourse that, for all of its claims to inclusiveness, will repeatedly fail to bring the black segments of its population within the national pale (i.e., mestizaje).²⁴ Thus Bolívar emerges as an allegorical embodiment of an imagined community mediated by an affective discourse of masculine emotion wherein the disparate and heterogeneous parts ("los compuestos desemejantes") come together under the banner of a feeling male whole ("en la hermandad de la aspiración común junto"). Yet even as Bolívar maintains a privileged relation with the dead in Martí's eyes for the above mentioned reasons, this fact alone does not spare him the fate of becoming a ghost himself. Why Bolívar emerges not only as a ghost, but moreover, as the ghost from which all other ghosts emanate in Martí's writings, will be the subject of the following section.

²⁴ See also Martí's more famous essay "Nuestra América" for another instance wherein he evacuates black subjectivity from his formulation of Latin American identity. For a good overview of the discourse of mestizaje in Latin America, see Marilyn Grace's Miller's *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. For a perspective that charts the critical possibilities of "Nuestra América" and Martí's politics for a hemispheric or transnational understanding of American studies, see José David Saldívar's chapter "The Dialectics of Our America" in his seminal book that bears the same title, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak recuperates Martí for a new, revitalized comparative literary studies. See her *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

After favorably considering Bolívar's biography and the veritable cult devoted to the South American liberator that ensues as a result,²⁵ Martí chooses to recuperate one aspect of his legacy. The means by which he arrives at his favored aspect of Bolívar's biography and the specific place he ascribes to the condition of Cuban coloniality within this vision both beg a more lengthy examination:

Del historiador Gervinus al *cholo* del Perú, todos le ven desensillando el caballo en la agonía de San Mateo; pasando los torrentes y el páramo para ir a redimir a Nueva Granada; envolviendo con las llamas de sus ojos y con sus escuadrones a los realistas de Carabobo; hablando con la inmortalidad en el ápice de Chimborazo; abrazándose en Guayaquil con San Martín entristecido; presidiendo en Junín, desde las sombras de la noche, la última batalla al arma blanca; entrando de lujo a Potosí, a la cabeza de su ejército conquistador, mientras los pueblos y montes le saludan y en la cumbre del cerro de Plata ondean las banderas nuevas de sus cinco repúblicas. Otros lo ven muerto, casi sin ropa que ponerse, en el espanto de caída, al borde de la mar; *los cubanos lo veremos siempre arreglando con Sucre la expedición, que no llegó jamás, para libertar a Cuba!*²⁶ (emphasis mine)

Martí's view from up high thus shifts to one from down below. That is, it shifts from one wherein Bolívar occupies the position of omniscient viewer ("el vio, sin duda") to one wherein he becomes the viewed object himself ("todos le ven"). This shift increasingly relies on a perspective that paints him in hues that bear the imprint of a victorious masculinity. Thus Bolívar becomes the object of our readerly gaze: Our capacity to see Bolívar's feats not only confirms his messianic status, but moreover endows him with the sense of mastery and control necessary to carry out his mandate. In so doing, viewers both high and low occupy a similar position; one wherein all share the same view of Bolívar ("todos le ven") irrespective of social or national status ("del historiador Gervinus al *cholo* del Perú"). Bolívar's display of extraordinary heroism and bravery, moreover, gives Martí's version of messianism its masculinist appeal. In other words, it is because as spectators-readers we see Bolívar inaugurating revolution by readying himself for the battle of San Mateo ("desensillando el caballo en la agonía de San Mateo") that we are able to recognize within him the indelible signs of a messianic redeemer ("para ir a redimir a Nueva Granada"). His combination of undeterred bravery and military genius, innate qualities and acquired skill ("envolviendo con las llamas de sus ojos y con sus escuadrones a los realistas de Carabobo"), furthermore, confirms this status. Finally, his privileged relation to the divine seals his fate as exclusive purveyor of anti-colonial revolution ("hablando con la inmortalidad en el ápice de Chimborazo"). His connection to the other-worldly—his capacity to listen to the dead, and in this case, to speak to the divine—positions him in the favorable role of breaking with the colonial past so as to forge a sovereign and independent present. In so far as it carves open the space for a homosocial affect of national co-belonging ("abrazándose en Guayaquil con San

²⁵ For obvious reasons, Martí makes no mention of Bolívar's negative portrayals, such as Marx's famous depiction of Bolívar as a bandit.

²⁶ This essay, entitled "La Fiesta de Bolívar" written for la Sociedad Literaria Hispanoamericana was first published in the newspaper "Patria" on October 31, 1893.

Martín entristecido”), then, emotion becomes a key ingredient in Martí’s portrait of Bolívar. Nationalism’s inherent need for emotion within an all-male public sphere, I wish to contend, provides this loop hole in homosocial relations.²⁷ For Martí, then, Bolívar’s display of affection for San Martín, who surrenders the struggle for Peru, Argentina and Chile to him at Guayaquil,²⁸ makes him a desirable model of revolutionary masculinity. His capacity to offer solace to a fellow comrade-in-arms (San Martín)—that is, to display affection and when needed, to mourn for his fellow countrymen—sets him apart as someone who not only looks after the nation’s citizens, but moreover, lends emotional support. It is by way of Bolívar, then, that Martí ushers in a novel model of revolutionary masculinity, one wherein display of emotion as well as force, kindred feeling as well as military prowess, becomes instrumental in the forging of an incipient national gender ideal.²⁹ It is his combination of emotion and force, sentiment and violence that makes possible his decisive victory over the royalist troops at Junín (“presidiendo en Junín”), thereby foreshadowing (“desde las sombras de la noche”) their final defeat (“la última batalla al arma blanca”). His famous entry into Potosí (“entrando de lujo a Potosí”) at the head of a mighty army (“a la cabeza de su ejército conquistador”), amid a welcoming crowd (“mientras los pueblos y montes le saludan”), and underneath a summit of flags (“y en la cumbre del cerro de Plata ondean las banderas nuevas de sus cinco repúblicas”), signal not only the independence era, but moreover, a new phase in homosocial relation—a phase wherein fellow brethren, free from the shackles of colonial bondage, may finally co-exist as a unified and collective whole. And yet even in such a seamless triumphant vision, the specters of death and defeat that haunt the later part of Bolívar’s career reappear, if only briefly. It is as if Martí seems to suggest that he is all too aware that Bolívar’s detractors (“otros”) view his legacy in ruin and collapse (“muerto, casi sin ropa que ponerse”), verging on its extinction from memory (“en el espanto de caída, al borde de la mar”). To counter this prospect, Martí raises another one of Bolívar’s unfulfilled promises—the liberation of Cuba—so as to recuperate it for his own anti-colonial aims. That is, Martí recognizes in Bolívar a potent symbol around which to garner support for his own liberationist aims because of Cuba’s anomalous condition as a Spanish colony at a moment when nearly all of South America and Mexico have obtained formal independence. Having missed his opportunity to free Cuba in the past (“la expedición, que no llegó jamás, para libertar a Cuba”), Bolívar emerges as a ghost that defers its promise toward a future that Martí seizes as his own present (“los cubanos lo veremos siempre arreglando con Sucre”). Thus Martí forges his poetics of liberation under the sign of a broken promise: he recuperates Bolívar’s legacy as an unfinished project so as to carry out its completion in the form of Cuban independence.

²⁷ See Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, and in particular, the book’s last chapter, “Memory and Forgetting” for an illuminating account of the role of mourning as central to the fiction of nationalism. London: Verso, 1983.

²⁸ Borges recreates their encounter in a short story that bears the name of their place of meeting, “Guayaquil,” in *Brodie’s Report* (1970).

²⁹ To the extent that Martí’s republican ideal departs from a more classical model of republicanism (i.e., what Wingrove calls “masculine reason divorced from pathos”), in upholding Bolívar as a standard bearer of revolutionary subjectivity, he simultaneously constructs a novel gender ideal for a future Cuban nation. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the masculine ideal that Martí introduces does not altogether disappear in twentieth-century Caribbean fiction, but rather, resurfaces in various guises.

Martí's republicanism thus undergoes a crucial shift. By further underscoring Bolívar's role within a notion of civic virtue that stresses both emotion and force, feeling as well as reason, Martí not only announces an emergent political subject (a free Cuban citizen), he simultaneously gives rise to a novel gender prototype (revolutionary masculinity). To borrow Elizabeth Fox Wingrove's phrase, Martí's republican moment is one that "engenders political subjects as it engenders men and women." Indeed, it gives birth to both a public ideal and a private wish. Martí's republican moment envisions home and world, and by extension self and citizen, in a relation of masculine correspondence and communion.

Yet if Martí's republican prose propounds a seamless vision of national liberation, his civic poetry offers a different story. Whereas his prose extols the virtues of republican masculinity, his poetry exposes its contradictions. That is, whereas his prose announces victory, his poetry signals defeat. Martí's poetry enacts what Julio Ramos calls "a drama of virility³⁰" that is submerged—not in optimism—but in gloom. It is this darker side to Martí's ghosts that distinguishes his civic poetry from his republican prose, his understanding of history from his faith in great men, and his conception of art from his aspirations in real life. Why Martí's ghosts maintain such a terrifying hold over him in his poetry, in contrast to his prose, will be the subject of this final section. More importantly, why the discourse of nation converges with the ideology of republicanism in his poetry, will inform this section's latter part.

Something will strike readers as unusual about Martí's ghosts in his *Versos sencillos*. They do not appear briefly before him only to disappear in thin air. That is, they do not speak to their viewer but remain in a mute indifference to its repeated calls. They are material ghosts, and by their very nature, defy commonplace definitions of the term:

Sueño con claustros de mármol
Donde en silencio divino
Los héroes, de pie, reposan:
¡De noche, a la luz del alma,
Hablo con ellos: de noche!
Están en fila: las manos
De piedra les beso: abren
Los ojos de piedra: mueven
Los labios de piedra: tiemblan
Las barbas de piedra: empuñan
La espada de piedra: lloran:
¡Vibra la espada en la vaina!

³⁰ See his classic book, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. Ramos refers to Martí's desire to compensate for literature's marginal—and therefore effeminized—status in an age of instrumental reason. My readings of Martí's poetry remain indebted to this path-breaking work. What follows is the full-length quote: "Martí responded to the folding back of the lyrical subject with marked ambivalence, even with suspicion that the autonomization of interdependent spheres of knowledge reduced literature to a mere state or position of solipsism, a 'weak' form of social intervention. His reflection [...] inscribes the emergence of modern poetry in a drama of virility that feminizes the marginality of literature with respect to 'strong' and effective discourses of instrumental rationality." 272.

Mudo, les beso la mano.

Martí's "[s]ueño con claustros de marmol" signals a call for an uncontaminated space of masculine wholeness based on a cult of great men or hero worship not unlike the one his contemporaries Carlyle and Emerson endorsed. That is, he imagines a space of masculine homage similar to a mausoleum or a public memorial ("mármol"), except that it emerges as self-enclosed and removed from the public eye ("claustros"). In short, he envisions an idyllic space of calm and repose³¹ where its revered heroes rest in a decorous dignity ("Los héroes de pie reposan:"), undisturbed by the cacophony of everyday life ("Donde en silencio divino"). It is one, moreover, where patriot sons may come into contact with founding fathers. Even more to the point in the original, Martí does not simply dream of, but dreams *with* marble cloisters; that is, he does not merely imagine their presence but longs for their proximity. Martí's republicanism thus relies on a distinct notion of civic virtue based on a homosocial logic of desire that seeks a sense of wholeness in a cult of great men that it must continuously defer.³² As I will later demonstrate, however, it is a homosocial desire that must always be held in check. In other words, the poem's built-in space for male bonding obeys an androcentric logic of father-son affect bordering on homoeroticism that signals this promise that is at the same time a prohibition.³³ It is nighttime, moreover, that provides the proper conditions for a masculine space of civic mourning ("¡De noche, a la luz del alma") because it offers an alternate source of light; one that emanates not from the immediate rays of the sun, but rather, from the more profound depths of human emotion. Indeed, only at night is Martí able to look them in the face and communicate to them his desires ("Hablo con ellos: de noche!"). It is night's silent depth (rather than daytime's disorderly disquiet) that offers an ideal space of affective encounter between founding fathers and patriot son, between cold marble and warm flesh, and between past rubble and present fire. But if they appear before its viewer in rows ("Están en fila"), allowing him to behold them more fully, Martí offers homage of a most intimate kind: he kisses their stony hands ("las manos / De piedra les beso"). That is, Martí's gesture signals as a quintessential act of filial piety: it represents an opening of lip to hand, orifice to surface, son to father, frail flesh to brute force. Moreover, this momentary meeting of flesh and stone, living breath and dead matter, prompts their awakening ("abren / Los ojos de piedra") and signals their return from the grave ("mueven / Los labios de piedra"). However, not once does Martí suggest they transform into living flesh. The stoniness of the stone, to invoke a phrase coined by the Russian formalists, is felt more than ever; their waking eyes, moving lips, and trembling beards, remain as stony as ever.³⁴ It is, however, his kiss that sets in

³¹ See Julio Ramos' classic, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. In it, he calls this patriotic gesture "the repose of heroes."

³² See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* for the notion of homosociality as a structuring principle in Western gender norms. Again, I am indebted to Silvia Molloy's reading of fin-de-siecle *modernismo* as a self-consciously homosocial literary movement (1992). Also, of interest, see Francine Masiello's *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

³³ See Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* for a more sustained reflection on the androcentric structure of the field of politics. London: Verso, 1997.

³⁴ Derrida suggests that it is perhaps ghosts in their material form that are most fearful. See *Specters*: "One does not chase away the *real* emperor or pope in a single blow by exorcising or by conjuring away

motion their sudden awakening from a long and deep slumber. Indeed, it is as if his kiss passes through their bodies like a ray of lightning that jolts them back to life. Their opening eyes, then, signal both a restoration of vision and a somatic return of consciousness; their moving lips announce both the vitality of breath and the primacy of speech; and their trembling beards recall both the authority of experience and the seniority of old age; finally, their clasp of the sword joins an image of male chivalry with one of phallic violence. However, insofar as they figure as crying (“lloran”), this image of masculine recovery is not altogether complete. Moreover, the following image (“Vibra la espada en la vaina!”) is one of phallic uncertainty. Wavering between the draw of a sword and its possible failure, between the virility of victory and the castration of defeat, the image of a quivering sword in its sheath hints at the phallic ambiguity at the heart of the poem. That is, part of the fascination the statue’s sword holds over the poet is the possibility of its failure to unleash the violence that it seeks to unfurl, thus amounting to castration. It is this prospect that renders the poet speechless, finding solace in the kiss of a hand (“Mudo, les beso la mano”). But as we have seen, it is the meeting of hand and lip, surface and orifice, tender flesh and firm skin, that fulfills a critical metonymic function: it restages the homosocial fantasy of filial piety that his version of republicanism is based upon, a fantasy wherein patriot sons may find a sense of civic wholeness and completion in a space of communal bond with founding fathers.

And yet if the previous stanza ends in a scene of respectful silence, the following one follows a more loquacious poetic line. That is, if the previous stanza extols the virtues of quiet mourning, the following one opts for a more vocal mode. Previously staging an idyllic scene of filial piety, the following stanza suggests unrest within the law of the father:

Hablo con ellos, de noche!
 Están en fila: paseo
 Entre las filas: lloroso
 Me abrazo a un mármol: “Oh mármol,
 Dicen que beben tus hijos
 Su propia sangre en las copas
 Venenosas de sus dueños!
 Que hablan la lengua podrida
 De sus ruifanes! Que comen
 Juntos el pan del oprobio,
 En la mesa ensangrentada!
 Que pierden en lengua inútil
 El último fuego!: ¡dicen,
 Oh mármol, mármol dormido,
 Que ya se ha muerto tu raza!”

[*escamotant*] the mere *ghostly* form of their bodies. Marx is very firm: when one has destroyed a phantomatic body, the real body remains. When the *ghostly* body (*die gespenstige Leibhaftigkeit*) of the emperor disappears, it is not the body that disappears, merely its phenomenality, its phantomaticity (*Gespensterhaftigkeit*). The emperor is then more real than ever and one can measure better than ever his actual power (*wirkliche Macht*).” Martí’s example here would seem to confirm Derrida’s intimation.

This time he insists on speaking to them (“Hablo con ellos, de noche!”). As he wanders through the rows of statues in tears of dissatisfaction (“paseo / Entre las filas: lloroso”), he clings to one in search of answers (“Me abrazo a un mármol: “Oh mármol, / Dicen que...””). But, how, then, are we to read the troubling content of the poet’s questions and their indirect mode of address? To claim that the nation’s “sons drink their own blood from the poisoned cups of their masters” is not only to evoke a scene of deathly terror, but rather, to understand colonialism as a particular kind of death. It is to offer a nightmarish vision of colonial domination, one wherein the self is forced to administer its own death from the poisonous hand of the other. In other words, it is to understand that while the source of that self-destruction emanates from the self, its foundation and underlying form that sustains it, lies in the other (the cup). More than its literal translation suggests, “copa” in Spanish means both cup and chalice, linking an image of luxurious consumption with one of elemental thirst, one of ritual sacrifice with one of routine necessity. Similarly, when he claims that the revolution’s progeny “break the bread of infamy together at a table soaked in blood,” Martí recalls Christ’s last supper except that it is a scene stained with the blood of violence and hints at a taboo rendered unnamable by its own ambiguity. But what exactly does it mean to break the bread of infamy together? What taboo does such a scene transgress and why does it remain unnamed? It is my contention that the poem’s recurring imagery of blood, in that it recalls taboos of sameness, is structured around a scene of homosexual panic—a scene that likens collaboration with the forces of tyranny and injustice not only to death, but moreover, to male homosexuality as a form of death. By evoking images of royal pomp and Christian ritual (the chalice and breaking of bread) as sacrificial scenes of self-harm and unspeakable actions, then, Martí associates colonialism through its twin institutions (the Church and the crown) with male homosexuality. In so doing, he offers an image of colonial domination synonymous with a transgression of a masculine ideal, one wherein male and male remain in a close yet respectful relation of mutual affection vis-à-vis the nation. That is, it signals a breach in nationalism’s homosocial contract mediated by a disembodied and abstract female figure of the nation.

To suggest that “they speak the rancid language of their tormentors,” however, is to invoke a particular understanding of colonial relations with regard to language. Understood metaphorically, it hints at a failure to articulate a new language (i.e., one of republican revolution) that would break with that of colonial bondage (i.e., monarchism). It is also to suggest that this language contains within it the poisonous germs of its own undoing (“podrida”). It is impossible not to think here more generally about the fate of language in Spain’s new world possessions. That is, insofar as Spanish came to play a dominant role both in the colonial and postcolonial era, the fate of language—and indigenous languages, in particular—is one of the contrasting features between Latin America and most (although not all) regions of the world that shouldered the burden of colonial domination.³⁵ Indeed, to introduce a master-slave dyad with regards to language is to imbue it with a specifically tragic understanding, one that is all too aware of the fact that the meaning of one’s language is to a large extent made possible by the subordination and eventual death of another. In short, it is to understand that so much has been lost—and so much still to be gained—on the eve of emancipation. It is this tragic awareness—in short, an aesthetics of mourning—found in his poetry, that gives us

Martí's most profound insights about Latin America's distinct historical conditions of emergence above and beyond his more celebratory proclamations that characterize his prose. It is in light of this awareness, moreover, that his preoccupation with the waning possibilities of language ought to be understood when he suggests that their "useless tongues are losing their last fire." It is the possibility of a new language—one capable of finally breaking with the language of the colonizer—which republican revolution promised to offer and Martí now fears is dead ("Que ya se ha muerto tu raza!")—that the poet inherits as his singular task. But if the poet worries for the possibilities of a language of political action (i.e., republicanism), he voices his concerns not seeking a genuine answer, but rather, with hopes the statues will assuage his fears. In other words, the poem's inherently indirect mode of address, in that it employs circuitous means to extract an answer regarding a potentially touchy subject, is by definition an open-ended and loose discourse. It seeks not so much an answer but an affirmation of mutual loyalty in the sphere of politics. It seeks not so much factual evidence, but rather, a reassurance of kinship ties and obligations. It is a discourse that by preserving a sense of decorum and respect toward its listener, first and foremost seeks to renew the ties that binds listener to speaker, patriot son to founding father, and loyal citizen to sovereign leader. As Rafael Rojas best put it, "[b]rief and solemn forms, succinct and respectable republican representation: herein lies the discreet, primordial republicanism of José Martí."³⁶

The final stanza is remarkable in that it defies the poet's every expectation. The statues prove more terrifying than his own fears of republican collapse, and instead of ending in a scene of filial bliss, the poem hints at a violence more profound than anything previously imagined. It is this fundamental enigma at the heart of the revolutionary endeavor—the violence of the storm before its clearing at dawn—that the poem's final stanza enacts. It is the status of the phallus and its relation to that violence, moreover, that not only gives the stanza its poetic feel, but informs the ambiguity of its closing lines:

Échame en tierra de un bote
 El héroe que abrazo: me ase
 Del cuello: barre la tierra
 Con mi cabeza: levanta
 El brazo, ¡el brazo le luce
 Lo mismo que un sol!: resuena
 La piedra: buscan el cinto
 Las manos blancas: del soclo
 Saltan los hombres de mármol!

As if not wanting anything to do with his supplications, the statue he holds on to throws him to the ground. It is as if his admiring son has come too close for his own comfort and brushes him aside. In other words, it is as if the poet himself has transgressed the very boundary he claims others have crossed. In contrast to the poet's deferential affection, the statue's act of pushing someone to the ground signifies an act of open

³⁶ "'Otro gallo cantaría:' Essay on the First Cuban Republicanism" in *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*. Edited by Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006. 14-15.

confrontation. It signals a call to violence as a renewal of hostilities. Perhaps more to the point, it signifies a refusal to entertain the fiction of filial piety that the poet's notion of civic virtue relies on. Thus by seizing him by the neck and dragging him across the ground, the statue breaks through the fiction of a benevolent founding father and instead reveals himself to be angry and capable of harming his own kin. The comparison of his raising arm to a flashing sun, moreover, conjures up a violent image of a blinding and burning light. This image recalls not only the sun's infinite capacity to give life, but also, to extinguish it. It comes remarkably close to Foucault's definition of the sovereign as he who is endowed with the capacity to both "kill and let live."³⁷ The raising of the arm thus recalls the moment before brute force strikes frail flesh, the moment before the state makes its imprint on the subject—in short, the moment before the sovereign employs his right to discard life. In short, this image offers a glimpse of the mechanisms of governmentality before the postcolonial state's emergence as such.³⁸ The reverberating sound of the stone that follows, moreover, implies an impending violence that looms not far on the horizon. That is, it sets off the first sounds of thunder of the coming storm.

The poem thus comes full circle: its initial calm ends in revolutionary clamor and its phallic ambiguity gives way to an image of assertive violence ("the marble statues leap!"). Its closing scene offers an image of phallic sovereignty and revolutionary violence. It is a violence, however, that defies the poet's every expectation. It is one that gestures to a space beyond the constraints of the page and beyond the strictures of public memorials—or rather, beyond the poem as a form of public memorial ("del soclo saltan los hombres de mármol!"). In the process, the poem shatters the poet's fiction of civic virtue. In so far as the statues appear to leap beyond the page (and consequently, beyond our readerly purview), the poem's closing lines gesture toward an unforeseeable space (that is, at once not visible and not predictable beforehand) of poetic and political possibility. Indeed, it signals a space beyond the representational divide that separates object and viewer, art and life, and perhaps more crucially for Martí, language and action.

Before concluding, I wish to take up another poem that both signals a desire to cross art's representational divide and speaks to the aesthetics of mourning that lay at the heart of Martí's liberationist project: "Dos Patrias." More than Bolívar or any of the founding fathers Martí pays homage to in his other writings, the nation emerges as the ghostly protagonist in this poem. This time, however, the ghost is not masculine but feminine, and its poetic register is not one of successful mourning but of never-ending loss. What marks this shift from founding father to widow nation, from masculine mourning to feminine loss, and from irate statue to weeping specter, will be the subject of this final section:

Dos patrias tengo yo: Cuba y la noche.
¿O son una las dos? No bien retira

³⁷ See his posthumously published lectures "*Society Must Be Defended*:" *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-6*. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. 43-64, 239-264.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson claims that revolutionaries always inherit the state of their predecessors: "... even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime... One should therefore not be so much surprised if revolutionary *leaderships*, consciously or unconsciously, come to play lord of the manor." In *Imagined Communities*. 160-1.

su majestad el sol, con largos velos
y un clavel en la mano, silenciosa
Cuba cual viuda triste me aparece.
¡Yo sé cuál es ese clavel sangriento
que en la mano le tiembla! Está vacío
mi pecho, destrozado está y vacío
en donde estaba el corazón. Ya es hora
de empezar a morir. La noche es buena
para decir adiós. La luz estorba
y la palabra humana. El universo
habla mejor que el hombre.

Cual bandera
que invita a batallar, la llama roja
de la vela flamea. Las ventanas
abro, ya estrecho en mí. Muda, rompiendo
las hojas del clavel, como una nube
que enturbia el cielo, Cuba, viuda, pasa...

The opening lines accomplish what Martí seeks to do toward the previous poem's end; poetry and nation, Cuba and the night, are revealed to be one and the same. That is, the night understood as a metaphor for poetic inspiration and Cuba as a signifier for the nation that has yet to come into being, acquire a poetic density that blurs distinctions between art and politics, poetry and life. And yet while the night could be said to symbolize poetic time, it also marks a temporal shift of another kind: the image of sun's departure, in that it is linked with "majesty," evokes the end of one era (colonial) and the beginning of another (independence). It evokes what Hannah Arendt called "the legendary hiatus between end and beginning, between a no-longer and a not-yet."³⁹ Indeed, it is to envision the moment between the clearing of the storm at dusk and the announcement of a new day at dawn. It is at this critical juncture that Cuba emerges as a ghost for the first time ("Cuba cual viuda triste me aparece"). This time, however, instead of offering an image of masculine victory, Martí opts for one of feminine resignation. The Cuban nation thus emerges for Martí as the eternal female figure in mourning, one with a long history of antecedents in the West, but with its fullest expression in modernity as an allegory for the nation-form. The blood-stained carnation she holds, moreover, serves the added function of indicating his shared grief. Thus son and mother are joined for the first time not in life but in death, and their pact is not shaped by a son's oedipal desire for the mother but rather by a shared longing for an absent father. The carnation thus not only serves as an outward reminder of "an iradicable mourning" as Marc Redfield puts it, but as the very symbol of the homosocial logic that it is predicated upon. It is his grasp of the symbol's meaning—his self-avowed capacity to decipher the sense of immeasurable loss for a father it commemorates—that brings him ever closer to his widowed mother's side ("¡Yo sé cuál es ese clavel sangriento").

Such a mourning takes on a peculiar form. The carnation itself is stained with the freshness of a blood shed recently and trembles as if afflicted with the same pain of the deceased father it commemorates. The scene that follows calls attention to the

³⁹ *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1963.

fundamental absence at the heart of the poem (and the poet). Thus the poem relies on a homosocial logic of mourning for a father that cannot be anything other than absent. The poem's aesthetic pull—its affective center of gravity—relies on a son's desire for a father figure that is irrevocably dead. It is this implicit link between absent heart and dead father, gaping wound and inconsolable grief, and phantom organ and impossible reunion that gives the poem its distinctly mournful quality. And yet if such a reunion is not made possible in life, the following line suggests it is more readily attainable in death (“Ya es hora / de empear a morir”). Paradoxically, nationalism offers in death what republicanism seeks in life—the fulfillment of a homosocial fantasy of masculine wholeness anchored in an aesthetics of mourning. Republicanism's convergence with the discourse of nation, I wish to argue, is what makes such a reunion possible. To the extent that nationalism is predicated upon an individual's willingness to surrender his life for an abstract or imagined community, it provides suitable grounds for the fulfillment of such a fantasy. Nationalism and republicanism thus figure as at once distinct and complimentary discourses that converge in a poetry of repose; that is, in an aesthetic that no longer takes life—but death—as its mimetic aim. In the process, the fiction of filial obligation is taken to its logical conclusion: the act of dying for one's nation signals at the same time a return to a space of masculine wholeness, one wherein patriotic sons may finally lay to rest alongside founding fathers.⁴⁰

I am well aware, however, that the reading I have put forth of “Dos Patrias” may not sit well with Martí devotees. Indeed, Martí's mythic status in the pantheon of Cuban letters has created reading habits that assume the poet as the de facto dead husband of a widowed Cuban nation. Reading Martí not as father but as son—that is, not as generator but rather, as inheritor of a republican fiction of mourning—not only uncovers an aesthetic mode that defies the logic of heterosexual romance, but in so doing, calls attention to literature's potential in redefining what Chantal Mouffe has called “the return of the political;”⁴¹ that is, in forging a critical space that does not view democracy as a normative or predetermined set of ideals, but instead, as an inherently vexed—and incomplete—process of becoming.

I have shown how both authors' republican visions are reflective of an early (Bolívar) and late nineteenth-century (Martí) desire for correspondence between new world social realities and an emergent autochthonous demos. Bolívar's Jamaica Letter, I demonstrated, stages a primal scene of Spanish American self-awareness that mourns the present as past and the future as present, and in so doing, clears the ground for subsequent republican thought in the region. Martí's sustained interest in Bolívar's legacy in his republican prose, in turn, enables him to forge a concept of civic virtue that bases itself in a cult of foundational figures of Spanish American revolution. In the process, Martí simultaneously engenders a novel political subject: revolutionary masculinity. Ultimately, however, Martí's civic poetry offers a more somber, indeed tragic, vision of revolutionary politics in the region. His poetry's insistence on violence over emotion, terror over consensus, and by extension, force over virtue, I contend, is reflective not

⁴⁰ Julio Ramos appropriately calls the sacrificial logic at the heart of Martí's patriotic poetry “the repose of heroes.” See his *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America*. Trans. John D. Blanco. 2001.

⁴¹ *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, 1993.

only of an aesthetic that redefines the republican project in critical terms, but moreover, one whose very redefinition is made possible by its convergence with the discourse of nationalism. It is this unique affective structure that Bolívar offers and Martí makes anew that I have been calling an aesthetics of mourning; that is, one concerned not so much with life—but death—as its ultimate mimetic aim.

Finding Virtue in an Uncertain State: Republicanism and the Rhetoric of

Corruption in Conrad's *Nostromo*

This chapter examines how Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*, a novel about a fictional South American republic on the brink of revolution, critically reflects upon the possibilities of reconciling a civic-minded public ethos defined by a shared concern for the common good (republicanism) with a commercial philosophy that places emphasis on individual gain (liberalism) under precarious political and economic conditions. It seeks to understand why, in the language of the novel, "material interest" ultimately undermines every effort to establish a republican form of government that upholds the rights of the many before the privileges of the few. Such an approach, however, first warrants a word of clarification: while the exact location of Conrad's imaginary republic has been the subject of wide-ranging debate,⁴² my aim will be not so much to find correspondence between Costaguana and any one particular nation, but rather, to examine how the novel critically re-imagines the idea of Latin America and its intimate, if vexed, relation to both liberal and republican thought. As John Chasteen recently noted, the fact that Latin America remains home to a majority of the world's first modern republics in itself offers reason to reconsider the meaning of liberty and democracy beyond North Atlantic models.⁴³

I. Old World Versus New World Republican Modes

Conrad's portrait of Costaguana initially conforms to the image of the banana republic—a state plagued with endless tyranny and chronic bouts of social unrest. Giorgio Viola, the novel's model of old world republican heroism, settles in the troubled nation after spending the greater part of his life fighting alongside Garibaldi for the cause of Italian unification in Europe. So uncertain do the future prospects of Costaguana's political life appear that he refuses to view its political developments as having any significant bearing upon the modern world. Instead, he reacts to the initial signs of an impending revolution with characteristic scorn:

The old man, full of scorn for the populace, as your austere republican so often is, had disregarded the preliminary sounds of trouble. He went on that day as usual pattering about the *casa* in his slippers, muttering angrily to himself his contempt of the non-political nature of the riot, and shrugging his shoulders. (48)

Conrad offers here a scene of domestic indifference. So insignificant do the first signs of a revolution appear to Viola that not only does he abstain from venturing outside the safety of his home, but further gives the impression of retreating into the inner recesses of

⁴² Some critics find correspondence between Costaguana and Peru, others more closely align the ailing republic with Colombia, and yet others have suggested Mexico or Venezuela as Conrad's favored nation of inspiration.

⁴³ See his recent book, *Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

a solitary domesticity (“He went on that day as usual pattering about the *casa* in his slippers”) safely closed off from the revolutionary clamor that awaits outside his door (“muttering angrily to himself his contempt of the non-political nature of the riot, and shrugging his shoulders”). The association of the populace or masses with scorn, moreover, is one with a history that stretches back to colonial times in Latin America, and one with racist and classist overtones. Viola’s republicanism, unfastened from its original Italian context, Conrad seems to suggest, reverts to racist scorn. Unable to adapt his ideals to new world demands, Viola is not only ill-equipped to confront the complex realities it presents him, but moreover, his very understanding of the political is out of pace with the novel forms the term takes in his South American surroundings. As we will later see, what Viola means by politics is shown to be vastly different than anything he encounters in Costaguana. Viola’s understanding remains caught up in a normative view of republican thought that implicitly defines the political as the exclusive province of white male citizenship. Faced with a far more heterogeneous racial reality, the old world republican retreats into a sphere hermetically sealed from the public world of politics. Paradoxically, Viola takes comfort in the private sphere of domestic seclusion, a sphere more readily associated with the everyday labor of women than with more lofty masculine pursuits.

Viola sinks into political solipsism even further, this time not only refusing to view the politics of Costaguana on its own terms, but admonishing what he takes as its misguided and doomed nature. His close up view of the uprising is revealing not only of a larger Eurocentric attitude toward new world politics, but perhaps more crucially, of the limits the vocabulary of republican thought faces when transplanted onto a South American context:

These were not a people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation for a man who had been one of Garibaldi’s immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily. He had an immense scorn for this outbreak of scoundrels and *leperos*, who did not know the meaning of the word ‘liberty.’ (51)

The Manichean logic behind Viola’s heightened scorn is fully revealed and the rigid views he clings to are laid bare. Just heroes and lawless villains, virtuous republics and degenerate states, worthy causes and unsuitable emotions, herein lies the essential and originary distinction of a binary vision of two irreconcilable worlds. An image of a heroic and victorious army destroying the last remnants of European feudalism (“Garibaldi’s immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily”) is juxtaposed to one of human vermin threatening to unleash a plague of terror and destruction (“this outbreak of scoundrels and *leperos*”), revealing the hopelessly outdated nature of Viola’s views. The conclusion he derives further drives the conceptual point home: the very meaning he ascribes to the word ‘liberty’ proves inadequate for what he witnesses unfold.

Ultimately, however, the distinction is blurred (herein lies the novel’s critique) and the republican hero that Viola so admires is revealed to be as closely connected to the independence movements of the new world as he is to the republican aims of the old. Conrad makes ironic use of the fact that the very emblem of Italian unification (Garibaldi) was as much shaped by his experience fighting in various South American

wars—first, in Brazil, and later in Uruguay—as by his decisive victories for the *Risorgimento* responsible for Italy’s much sought-after unification:

He grounded his old gun, and, turning his head, glanced at the coloured lithograph of Garibaldi in a black frame on the white wall; a thread of strong sunshine cut it perpendicularly. His eyes, accustomed to the luminous twilight, made out the high colouring of the face, the red of the shirt, the outlines of the square shoulders, the black patch of the Bersagliere hat with cock’s feathers curling over the crown. An immortal hero! This was your liberty; it gave you not only life, but immortality as well!

For that one man his fanaticism had suffered no diminution. In the moment of relief from apprehension of the greatest danger, perhaps, his family had been exposed to in all their wanderings, he had turned to the picture of his old chief, first and only, then laid his hand on his wife’s shoulder. (51-2)

At the moment an armed uprising threatens to disrupt Viola’s domestic insularity, Conrad turns our attention as readers to the portrait of Garibaldi that hangs in his home. Instead of taking cover and providing protection to his family, Viola first pauses to admire the portrait. Such a scene is presented as a moment of patriotic absorption. The “thread of strong sunshine” that “cut[s] it perpendicularly” gives us the impression of a sacred-like aura, further heightening Viola’s religious-like devotion. It serves to remind us of the sacred status of the object of his absorption. Viola’s capacity to decipher the portrait’s contours, his ability to read its distinctive markers, further underscores a civic relation of absorption that connects viewing subject with art object and patriot citizen with sacred symbol. It is within the parameters of this relation that Viola derives a definition of liberty based not so much in a political concept of representative government, but rather, in a homosocial desire for male friendship and companionship. The coupling of immortality with heroism (“an immortal hero”) and in turn, liberty with immortality (“it gave you not only life, but immortality as well”) signal a desire for a space of male bonding and friendship above ordinary interactions and beyond routine heterosexual mores. It signals a desire for liberty coded in masculine and imagined in homosocial terms. There is a degree of irony, however, to this ideologically charged vision. The distinctive features that define Garibaldi show the emblematic figure of modern Italian republicanism to be as much defined by his early South American ventures as by his late Italian feats, and the defining features of his devotion are ones that correspond with new world dress rather than with old world sartorial tradition. Conrad reminds readers that Garibaldi acquired his signature look not from European republican attire, but rather, from gaucho dressing habits of southern Brazil and Argentina. But why, then, associate an image of aesthetic absorption with one of homosocial devotion? Why, in other words, draw our attention to Viola’s religious-like devotion? In a previous chapter I argued that among its primary features, late nineteenth century republican thought did not only comprise a shared concern with the common good, but moreover, an aesthetics of mourning anchored in a homosocial fantasy of masculine wholeness. This aesthetic component of republicanism, I argued, was made possible by its convergence with the rhetoric of nationalism. Conrad registers this added element, although with an irony that casts it in a critical light, calling attention to its limitations when not properly adapted to

its new surroundings. Thus there lies within Conrad's critical purview an awareness of the contradictions inherent in defining the national community in homosocial terms. Here Conrad seems to suggest that Viola clings too closely to a republican notion of homosocial desire that privileges male friendship and companionship ("he had turned to the picture of his old chief, first and only,") at the expense of a desired heterosexual private sphere ("then laid his hand on his wife's shoulder"). We are led to believe here that Viola's old world republicanism does not translate into proper gendered terms in new world grounds. So loyal a model under new and unaccounted for conditions, Conrad seems to suggest, risks taking the republican project into dangerous gendered territory.

So central a role does a homosocial structure of desire play in Viola's republican vision that not only does it give rise to a masculinist fantasy of politics, but moreover, yields a private relation of mourning toward its own conditions of impossibility. That is, in so far as he remains mindful of the contradictory demands the heterosexual family unit poses to his republican aspirations, he simultaneously mourns the impossibility of his own homosocial longings. Viola's relation to his immediate family is for this reason revealing:

Old Giorgio contemplated his children thoughtfully. There was two years difference between them. They had been born to him late, years after the boy had died. Had he lived he would have been nearly as old as Gian'Battista—he whom the English called Nostromo; but as to his daughters, the severity of his temper, his advancing age, his absorption in his memories, had prevented his taking much notice of them. He loved his children, but girls belong more to the mother, and much of his affection had been expended in the worship and service of liberty. (56)

Even as Viola retreats into a solitary domesticity, he finds himself increasingly ill at ease in an environment dominated by women, so much so that he creates a separate, private sphere of his own. Viola dwells in an inward-looking world of male mourning and paternal loss while his daughters carry on in a presumably more immediate realm of feminine domesticity. Viola even goes so far as to nearly absolve himself of any paternal obligation toward them ("the severity of his temper, his advancing age, his absorption in his memories, had prevented his taking much notice of them"). Perhaps more to the point, the Viola daughters' secondary importance is not simply symbolic ("had prevented his taking much notice of them"), but actually indicates that their conception coincides with the end of a period of grief for their son's untimely death ("they had been born to him late, years after the boy had died"). Their very birth, then, both reveals and masks, both indicates and obfuscates, a masculine relation of loss that signals the end of a process of mourning for a son whose untimely passing Viola never quite overcomes. More specifically, the death of a *son* (as opposed to a daughter), we are given the impression, signals for a father a greater form of loss than any daughter's could acquire ("but girls belong more to the mother"). From the perspective of a masculine concept of republican virtue, the death of a son, Viola leads us to believe, signals not only a relation of private tragedy, but simultaneously, a public form of loss. It potentially signals not only a parent's private grief for a lost child, but moreover, an instance of collective mourning for a nation's fallen citizen. Left with no alternative but to dwell in the impossibility of return, Viola sublimates his affection for his lost son in the republican cause of Italian

unification (“much of his affection had been expended in the worship and service of liberty”). In the absence of a son, Viola’s concept of liberty is marked by a notion of republican revolution that defines relations between messianic hero (Garibaldi) and loyal follower (Viola) as akin to one between dutiful son and patriot father. It is at this very moment that Viola self-consciously links Nostromo—the novel’s principal, if hapless, character—as the republican cause’s best hope in the new world. Nostromo’s age and nationality not only correspond with a would-be-eldest son (“Had he lived he would have been nearly as old as Gian’ Battista”), but moreover, he is viewed as the one character capable of leading Costaguaneros toward the proper revolutionary path (“—he whom the English called Nostromo”). His name, a distortion from the original Italian to mean “the man of the hour” (*nostro uomo*), suggests he seeks to carry out Viola’s revolutionary mandate.

As Viola’s fantasy of Spartan heroism and muscular virtue further unfolds, its gendered logic reaches new levels of sublimation, and paradoxically, its inherently fractured and vexed nature becomes apparent. Viola’s views undergo further transformation, the republican cause he clings to becomes as riddled with contradictions and failures as the one he holds in contempt, and the binary vision of two irreconcilable worlds he holds is further collapsed:

When quite a youth he had deserted from a ship trading to La Plata, to enlist in the navy of Montevideo, then under the command of Garibaldi. Afterwards, in the Italian legion of the Republic struggling against the encroaching tyranny of Rosas, he had taken part, on great plains, on the banks of the immense rivers, in the fiercest fighting perhaps the world had ever known. He had lived amongst men who had declaimed about liberty, suffered for liberty, died for liberty, with a desperate exaltation, and with their eyes turned towards an oppressed Italy. His own enthusiasm had been fed on scenes of carnage, on the examples of lofty devotions, on the din of armed struggle, on the inflamed language of proclamations. He had never parted from the chief of his choice—the fiery apostle of independence—keeping by his side in America and in Italy till after the fatal day of Aspromonte, when the treachery of kings, emperors, and ministers had been revealed to the world in the wounding and imprisonment of his hero—a catastrophe that had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of divine justice. (58)

In offering a battle image of epic proportions in a South American setting, Conrad shifts the scene of action from old world to new world soil (“in the fiercest fighting perhaps the world had ever known”). The allusion to dramatic and awe-inspiring aspects of the South American landscape (“on *great* plains, on the banks of *immense* rivers” [emphasis mine]), further serves to underscore an image of the new world as a privileged site of epic struggle and of events of world historical importance. This image, however, not only frames history as an epic battle against formidable odds, but moreover, forms the very basis of Viola’s republican ethos insofar as he defines civic virtue as a war-like, Spartan, and heroic masculine ideal. This scene insists upon the intimate link between liberty and a homosocial vision of politics by way of repetition (“[h]e had lived amongst men who had declaimed about liberty, suffered for liberty, died for liberty”), but perhaps more

crucially, it also frames this connection in terms that sublimate, and in the process, safeguard a masculinist structure of feeling (“with a desperate exaltation”). In short, this image takes as its purpose a structure of devotion that allows sympathetic readers and suffering soldiers, concerned onlookers and toiling men, to converge in a mirror-like moment of mutual recognition. Viola thus imagines the republican cause (“[h]is own enthusiasm had been fed on”) as a homosocial realm of both manly violence (“scenes of carnage”) and abstract virtue (“on the examples of lofty devotions”), of both soldier-like force (“on the din of armed struggle”) and masculine emotion (“on the inflamed language of proclamations”)—in short, as a community of both virtuous readers and virile protagonists. Once the scene of action shifts to the new world, however, its protagonists’ gazes are once again turned toward the republican causes of the old (“and with their eyes turned towards an oppressed Italy.”) At the very moment Viola appears to extend his awareness of republican possibility toward his awesome South American surroundings, he once again redirects our attention to Europe. Paradoxically, even as the South American setting acquires greater political density, its heroic protagonists appear to be waging a war with European aspirations in mind. Such a scene makes possible a view of Viola’s republicanism that brings its androcentric father-son logic to the fore. Viola does not only take part in these epic scenes of battle, but rather, makes it clear that he never leaves his beloved Garibaldi’s side (“[h]e had never parted from the chief of his choice”). The very title that he ascribes to the Italian liberator (“the fiery apostle of independence”) itself calls attention to the messianic and laudatory status he holds in Viola’s mind. By calling attention to both his constant physical and affective proximity to Garibaldi, Viola further turns the republican narrative frame of reference away from the Americas and restores it to its original European setting (“keeping by his side in America and in Italy till after the fatal day of Aspromonte”). Its final European designation, however, is hardly a consoling one for Viola as his beloved old world republican dreams are tragically thwarted there as well (“when the treachery of kings, emperors, and ministers had been revealed to the world in the wounding and imprisonment of his hero”). Viola’s homosocial fantasy of republican fraternity is thus shown to have a melancholic underside that mourns the impossibility of its own wish-fulfillment even as he strives for its attainment. The language of disaster he employs to describe the ultimate fate of Garibaldi’s efforts extinguishes Viola’s republican hopes, and in the process, indelibly shapes his outlook on life more generally (“—a catastrophe that had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of divine justice”). Viola’s bleak outlook, then, applies not only to his adopted country (Costaguana), but perhaps more painfully, to one he knows will not—indeed, cannot—meet the high standards he once hoped it might (Italy). The affective structure of this impossibility, moreover, is one that is distinctly framed in homosocial terms.

II. Between Tragedy and Farce

Nearly eighty years before Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier sets the tone for subsequent reflection on Latin American fiction in a widely known essay “On the Marvelous Real in America,”⁴⁴ thereby articulating a literary strategy that subsequently became commonly associated with Latin America, Joseph Conrad ascribes an art form to

⁴⁴ Reprinted in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. Edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. 76-88.

the region all of his own. Rather than privilege the marvelous or the occult as Carpentier (among others) later do, however, he turns to theatrical metaphors as a means of capturing the inner workings of modern states. Rather than create a narrative thread bound by the romance of magic, he forms one that links pathos with comedy, and tragedy with farce. Why theater becomes the central metaphor by which Conrad understands Latin America will form the subject of this section. Why tragedy and farce, in particular, emerge as the two competing modes by which he renders its *political* life in *Nostromo* will inform the critical concerns that follow hereafter.

Conrad's image of Latin America—witting or unwitting, intentional or fortuitous—is to a large extent indebted to Marx's concept of history. By and large a work of imaginative recreation (Conrad's contact with South America was brief, his acquaintance with its history and society cursory), *Nostromo* bears the imprint of its author's cultural moment. By culture I am specifically referring to what Raymond Williams calls "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period."⁴⁵ Marxism makes up a significant aspect of Conrad's social experience, even if he never goes anywhere near its shores of commitment. Marx's opening statement in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*⁴⁶—his assertion that all events of world history occur twice, "the first time as tragedy and the second as farce"—corresponds with a desire to locate a reality, and in the process, invent a literary mode that might capture the continent's turbulent and vexed political character in *Nostromo*. This tragicomic vision is made possible by Martin Decoud—the novel's most Europeanized native character. Decoud's political awakening—his shift from scornful observer to sympathetic participant—offers a germane point of entry into the novel's greater vision of a continent torn asunder by the pressures of greed and self-interest.

While the idea that history bears a structure of its own is not one unique to Marx, the notion that it follows a dramatic structure of repetition, however, is one he outlines with considerable depth in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. In Marx's principal work of historiography, he posits the French Revolution as a watershed moment in the history of class struggle. Decoud's initial turn to comedy as the privileged mode by which to understand Costaguana politics strongly resonates with Marx's concept of history⁴⁷, a concept wherein Latin America—by virtue of its belated or secondary status—emerges as the farcical double of an originary scene of European tragedy.⁴⁸ As the following passage demonstrates, the initial comedic terms Decoud employs to describe the political life of Costaguana coincide with a Eurocentric concept of history (one wherein Europe invariably emerges as the sole subject of history), even as he gradually abandons them in

⁴⁵ In *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. 131

⁴⁶ What follows is the full-length quote from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Caussidiere for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the *Montagne* of 1848 to 1851 for the *Montagne* of 1793 to 1795, the Nephew for the Uncle."

⁴⁷ Theater still maintained an influential role in European literary and political life throughout the nineteenth century, even as it was gradually eclipsed by the novel.

⁴⁸ Marx, following Hegel, is famous for omitting the United States from his dialectic concept of history. What is often left out from remarks about his omission is his curious silence not only about the United States but also its contemporaneous Latin American republics.

favor of a more complex understanding of events and their effects beyond their immediate surroundings:

Of his own country he used to say to his French associates: ‘Imagine an atmosphere of *opéra bouffe*, in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe. Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind; but really we Spanish-Americans do overstep the bounds. (152)

Decoud’s comparison of Latin American politics to *opéra bouffe*—a light form of political satire that gained considerable popularity during the second French Empire — offers a grandiloquent image which calls attention to a world drained of its original content so that all that remains appears trite, contrived—in a word, insignificant. The opera (as opposed to the traditional stage) offers an at once grand and miniature image of Latin American politics, one wherein grand and showy gestures are ultimately revealed to be empty and devoid of meaning. Gone are the days of poignant tragedies of mournful princes and brooding kings. In its place, theater offers solace in amusing views of incompetent diplomats and corrupt statesmen unable to comprehend the far greater reality that surrounds the stage. The problem, however, lies partially in the fact that Latin America bears the brunt of Decoud’s joke. To be sure, his farcical vision relies on a binary concept of history, one wherein Latin America is forced to stand in a secondary, and by implication, corrupted relation to an originary European whole. Indeed, such a view offers the impression that Latin America cannot offer anything other than a pale and corrupted copy of a noble (because tragic) European whole. His allusion to “Spanish America,” (as opposed to Lusophone Brazil or Francophone Haiti), moreover, doubly references a group of nations bound by a shared linguistic—and political—legacy in the new world; namely, those that gained independence from Spain—Mexico, Gran Colombia and the Rio Plate Provinces—in the age of enlightenment revolution. Decoud further dwells on a farcical view of Spanish American politics, making it the region’s trademark feature, even as he momentarily extends the analogy toward all nations as a whole. The problem with Decoud, Conrad seems to suggest, lies not only in the scorn he holds for Spanish America, but in the manner he distorts those European values he claims to endorse. Decoud’s symbolic association with France, then, indicates the strain of European thought that shapes his view of politics, except that it is one he distorts to the point of non-recognition:

As a matter of fact, he was an idle boulevardier, in touch with some smart journalists, made free of a few newspaper offices, and welcomed in the pleasure-haunts of pressmen. This life, whose dreary superficiality is covered by the glitter of universal *blague*, like the stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley custom, induced in him a Frenchified—but most un-French—cosmopolitanism, in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority. (151-2)

Decoud's French associations offer little in the way of redeeming qualities. Described as "an idle boulevardier," Decoud represents a pale and uninspiring version of a nobler French cultural ideal. Critics and biographers of Conrad have examined his French cultural connections with considerable persuasion. Many critics, for example, underscore the fact that French (rather than English) was his *second* language, Polish being the first.⁴⁹ Perhaps more revealing, it is a well known fact that Conrad's parents—ardent Polish nationalists in a period of Russian occupation—dressed him as a child in the colors of the French flag so as to instill in him the values of Western freedom and democracy at an early age. Conrad's years in Marseilles working for French merchant vessels, moreover, are also well known. Conrad's French affinities, then, correspond with a more widespread environment of cultural hegemony France enjoyed in Europe, with its roots in the age of absolutism, but making an indelible mark in the modern era with the advent of the French Revolution. One is reminded that the shape of modern European political affairs took hold in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. This legacy is what allows intellectual historian F.R. Ankersmit⁵⁰ to distinguish the European parliamentary tradition from the Anglo-American two-party system. In *Nostramo*, Conrad not only demonstrates an awareness of this distinction, but moreover, of the French republican tradition's influential role in Spanish American politics. The problem with Decoud, Conrad seems to suggest, is not so much that he emulates a French (rather than Anglo-American) model of cultural mimesis, but rather, that he offers a failed and corrupted version thereof. Decoud's "Frenchified—but most un-French—cosmopolitanism" signals a relation of mimicry toward a mode of universal appeal, one that simply mimes rather than fully absorb the tenets of its underlying value system. Reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's notion of the colonial subject whose constitutive ambivalence inherently marks him or her as "white but not quite,"⁵¹ Decoud is described along similarly split or fractured lines. The emphasis on surface meaning ("whose dreary superficiality") and exterior appearances ("covered by the glitter of universal *blague*") offers an image of a personage devoid of interiority and lacking a substantial inner core. By comparing his behavior to "a stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley custom," moreover, Conrad explicitly references the language of mimicry so as to critique the kind of creole lettered subject Decoud embodies: one whose masquerading as a South American purveyor of French universalism conceals a more subservient relation of mimicry toward the very culture he purports to represent.

After a long hiatus in Paris, Decoud returns to Costaguana only to find himself ill at ease with his previously formed views. As he witnesses the political drama of his native country up close, Decoud undergoes a subtle transformation, gradually abandoning the ridicule associated with farce in favor of the more serious and urgent tone of tragedy:

Martin Decoud was angry with himself. All he saw and heard going on around him exasperated the preconceived views of his European civilization. To

⁴⁹ See, for example, Martin Seymour-Smith's "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of the novel. New York: Penguin, 2001.

⁵⁰ See *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

⁵¹ See "Of Mimicry and Man" in his *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 85-92.

contemplate revolutions from the distance of the Parisian Boulevards was quite another matter. Here on the spot it was not possible to dismiss their tragic comedy with the expression “*Quelle farce!*”

The reality of the political action, such as it was, seemed closer, and acquired poignancy by Antonia’s belief in the cause. Its crudeness hurt his feelings. He was surprised at his own sensitiveness.

‘I suppose I am more of a Costaguanero than I would have believed possible,’ he thought to himself. (169)

Decoud’s political awakening is occasioned by a fortuitous encounter with a reality that defies an image formed from a safe distance. Once removed, the spectacles of Paris are proven inadequate and the reality he sees before him acquires a poignancy heretofore unaccounted for. Decoud’s transformation takes place at a turning point between a former self and an emergent subjectivity, between a residual worldview and a novel awareness—that is, between the scorn distance affords and the urgency proximity offers. Bearing witness (“[a]ll he saw and heard going on around him”) takes the place of predetermined judgment (“exasperated the preconceived views of his European civilization”) as urgency replaces the more removed emotion of scorn borne of inaction. Yet if tragedy trumps farce, Decoud opts for a tragedy an unusual persuasion. Before Decoud’s eyes, tragedy and comedy are joined together for the first time so as to convey an image of Latin America that defies traditional dramatic distinctions. This time Decoud’s original Eurocentric perspective is overturned: Latin America appears no longer as Europe’s farcical double, but rather, as a space wherein the boundary between sorrow and laughter, pathos and derision, and tragedy and farce are blurred to the point of indistinction. Conrads’ Latin America signifies a space that defies a Eurocentric concept of history (i.e., “after tragedy, farce”) and its corresponding linear narrative mode (realism). That is, even if it is one always mediated and ultimately undermined by those very creole lettered subjects that determine its fate, Conrad’s image of the region signals a modernist space of renewal and transformation—one wherein otherwise antithetical modes and realities co-exist in a state of impure and productive tension.

Barely one decade after José Martí helps reinvigorate a strain of civic writing in the Americas with a poetry that gathers emotional force through a homosocial structure of desire for male friendship and companionship, Conrad pens an early modernist fiction of republican demise that blends tragedy with farce. In so doing, he offers a prescient reflection of both the hopes and the despairs, both the victories and the defeats, of a mode of civic consciousness that took hold in the region. Why Conrad—an author of Polish birth and British nationality—writes one of the most enduring novels about politics in the Americas will be the subject of this chapter’s second half. In particular, why virtue and corruption become so intimately connected in Conrad’s image of new world revolution, will form a crucial part of its underlying argument.

III. Modernity and Corruption

One reason tragedy and farce hold such strong resonance in *Nostramo* lies in the idea of corruption and its central role in the novel's critique of modernity. More than any of its central characters, corruption emerges as the novel's main force of action, sullyng the reputation of every character that crosses its path. Corruption threatens to engulf the whole of Costaguana, splintering the troubled nation in two, and leading the renegade republic of Sulaco toward a path of death and destruction. Yet if *Nostramo* is "Conrad's metaphor for the whole modern world" as Edward Said once suggested,⁵² how might one take stock of corruption's all-encompassing power in the novel? Moreover, what role do we ascribe to the signifier Latin America in so bleak a vision? What is at stake in placing Latin America at the forefront of a dystopian vision of modernity? In other words, what choices (if any) do so bleak a vision offer those of us concerned not only with the signifier, but moreover, the referent Latin America? In what follows, I will address these questions by situating them in relation to the novel's reflection on the possibility of civic virtue—defined as a desire for collective forms of duty and self-sacrifice—under inauspicious conditions of greed and self-interest.

The idea of corruption is intimately connected to the introduction of modernity through the novel's setting. Initially described as an idyllic space of timeless traditions and customs, the novel's town of Sulaco undergoes a significant transformation. Charles Gould's re-opening of Sulaco's once neglected silver mine leads the town toward a gradual but irrevocable modern path. Originally founded and then abandoned by the Gould family founder (father), Charles Gould (son) revives the San Tomé mine with the hopes of making it the region's principal source of prosperity. Just as Martin Decoud embodies a particular version of Latin American creole subjectivity⁵³ (one based on a French model of cultural mimesis), Charles Gould's association with the mine *and* well known English origins distinguish him as a character more closely linked with a commercial philosophy widely understood as emanating from the British Isles (liberalism). While I will return to this point shortly, my aim now is to underscore the San Tomé mine's connection to Sulaco's modernity:

The material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet; but over the worn-out antiquity of Sulaco, so characteristic with its stuccoed houses and barred windows, with the great yellowy-white walls of abandoned convents behind the rows of somber green cypresses, that fact—very modern in its spirit—the San Tomé mine had already thrown its subtle influence. (109)

The San Tomé mine is not only responsible for Sulaco's entry into modernity, but is very the precondition for its initial step toward a progressivist concept of time. Without the

⁵² "The so-called New World of South America is Conrad's metaphor for the whole modern world which, because of its addition to extreme forms of action stemming from willful beginnings, persuades morally convinced people of the necessity for action of a mastering, conquering kind." In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

⁵³ By 'creole' I am evoking the term's Spanish American (as opposed to Anglophone or Francophone) usage—that is, as a racial category that differentiates light-skinned or European new world subjects from dark-skinned or non-white others.

mine's rebirth, the above passage suggests, Sulaco would remain forever enclosed in a timeless insularity unaffected by whatever revolutionary upheaval or technological advancement may cross its path. But what exactly does this "modern spirit" the San Tomé mine has cast over Sulaco comprise? In other words, what emergent structures of thought or *idiologèmes* does the modernity of the San Tomé mine signal? What residual forms are in the process lost, stored or forgotten? Finally, how does the novel resolve the ideological conflicts this epochal shift brings about? In order to establish adequate answers to the above concerns, one must turn to Charles Gould (and his variant of corruption) in the novel.

Perhaps nowhere in the novel does one get a more revealing portrait of Charles Gould—the so-called king of Sulaco—than in the eyes of his wife, Emilia Gould. The San Tomé mine, after an initial period of uncertainty, proves exceedingly successful, sapping the strength of the community it relies on for its existence. A character who more than any other carries with her the moral compass of the novel, Emilia reflects upon the deleterious effects of financial success on her husband, recognizing in him the inner workings of a form of corruption far greater than anything previously witnessed in tradition-bound Sulaco:

The word 'incorrigible'—a word lately pronounced by Dr Monygham—floated into her still and sad immobility. Incorrigible in his devotion to the great silver mine was the Señor Administrador! Incorrigible in his hard, determined service of the material interest to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice. Poor boy! She had a clear vision of the great hairs on his temples. He was perfect—perfect. What more could she have expected? It was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Camp, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush the innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never, not for one short hour altogether to herself in this old Spanish house she loved so well! Incorrigible, the last of the Corbeláns, the last of the Avellanos, the doctor had said; but she saw clearly the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time that perhaps—But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal life, of love, of work—all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words:

'Material interest.' (431-2)

The word 'incurrable' enters Emilia Gould's mind the way a ghost—or a repressed memory—exerts its influence over the psyche. One gets the impression the word acquires definitive meaning only gradually over time and as if by chance. As the word assumes definite shape and meaning, leaving an indelible mark on her mind, it becomes the filter by which she understands her husband's every feat. Designating a fundamental flaw or error, "incurrable" offers an image of corruption in that it establishes a dichotomy between a pure and an impure substance, an original and a pale copy, and an upright and a degenerate moral state. While emanating from the same verb in Latin meaning to destroy or tear apart entirely (*corregere*), incurrable signals corruption's opposite. That is, while corruption implies a moment of conversion from a pure to an impure state, "incurrable" signifies precisely the impossibility of redressing an original flaw or error. While corruption signals decay or decline, incurrability signals a failure to blot out a prior stain or error. It announces a point of no return, a threshold of irreversibility. The repeated juxtaposition between Gould's labor ("his devotion to the great silver mine" or "his hard, determined service of the material interest to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice") and his "incurrable" devotion to the mine, moreover, signals an inability to distinguish between self-interest and a greater common good. The emphasis placed on that very labor, moreover, calls into question an aim that cloaks personal gain in a shroud of collective or shared interest. The perfection Emilia alludes to ("He was perfect—perfect") thus acquires an ironic, even sarcastic meaning. Paradoxically, the efficiency with which he carries forth his duties marks him as the very symbol of corruption before his wife. This is made all the more evident in the contrast between his success and regard for his wife. While his success is described in long lasting terms ("lasting"), his love for his wife acquires a brief and ephemeral life ("short moment of forgetfulness"). While his success is described as immense ("colossal"), his affection for his wife stands as pale in comparison ("a short intoxication"). So immense does the mine's success stand in comparison that it dwarfs his love for his wife, a love so thoroughly dwarfed that it is likened to a form of grief ("whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness") that mourns a love object forever lost ("as if it had been a deep grief lived through").

Yet if Emilia Gould's grief holds as a mirror to the negative reflection of Charles Gould's success, the remainder of the passage suggests a more sweeping critique of the San Tomé mine's effects on the community as a whole. Charles Gould's unswerving labor in the name of "material interest"—a shorthand term for an unbridled desire for personal (rather than collective) wealth—ultimately yields a disorder far greater than any previous devastation. However, as Frederic Jameson has noted,⁵⁴ Conrad's critique of greed as a form of corruption stops short of a Marxist critique of capital—that is, he does not give a wholesale theory of labor or of the means of production, but instead offers a more bleak and general outlook about human ideals and their passage from abstract thought to concrete action. All good intentions, Conrad seems to suggest, necessarily undergo a form of corruption in their compromised passage from abstract possibility to concrete realization. What Conrad means by "something inherent" alludes to the necessary process of corruption in the more elemental or biological sense—that is, as a

⁵⁴ See *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981. 206-80.

process of decay or putrefaction—an ideal undergoes the moment it turns into a concrete reality (“in the necessities of successful action”). That very process, however, is one “which carrie[s] with it the moral degradation of the [original] idea.” The moment of corruption, then, lies not so much in the result (although certainly present there as well), but in the *inherent* sacrifice that process demands. The result of this impure admixture between abstract thought and concrete action, between desired ideal and compromised reality, hovers like an ominous cloud over the whole of Sulaco (“She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Camp, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy”). In the case of the San Tomé mine, however, such an admixture takes on an especially sinister turn. Described as “more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush the innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness” there is no doubt the mine leaves behind anything other than a trail of death and destruction. But what precisely makes it worse than a ruthless despot? What exactly makes it more fearsome than a rogue state?

IV. Corruption and Governmentality

Perhaps the most astonishing feature of Conrad’s rendition of the San Tomé mine lies precisely in the extent to which it is likened to a reviled regime with its requisite dictator and ubiquitous bureaucratic apparatus. In a word, the mine takes on the character of what Michel Foucault famously called “governmentality,”⁵⁵ namely, the modern state’s propensity toward exerting its power as a kind of stranglehold over its citizens, determining every aspect of their existence from the most minute aspects of their daily lives (biopower) to their ultimate experience of death (necropolitics). While Foucault had in mind the emergence of modern bureaucracies crucial to nation-states, Conrad recognizes the danger of private enterprises assuming a similar form and function in environments wherein the enforcement of concepts of sovereignty and rule of law are at best weak or negligent.

Perhaps just as striking as Conrad’s warnings about the heightened conditions for corruption in formerly colonized states is his faith in the primacy of vision—that is, in a testimonial mode of cognition capable of responding to those very conditions. By testimonial I mean a mode of self-awareness based on experiential observation and by recognition I refer to a moment of discovery and clarity in critical thought or moral vision. For Emilia Gould, recognition is preceded by vision, and vision is what yields the moment of realization. The joining of these two elements—sight and insight, vision and recognition—prompts the moment of self-awareness. In contrast to Emilia, however, Charles Gould does not—indeed cannot—possess within his field of vision an awareness of the source of the San Tomé mine’s transformation into a veritable cauldron of corruption. Thus does one get the distinct impression that his failure to recognize the real danger engulfing the entire town of Sulaco is preceded by a blindness to what is for Emilia in plain sight: a mine that no longer resembles the well-meaning enterprise that offered the promise of collective prosperity through individual resolve, but rather, a more sinister venture that crushes all who dare cross its profit-driven path. One is further given the impression that the mine’s reach exceeds Charles Gould, spinning well beyond his control and taking on a life of its own (“It was not his fault”). Her repeated reference to

⁵⁵ In “*Society Must be Defended*,” *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. 46-64.

his perfection (“He was perfect, perfect”) drives the point home: so thoroughly has he mastered the art of extracting profit that the mine no longer even needs him for its daily operations. Yet the mine does not remain content with its self-sustaining efficiency; it takes a toll on the very character behind its enormous success. Indeed, the insight that Emilia Gould’s field of vision affords her (“but she saw clearly that”) points toward a force so formidable that not only does it destroy the last member in a long line of Gould patriarchs (“the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds”), but in fact overtakes him the way a malignant spirit possesses the living before discarding with the corpse (“mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father”). This moment of realization, prompting in Emilia Gould a bittersweet reaction, bespeaks a greater grief whose cry of lament reflects an awareness of the very irrecuperability of its loss (“A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last!”). Hers is a mourning for the passing a generation of men (yet another homosocial longing) largely responsible for Costaguana’s biography as a nation, from its inception as a territory that broke the shackles of colonial bondage to a fledging republic on the periphery of the world system that sought to tip the balance of power in its favor. The homosocial dimension of her grief is further made apparent by her elliptic desire for a son she never bore (“She had hoped for along, long time that perhaps—But no! There were to be no more!”). Her grief thus takes on a double meaning; she mourns not only a husband now beyond her present grasp, but a son to whom she will never give future life. Hers is a grief not only for an imperfect present, but moreover, for a future past.⁵⁶

The moment of self-awareness occurs at the precise juncture where vision precedes (and gives rise to) recognition. Her awareness of the full extent of the mine’s damage over the whole of Sulaco comes at the moment she recognizes the Gould legacy has been forever extinguished and is already in a sense dead. The image that accompanies this realization announces a bleak forecast, gesturing toward the overwhelming grief that fills her (“An immense desolation, the dread of her continued life”). This scene of sorrow is conveyed as a tragedy of national importance. So intimately linked is the nation’s destiny with the Gould family name that Emilia’s mourning is compared to a first lady’s grief for her sovereign counterpart (“descended upon the first lady of Sulaco”). Herein lies the moment of recognition. Emilia becomes cognizant of what lies ahead in a scene that emphasizes vision experienced in grief—in short, a moment of critical self-awareness (“With a prophetic *vision* she *saw* herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal life, of love, of work—all alone in the Treasure House of the World” [added emphasis]). Described as a watershed moment, Emilia’s experience of awareness comes with an oracular sense of purpose (“With a prophetic vision”). And with a tinge of tragic resignation, she awaits her fate with an awareness of its solitude and the difficult nature of her confinement (“she saw herself surviving alone”).

⁵⁶ Her grief raises important questions about status of women and about the role heterosexuality plays more generally in the novel. While at other moments women are viewed as obstacles in the greater goal of achieving male bonding, here Emilia’s desire for a male heir remains in keeping with the gender ideology the novel operates under. Her mourning for a male (as opposed to female) heir reflects of the means by which female characters serve a crucial function yet remain marginalized political actors in *Nostramo*. Emilia Gould experiences her ascribed gender role as a form of loss in part because she is unable to secure the Gould family line: she never gives birth to a son. In this instance, heterosexuality is viewed as a necessary burden—that is, as a means of investing in future male heirs.

Knowing her husband's demise is now merely a matter of time, she envisions her own gradual decline, her own ultimate deterioration, that is, her own bodily corruption that her own death will ultimately occasion. Gone are her dreams of youth, romance and purpose. In their stead she is left with a moribund version of once admirable aspirations ("the degradation of her young ideal life, of love, of work"). However, her positioning at the center of wealth only heightens (rather than lessens) her sense of sorrow and loneliness ("—all alone in the Treasure House of the World"), further giving one the sense that hers is an integrity unsullied by greed or worldly possession. One gets the impression that her grief takes on a form similar to Freud's definition of a melancholic. Unlike the mourner who gradually abandons its love object in favor of another, Emilia's grief never eases its grip on her, and instead appears to remain without the intention of ever leaving, thus acquiring the form of melancholia ("The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes"). The way dreams reflect experiences too painful to confront in waking life, Emilia's recognition of the reduced terms of her fate infiltrates more subterranean but all the more critical regions of her unconscious. It is as if she comes to terms with the magnitude of her own grief through an awareness of the corruption she knows is responsible for her reduced circumstances. Aware of the cycle of perpetual gloom that lies before her, Emilia faces her fate with an admixture of resignation and exasperation ("In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare").

Emilia's words strongly resonate with one of Marx's favorite metaphors for history—that is, as a never-ending nightmare from which one may one day wake ("a merciless nightmare"). In this critical view of history, an image of passivity comes to the fore ("in the grip" and "lying passive"), giving one a sense that Emilia's options in this situation are few and only a greater social transformation will free her from corruption's grasp. What makes Emilia's moment of critical awareness poignant partially lies in the way it gathers its force from an appeal to voice. The image that emerges is one of a searing cry or of a helpless lament ("she stammered out aimlessly the words"), both invariably gesturing toward their underlying source of discomfort ("Material interest").⁵⁷ What Emilia Gould means by these two words—words she never tires of denouncing—do refer to greed and worldly possession. Yet they amount to more. Given the existential character of Conrad's conception of corruption, material interest may be equally understood as a philosophical corollary of corruption; that is, as a state of subjective (interest) absorption (material), or better yet, an unchecked tendency toward personal gain that, having gained so much traction, threatens to overpower nearly all will to resistance. Emilia's last words, then, offer a poignant image of the desperate nature of her appeal. In that they designate a state of both resignation and denunciation, passivity and activity, her words are an *out* cry in the original sense: they signal a desire for resistance (out) within conditions of painful subjection or passivity (cry). Such an image makes possible an expanded understanding of corruption that traces not only its causes and its consequences, its perpetrators and its victims, but its wide range of its incarnations, even as it appears to favor its existential over its social dimensions as it casts it as an

⁵⁷ Frederic Jameson suggests that "[t]he whole drama of value and abstraction is concentrated in this antithetical phrase ['material interest'], in which the ideal sentimentalism of the capitalist dynamic is suddenly and brutally demystified." See *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981. 277-8.

existential (rather than social) problem that risks suspending the more critical conclusions one might draw.

No longer capable of recognizing the distinction between mere personal gain from a more public or social goal, Charles Gould's demise lies in an uncritical relation toward the aims of his labor. Yet whereas Gould's fatal flaw lies in a distorted economic relation of production, Nostromo adds a moral element to its equation, hence completing the novel's circle of corruption. Proverbially known as the "Capataz de Cargadores" Nostromo is portrayed as a modern day bandit-hero, except that the boundary between his own interests and those he purports to defend is seldom made clear. Signaling a linguistic distortion from Italian for "our man" (*nostro uomo*), his very name speaks to heart of the novel's preoccupation with corruption as problem inherent to modernity in its multiple incarnations (cultural, economic *and* moral). As we will see, more than any other character in the novel, Nostromo reflects a disquieting vision of modernity linked to an inherent fall from grace; that is, as a betrayal of a noble or lofty ideal in thought (virtue) in the realm of concrete action (corruption). And just as Charles Gould's degradation is refracted through Emilia's melancholic moment of self-awareness, Nostromo's particular strain of corruption is mediated through another character's critical perspective—in this case, Martin Decoud's. In the following passage, Nostromo underscores to Decoud his esteem for the silver he has rescued from a mob and is safeguarding in a secret location in an island off the coast of Sulaco:

Honesty alone is not enough for security. You must look to discretion and prudence in a man. And always remember, *señor*, before you open your lips for a confidence, that this treasure may be left safely here for hundreds of years. Time is on its side, *señor*. And silver is an incorruptible metal that can be trusted to keep its value forever.... An incorruptible metal,' he repeated, as if the idea had given him a profound pleasure.

'As some men are said to be,' Decoud pronounced, inscrutably, while the Capataz, who busied himself in baling out the lighter with a wooden bucket, went on throwing the water over the side with a regular splash. Decoud, incorrigible in his skepticism, reflected, not cynically, but with general satisfaction, that this man was made incorruptible by his enormous vanity, that finest form of egoism which can take on the aspect of every virtue. (260-1)

Nostromo's emphasis on intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) value and monetary (over moral) authority reveals a shift from an initial preoccupation with the greater good to a more narrow concern with personal gain in the novel. By deeming honesty an insufficient means ("[h]onesty alone is not enough") of safeguarding an object's financial appreciation over time ("for security"), Nostromo points to the limits of a form of virtue based on transparency and good will, offering a grim picture for its prospects in an environment increasingly characterized by unrestrained greed. In its stead, he turns to prudence and discretion ("you must look to discretion and prudence in a man") as alternate modes of conduct more compatible with a heightened awareness of the primacy of financial interest over more communitarian-based concerns. In contrast to honesty, prudence and discretion evoke images of opacity and dissimulation. Rather than laying bare a person's intentions, they submerge them in concealment and subterfuge, offering

not only a more cautionary understanding of relations between self and other in financial matters, but perhaps more crucially, foreclosing the prospect of kinship or alliance forged in the process of recognition of common interest. The historic associations of precious metals—namely, silver and gold—with the conquest and expropriation of new world soil, moreover, brings Costaguana's hero within the fold of its erstwhile oppressor (Spain), casting further doubt on his intentions. Perhaps more revealing, Nostromo's insistence on the silver's *constant* value adds a temporal element to the novel's conception of corruption as a widespread phenomenon (cultural, moral and economic), suggesting an underlying structure that brings each form in close proximity to the other. As I intend to demonstrate in what follows hereafter, corruption is ultimately conceived in *Nostromo* as a problem akin to the experience of seduction.

V. Ideology and Seduction

The prominence of tropes that gesture toward infinite stretches of time offers a bridge that links the language of corruption with a mental process similar in form and substance to seduction—that is, an experience of passive enjoyment or attraction occasioned by an idea or thought made real in the realm of fantasy. The explicitly temporal terms of his insistence (“for hundreds of years”, “[t]ime is on its side”, “to keep its value forever”) underscore the centrality of seduction in Nostromo's gradual descent into a downward spiral of greed and corruption. Nostromo's language offers an image of the precious metal as standing powerfully over an infinite stretch of time, squashing other forms of value (moral, political) and seducing its beholder in the process. This image signals a near total eclipse of a communal-based politics in favor of the more self-serving ends Nostromo puts forth. Nostromo's turn to a precious metal (silver) rather than to political aims (revolution), and to surreptitious modes of conduct (prudence and discretion) rather than to a transparent form of virtue (honesty), signals a near total abandonment of communitarian possibilities in the novel. This moment is strategically cast in the irony of a narrative technique that frames Nostromo's thoughts and actions in a critical light (“An incorruptible metal,” he repeated, as if the idea had given him a profound pleasure”). The irony lies in Nostromo's repetition of the silver's intrinsic quality as “[a]n incorruptible metal;” the very thing that ensures an object's value in one sphere (economic) gives rise to a moral degradation in another (political). Understood as a form of seduction, however, corruption reaches new heights, no longer simply emerging as a problem borne in the imperfect transfer of abstract thought to concrete action, but one that afflicts the means by which the mind wields its cognitive powers over the body. A crucial distinction, Nostromo's source of seduction lay not so much in a correspondence between thought and an immediate or verifiable reality (as in absolute value), but rather, the moment thought itself (“as if the idea”) is transformed into a heightened sensation of enjoyment (“had given him a profound form of pleasure”). Such a distinction makes possible an understanding of corruption that acknowledges the role of the psychic in a subject's ideological interpellation—a process that bears a striking resemblance in form and substance to seduction.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See Louis Althusser's classic essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. Also of interest is Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

The moral fabric of the passage is woven together by a narrative strategy that reflects one character's questionable intentions through another's critical interjection. At the moment seduction and corruption, enjoyment and cognition come together to form one, the narrative focus shifts from Nostromo to Decoud. Decoud's interjection adds to the irony in his pronouncement, fully stripping him of his moral authority ("[a]s some men are said to be,") and adding credence to his own emboldened transformation as a voice of reason ("Decoud pronounced, inscrutably"). In other words, by fixating uniquely on the "incorruptible" qualities of silver, Nostromo fails to recognize his own corruption occasioned by the precious metal, while Decoud's "inscrutability" suggests a moral fiber resistant to even its most advanced and insidious forms. The contrast between both characters is made all the more apparent by Nostromo's apparent oblivion to Decoud's sarcastic interjection. Nostromo is portrayed as going on with a mundane task (emptying water from a bucket) without demonstrating a trace of hesitation or remorse to Decoud's biting remark ("while the Capataz, who busied himself in baling out the lighter with a wooden bucket"), not so much stopping for a moment to consider the import of his words ("went on throwing the water over the side with a regular splash"), thereby revealing himself to be devoid of self-reflection and lacking a moral center. The contrast is further made apparent by a strategy of juxtaposition ("incorruptible" versus "incorrigible") carried forward with heightened emphasis so as to fully reveal their divergent transformations in the final phase of the novel—Decoud as an indifferent dandy turned moral observer and Nostromo as a man of action revealed as corrupt. Among Decoud's newly sown critical faculties involves an uncompromising ("incorrigible") critical predisposition ("in his skepticism") that seeks to grasp the environment that surrounds him not with scornful indifference ("reflected, not cynically"), as previously seen, but rather, with an at once broader and deeper appreciation ("but with general satisfaction") of the link between men's corrupt actions ("that this man was made incorruptible") and the subtle and gradual ways they take hold in their minds ("by his enormous vanity"). Carried through and through, Decoud's reflection goes to the heart of Nostromo's corruption, uncovering its murky origins in the unconscious ("that finest form of egoism") and revealing its most sinister guise in the form of its moral opposite ("which can take the aspect of every virtue"). The novel thus arrives at its long awaited destination; so ingrained is corruption in Nostromo's moral fabric that it now takes the guise of its opposite, creating an environment where distinguishing one from the other becomes virtually impossible. The danger in so heightened a form of seduction, Conrad seems to suggest, lay in its propensity toward taking on a more lofty or selfless guise—the ultimate barometer of a society fully besieged by corruption's all-encompassing grasp.

By creating a fictional republic so corrupt that the very possibility of virtue has been eclipsed and by situating such a fiction in both a new world *and* hispanic setting, Conrad identifies Latin America as the heart of a dystopian version of modernity. Latin America emerges as the privileged destination—that is, as the location that best illustrates—modernity's most pernicious and enduring consequence: corruption. Such a vision offers a refreshing corrective to commonplace conceptions of modernity as the forward march of time (history) or as the economic ordering of space (geography). As if to anticipate Benjamin's reflections on civilization as a double-edged sword,⁵⁹ *Nostromo*

⁵⁹ See his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*. 253-264. New York: Harcourt, 1968.

signals not only the advantages gained but the damage wreaked, the fortunes made but the opportunities foreclosed by a nightmare-like modernity that harms as much as it strengthens, and that hampers as much as it extols, the collective possibilities of a fledgling republic on the periphery of an imperialist world system that threatens to engulf it.

VI. Beyond the Banana Republic

There is a risk, however, in Conrad's prescient vision. Just as this vision calls attention to the underside of modernity, so, too, does it border on perpetuating an image of the region—in that it foresees no way out—borne in Conrad's historical moment but that persists in our own; namely, that of a makeshift republic incapable of forging a destiny of its own—Latin America as the real world referent of a fictional trope. In this chapter's final section I will demonstrate that far from inscribing the trope of the banana republic in a narrative of perpetual self-fulfillment, the novel's conclusion pushes this trope to new heights, exceeding and therefore emptying it of all prior content. The ensuing mystery that enshrouds the novel's final act of violence—the death of Nostromo at the hands of Viola—renews as much as it closes, gives birth as much as it extinguishes, the dream of a shared public good that might withstand the passage of time and the contingent element of space.

The novel's final chapter signals a dramatic reversal of fate for Nostromo. A character of both romantic and political persuasion, Nostromo courts Viola's two daughters, promising the younger and effusive Giselle (rather than the more reticent and mature Linda) to elope with her one night. The temptation of the treasure, however, yet again proves too difficult to resist; Nostromo returns for the remaining silver that lay hidden in the remote island off Sulaco—an island whose very name recalls an image of new world rape and plunder by one deemed older and corrupt (Isabella). Suddenly, their plans come to a complete halt: Viola 'mistakes' Nostromo for a thief, signaling the greatest moment of irony in a novel-length reflection on the wages of modernity in a world turned corrupt at the same time that it clears the ground by ending the revolutionary-turned-bandit's life. The subsequent gap between one daughter's inconsolable grief and a father's apparent incomprehension, and between an act of violence and the enigma to which it gives rise, are rendered in a narrative strategy that refuses the closure of cognition, and opts instead for a more uncertain—and open ended—collective path:

'You have killed Gian' Battista.'

The old man smiled under his thick moustache. Women had strange fancies.

'Where is the child?' he asked, surprised at the penetrating chilliness of the air and the unwonted dimness of the lamp by which he used to sit up half the night with the open Bible before him.

Linda hesitated a moment, then averted her yes.

'She is asleep,' she said. 'We shall talk of her tomorrow.'

She could not bear to look at him. He filled her with terror and with an almost unbearable feeling of pity. She had observed the change that came over

him. He would never understand what he had done; and even to her the whole thing remained incomprehensible. He said with difficulty:

‘Give me the book.’

Linda laid on the table the closed volume in its worn leather cover, the Bible given him ages ago by an Englishman in Palermo.

‘The child had to be protected,’ he said, in a strange, mournful voice.

Behind his chair Linda wrung her hands, crying without noise. Suddenly she started for the door. He heard her move.

‘Where are you going?’ he asked.

‘To the light,’ she answered, turning round to look at him balefully.

‘The light!’ *Sí—duty.*’

Very upright, white-haired, leonine, heroic in his absorbed quietness, he felt in the pocket of his red shirt for the spectacles given him by Doña Emilia. He put them on. After a long period of immobility he opened the book, and from on high looked through the glasses at the small print in double columns. A rigid, stern expression settled upon his features with a slight frown, as if in response to some gloomy thought or unpleasant sensation. But he never detached his eyes from the book while he swayed forward, gently, gradually, till his snow-white head rested upon the open pages. A wooden clock ticked methodically on the white-washed wall, and growing slowly cold the Garibaldino lay alone, rugged, undecayed, like an old oak uprooted by a treacherous gust of wind. (463-4)

The rift between Viola’s inability to grasp the consequences spurred by his actions and the pointed accusations Linda aims at him corresponds with narrative mode that alternates between a direct and an indirect form of transmission and between an inner and outer method of character description. Whereas Linda’s is an active voice that directs blame toward her father (“You have killed Gian’ Battista”), Viola offers gestures that cloak knowledge in mystery and resist access to an individual interiority (‘The old man smiled under his thick moustache’). By eschewing identifiable motives, Viola’s consciousness is represented in an instance of free indirect discourse that obfuscates (rather than reveals) his true intentions, settling for a perfunctory form of male chauvinism that echoes a previously examined homosocial longing frustrated by its own impossibility (“Women have strange fancies”). Viola’s shift in emphasis toward the whereabouts of his younger daughter (“Where is the child?’ he asked”) is followed by a moment of a mental interiority that dwells on details that acquire greater and greater significance as the novel draws to a close (“surprised at the penetrating chilliness of the air and the unwonted dimness of the lamp by which he used to sit up half the night with the open Bible before him”). By shifting the focus away from individual intentions and grounding it in more fleeting and elemental conditions (air and light), Viola sets the tone for a scene of reading that frames his own astonishing departure from the novel. As we will ultimately see, this scene of reading makes possible a narrative strategy that does not rely on traditional conceptions of novelistic closure, but rather, on a more open-ended and ambiguous resolution that corresponds with a keenly felt desire for collective forms of renewal and redemption at critical stages throughout the novel.

Rather than press him further, Linda abandons her line of inquiry, offering a clipped answer that renders Giselle in a child-like image of innocence (“She is asleep,’

she said”), seeking to placate him and cease conversation altogether (‘We shall talk of this tomorrow’). In sharp contrast to Viola, moreover, Linda’s moment of interiority is described not in terms of playful indifference, but rather, as an experience too difficult to witness (“She could not bear to look at him”). Hers is a feeling of fear that spills into sympathy, and of dread transformed into sorrow (“He filled her with terror and with an almost unbearable feeling of pity”) held toward a father deemed no longer in control of his senses (“She had observed the change that came over him”). The emphasis on his inability to grasp the exact target of his act (“He would never understand what he had done”) underscores a more general feeling of incomprehension and mystery in the immediate aftermath of Nostromo’s death (“and even to her the whole thing remained incomprehensible”). Wittingly or unwittingly, then, Viola fundamentally alters the course of Costaguana politics, creating an empty void in a place where Nostromo once held prominence and a future left wide open in a present now marked by his absence. The logic of Viola’s initial thoughts, however, is such that it gradually acquires meaning, demonstrating lucidity where insanity was once presumed and revealing a sense of purpose where none was previously ascribed. In asking for a previously mentioned book (‘Give me the book.’), Viola gives the impression not so much of a mind fully in control of its senses, but rather, of a form of lucidity that exceeds commonplace notions of reason. Linda’s acquiescence to her father’s request further clears the ground for the moment that awaits—and gives shape to—an ambiguous novelistic resolution. By placing in plain sight an object bound and tarnished by the passage of time (“Linda laid on the table the closed volume in its worn leather cover”), she sets the stage for a scene of reading occasioned by a text whose status as gift and holy object exceeds the logic of exchange value (“the Bible given him”), whose wear and tear reflects a diminished emphasis on financial gain (“ages ago”), and finally, whose national referent corresponds with a once held belief in English identity as the marker of a moral state of grace (“by an Englishman in Palermo”).

Calling into question his prior unknowing stance, Viola’s delayed response to Linda’s query intimates a fuller awareness of the consequences of his action (“‘The child had to be protected,’ he said, in a strange, mournful voice”). Viola’s emphasis on innocence and its need for protection, inexperience and its requisite guidance, reveals a conception of virtue that corresponds with a triangular structure of oedipal desire. Akin to a vulnerable daughter that requires her father’s protection from a male rival’s questionable influence, the common (res) good (publica) stands revealed as a feminine love object to be shielded from corruption’s seductive reach. Further driving the point home, Viola’s idiom is not one of individual desire or volition, but of communal obligation (“had to be”); his tone not one of cheerful optimism, but of a cloud of doom in need of clearing (“in a strange, mournful voice’). Overwhelmed with the terror over the prospect of her father’s murderous intent, both Linda’s positioning behind her father’s chair (“Behind his chair”) and silent cry (“Linda wrung her hands, crying without noise”) symbolically reflect her subordinate status as a woman in a homosocial fantasy that not only maintains a firm hold over an all male public sphere (women do not first gain suffrage in England until decades later), but moreover, seeks to collapse both private and public spheres so as to redefine the republic as a transparent space of mutual and unrestrained surveillance. In short, Viola’s is a fantasy of masculine mastery and control that makes private matters public knowledge and individual concerns a collective

responsibility. In such a claustrophobic vision, Linda finds no alternative other than out and sees no other solution than flight (“Suddenly she started for the door”). Underscoring his calm repose before her frantic terror, Viola does not see but *hears* her exit (“He heard her move”), does not witness but intuits her departure. Upon asking where she goes (“Where are you going?” he asked’), her moment of turning reveals not only a daughter burdened, but moreover, a lover resentful toward the source she holds responsible for her love object’s sudden death (“‘To the light,’ she answered, turning round to look at him balefully”). Without the faintest regard for her anger, in one stroke Viola reaffirms a republican vocabulary of communal obligation in the face of individual loss, invokes a politics of masculine authority at the expense of feminine desire, and calls for an ethics of filial piety over the demands of heterosexual romance (“‘The light!’ *Sí*—duty”). In a word, Viola signals a call for a virtue made public over a sorrow experienced as a private—and corrupt—loss.

Viola’s exit from the novel follows a more precipitous and ambiguous path. Arriving at a sudden standstill, the novel shifts from an emphasis on interior motives to one of exterior reflection, from a plot-driven quest for answers to an ambiguous scene of reading, and from a fluid and subjective strategy of conveying conflicting interests (dialogue) to an objectivist method of expressing common purpose (omniscient narration). Anticipating the novel’s own completion, Viola’s exit is framed in a solemnity reflective of his conduct and colored in hues matching his austere persona. Even in his last moments before expiring, Viola emerges as a standard bearer of republican virtue and avuncular masculinity, demonstrating the outward markers of an inner citizen ideal (“Very upright, white-haired, leonine, heroic in his absorbed quietness”). Preparing to open the book that lay before him, Viola’s search for a pair of glasses that serves to *correct* a faulty eye sight (rather than corrupt a healthy one) metaphorically intimates an understanding of the common good as an inherently fragile moral vision in constant need of rehabilitation (“he felt in the pocket of his red shirt for the spectacles”). Originally a gift from Emilia Gould, the glasses signal a double restoration of vision, redeeming English cultural identity as a tenable model of moral authority and giving preference to a self-sacrificing gender ideal both in one stroke (“given him by Doña Emilia”). The moment of placing the glasses before his eyes, then, coincides with a reversal from a corrupt to a correct form of seeing, and from a degenerate to a virtuous mode of apprehension (“[h]e puts them on”).

Suddenly the narrative winds down, arriving at a complete halt; silence and stasis, calm and inaction dominate the horizon. Only after a prolonged period (“[a]fter a long period of immobility”) does it regain its forward movement, setting the stage for Viola’s astonishing departure. His opening of the book initiates a scene of reading that covers over its textual object (“he opened the book, and from on high looked through the glasses at the small print in double columns”), thereby denying readers access to an inner state of mental cognition. One does not get discernible words but blank columns, one cannot make out visible letters but indecipherable signs. Perhaps more crucially, one cannot make out Viola’s own mental thought process. Instead, Viola offers stoic but impenetrable gesticulations, deep but ambiguous features, and painful but inscrutable expressions (“[a] rigid, stern expression settled upon his features with a slight frown, as if in response to some gloomy thought or unpleasant sensation”). By drawing reader away from Viola’s interiority and toward the textual object he beholds, the narrative

underscores a scene of reading that gradually culminates in a moment of death (“[b]ut he never detached his eyes from the book while he swayed forward, gently, gradually, till his snow-white head rested upon the open pages”). By employing a narrative strategy that peaks by winding down and achieves fruition in stillness, the novel cloaks Viola’s final moments in mystery. Not once does one gain access to Viola’s mental interiority; not once do the words acquire legibility. Instead, one is left with two competing temporal registers. On the one hand, an image of “homogenous, empty time,” to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase,⁶⁰ comes to the fore; a seemingly infinite series of discrete temporal units is carried forward at a constant and measured speed (“[a] wooden clock ticked methodically”) over a discernible and malleable stretch of space (“on the white-washed wall”). On the other, an image of a more gradual and ambiguous sequence that defies the serial logic of an imagined national community remains in place (“and growing slowly cold the Garibaldino lay alone, rugged, undecayed, like an old oak uprooted by a treacherous gust of wind”). Viola’s passing is narrated not in communal but in individual terms, his final breath captured not in a discrete but an ambiguous moment. His is a death that does not correspond with an objectivist concept of calendrical time, but rather, with a more subjective logic of sensory experience. Remarkably, even in death does he preserve his integrity; even in death does he emerge unsullied and uncorrupted (“rugged, undecayed”), even if the forces of corruption are the main sources that produce his demise (“like an old oak uprooted by a treacherous gust of wind”).

By placing two irreconcilable temporal registers next to one another—standardized versus subjective time, communal versus individualist strategies of emplotment—the novel paradoxically dramatizes without fulfilling (and conveys without resolving) a mode of civic consciousness that yearns for collective forms of virtue under conditions of heightened self-interest. Oscillating between dependency and self-determination, colony and republic, the novel’s ambiguous new world setting serves not so much to reflect back upon Latin America as a “hopelessly besmirched” space of political possibility as Decoud initially puts it, but rather, as a hostile arena where the forces of virtue and corruption face a head on collision. It is this agonistic image of the region—the Americas as a geography of showdown between two bitterly opposing forces—that gives *Nostramo* its distinctly poignant character as a novelistic object of political and historical rumination.

VII. Toward a Greater New World Understanding

Said’s suggestion that *Nostramo* belongs not to an established European, but rather, to a nervous *American* literary tradition, offers a strategic point of entry into an imagined new world.⁶¹ Commonly portrayed as a novelist more concerned with the colonial worlds of Africa and Southeast Asia than with the realities of new world

⁶⁰ In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991. 37-47.

⁶¹ “... *Nostramo* is most assuredly not the product of a great established literature. Even though it is written in English, its author was not an Englishman but a Polish émigré who was educated in France. Because its origin as a novel is so dubious, *Nostramo* bears little resemblance to novels in either French, English, or Russian. It is most profitable to compare the novel with novels written in the most insecure, individualistic, and nervous American tradition. *Nostramo*’s closest counterpart anywhere—at least in strangeness of idiom and intention—is *Moby Dick*.” In *Intention and Method*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

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domination, Conrad's oeuvre has generated nowhere near the same interest in Latin American critical circles as in Anglophone postcolonial thought. By restoring one of the main political preoccupations that informs *Nostromo*—the prospect of founding a republic under precarious economic conditions—to the forefront of a narrative strategy of unrequited collective longing, I have sought to widen the scope of a Conradian image of modernity that links, even as it distinguishes between, competing imperialist formations. In sharp contrast to prevailing images of the region, Conrad's Latin America is not so much one of present pasts,⁶² but more importantly, one of future presents. As one critic more recently noted,⁶³ the writing of *Nostromo* coincided with the opening of the Panama Canal, an event Conrad observed with great critical interest. Conrad's vision of the Americas is inherently shaped by a geopolitical understanding of modernity that grasps the violence and subjection the prosperity of one nation signals for others. Given the tragic outcomes of the various struggles for autonomy and self-determination in the Americas throughout the twentieth century, the prescience of Conrad's image can hardly be underestimated.

⁶² Nestor García-Canclini perhaps best captures this attitude—one he takes issue with—in defining Latin America as that place where “tradition has not yet left, and modernity has not fully arrived.” See his *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

⁶³ See Ruth Nadelhafft's “Introduction” to the Broadview edition of *Nostromo* as well as the appendix in this edition, entitled “Documents relating to the Panama Canal Treaty of 1903.” Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 1997. 7-30. 383-396.

Paradoxical Republics:
Metaphors of Caribbean Revolutionary Origins in
Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*

Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* signals an understanding of the Caribbean beyond monolingual models by locating kinship and communion among nations marked by the transatlantic slave trade and its histories of resistance in the region. By offering a polycentric view of the rise and spread of anti-slavery revolution in the Caribbean—one that does not simply ascribe an origin to a single location, but rather, traces multiple centers of emergence—*El siglo de las luces* imagines a paradoxical republic that transmits through the imagination a notion of civic virtue erased or rendered inaudible by persistent structures of domination specific to the region. Written with an eye toward societies where the legacies of slavery run deep, in this novel Carpentier seeks to imagine the ties that might bind racially divided communities. Designating an abiding concern for the *res publica*—or common good—*El siglo* reflects upon both the difficulties and possibilities of instilling a civic consciousness in communities created as a result of slavery and its violent legacies. Carpentier envisions communities based less in a common language (French versus Spanish) or metropolitan affiliation (England versus Spain), and more in a shared experience of anti-slavery resistance across national boundaries.

While initially portrayed in androcentric terms, the novel gradually abandons a view of the common good as a space of male friendship and companionship in favor of one more capable of responding to its own conditions of emergence in a tragic fable of anti-colonial resistance. By revealing the Janus-faced nature of the transatlantic republican project—signaling not only friendship but enmity, and yielding not only democracy but autocracy—*El siglo de las luces* opts for a notion of civic virtue linked to a martyr-like citizen ideal.

Framed as a fortuitous encounter between three wealthy but orphaned children and a French merchant from Haiti seeking to make business contacts in Cuba, *El siglo* signals a fiction of hemispheric proportions. Set in late eighteenth century Havana, the spatial parameters of the novel stretch from Cuba to France, shifting between Spanish, French, English and Dutch territories across a Caribbean sea understood to include the northern coast of South America and Brazil. Forming a vast archipelago, its unity does not so much lie in a common cartography, but rather, in a shared relation of disenchantment with European political thought in its civic republican incarnation. By reflecting on a moment of political transformation in the Atlantic world—the age of revolutionary Enlightenment—from the perspective of its slaveholding colonies, three character pairings correspond with different facets of a broader critique of civic virtue in the novel.

I. A Novel about the Greater Caribbean

In the afterward to *El siglo de las luces*, Alejo Carpentier states that the novel's origins lie in his fascination with Victor Hugues, a historical figure commonly overlooked by historians of the French Revolution. Born in Marseilles of ambiguous mixed race ancestry, Hugues sails off to the Caribbean as a cabin boy in French merchant ships, eventually establishing himself as a shop owner in Haiti during the eighteenth century. "Su verdadera entrada en la Historia," Carpentier states in the novel's afterward, "data de la noche en que aquel establecimiento fue incendiado por los revolucionarios haitianos." Retracing his transformation from colonial shopkeeper toward his eventual notoriety as the French Revolution's ruthless practitioner in the Caribbean from this moment onward, the novel examines Hugues' legacy as "the Robespierre of the Antilles." Carpentier retraces Hugues' activities in Guadeloupe and French Guyana in the novel, but ultimately leaves open or unresolved the question of his ultimate fate:⁶⁴

¿Cuál fue, en realidad, el fin de Víctor Hugues? Aún lo ignoramos, del mismo modo que muy poco sabemos acerca de su nacimiento. Pero es indudable que su acción hipostática—firme, sincera, heroica, en su primera fase; desalentada, contradictoria, logrera y hasta cínica, en la segunda—nos ofrece la imagen de un personaje extraordinario que establece, en su propio comportamiento, una dramática dicotomía. De ahí que el autor haya creído interesante revelar la existencia de ese ignorado personaje histórico en una novela que abarcara, a la vez, todo el ámbito del Caribe. (399)

Carpentier's recreation of Victor Hugues' legacy, then, serves a dual purpose in the novel. By uncovering the oft-neglected consequences of the French Revolution in the region, his story at the same time signals a desire to rethink the borders of the Caribbean beyond national and insular categories.

II. Transatlantic Crossings and Homosocial Longings

The novel initially seeks to find virtue in moments of male bonding. In the present case, the orphaned Esteban accompanies the French merchant Hugues along a seafaring journey to the epicenter of European political transformation: revolutionary France. The terms by which Esteban imagines the journey—and the form it takes in his imagination—reflect a conception of revolution (and by extension, civic virtue) as an opportunity to re-imagine and rekindle kinship ties among men in tandem with heterosexual mores. The journey signals a moment of homosocial reawakening occasioned by a common purpose (republican virtue) and untrammelled by a social norm (heterosexual chivalry):

La rara aventura que hoy empezaba no era de las que podían emprenderse con mujeres en un buque donde, desde ahora, quien tuviese el empeño de asearse tenía que hacerlo a la vista de todos—con otras muchas cosas que se harían, por fuerza, a la vista de todos. Esteban, entre inquieto y remordido, feliz ante la increíble novedad que le salía al paso, se sentía más sólido, más hecho, más levantado en estatura

⁶⁴ *El siglo de las luces*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004. [1962] All subsequent references to the novel will be from this edition.

masculina, junto a Víctor Hugues. Ahora, de espaldas a la ciudad como alardeando de haber enterrado su pasado bajo un montón de cenizas, el francés vuelto más francés que nunca al hablar en francés con un francés, se enteraba de las últimas noticias de su patria.⁶⁵ (100)

Signifying a momentary respite from familial obligations, the sea occasions a renewal and reconsideration of kinship ties between like-minded individuals. Viewed as a rare opportunity (“la rara aventura”) made possible by a new and emergent temporal order (“que hoy empezaba”), the sea offers a ripe opportunity to fasten the ties of friendship and renew the bonds of companionship among men committed to a common vision or purpose. No longer beholden to a code of honor based on a measure of deference toward women (chivalry), the sea signals a moment of homosocial opportunity in the novel. By momentarily doing away with Sofia (and thus clearing women altogether from the scene), the narrative allows Esteban to join Hugues as a dual protagonist in a transoceanic fiction of republican kinship. Threatening to undermine or weaken their awaited union, Sofia’s absence helps solidify their friendship and reaffirm their status as dual protagonists in the initial phases of the novel. By invoking notions of ‘faintness’ and ‘embarrassment’ as inherent markers of feminine weakness or susceptibility, Esteban brands Sofia as an unfit agent of revolution, thereby prompting her momentary disappearance from the novel. Described as a pleasurable experience, news of her departure signals for Esteban a moment of excitement and opportunity—that is, as a welcome departure from the usual business of gender obligations.

While Sofia’s absence provides the necessary fodder for Esteban and Hugues’ strategic reunion, their close proximity afforded by geographic isolation and closed quarters offers Esteban a sense of community and belonging couched in masculinist overtones (“se sentía más sólido, más hecho, más levantado en estatura masculina, junto a Víctor Hugues”). Described as feeling more upright, more powerful, indeed more *manly* by Hugues’ proximity, Esteban’s admiration reflects a conception of the *res publica* or common good as an association of virile protagonists. Bringing Esteban within the fold of a sought-after brotherhood, Hugues’ proximity affords membership within its carefully guarded community. Both stemming from the Latin noun *vir* signifying man, virtue and virility define two distinct yet related states of republican longing in the novel. As Richard Dagger has noted:

The concept of virtue derives from the Greek *arête*, or excellence, by way of the Latin *virtus*, which carried from its association with *vir* (man in the gender-specific sense) the additional connotations of strength and boldness. These connotations certainly persisted in the classical republican theorists’ use of “civic virtue;” indeed, they often described men who lacked virtue as “effeminate.”⁶⁶ (Dagger 13)

⁶⁵ *El siglo de las luces*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004. [1962]

⁶⁶ *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Feminist political philosophers have critiqued the concept's exclusionary dimensions, demonstrating how it explicitly relies on the denigration of women.⁶⁷ Iris Marion Young, for example, notes that at the core of civic virtue's traditional definition lies an eschewal not only of all things feminine, but moreover, of all associations with the body.⁶⁸ Along similar lines, Lisa Tessman has expressed a desire to move beyond its normative underpinnings in order to make it bear upon conditions of oppression and social injustice.⁶⁹

As we will see, Carpentier's efforts to rethink the bonds of friendship and common purpose in *El siglo de las luces*—as dramatized by Esteban's relation to Hugues—reflect a similar desire to rethink civic culture from a non-Eurocentric male perspective. How might efforts to situate Latin America in relation to a broader transatlantic republican tradition—habitually traced from renaissance Italy (via France and England) to the present-day United States—offer a greater sense of its legacies beyond classical examples?⁷⁰ Such a question lies at the heart of *El siglo de las luces*, making its concern with the revolutionary past at once a desire for alternate modes of resistance in the present, and revealing its literary form (fiction) at the same time a testing ground for an art in new forms of regional possibilities and alliances (politics). In the section that follows, I will trace Esteban's gradual disappointment with Hugues in order to reveal the novel's eventual abandonment of a narrowly conceived notion of civic virtue in favor of one with greater resonance across Latin America and the Caribbean.

III. Broken Promises

It has been established here that to long for a new age virtue is at the same time to strive for a community of able-bodied protagonists who might transform the world in their virile image. Esteban's longing for a community of able-bodied individuals united under a common vision or purpose, however, remains a frustrated endeavor throughout the course of the novel. Initially drawn by the revolutionary fervor sweeping through Paris, Esteban increasingly grows homesick, witnessing events whose contradictory nature defies his comprehension. In a moment of estrangement mirroring the author's own years working in Paris in the nineteen thirties as a radio producer, Esteban experiences the French capital as a place far more 'exotic' than his native Cuba. Signaling comfort and familiarity, Cuba is described as a place "de palmeras y azúcares, donde había crecido sin pensar que lo visto siempre pudiera resultar exótico para nadie."⁷¹ By making France—rather than Cuba—and Europe—rather than the Caribbean—the space of the other, the novel inverts the terms of a Eurocentric narrative point of view. The history of Enlightenment revolution is narrated—not from the perspective of its metropolitan actors—but from that of its colonial subjects.

Esteban and Hugues' friendship begins to deteriorate and their views on what constitutes the common good take separate paths; the former is drawn to the free masonry

⁶⁷ See the pioneering work of Iris Marion Young, Bonnie Honig, Seyla Benhabib, María Lugones, among others.

⁶⁸ See her *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁶⁹ See her *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁷⁰ See *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica: Ensayos de historia intelectual y política* by José Antonio Aguilar and Rafael Rojas. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002.

⁷¹ *El siglo*, 106.

movement's cosmopolitan outlook, while the latter adopts a hard-line Jacobinist stance. As the revolution's Jacobinist strain takes hold and the reign of terror gains momentum, Esteban rejoins Hugues in a reverse transatlantic journey—this time to Guadeloupe. Aiming to rekindle their friendship and seeking to avert possible persecution, Esteban eagerly agrees to embark upon a journey to extend the revolution to Caribbean shores by proclaiming blacks and whites, free men and slaves, equal citizens before the law. In a moment of foreshadowing, however, Esteban's long awaited reunion with Hugues sets an ominous tone for what follows thereafter:

Victor abrazó friamente al joven, al cabo de la larga separación. Había adelgazado un poco, y su rostro, esculpido en fuertes relieves, reflejaba una energía acrecida por el mando. Rodeado de oficiales, estaba entregado al tráfigo de los preparativos finales, estudiando mapas y dictando cartas, en una sala llena de armas, instrumentos de cirugía, tambores y banderas enrolladas. “Hablaemos luego—dijo, volviéndole las espaldas para leer un despacho—. Vete a la intendencia.” Rectificó: “*Vaya* a la intendencia y espere órdenes mías.” A pesar de que el tuteo en aquellos días, se tenía por una muestra de espíritu revolucionario, el otro acababa de afirmar un matiz. Esteban comprendió que Víctor se había impuesto la primera disciplina requerida por el oficio de Conductor de Hombres: la de no tener amigos. (131)

Hugues' political views are no longer guided by a desire for friends or allies, but by a growing suspicion of possible enemies; his concept of the common good is no longer propelled by a conviction in popular rule (democracy), but rather, by a proclivity for individual domination (autocracy). Hugues' tepid reception of Esteban after a lengthy separation suggests a shift in homosocial relations initiated upon their arrival in France. Growing increasingly distant and cold, Hugues undergoes a gradual transformation. Gone are the days of seafaring adventure as a form of male bonding and ahead lies a policy of strictly business and cold relations. His changed physical attributes reflects not only an inward process of transformation, but moreover, draws a parallel between a lean body and a hawkish personality: Hugues' new found energy reflects an invigorated sense of personal power. Framed as a scene of preparation for warfare, an image of Hugues surrounded by officials gives the impression of a mighty leader amidst a group of subordinates, thus further underscoring their difference in status.

A view of Hugues studying maps and dictating letters emphasize two forms of knowledge crucial to securing victory in a revolution waged from the water ways of modernity: navigation and writing. Maps not only chart desired destinations, but moreover, impose order on them, thereby reinventing the means by which we imagine places. By the same token, to dictate a letter does not only signal a transmission from oral to written language, but more importantly, implies a status differential. A room full of weapons, medical supplies, war drums and rolled banners offers a backdrop of war preparation, thereby completing a shift from a space of friendship to a field of enmity in the novel. Early modern warfare and its symbolic and material means of preparing for distinct scenarios—saved lives versus sustained casualties, inroads made versus setbacks suffered, the hope of victory versus the specter of defeat—now serves as the guiding principle of homosocial relations. Opting instead to read a command, Hugues returns

Esteban the swords he offers him as a gift, not only deferring their long awaited conversation, but moreover, metaphorical rejecting a gesture of friendship. Hugues' shift of command—from the informal to the formal voice—offers an index for a wider transformation in the novel. Distance now resides where intimacy once stood and hostility now reigns where friendship once ruled. Hugues' conscious use of the formal voice, in spite of the informal voice's revolutionary associations, prepares the path for the novel's phase of terror.

Coinciding with their departure for the Caribbean, Hugue's gradual transformation from friendly associate to hostile superior foreshadows a broader experience of anti-slavery revolution in the novel; terror and freedom, and slavery and liberation mark the region with equal and—at times—indistinguishable force. This transitional moment is understood as yielding a new conception of homosocial relations in the novel. Mediated by Estaban's emergent critical perspective, Hugues' new status as liberator-autocrat is one made possible by the foreclosure of friendship and the emergence of enmity as the necessary precondition upon which anti-colonial revolution is waged in the Caribbean.

Further signs of strain on a once close friendship show over the course of a transatlantic mission whose purpose of proclaiming blacks and whites, slaves and free men, equal citizens before the law goes off course. Initially offering a space of conviviality and brotherly affection, the sea now signals a horizon of tension and distrust. As they approach Guadeloupe's shores in a night that intimates ominous consequences, Hugues reveals his most prized possession (the guillotine), confirming Esteban's growing unease about a revolution about to be undertaken under the sign of terror in new and untested soil. Violence—rather than reason—and bloodshed—rather than writing—become the primary means by which Hugues seeks to overturn slavery in the Caribbean. In a moment of many subsequent disappointments in the novel, Esteban mourns for an opportunity he sees slip their grasp: a revolution's promise of kinship and common purpose lost amidst a heap of corpses and widespread destruction: "All the same, he said, "I would rather it were accomplished without our having to use the guillotine."

Hugues' revolution yields mixed results. Instead of creating a colorblind republic where blacks may live unencumbered by the barriers of slavery and race, Hugues foments an environment of fear and distrust. In this environment, former slaves' conditions remain essentially unaltered from before. Pursuing similarly draconian measures as the revolutionary for which he professes deep admiration, Hugues earns the reputation of "Robespierre of the Caribbean." In a growing atmosphere of terror, however, Hugues grows strangely accustomed "to taking long siestas under mosquito-nets—watched over by mulattas" fanning him and his commanders with palm fronds. At the very moment a revolution sweeps through the Caribbean for the first time, promising to transform the very fabric of a racially divided society, the specter of slavery yet again makes its appearance. Esteban finds himself a stranger—except this time, in an island (Guadeloupe) very similar to his own (Cuba).

Disappointed by the recent turn of events, Esteban finds solace in the flora and fauna he discovers in solitary excursions out to sea. The more corruption Esteban witnesses, the greater an image the Caribbean acquires in his imagination as an alternative geography to European political forms—not in the perverse or misguided manner in which Hugues pursues his ideas—but as an aesthetic space of possibility

distinct from instrumentalized forms of reason. Forming a significant component of the novel's critique of Enlightenment political modernity, I will return to this vision of the Caribbean as the province of *tropos*—as both starting and turning point, as both protocol and its departure, as both trope and tropics—in this chapter's final section.

IV. A Critique of Enlightenment in an Age of Decolonization

Esteban's disillusionment reaches its culminating point after joining *L'Ami du peuple*, a ship of revolutionary privateers whose mission of making the waterways safe for the spread and propagation of revolutionary ideas is encoded in its very name. Referencing the newspaper Marat created to disseminate his ideas during the early phases of the French Revolution, *L'Ami du peuple* furthermore makes allusion to the idea of the republic as a bond between friends vested in a common vision or purpose—in this case, anti-slavery revolution. Instead of adhering to this shared vision, the captain of *L'Ami* engages in the illicit slave trade:

Esteban lo miró con asombro invocando el Decreto de Abolición de la Esclavitud. El Capitán sacó de su despacho un pliego de instrucciones escritas de puño y letra de Víctor Hugues. 'Francia, en virtud de sus principios democráticos, no puede ejercer la trata. Pero los capitanes de navíos corsarios están autorizados, si lo estiman conveniente o necesario, a vender en puertos holandeses los esclavos que hayan sido tomados a los ingleses, españoles y otros enemigos de la República.' '¡Pero esto es infame!'—exclamó Esteban—. '¿Y hemos abolido la trata para servir de negreros entre otras naciones?' 'Yo cumplo con el escrito—replicó Barthélemy secamente. Y, creyéndose obligado a invocar una inadmisibile jurisprudencia—: Vivimos en un mundo descabellado. Antes de la Revolución andaba por estas islas un buque negrero, perteneciente a un armador filósifico, amigo de Juan Jacobo. ¿Y sabe usted cómo se llamaba ese buque? *El Contrato Social*.' (213)

Invoking the revolutionary decree abolishing slavery, Esteban's dismay reflects an appreciation of the printed word as an agent of revolution in the novel. Making possible for the first time the widespread dissemination of writing in the form of anti-slavery propaganda in the region, the printing press symbolizes a revolutionary ideal Esteban holds as sacred (abolition). By recalling the decree's significance, Esteban at once bemoans the violation of this ideal and the failure of the printed word to take hold in the minds of its own propagators. In contrast, by taking out Hugues' letter that exempts the selling of slaves in foreign port cities, the captain signals a preference for hand writing over print culture, a desire for old (a pen) over new forms of inscription (the printing press), and a revalorization of vertical over horizontal relations.

The orders inscribed therein reveal a by-now-familiar dynamic: virtue and corruption trade places, the former taking the guise of the latter. 'By virtue' for this reason does not merely function as common expression or a figure of speech. Designating not only a set of values associated with the French state ("by virtue of its democratic principles"), it harks back to the idea of the republic as synonymous with the politics of virtue; that is, by an investment in a greater good—in this case, a society free of slavery—unwavering in the face of greed or self-interest ("no puede ejercer la trata").

This notion, however, proves hollow and easily co-opted by a thriving slave trade in neighboring islands. By authorizing the sale of slaves from rival imperial powers in Dutch ports, Hugues abandons this vision, trampling on the very ideal that was once the driving force behind his revolution.

The legalistic language of the letter further underscores the sense of a violation, a distortion—indeed of a corruption—of a once admirable political ideal. Couched in legalistic ambiguity (“si lo estiman conveniente o necesario”), Hugues’ language distorts even as it claims to adhere to its anti-slavery stance. Rather than grant slaves “taken from the English, Spanish and other enemies of the Republic” their freedom, Hugues authorizes revolutionary privateers to return them to their former state in Dutch ports, thereby extracting a profit for each slave they return. Dutch ports in the region, whose colonial designation mark them as neither ally or enemy, as neither friend or foe, constitute juridical zones of exception in the novel, affording Hugues the veneer of neutrality he seeks in his profiteering ventures. This neutrality, however, is shown here for what it really is—a fiction—as Esteban’s condemnation makes clear (“!Pero esto es infame!—exclamó Esteban—”). Recalling their original motive for waging revolution in the Caribbean, Esteban signals with indignation the first of many scenes of radical questioning of metropolitan conceptions of anti-slavery revolution in the novel (“¿Y hemos abolido la trata para servir de negreros entre otras naciones?”).

Barthélemy’s reply in this regard is instructive. Expressing an attachment to the letter over the spirit of the law, it suggests something fundamentally flawed with the revolution’s course (“Yo cumplo con el escrito—replicó Barthélemy secamente”). Esteban’s preferred branch of a revolution conceived in two halves—reason rather than violence and the word instead of the guillotine—has been transformed into an instrument of domination. By “feeling obligated to invoke an inadmissible jurisprudence,” Barthélemy makes in plain view a conception of the law—and by extension, writing—heretofore unacknowledged: words no longer yield reason and virtue but a more melancholy vision of violence and domination in the novel. Prompting him to deem that they “live in a world turned upside down,” Barthélemy renders a dystopian vision of Enlightenment modernity, a vision wherein reason and virtue take an equally sinister form as violence and corruption. The evidence he offers as proof—a slave trading ship belonging to a *friend* of Rousseau bearing the name of his principal work of political philosophy—marks the defining moment of an excoriating critique leveled against Enlightenment thought in the novel. From its earliest contact with the region, Enlightenment modernity yields paradoxical results, revealing the dark underside of narratives of reason and virtue.

Recalling Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of Western civilization in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,⁷² Carpentier offers a vision of modernity that reveals corruption and violence as the correlatives of virtue and reason. Yet whereas Adorno and Horkheimer write in response to of the mass execution of European Jewry culminating in the Holocaust, Carpentier recalls the slave trade and its enduring legacies in the Caribbean. Perhaps it may be more useful to situate *El siglo* in relation to anti-colonial critiques that Caribbean and African American intellectuals such as W.E.B Du Bois, C.L.R. James, George Padmore and Aimé Césaire leveled against Europe in the wake of the Second World War. These authors understood fascism not simply as a destructive force

⁷² New York: Herder, 1972 [1947].

containable within the borders of Europe. For them fascism was the logical outcome of technologies of violence and extermination perfected over centuries of conquest in Africa, Asia and the Americas by Europe's imperial powers.⁷³ W.E. Du Bois best captures this sentiment in *The World and Africa* (1947):⁷⁴

There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization or Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.

Like Du Bois, Césaire and C. L. R James, Carpentier witnesses the rise of totalitarianism in Europe first-hand in the early thirties while living in Paris. He participates in an international conference of writers against fascism in Madrid in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1937) and returns to Cuba as a war correspondent two years later.⁷⁵ Drawing parallels between twentieth-century European atrocity and prior moments in Caribbean history, Carpentier offers a critique in *El siglo* of the *res publica*—or greater good—from a perspective that ties the legacies of racial violence in Europe to the very first efforts to create modern republics in the western hemisphere.

V. Beyond Magical Realism and Toward a New Politics of Belonging

In the section that follows hereafter, I wish to demonstrate how *El siglo de las luces* reflects Carpentier's evolving views on the idea of a uniquely New World literary aesthetic in a moment of transition in the region--views shaped by events witnessed from the late thirties to late fifties and by his diplomatic missions on behalf of the Cuban government in the sixties. As Roberto Márquez puts it, this period did not only give birth to armed leftist movements Latin America, but moreover, bore witness to newly independent republics in the Anglophone Caribbean and beyond. Formal decolonization and leftist armed struggles swept the region during the fifties and sixties, culminating not only in the Cuban Revolution's victory, but moreover, in the independence of Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad. These events played a greater role in shaping Carpentier's political views than has been previously acknowledged. His contextualization begs a full quotation:

The period would see the emergence of Guyana's Cooperative Socialist Republic and Jamaican Michael Manley's 'Politics of Change.' It also saw the rise of Grenada's New Jewel Movement. It bore witness to the growth of the cultural influence of the revitalized black nationalism of the Rastafarians and to the eruption, in Trinidad, of the crisis provoked by the protests of the Black Power movement there. A politics of change was no less evident in the increasing

⁷³A recent work that engages some of the above-mentioned authors with respect to the Holocaust, see Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

⁷⁴New York: International Publishers, 1947. 23,

⁷⁵He attended an international conference of writers against fascism in Madrid in the midst of the Spanish Civil War.

promotion, in the Francophone islands, of a more self-affirmative *antillanité* and *creolité*. Witnessing the crucial and decisive stage of the Civil Rights movement and of the protests against the war in Vietnam in the United States, the era further coincided with the emergence to political independence of Africa and Asia.⁷⁶

While Carpentier could not have anticipated the wave of revolutionary decolonization that swept the region in the decade following the Cuban Revolution, he does convey in *El siglo de las luces* a longing for new forms of community and belonging beyond existing colonial realities. And while those forms are not always explicit, its intimations are evident in its constant probing of the Caribbean's boundaries through its unusual blend of historical references and narrative experimentation. Added to this is the fact that Carpentier wrote *El siglo* toward the end of his fourteen year residence in Venezuela (1945-1959), a nation strategically situated on the border of South America and the Caribbean. Perhaps best captured in the words of novel's postscript ("La Guadalupe, Barbados, Caracas, 1956-1958."⁷⁷), Carpentier links the insular Caribbean with mainland South America, and situates Francophone, Anglophone and Hispanic spaces within a larger geographic unity. At the same time, he reveals the conditions of possibility inherent in *El siglo de las luces'* writing. Often overlooked is the fact that the novel was written during the final years of his residence in Venezuela, influencing his desire to re-imagine the region beyond linguistic and insular categories.

First published as a preface to *El reino de este mundo*—a novella inspired by a visit to Haiti in 1943—"De lo real maravilloso americano" is widely recognized as Carpentier's principal articulation of a pan-Caribbean aesthetic. In contrast to a secular Europe thoroughly infiltrated by the logic of Enlightenment, Carpentier saw in Latin America magical or marvelous manifestations in every day reality that could more easily be etched in literary form. Due to the factors of racial mixture, uneven modernity, and incomplete geographic colonization, elements of magic and romance that were lost or forgotten in Europe, according to Carpentier, persisted in Latin America. Nonetheless, Carpentier's views on art and politics gradually shifted over the course of his career. Voicing views even more cosmopolitan and self-consciously political in their appeal for a wider range of cultural affinities after the Cuban Revolution, Carpentier subsequently revised and reconsidered his views on the marvelous real. For example, in an expanded version of the same essay, Carpentier incorporates his travels to China, Iran, Russia and Prague as a means of reflecting upon Latin America's unique historical conditions (1968). In its introduction he repeatedly makes references to Baudelaire's travel poetry and posits exposure to other global regions as a precondition of Latin American self-consciousness. Even prior to this, he frames his vision of American cultural identity within a greater sense of regional belonging. In a speech he gave to an audience of artists and writers, Carpentier calls for a wider understanding of the Americas, incorporating nations and cultures traditionally neglected—in the eyes of Spanish Americans—as integral to the fabric of their identity (1961):⁷⁸

⁷⁶Roberto Márquez, "Guillén and his critics," in *Man-Making Worlds: Selected Poems of Nicolás Guillén*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003 [1973]. xix.

⁷⁷*El siglo*, 396.

⁷⁸"Literatura y conciencia política en América Latina." Havana: August, 1961. Republished in *Literatura y conciencia política en América Latina*. Madrid: Alberto Corazón, 1969.

No es en vagas teorías de gabinete, de tertulias de café, de coloquios eruditos, donde se encuentran las soluciones de los problemas fundamentales, vitales, de este continente—continente cuya unidad indudable, en ciertos aspectos, no ha de buscarse en el uso de un idioma común a muchos países, sino en la existencia de idénticos o parecidos problemáticas que son compartidas por un inmenso país donde se habla el portugués y en no pocos donde se habla el inglés, el francés, el guaraní o el papamiento. (78)

Reflecting the sense of promise that the Cuban Revolution signaled for intellectuals and politicians in the Caribbean and beyond, Carpentier calls for a greater notion of cultural affinity and belonging beyond a common language or a shared colonial heritage. Such a call reflects a desire to develop deeper ties—both political and cultural—with neighboring territories and nations in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution's victory. Carpentier also seeks to rethink an intellectual tradition—dating from Martí to Rodó—whose views of a shared identity often rely on an assumed common language (Spanish). By alluding to nations that speak other languages and bear different colonial legacies in the region, Carpentier offers an extended vision of American identity—a vision fostered in the wake of armed struggles for autonomy and independence. The legacies of this extended vision can be felt today in the formation of ALBA⁷⁹ (Spanish for the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas), the international organization of aid and cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean spearheaded by Chavez' Venezuela and Castro's Cuba. Created as a socialist alternative to U.S.-led free trade efforts in the region, ALBA takes Simón Bolívar as its unifying symbol, invoking the historic role of the Caribbean as the point of origin of his revolutionary efforts against Spain.⁸⁰

At the same time, Carpentier's own relation to Europe was more conflicted—indeed, more ambivalent—than his works of cultural criticism initially suggest. As a Cuban citizen of Swiss birth and French and Russian parents, Carpentier felt both European and Caribbean influences with an equal—and often conflicting—force. As the novel's title intimates, his desire to emancipate himself from a European order of cultural authority is as keenly felt in *El siglo de las luces* as in his prior works, *El reino de este mundo* (1949) and *Los pasos perdidos* (1953). Beneath its outward appearance as a historical fiction lies a work of formal innovation with profound autobiographical traces.⁸¹ Its main protagonist's name means Stephen in Spanish (Esteban), recalling Joyce's narrator in his semi-autobiographical novel about growing up in another historically dominated island-nation (Ireland).⁸² An orphan who follows a French merchant along revolutionary journey that yields contradictory results, Esteban's disenchantment with Victor Hugues signals a desire to unearth local histories of resistance over imported models. It also reflects a yearning to create new forms of kinship and belonging as suggested by his orphaned status. And while elements of the

⁷⁹ *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América.*

⁸⁰ The alliance between Evo Morales' Bolivia—a majority Indian nation where Quechua and Aymara are the most widely spoken languages—and Hugo Chavez' Venezuela is no less significant for similar reasons.

⁸¹ On the idea of autobiography as a literary strategy, see Sylvia Molloy's classic, *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America*. Also see Roberto González Echevarría's *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

⁸² *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

marvelous do surface at some moments in the novel, *El siglo de las luces* hardly gives the impression of a work of magical realism, especially in comparison to his earlier and more celebrated work, *El reino de este mundo*. Moreover, whereas the latter work was inspired by the influence of Haitian voodoo on his visit to that island, *El siglo* is the fruit of a much longer residence in a nation that both forms a part of continental South American and is surrounded by Anglophone, Francophone and Dutch territories and nations.

Similar to Carpentier's formative encounters with other islands and territories during his residence in Venezuela, Esteban's subsequent journey across the Caribbean—this time, to the Guyanas—signals a new understanding of civic virtue in the novel. No longer inspired by a body of writing inherited from European political thought (i.e., Rousseau or Marat), but rather, by a growing awareness of a deeper history of anti-colonial resistance in the region, this understanding ultimately yields a greater hemispheric consciousness in the novel.

VI. A Counterculture of Modernity

The Guyanas offer a space where metropolitan and colonial histories of anti-slavery revolution overlap—and as we shall see, ultimately clash. Signaling at once its true heart and outer limit, the Guyanas more than anything else signal what Paul Gilroy calls “a counterculture of modernity.”⁸³ a place that simultaneously captures and unsettles European claims of civic virtue and reason. In his journey to French Guyana, Esteban encounters fool hardy Acadians, the last remaining loyal subjects of the French crown, who flee Nova Scotia for a landscape more unforgiving than their persecutors in North America. In the penal colony of Sinnamary, he witnesses prominent Jacobinists waste away, each day coming closer to a more certain death. And in Cayenne, he meets face to face with Billaud-Varenne, the revolutionary responsible for Marie-Antoinette's, Danton's and ultimately Robespierre's execution during the reign of terror's multiple purges. “[I]nexplicably favored with power and official positions” in spite of being banished from France, the erstwhile head of the revolution is ironically described with the air of dignity of a dethroned monarch.⁸⁴

During the course of his visit, Esteban partakes in a debate between Billaud and two other characters with revolutionary associations—the Abbé Brottier and Sieger—about the abolition of slavery in the region. Signaling a polyphonic moment in the novel, the fusion of competing views in a single passage yields a broader critique of anti-slavery revolution in the novel. At the present juncture, Sieger reminds Billaud and Brottier of prior insurrections, signaling to readers that anti-colonial resistance long predates the age of Enlightenment in the region. Calling into question Enlightenment claims of modernity and universality, Sieger's perspective signals to readers that blacks have sought their freedom since their earliest subjection to the European slave trade (the sixteenth century):

‘Todavía recuerdo—decía Sieger—aquella ridícula proclama que Jeannet hizo fijar en las paredes de Cayena, cuando anunció el Gran Acontecimiento. –Y,

⁸³ *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993. I borrow the phrase from the book's first chapter, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity.” 1-40.

⁸⁴ “Había algo de la dignidad de un rey destronado en la deferencia algo distante con que el Terrible de otros días recibió los envíos de Víctor Hugues.” *El siglo*, 259.

ahuecando la voz—: *Ya no existen amos ni esclavos... Los ciudadanos conocidos hasta la fecha con el nombre de negros cimarrones pueden regresar junto a sus hermanos, que les prestarán seguridad, protección y la alegría que provoca el disfrute de los derechos del hombre. Aquellos que eran esclavos pueden tratar de igual a igual con sus antiguos amos en los trabajos a terminar o emprender. Y bajando la voz—: Todo lo que hizo la Revolución Francesa en América fue legalizar una Gran Cimarronada que no cesa desde el siglo XVI. Los negros no los esperan a ustedes para proclamarse libres un número incalculable de veces.* (261)

Sieger's perspective reveals a narrative strategy that contrasts the written with the spoken word, official with subaltern versions of history, and imposed with self-extracted freedom. By recalling an event that was supposed to carry epochal consequences in mocking terms—the proclamation ending slavery in France's overseas colonies posted all over Cayenne—Sieger casts a critical light on a revolution imported from above. Describing the proclamation as 'ridiculous' on the one hand, and naming the moment it signals as the "Great Event" on the other, gives off an absurdist effect that neutralizes its importance and discredits its would-be-universalist pretensions. In a subsequent moment of ridicule, he is shown casting his voice in an emphatic tone, openly mocking the universalist rhetoric commonly associated with revolutionary proclamations. Sieger's critical portrayal of the proclamation signals an act of parody that strips its language of universalist pretensions by revealing its commanding tone as patronizing at its core. Evoking images of passivity, its use of verbs of permission ("pueden regresar", "les prestarán", "pueden tratar de igual") further underscores a relation of subordination between blacks and whites even as it claims to undo those very relations. One gets the impression blacks are free—not because they have sought their freedom—but because Paris now deems them citizens.

Whereas Sieger raises his voice to signal a moment of parody, he lowers it to convey a more serious admission: the French Revolution did not usher in a new age of racial equality in the region, but rather, merely provided the legal basis for a more widespread slave rebellion flourishing in the region since the sixteenth century. Recalling the prior and simultaneous existence of maroon communities—entire regions and autonomous states of runaway slaves constituted throughout whole of the Caribbean including Jamaica, Brazil and Venezuela—Sieger makes the following admission in unmistakably forceful terms: "Los negros no los esperan a ustedes para proclamarse libres un número incalculable de veces" ("Blacks did not wait for you to proclaim themselves free countless times"). The cloak of Enlightenment modernity now removed, a deeper history of anti-slavery resistance in the region is revealed—a history in which blacks are no longer passive recipients of an external revolution (France), but rather, emerge as active agents of their own liberation.

Esteban's meeting with Billaud signals a return to the private sphere for the first since the novel's opening chapter. Their debate takes place—not in the *res publica* of city squares or streets—but in the private quarters of Billaud's home. Described at once as "dilapidated but extraordinarily well kept," his house stands a metaphor for his ill-fated efforts to foment a revolution in a territory (Guyana) whose status as a penal colony marks it as doubly marginal. In spite of his best efforts to impose order on a dilapidated

home, one gets the impression Billaud faces impossible odds. Their debate winds down with Brigada's entry—a character whose status as a woman and a servant closes a chapter of homosocial desire in the novel. Brigada's entry as Billaud's domestic servant and lover troubles a conception of civic virtue as a space of male friendship by revealing the racialized and gendered forms of exclusion it is based upon. Signaling a moment of irony, Brigada labors in the background as the four men debate Caribbean politics. As the evening passes, Esteban awakens to a vision of Enlightenment as two worlds that co-exist but follow separate or divergent paths:⁸⁵

Despertó poco despues de la media noche: en la habitación contigua, con la camisa quitada a causa del calor, Billaud-Varennes escribía a la luz de un candil. De cuando en cuando mataba con un potente manotazo algún insecto que se hubiera posado sobre sus hombros o nuca. Cerca de él, echada sobre un camastro, la joven Brígada, desnuda, se abanicaba los pechos y los muslos con un número viejo de *La década philosophique*. (265-6)

Sexuality here represents a force that at once binds and separates Billaud and Brigada; binding them through sexual relations and separating them by revealing those relations as reflective of racial and gendered forms of oppression. Despite their proximity, Billaud and Brigada inhabit two separate worlds. Described as shirtless, writing past midnight with a candle, Billaud's depiction combines an image of the body with an activity of the mind and situates a trope of reason (light) within a backdrop of darkness (night). Both states take place in a space associated with sexuality and the unconscious (the bedroom). Further calling attention to his body, Billaud is describe as periodically smacking a fly over his shoulder or neck with a powerful hand. Such an image renders Billaud in eroticized terms, portraying him not simply as a banished revolutionary wasting away in isolation, but moreover, as virile and able-bodied master of his home. Such an image highlights Billaud's superior status in an economy of colonial sexual arrangements, an economy wherein relations between master and slave, and between male and female, reinforce one another.

Whereas Billaud is portrayed in vertical terms (sitting upright), Brigada appears in a horizontal pose (lying down), serving as another reminder of their difference in status. And whereas Billaud's effort to ward off flies suggests he views his surroundings as an obstacle toward his task at hand (writing), Brigada's gesture of fanning her naked body with an old copy of *La década philosophique* signals a moment of subversion in the novel. Revealing the yawning gap between its claims of universality and her own subordinate status, Brigada casts an ironic light on the discourse of Enlightenment in the novel by fanning her naked body with the journal. While not unproblematic—she is eroticized in terms that implicitly assume a heterosexual male gaze—Brigada's indifference toward the journal she holds signals a moment of subversion in a novel by redrawing the terms of republican philosophy from the perspective of Europe's slave-holding colonies. Resulting in Esteban's final disenchantment with Hugues' revolutionary efforts in the Caribbean, this paradoxical vision prompts him to leave Guyana and reunite with Sofia in Havana. Esteban's first words upon arriving in his old

⁸⁵ *Divergent Modernities: Literature and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

home are reflective the novel's overall strategy of overturning a view of Enlightenment revolution as a moment of progress and liberation by revealing its darker, more sinister consequences: "I have been living among barbarians."

VII. The Promise of Romance

Esteban's reunion with Sofia gets off on a rocky start. The innocence of childhood now gone, the two characters struggle to redefine their friendship as adults. Unable to mask his disappointment with Hugues' revolution, Esteban's lost idealism borders on a cynicism Sofia finds off-putting. By reminding Esteban of the need to abolish slavery in Cuba, Sofia burnishes her own revolutionary credentials and emerges as an agent of political transformation in the novel. In a scene where the two characters return from a party of a wealthy creole landowner, Sofia reveals the struggle to end slavery in Cuba as an unfulfilled promise:

Y así transcurría el tiempo, en aquellos días finales de un Siglo de las Luces que parecía haber durado más de trescientos años, por las tantas y tantas cosas que en él habían acontecido. "Vida maravillosa—decía Sofía—. Pero detrás de esos árboles hay *algo* inadmissible." Y señalaba hacia la fila de altos cipreses, alzados como obeliscos verdinegros sobre la vegetación circundante, que ocultaba otro mundo: el de los barracones de esclavos que a veces hacían sonar sus tambores como un granizo remoto. (305)

The age of Enlightenment is described as a period that lasts much longer than its commonplace one hundred year designation (the eighteenth century). Likened to the passing of three hundred years, the sense that it lasts much longer than one century forms part of the novel's multilayered representation of history. Beyond its overt thematic concern for the contradictory forms Enlightenment takes in a colonial environment, lies a greater preoccupation with the consequences of European modernity in the region more generally. Even though its title suggests the Enlightenment as its subject matter (*El siglo de las luces*), the novel by moments expands to include the whole of modern Caribbean history, from the eighteenth century to Columbus' first voyage nearly three centuries before. Its own use of Enlightenment discourse, then, does not simply signify a strict historical marker (i.e., the eighteenth century), but rather, a metaphor for modernity in the New World as a whole beginning with its first encounter with Europe.

Sofia's ambivalence toward the landowner's property reflects the novel's use of Enlightenment discourse as a metaphor for modernity in the region. Her emphasis on some *thing* that lies behind a row of cypress trees underscores the institution that sustains the lavish mansion even in a supposedly more enlightened era: slavery. Covered over by a row of cypress trees symbolizing order, prosperity and reason, the sound of the slaves' drums barely audible from a distance serves as a stark reminder that slavery functions as racial barrier still separating whites and blacks in the region. At the same time, this moment signals emergent modes of resistance in the novel. In that drums represent African musical forms that took hold in the New World, they suggest a mode of collective resilience and cultural resistance in spite of the traumas of slavery and the middle passage. Likened to a distant hailstorm, the sound of drums signals a revolution to come. By asking Esteban to turn from a visual toward an audible mode of political

orientation, then, Sofia leads the path toward imagining new forms of affinity and belonging grounded in the traditions of the subaltern. It as if by asking Esteban to listen for what lies behind what is visible, Sofia at the same time seeks to make him imagine a politics of solidarity and belonging based on the actual resistance of slaves.

Sofia's re-emergence as a significant character prompts a shift in gender relations in the novel. As previously examined, Esteban and Hugues' initial pairing reflects a homosocial moment that requires Sofia's temporary exclusion in order to create a space of male friendship and companionship in the first half of the novel. While this homosocial moment does not last—Esteban grows disillusioned with Hugues, ultimately abandoning his cause—it sets the stage for his ultimate reunion with Sofia and the novel's resolution of its gendered contradictions. Their strategic union, however, does not take place until the novel's closing chapter. Sofia and Esteban must first part ways before they join hands as dual protagonists in the novel's tragic conclusion.

Sofia leaves on a boat for Guyana where she pursues a liaison with Hugues heretofore kept secret. Her pairing with Hugues reflects a temporary shift toward a heterosexual mode of romance in the novel—a moment with prior traces in the novel but most evident here in its sexually explicit revelation of their liaison. It is as if compensating for a previous lack or absence, *El siglo* offers an image of heterosexual romance in copious detail. Depicted as a meeting of kindred spirits whose shared political and sexual attraction makes them ideal partners, Hugues and Sofia's union signals the first and only instance of a desirable heterosexual ideal in the novel. Lasting only a fleeting moment, however, Sofia grows disillusioned with Hugues and leaves him after witnessing his reinstatement of slavery in the Caribbean with her own eyes. Their break signals the end of Hugues' tenure as principal political protagonist and the beginning of Sofia and Esteban's final journey as symbols of civic heroism and martyrdom in the novel. Esteban and Sofia re-unite at long last as tragic figures of civic virtue—that is, as exemplary citizens who give their lives fighting for a greater sense of justice or purpose. Paradoxically, their reunion signals a return to Europe—this time, Madrid—as the scene of action in the last and final transatlantic journey of *El siglo de las luces*.

VIII. Tragedy and Modernity in the South Atlantic

Sofia reunites with Esteban in Spain where she pays a ransom to free him from prison he is held for conspiring against the Spanish crown in Cuba. In so far as both characters meet their tragic death fighting Napoleon's army in the streets of Madrid in the novel's final chapter, they reflect an ironic understanding of modernity and enlightenment in the Caribbean—and by extension, the South Atlantic—as an inherently paradoxical encounter that often yields results distinct from its stated aims or intentions. In a sense, the novel's vision resonates with Julio Ramos' conception of modernity as a divergent and even missed encounter between Europe and Spain's former colonies.⁸⁶ Along similar lines, it also recalls James Scott's understanding of tragedy as a mode that captures the essentially unknowable or unpredictable outcome of Enlightenment nation-building projects in colonial environments.⁸⁷ As a novel that critically retraces the legacies of the French Revolution in the Caribbean and yet concludes with its two main

⁸⁶ *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. John D. Blanco, translator. [*Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina*]

⁸⁷ *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

characters fighting Napoleon's troops in Spain, *El siglo de las luces* reflects Ramos' and Scott's insights on tragedy and divergence as essential elements of the Caribbean encounter with Enlightenment, extending them toward the South Atlantic as a whole. And just as the novel expands the boundaries of the Caribbean to include a wider geography of linguistic exchange and territorial interaction, then, so too does it offer a conception of the Atlantic that goes beyond French, British or American circuits of trade to include those of Portugal and Spain.

An empire as well as a nation viewed an internal colony of France under Napoleon, Spain functions as an allegory for the tragic and violent turns of Enlightenment in the South Atlantic in the novel's final chapter. Finding themselves in an empire held hostage by another, Sofia and Esteban must eventually decide with whom they wish to side—Napoleon's troops or the people resisting them in the streets. Posing an existential problem, its resolution offers a statement about the meaning of collective resistance—and by extension, civic virtue—in peripheral or semi-peripheral environments.

An image of Madrid at its darkest hour is described as a massive uprising foreshadows the choice Esteban and Sofia must eventually make. It also reveals a conception of politics as acquiring its own poetic structure or logic. As I wish to demonstrate, the following passage articulates a poetics of resistance conceived in conditions of civil strife and colonial occupation. Recreating the Second of May 1802 uprising whose brutal repression was supposed to solidify Napoleon's hold over Spain but instead prompted widespread rebellion all over the country, this passage offers perhaps the most poignant image of collective resistance against a revolution-turned-empire in the novel:

El pueblo entero de Madrid se había arrojado a las calles en un levantamiento repentino, inesperado y devastador, sin que nadie se hubiese valido de proclamas impresas ni de artificios de oratoria para provocarlo. La elocuencia, aquí, estaba en los gestos; en el impetus vocinglero de las hembras; en el irrefrenable impulso de esa marcha colectiva; en la universalidad del furor. De súbito, la marejada humana pareció detenerse, como confundida por sus propios remolinos. En todas partes arreciaba la fusilería, en tanto que sonaba por vez primera, bronca y retumbante, la voz de un canon. “Los franceses han sacado la caballería,” clamaban algunos, que ya regresaban heridos, asauleados en las caras, en los brazos, en el pecho, do los encuentros primeros. Pero esa sangre, lejos de amedrentar a los que avanzaban, apresuró su paso hacia donde el estruendo de la metralla y de la artillería revelaba lo recio de la trabazón... (393-4)

An image of a mass insurrection lays bare the consequences of the French Revolution once it assumes the form of a dictatorship with imperial ambitions. True to its commitments as a novel about the French Revolution from the margins or borders of Europe, this scene reveals a fearful army willing to crush all who dare cross its path. Added to this the inherent irony in Esteban and Sofia's status as colonial subjects in space that is both the capital of an empire and a city occupied by a foreign power, the boundary between colonizer and colonized becomes blurred. By contrasting “un levantamiento repentino, inesperado y devastador” (a sudden, unexpected and devastating

uprising) against “proclamas impresas” (printed proclamations) and “artificios de oratoria” (oratory artifices) a connection is drawn between Spain’s plight against Napoleon and the Caribbean experience under Hugues. In both instances, revolutionary discourse serves as a cover, obfuscating a more significant moment of resistance in the novel. Just as previously Sofia asks Esteban to listen to a history of resistance based in the experience of black slaves themselves, here the uprising against Napoleon does not take its cue from enlightenment discourse, but rather, from a form of resistance conceived in a struggle against colonial violence. By staging a contrast between language and action, and between rhetoric and resistance, the narrative refuses a causal relation between French revolutionary discourse and events outside its immediate orbit, hence making possible a new vocabulary of political transformation.

A new language of resistance—one grounded in conditions of imperial violence and colonial occupation—is occasioned by an image of Madrid rising up against a foreign invader. Locating its eloquence in images of bodily motion (“en los gestos”), in the voices of women (“en el impetus vocinglero de las hembras”), and in spectacles of overwhelming force (“en el infrenable impulso de esa marcha colectiva”) and unanimous resistance (“en la universalidad del furor”), a new civic vocabulary is forged out of a shared sense of struggle against a common foe. An image of a crowd at a sudden standstill (“[d]e súbito, la marejada humana pareció detenerse”), as if momentarily lost in its own convulsions (“como confundida por sus propios remolinos”), breaches once and for all the divide between language and action, and between rhetoric and reality that stood as a barrier for most of the novel. By creating a language that gains inspiration from the streets rather than from borrowed forms of writing, this divide is finally breached, thereby signaling a new age of resistance in the novel. As I wish to ultimately demonstrate, this new age is revealed as not only having far reaching consequences in Europe, but moreover, across Latin America and the Caribbean as well.

The frightening sound of gunshots pouring from every direction further reveals a formidable enemy willing to crush resistance at all costs (“[e]n todas partes arreciaba la fusilería”), and the firing of a canon for the first time (“en tanto que sonaba por vez primera, bronca y retumbante, la voz de un canon”) serves as an ominous reminder of the odds they are up against. By warning others of the French army’s use of its cavalry (“[l]os franceses han sacado la caballería,” clamaban algunos”) as they return bloodied from the first skirmishes of battle (“que ya regresaban heridos, asabados en las caras, en los brazos, en el pecho, do los encuentros primeros”), street fighters at once foreshadow a more widespread violence and reveal a self-consciousness about their own conditions of resistance. Under asymmetrical conditions, resistance against a more powerful enemy must take novel and unforeseen means. Far from discouraging them, then, the blood they shed is portrayed as further instilling in them a desire to take to those areas where the fighting is fiercest (“[p]ero esa sangre, lejos de amedrentar a los que avanzaban, apresuró su paso hacia donde el estruendo de la metralla y de la artillería revelaba lo recio de la trabazón”). Guerrilla warfare—a term first used to describe a strategy of resistance used against Napoleon’s troops in Spain—here symbolizes a form of insubordination capable of undermining a greater or more formidable opponent. As if recognizing for the first time their home field advantage—namely, a greater capacity to ambush or hide from your opponent—street fighters join the ranks of more experienced warriors as a force to be reckoned with.

A scene of guerilla warfare foreshadows the existential choice Esteban and Sofia face. Overhearing the noise in the streets, Sofia looks out the window and watches the fighting unfold with unusual interest. Framed as a scene of witnessing, Sofia urges Esteban to take to the streets, completing an image of civic virtue as an inherently violent process of severing old ties and creating new ones by fighting for a common vision or purpose. Within this image, Sofia and Esteban emerge as the ultimate revolutionary protagonists of the novel:

Fue en ése momento en que Sofía se desprendió de la ventana: “¡Vamos allá!” gritó arrancando sables y puñales de la panoplia. Esteban trató de detenerla: “No seas idiota; están ametrallando. No vas a hacer nada con esos hierros viejos.” “¡Quédate si quieres! ¡Yo voy!” “¿Y vas a pelear por quién?” “¡Por los que se echaron a la calle!—gritó Sofía—. ¡Hay que hacer algo!” “¿Qué?” “¡Algo!” Y Esteban la vio salir de casa, impetuosa, enardecida, con un hombro claro y un acero en alto, jamás vista en tal fuerza y en tal entrega. “Espérame,” gritó. Y armándose con un fusíl de caza, bajó las escaleras a todo correr... (394)

Prompting a shift from neutral observer to active participant, the first signs of bloodshed instill in Sofia a desire to rush to the scene of fighting. An image of Sofia removing herself from the window—a symbol used to portray female captivity and inaction—and yelling at Esteban to rush to the scene of fighting reflects a consciousness in full command. Her act of grabbing a sword and a spear—weapons that symbolize war both in its archaic and universal form—further highlights her undeterred willingness to take up arms for a greater sense of justice or purpose with whatever means she finds. In contrast, Esteban’s efforts to dissuade her reveal a sexist attitude that presume her as too naïve to be fully cognizant of her actions. By underscoring her inability to do anything “with those old pieces of metal,” Esteban dismisses her intentions as those of someone overly naïve and inexperienced in the art of war. Contrasting archaic and modern weapons, and everyday civilians with armed soldiers, Esteban’s dismissal aims to give her the sense that her efforts are useless against such a formidable foe. It also serves to try to contain her within the private sphere.

Sofia’s reply reflects a confidence and awareness of her own actions that exceeds Esteban’s expectations. In a moment of gender reversal, Sofia indicates her decision to join the fighting in the streets, giving Esteban the option to stay behind in the relative comfort of the domestic sphere. Demonstrating a preference for action over inaction, and for the dangers of the street over the safety of the home, Sofia subverts traditional gender roles in the novel. Startled by her unusual courage in the face of grave danger, Esteban’s question gets to the heart of the novel’s critical reflections about the margins of Enlightenment revolution in the Atlantic world. When the boundary between colonizer and colonized is blurred, with whom do you side? Sofia’s reply reflects an eschewal of easy answers and an understanding of resistance based on historical circumstances (“¡Por los que se echaron a la calle!—gritó Sofía—”). Hers is a conception of resistance from the perspective of witnessing injustice through personal experience. By championing those who “took to the streets” Sofia does not so much side with Spain over France, but rather, demonstrates an understanding of resistance as rooted in the experience of subjection to a greater power through violence or coercion. Electing people over soldiers,

the streets over the battlefield and innocent civilians over a mighty army, Sofia at once reflects and anticipates an understanding of subaltern resistance beyond national boundaries. Her decision also reveals the last and final break in the novel with the French Revolution as a desirable model of forging resistance in environments that primarily experienced its darker, more sinister consequences.

By depicting Sofia's final heroic act less as the product of an individual consciousness, and more as an allegory for a new age of emancipatory politics, *El siglo de las luces* paradoxically reinstates the private-public gender divide she transgresses. Even though Sofia takes the lead—thereby occupying the role of principal protagonist—her heroic gesture is ultimately stripped of its subversive nature.⁸⁸ The novel's framing of Sofia's heroism transforms her into something resembling less a literary character and more an allegorical symbol or figure. Part of the reason her exit gives the sense less of an actual character and more of a figure etched in a canvas lies in its resemblance to allegorical modes of representation. Viewed as holding a spear up high and showing a bare shoulder, Sofia's image recalls Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Just as the title of Delacroix's painting suggests, an image of a corpulent woman showing one bare shoulder and holding a sharp object does not signify an actual person leading another but rather a metaphorical reflection about revolutionary fervor and inspiration.

This second layer of meaning is what gives allegory its distinct signifying function and what makes *El siglo de las luces* less a historical novel in the strict sense of the word and more of a work of meta-fiction. Its mimetic recreation of struggles between European powers and their overseas colonies, and between imperial and anti-colonial modes of revolution, at once reveal and reflect an external drama of Caribbean cultural and political origins. Acquiring the status of myth,⁸⁹ *El siglo de las luces* is ultimately a novel about the creation of a Latin American and Caribbean revolutionary self-consciousness. As if anticipating and revealing a *longing* for a greater sense of regional cooperation and belonging—a desire that was transformed into a reality shortly after the novel's completion in an age of decolonization and left-wing movements—*El siglo de las luces* traces the origins of a pan-Caribbean revolutionary tradition. Once a mighty empire, a weak and humiliated Spain serves as the backdrop for the subsequent emancipation of its New World colonies.

Not particularly known for his portrayal of strong female characters, Carpentier's decision to situate a female character at the forefront of a fiction of Caribbean revolutionary origins corresponds not so much with a view of resistance sympathetic with feminist aims. Rather, the novel's conclusion resonates with a republican tradition of visual modes of representation dating back to the French Revolution that makes women powerful symbols and at the same time passive recipients of political change or action. It is as if Carpentier struggles to overcome, even as he remains mindful, of the limits of his own Euro- and male centric cultural baggage. Reflecting a desire to rethink the bonds of the *res publica* or common good beyond the narrow purview of a few privileged men, *El*

⁸⁸Lynn Hunt has shown how the figure of the woman served as a powerful symbol of revolutionary subjectivity and at the same time undermined or cancelled the emancipation women by relegating them to status of caretakers or mothers during the French Revolution. See her classic *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

⁸⁹ On myth-making as a strategy of creating cultural origins in Latin American literature, see Roberto Gonzalez-Echeverría's *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

siglo de las luces strives to imagine an alternative vision of kinship and regional belonging. In the last analysis, however, the novel does not so much offer a prescription for a complete break from European communitarian models, but rather, dwells on the threshold between competing political, cultural and gendered geographies.

Forging Bonds Out of Water:

Melancholic Kinship and Belonging in V.S. Naipaul's *A Way in the World*

I no longer seek to find beauty in the lives of the mean and the oppressed. Hate oppression; fear the oppressed.

—V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*

In his Nobel lecture (2001), “Two Worlds,”⁹⁰ V.S. Naipaul outlines an element of his fiction that reaffirms a feeling many readers familiar with his work frequently experience: the sense of finding in each new text elements or traces from previously published works. From indirect allusions to explicit references, traces of previous works abound in every one of Naipaul's works:

I said earlier that everything of value about me is in my books. I will go further now. I will say I am the sum of my books. Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others. (181)

This intertextual strategy of creating new fictions out of older works and of incorporating prior plots and characters into fresh material is especially true of *A Way in the World*, the last novel Naipaul published (1994) prior to winning the Nobel prize for literature.⁹¹ One not only finds echoes of prior works in this novel, but moreover, several of the chapters contained within it are actual rewritings of some of his previous works of history (*The Loss of El Dorado*), travel writing (*The Middle Passage*) and fiction (*A Bend in the River*). Naipaul attributes this method of creating fictions that contain or build upon previous works to his cultural and social milieu as a Trinidadian author. As his Nobel lecture's title suggests, Trinidad's unique relation to both South America and the Caribbean as an island-nation that borders both regions but does not fully inhabit one or the other informs his own style of writing. Given that Naipaul conceives of each work as an extension or as a turning point toward a future project, his understanding of writing exceeds commonplace notions of the book as a finite and discrete object. Perhaps more importantly, such an understanding is intimately linked to his own sense of identity as a Trinidadian author:

⁹⁰ Published in a collection of essays titled *Literary Occasions*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2003. 181-196.

⁹¹ Since then, he has published two novels, *Half A Life* (2002) and *Magic Seeds* (2004).

It's been like this because of my background. My background is at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused. I was born in Trinidad. It is a small island in the mouth of the great Orinoco river of Venezuela. So Trinidad is not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean. It was developed as a New World plantation colony, and when I was born in 1932 it had a population of about 400,000. Of this, about 150,000 were Indians, Hindus and Muslims, nearly all of peasant origin, and nearly all from the Gangetic plain. (181)

Naipaul traces his self-referential writing style to his conditions of possibility as a writer from a doubly peripheral nation rather than to a self-conscious effort to break with narrative convention or tradition. By calling his background "at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused," he underscores the fundamental paradox that lies at the heart of his condition as a Trinidadian author. Small in comparison to many other nations in the region, Trinidad's proximity to the Orinoco and Venezuela gives it as much of a sense of kinship and connectedness with mainland South America as with the insular Caribbean. Yet at the same time, "Trinidad is not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean." Its paradoxical status as a nation that forms part of both regions and yet does not fully belong to either, informs Naipaul's self-understanding as an author, as well as his conception of writing as an inherently intertextual process. His status as a Trinidadian of South Asian descent, moreover, adds another layer of complexity to his understanding of authorship. Created as a slave holding economy, his ancestors' migration to the island coincides with the abolishment of slavery and the subsequent need for cheap labor to replace slaves. Naipaul strives to bridge this dichotomy between the insular Caribbean and mainland South America, between bodies of water and bodies of land and between Europe and the Americas through an intertextual literary strategy that links spaces commonly viewed as separate or unrelated. By juxtaposing spaces commonly viewed as separate or distinct, Naipaul creates a novelistic vision of writing and postcolonial authorship as modes of experience and subject-formation born as a result of competing linguistic, cultural and geopolitical alliances. As I will later demonstrate, these modes at times yield friendship and affinity and at times hostility and enmity among the novel's principal protagonists.

I. A Bildungsroman for the Global South

At the same time, Naipaul's notoriety as a writer with disparaging views about Third World societies makes unprejudiced discussions of his literary writings particularly challenging. Perhaps more than any other living author of his stature, V.S. Naipaul is as famous for his disparaging remarks about Third World societies as he is for his award-winning fiction.⁹² Denounced by critics and authors on the left such as the late Edward Said and fellow Nobel recipient Derek Walcott from neighboring Saint Lucia and championed by intellectuals on the right, Naipaul occupies a conflicted and conflicting position in the canon of postcolonial writing. Yet for better or for worse, no other living author's works embrace and encompass the global South as extensively as Naipaul's.

⁹² Naipaul has obtained nearly every major literary prize in the English-speaking world, including the Booker Prize (1971), the David Cohen British literature prize (1993), and perhaps the most significant prize bestowed upon any author irrespective of nationality and language, the Nobel Prize (2001).

From his wide ranging travel writing on the Caribbean, Argentina, the U.S. South, South Asia and the converted nations of Islam to his novels set in Africa, Trinidad, India and South America, Naipaul embodies more than any other the very idea of a global postcolonial author. Part of my aim in this chapter will be to move beyond the cloud of controversy that surrounds Naipaul's image in order to uncover the more nuanced and ambivalent depiction of the global South one of his last and most enduring novels offers. As I will argue over the course of this chapter, *A Way in the World* reveals a keen awareness of some of the shared predicaments of postcolonial societies, offering unexpected moments of kinship and affinity among its protagonists—moments all too frequently overlooked by Naipaul's fiercest antagonists. While these moments are often fleeting and temporary, I wish to argue that they signal not so much a refusal to form bonds of affinity and shared belonging among the novel's protagonists, but rather, underscore the conditions that make such forms of kinship often precarious and sometimes impossible. By focusing on those moments John Updike has perhaps best described as "a pained and partial identification" in Naipaul's writing, I aim to offer a reading of *A Way in the World* that neither rests on dismissive premises or uncritical appraisals. The novel's distinct strategy of intertextuality, I will argue, resists transparent or straightforward alliances among its principal protagonists and instead creates moments of kinship out of spaces that exceed commonplace notions of national, regional and cultural belonging. Although prompted by unexpected friendships and affinities between characters of competing cultural, linguistic and regional affiliations, these moments reveal a melancholic underside. The available means for kinship and communion among (post)colonial subjects in the novel lies not so much in a space of emancipatory affirmation, but rather, in a negative horizon of impossible belonging. Yet even as it forecloses a more affirmative mode of belonging, *A Way in the World* incessantly mourns its own conditions of impossibility. By underscoring the adverse conditions under which its protagonists forge bonds of friendship and sympathy, *A Way in the World* melancholically longs for a greater sense of kinship and regional belonging.

Naipaul's portrayal of the global South in *A Way in World* relies on a relation of ambivalence between characters belonging to rival imperial masters. Signaling at once scorn and admiration, attraction and repulsion, empathy and indifference, the ambivalence of feeling "white but not quite" to use Homi Bhabha's famous formulation⁹³, structures the narrator's relation to characters across a wide trans-Atlantic historical spectrum. By critically recreating Trinidad's peculiar historic relation to Venezuela and mainland South America, the narrator reveals a more nuanced understanding of kinship and affinity in the postcolonial periphery. Uncovering Trinidad's multi-layered history as an island caught between Spanish and British imperial rivalries, the narrator melancholically re-imagines its relation to Venezuela—and by extension, mainland South America—as a severed homeland he strives to recover but is unable to claim as his own.

Combining various discursive registers—travel writing, autobiography and historical record—in *A Way in the World* Naipaul creates a larger narrative whole out of

⁹³ See his seminal essay "Of Mimicry and Man" in *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 85-92.

the gaps and fissures left unaccounted for in the colonial archive.⁹⁴ Forming nine chapters that span from the early modern period to the present—from Raleigh and Miranda’s hapless efforts in colonial Trinidad against Spain to the tragedies and disappointments of postcolonial migrants in Africa and South America—*A Way in the World* resembles a mosaic that draws together seemingly unrelated historical episodes to create a larger coherent narrative. Perhaps Naipaul’s most ambitious work of fiction to date, *A Way in the World* is also novel that traces both his peripheral origins as a Trinidadian writer and his subsequent rise as a postcolonial novelist of global stature. Even though the novel charts the narrator’s passage from youth to adulthood, and from inexperience to maturity, its emphasis on characters across a wide range of temporal and historical registers reveals more about his subjectivity than any formative moment of personal experience. In a sense, *A Way in the World* resembles a Bildungsroman except that the narrator-protagonist rarely reveals moments of interiority and offers only faint and oblique traces of his own formative experiences. Less a novel about individual experience and more about a larger collective unconscious, *A Way in the World* tests the limits of the Bildungsroman—and by extension, the novel—as a genre capable of adequately addressing the intercultural character of contemporary postcolonial societies. It is this desire to reinvent the parameters of novelistic writing that makes a *Way in the World* a critical testing ground for fiction’s bearing upon the global South. This desire is furthermore reflected through the novel’s intertextual structure. Caught between competing geopolitical and linguistic spheres of influence, its protagonists often face conflicting loyalties and allegiances.

Significantly, the novel’s opening chapter describes its narrator’s first memories of Leonard Side in Perry’s Funeral Parlour in Port of Spain—a character known locally for dressing the deceased as well as a cake decorator and flower arranger. Much like the narrator, Leonard Side’s story forms part of a broader history of South Asian migration to the island since the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. Even though he expresses repulsion for Leonard Side’s ability to move effortlessly between various vocations on a daily basis, the narrator’s own fears of mixture and impurity do not preclude him from revealing a fascination and even an attraction for a man he describes on various occasions as good-looking.

The second chapter is linked to the first by the idea of death intimated by Leonard’s Side’s vocation in Perry’s Funeral Parlour. The death of Blair—a career diplomat who comes of age in the era of black power and decolonization—is announced here but is not fully developed until later. Giving the novel a sense of circularity and coherence—we learn in a later chapter that Blair’s body is later laid to rest in Perry’s Funeral Parlour in Port of Spain—his death will stand as a metaphor for the narrator’s uneasy relation and disenchantment with the course of Trinidad’s formal independence from Great Britain in the early sixties. Blair’s promise is at the same time Trinidad’s, and

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida recalls that the word archive comes from Greek (*arckheion*) which initially meant “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law.... They have the power to interpret the archives.” Along similar lines, he argues that “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution and interpretation.” See *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1995]. 2, 4.

his sudden and shocking death at the same time signals an existing social disorder that was unleashed after decolonization.

All the while the smell of fish glue as a reminder of Trinidad's entry into the modern world as a British colony wrestled from Spain serves as a backdrop to the chapter. The narrator comes across its strong odor for the first time in the Registrar-General's Department where he works as a clerk making copies of birth, marriage and death certificates prior to leaving for study at Oxford. Serving to bind official records together in book volumes, fish glue signifies the thread that Trinidadians share in common except that its strong odor prevents the narrator from entering the vault where all the island's records are stored since its foundation as a British colony.

By channeling both the allure and the repulsion of fish glue, the narrator offers a historical example that serves to illustrate the novel's counterpunal method of rewriting history. At the very moment the Spanish conquer Trinidad as their own, claiming the native inhabitants surrendered the island willingly, an unnamed English marauder who turns out to be Sir Walter Raleigh raids their settlement, forcing the Spanish off the island. However, by freeing the aboriginal rulers held captive by the Spanish, Raleigh inadvertently confirms their names as true and sheds light on the violent nature of their dispossession. A counterpunal strategy of reading and re-imagining historical events from the perspective of those it has shut out from its vault of knowledge, the narrator seems to suggest, is necessary to make the archive speak on their behalf.⁹⁵ This counterpunal strategy serves as the basis of the novel's narrative structure, informing not only its depiction of history but moreover, its own understanding as a work that reflects upon fiction's relation to history and travel writing.

The third and fourth chapters explore the themes of exile and displacement as a result of the narrator's flight from Trinidad to study English at Oxford and by his developing interest in travel writing in the early phases of his career as an author. In the third chapter, the narrator recalls his first visit to South America, a trip to the Guiana Highlands, a place described as "an Amerindian no man's land on the frontiers of Venezuela, Brazil and what is now called Guyana"⁹⁶ and serves as the basis for the unfolding narrative. In this story, an English traveler in an unnamed South American country resembling Guyana travels to its wild interior with two indigenous tribesmen in an effort to garner their support to overthrow the current government. Toward the story's end, the narrator comes face to face with the tribe's chief who in turn reminds him of a promise the English made toward his ancestors but never kept. As he takes out a bundle of clothes his tribe has kept for three hundred fifty years—clothes that are recognizable as a Tutor doublet even in their perished state—we learn they belonged to an English explorer who gave them to the chief's ancestors in exchange for allowing one of his tribe's members to travel with him to England. We learn in a later chapter this

⁹⁵ I borrow this term from Edward Said who defines a counterpunal perspective as an ability "to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its own particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and systems of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others." For Said, this strategy of looking at "different experiences counterpually" offers a model of viewing the relation between metropolitan and formerly colonized societies as intertwined and overlapping as opposed to as separate or mutually exclusive. See his widely influential book, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994. 18, 32-33.

⁹⁶ New York: Vintage, 1994. 45. All subsequent references to the novel will refer to this edition.

Englishman happens to be Raleigh who presents the tribesman to King James as evidence of the newly discovered empire of Guyana he claims to have found.

Chapter four returns to the theme of writing for a narrator who recalls struggling to find his voice as an aspiring novelist in nineteen-fifties London. In this narrative of false beginnings, the narrator confronts his inability to write about realities that exceed the traditional parameters of English-language fiction through Foster Morris, a BBC critic who briefly serves as his mentor during this period. Similar to Morris who writes a book about a Trinidadian politics in the thirties, the narrator views his first effort at writing fiction as doomed from its inception. Just like Morris, he creates characters who are “versions of English people” and attributes to them a “social depth and solidity and rootedness” that betray their essential displacement and dispossession as a people⁹⁷. It is not until the narrator is able to distinguish his efforts from Morris’ and a longer tradition of European writing about the West Indies—from Columbus and Raleigh’s fifteenth-century and seventeenth-century accounts to Victorian travel narratives and Depression-era cruise books—that he is able write about the region on his own terms.

A central character emerges in the passage from the fourth to the fifth chapter: the Panamanian-Trinidadian revolutionary Lebrun—a character several critics have suggested was modeled after C.L.R. James, the Marxist intellectual from Trinidad. Lebrun is first introduced in the fourth chapter through Foster Morris who recalls incurring his wrath one evening; Lebrun reproaches him for his relative ease of seducing women in Trinidad afforded by his status a white man. Described as a moment of racial resentment, Morris remembers Lebrun’s sexual taunting as disconcerting coming from a man described by many as “very good looking” and known as having a way with women.⁹⁸ Thin-skinned and insecure despite his apparent good looks, Lebrun helps sediment the connection forged in the novel between Trinidad and Latin America in several important respects. His Panamanian background and fluency in Spanish tie him as much to the political tides of Latin American history as to those of the Caribbean. No less significant, the narrator recalls coming across his name for the first time as a student browsing his school’s library in Port of Spain. The book he authors draws connections between the political struggles of Trinidad and the Caribbean to the Spanish American Continental Wars of Independence nearly a century and half before. As we will later see, these are connections the narrator by moments rejects and by moments embraces.

Chapter six revisits the themes of travel and displacement in an age seemingly distant from the narrator. Its subject is Raleigh and he is depicted in this chapter as a broken old man whose vain efforts to find the legendary empire of Guyana only yield tragedy and disappointment among his followers. Over the course of the narrative, Raleigh’s surgeon repeatedly questions the veracity of his travel diary about his so-called discovery. Accusing him of “mixing fantasy and history,⁹⁹” these moments of critical questioning not only casts a critical light on European accounts of history, but moreover, serves to make readers at the same time wary of viewing the novel as a direct or transparent expressions of its author’s personal experience.

The story, however, moves beyond Raleigh to focus on a mestizo servant who accompanies him on his final return to England where he awaits execution. Framed as a

⁹⁷ 81.

⁹⁸ 94-5.

⁹⁹ 183.

dialogue between Don José (Raleigh's servant) and the seventeenth-century Franciscan friar and chronicler of Spain's New World provinces of New Granada and Venezuela (Fray Simón), the remainder of the narrative reveals his journey across the Atlantic, unwittingly setting the stage for the narrator's own conditions as a postcolonial migrant three-hundred years later. Similar to Don José's fear of traveling despite his safe return to New Grenada, the narrator reveals an anxiety about losing his British passport while traveling abroad in the seventh chapter, fearful he may not be able to convince airport officials of his nationality due to his skin color.

In this chapter the narrator forges a special relation with Venezuela, even imagining the country "as a kind of restored homeland" after making several trips there in the fifties. The story, however, shifts toward a passenger he meets onboard an airplane in one of his numerous visits (Manuel Sorzano). Initially mistaking him for Spanish American, certain clues about him (his accent and carry-on luggage) reveal he is an Indo-Trinidadian immigrant living in Venezuela. Over the duration of the flight, Manuel Sorzano depicts his adopted homeland as a land of riches and opportunity. Upon landing, however, he warns the narrator to exit the Caracas airport with caution since kidnappings are common among less careful travelers. Revealing the harsh realities of living in a society with gaping social inequalities, Manuel Sorzano's story refuses easy or straightforward forms of identification between the two neighboring countries.

The eighth and final chapter further explores the relation between Trinidad and Venezuela in distinct ways. Chapter eight reconsiders Francisco Miranda's historic legacy as a precursor to the more famous Venezuelan liberator, Simón Bolívar. Rather than situate Miranda within a lineage of Latin American revolutionary heroes, however, the narrator places him in the company of less admirable protagonists. Comparing him to Columbus and Raleigh, the narrator sees in Miranda a similar pattern of "madness and self-deception—followed by surrender."¹⁰⁰ Miranda's days in exile in Trinidad—and later as a prisoner in Puerto Rico—are recreated in order to give readers a more critical view of his neglected legacy.

Beyond what these pages purport to reveal—a flawed individual with unrealistic expectations about revolution—lies a sense of kinship and affinity between Miranda and two of the chapter's other protagonists. In Trinidad, Miranda develops a close friendship with the island's colonial governor, Hislop, whom expresses interest in joining the Spanish American cause. Both characters experience moments of empathy with one another over a shared sense of feeling damaged by their respective colonial societies (British and Spanish). And in Puerto Rico, the royalist Andrés Level de Goda visits Miranda regularly at his cell, professing admiration for him despite their political differences and expressing a shared sense of exasperation about the deforming effects of Spanish colonialism on colonizers and colonized alike.

The story's ending—an anecdotal history of the discovery of Miranda's papers after being presumed forever lost—reflects an archival moment in the novel that casts a critical light upon triumphalist images of historical figures. Indicating that they were found in England more than a hundred years after his death, the narrator reveals his papers were acquired and heavily edited by the Venezuelan government before they were published in the early twenties. By subsequently revealing how the unedited version of Miranda's writings were finally published in Havana in 1950 for the bicentennial of

¹⁰⁰ 246.

Miranda's birth, the narrator offers a counterpunal version of his legacy. Miranda's significance lies not in sanitized narratives championed by nations, but rather, in the remaining traces of a conflicted historical figure whose significance exceeds the bounds of Spanish-language nationality.

The final chapter returns to the subject of Blair's death—a subject previously announced. The narrator and Blair meet again for the first time since his days working as a clerk in the Red House of Port of Spain. The setting, however, is no longer Trinidad, but an unnamed East African country. Not unlike the nations and territories described in the novel's previous chapters, this newly independent nation is depicted as filled with its own form of hatred and hysteria. While the narrator struggles to begin as a writer, Blair's brilliant career as a diplomat is suddenly shattered. Covered in leaves, his body is found in a banana plantation several days after he goes missing. Whereas the exact motive behind his murder is never explained, it is understood Blair upset people in positions of power. A description of Blair's body making its return to Port of Spain without the formalities of a state funeral, eventually making its way to Parry's Chapel unnoticed, serves as the novel's closing image.

A sense of a shared historical emotion ties each of the novel's nine chapters together; combined with hatred and hysteria, mourning and melancholia emerge as the two leading states that lie at the heart of its conception of historical emotion. From Raleigh to Miranda and from Lebrun to Blair lies a sense that colonialism unleashed a set of emotions that were distilled rather than diffused and refined rather forgotten during and after decolonization. A diverse gallery of anti-heroes submerged in distinct spatial and temporal registers serve as the vehicle by which the novel conveys a sense of stored emotions awaiting confirmation after a long period of suppression. Burdened by colonial cultures they inherit but cannot entirely disavow, *A Way in the World* depicts its male protagonists as anti-heroic antidotes to the images of revolutionary masculinity commonly associated with postcolonial statist narratives.

Yet despite their flaws and shortcomings, the novel's male protagonists reveal a propensity toward forging bonds of friendship at unexpected moments in the novel, frequently expressing empathy and affection toward one another. In the following section, I will demonstrate how the novel's archival understanding of memory—that is, as emotions that are stored but not forgotten, and as traces that are hidden but never lost—reveals a conception of postcolonial kinship as a melancholic space of impossible belonging. Such a conception resonates with Derrida's understanding of the archive as a space of contestation over the meaning of history as well as with Roberto González Echevarría's understanding of archival fictions as receptacles of cultural origins.¹⁰¹ At once invested in the archive and seeking to disentangle itself from its hold, *A Way in the World* reflects an understanding of fiction as a space where history's lost emotions may be remembered and reignited. Perhaps more importantly for the present purposes, it also reflects an understanding of the archive as space where those emotions yield unexpected bonds of friendship as well as sudden or unforeseen outbursts of friction or violence between characters perceived as rivals or antagonists. Offering a view of the archive as a record of mixed emotions, *A Way in the World's* intertextual narrative strategy

¹⁰¹ See his *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

furthermore reflects a melancholic longing for a sense of kinship and belonging beyond cultural, linguistic and regional boundaries among its protagonists.

II. Stored Emotions

The question of the archive as a space where history is stored, updated and retrieved is raised for the first time during the narrator's short period working as a clerk in the Red House of Port of Spain. Perhaps all the more telling, his duties entail making copies of birth, marriage and death certificates for customers who request them. From an early stage in the novel, then, the narrator's desire to pursue a career as a writer is inextricable linked to the process of archiving knowledge about Trinidad's history and to the idea of representing its past for others.

At the same time, the narrator expresses ambivalent feelings toward an archive he forms a part of but at the same time wishes to escape. Upon learning that all of the island's records are stored in a vault in the Red House since its founding as a British colony, the narrator wishes to enter it and observe its records but finds himself unable due to the strong smell of fish glue and dust that overpowers him. Described with a mixture of attraction and repulsion, fear and fascination, this scene sets the stage for the narrator's relation toward a cast of characters both real and imagined:

I had been told that everything printed in the island was lodged in the vault. All the records of the colony were there, all the births, deaths, deeds, transfers of property and slaves, all the life of the island for the century and a half of the colonial time. I would have liked to look at old things, old newspapers, old books. But the smell of fish glue was very strong in the vault. That, together with the smell of old dust and old paper, the airlessness, which became worse the deeper you went in, the dim light, and the sheer quantity of old paper, was too much for me. (23)

The archive's strong odors reflect an understanding of Trinidad's past as a history too difficult for the narrator to face or witness. While initially expressing an interest in "old things," his fascination reveals an antiquarian desire to view objects rather than a deeper appreciation of their historical significance. Designating a sticky substance used to bind paper together, the smell of fish glue reflects an understanding of the archive as a repository of knowledge that draws in its visitors and implicates them in its history. Its associations with the ocean as a substance derived from the bones of dead fish, moreover, suggests a history conditioned by the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies of death and destruction in the region. Reflecting a history the narrator cannot ignore or forget, the smell of fish glue functions as a foul reminder of the challenges and demands the archive places upon its viewers.

Yet fish glue does not alone permeate the archive with its foul odor. A smell of "old dust and old paper" helps create a general atmosphere that depicts the archive as a space filled with history's unpleasant and uncomfortable reminders. An overall feeling of "airlessness" that grows worse the deeper he enters its parameters completes an image of the archive as a space devoid of life. Describing the experience as oppressive, "the dim light, and the sheer quantity of old paper" proves "too much" for the narrator. One gets the impression that the archive overwhelms him with its dark and difficult history.

Such a scene reflects a moment of archive fever—that is, what Derrida describes as “the desire and the disorder of the archive.”¹⁰² The narrator at once desires to enter the archive yet remains painfully aware of a malaise or disorder inscribed within its volumes of papers that document its history as a slaveholding colony. It is as if the very fact of slavery is metaphorically recalled in the unbearable stench of fish glue, haunting him and making him unable to confront the island’s dark past.

Setting the stage for subsequent moments of archive fever, the narrator’s repulsion of fish glue will reflect the uncertain forms of kinship and identification available to various characters under colonial and postcolonial conditions. In each moment of archival encounter, a desire for an origin that reveals a deeper malaise or disorder takes hold in the narrative—that is, a desire to remember and re-imagine events and experiences suppressed, distorted or left unaccounted for in the historical record. This excess or remainder left unaccounted for in the archive takes an affective turn at three distinct moments in the novel. The first moment of archival remembrance unfolds in Sir Walter Raleigh’s legacy as usurper of Spanish rule in Trinidad and as a failed explorer whose efforts to find the fabled kingdom of El Dorado yields disastrous results. By recreating an overlooked episode of Raleigh’s South American expedition—namely, his mestizo servant’s account of their journey together from South America and Europe—Naipaul posits mourning and melancholia as emotional states that reflect the conditions of New World colonials. The second moment of archival remembrance is reflected in the eighteenth-century Venezuelan creole Francisco Miranda’s efforts to garner support for Spanish American independence in Trinidad where he spends a year exiled prior to his eventual imprisonment in Puerto Rico and Cadiz. Structured as a dialogue between Miranda and Trinidad’s colonial governor Hislop, and then between Miranda and Venezuelan royalist Level de Goda, over the course of this chapter their conversation reveals hatred and hysteria as crucial ingredients in Spanish colonial rule in the Americas—ingredients that were exacerbated rather than diminished during the continental wars of independence. The third and final archival moment—one that combines mourning and melancholia with hatred and hysteria—occurs in the narrator’s re-encounter with Blair in East Africa in the novel’s final chapter. Blair’s shocking death is portrayed as the outcome of resurgent forms of hatred in newly independent nations (hysteria) and his unceremonious funeral rites are viewed as a moment of incomplete mourning (melancholia).

By closely examining these three archival moments in the novel, I wish to demonstrate how Naipaul creates bonds of kinship and affinity among characters caught in various colonial struggles even as he appears to undermine them. By forging bonds out of precarious conditions, however, the above characters do not offer exit strategies from the impasses of their colonial or postcolonial circumstances. Instead, they each reveal a compulsive desire to re-imagine history not only as a contest about ownership of

¹⁰² *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1995]. Derrida goes on to define the term archive fever (or, in its original, *mal d’archive*) as “a fever or disorder we are experiencing today” with respect to history and its rewriting. Moments of archive fever include “all the detestable revisionisms, as well as the most legitimate, necessary and courageous rewritings of history.” In perhaps his clearest explanation of the term, Derrida defines archive fever as follows: “It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.” 81, 90, 91.

the past in the present, but moreover, as a means of forging alternative notions of kinship and belonging for the future.

III. Forging Bonds Out of Water

The novel's recreation of Raleigh's disastrous seventeenth-century expedition along the Orinoco River is portrayed as much with an eye for emotional detail as for historical accuracy. Shifting between historical fact and felt emotion, between first and second person narration, and between Spanish and British accounts of New World discovery, Raleigh's failed South American expedition is framed in the terms of mourning and melancholia. Raleigh mourns not only for the loss of life his expedition yields, but moreover, for the fabled kingdom he never finds. As we will see, this form of mourning increasingly resembles melancholia in that it never fully overcomes its object of grief. Narrated in the second person, this form of mourning is conveyed by Raleigh's surgeon who accompanies him on his second voyage:

You arrived this time as you left twenty-three years ago, with the stench of death in your ship. You have buried your dead. But you have preferred to stay out here in the Gulf. You don't really want to know. You are hoping for luck. Or perhaps you are hoping for nothing at all. There was never any El Dorado in Guiana. The Spaniards stopped looking many years ago. The French have stopped looking. The Dutch never looked. They always came only to trade, to get tobacco and salt. Neither you nor Keymis saw anything on the river. You both thought only that where so many had looked for El Dorado, El Dorado existed. Keymis in his book said El Dorado had to exist, if only as a sign of God's providence: to give England an empire as Spain had been given one. (184)

Conveying at once anger and grief, the surgeon's emphasis on the second person ("you") recalls the language of debt. By calling attention to the widespread death and suffering his expedition has brought about not once—but twice—he seeks to hold Raleigh responsible for the consequences of his misdeeds and actions. Yet the surgeon both holds and does not hold Raleigh responsible for his crewmen's deaths. He holds him responsible by reminding him that his actions yielded no results yet incurred many deaths. At the same time, he momentarily forgives him because he has properly mourned by burying his dead men. The death and destruction he has wrought is forgiven so long as he mourns those who died and suffered in his name.

Less forgiving, however, is his unwillingness to face up to the non-existence of El Dorado. Faulting him above all for not giving up despite all evidence pointing to the contrary, his condemnation suggests an understanding of Raleigh's vain efforts as those of a melancholic. Unable to give up on a dream of discovering a fabled but fictitious golden kingdom, Raleigh's staying on reflects a form of grief that refuses closure and completion by ceaseless mourning a lost love object. The surgeon's insistence on the equally futile efforts of Britain's imperial rivals in finding El Dorado (Spain, France and Holland) further underscores the melancholic attachment Raleigh holds toward it. Soon thereafter, we learn that Raleigh's attachment reflects an interminable mourning for a British counterpart to Spanish empire in the New World. Representing a moment of imperial melancholia, the mood surrounding Raleigh's failed efforts sets the terms for the

unexpected friendship he develops with a Spanish mestizo servant he captures and takes with him to England to witness his own execution.

Shifting from Raleigh's toward his mestizo companion's account of their journey, the language of melancholia moves from a discourse of imperial loss toward one more closely tied to colonial subjectivity as a psychic condition occasioned by forced migration and imperial violence. Both accounts, however, are structured as dialogues between men. In Raleigh's case, his dialogue with his surgeon hits a critical note; it serves as a reminder of the debts he has incurred due to his melancholic inability to abandon an imperial venture doomed from the start. In Don José's case, his dialogue with Fray Simón, the Spanish friar and chronicler of the Spain's New World viceroyalty of New Grenada, reveals a strain of melancholia that goes beyond imperial desires and affects colonizers and colonized alike. As we will see, both dialogues are framed as tests of masculinity; tests that seek to measure a male character's honor based on his ability to display courage as well as admit failure under adverse conditions. These tests are furthermore contests over the archive and over the conditions that structure its meaning.

Don José's dialogue with Fray Simón contrasts sharply from Raleigh and his surgeon. Whereas the latter is framed as a conversation between equals, the former depends on a hierarchy of race relations (Spanish versus mestizo). Whereas the latter reveals anger and disappointment, the former reveals surprise and admiration. An extraordinary journey by early modern accounts, Don José's safe journey from New Grenada down the Orinoco to Europe and back is a source of marvel and fascination for Fray Simón:

'You are now a well-traveled man. Better traveled than most people in the world. You've been to England. You've seen some of its great cities and great buildings. You've seen things I haven't seen. The Spire of Salisbury, the great cathedrals of Winchester and Southwark, the Tower of London that they say Julius Ceasar built. You've met important men. You've been to Spain, too. You've been to Toledo and Salamanca. You've been to Seville. You've seen the galleons from the Americas on the river there. And now you're back here, in New Grenada, where you were born. Don José in name and deed.' (195)

In contrast to Raleigh's surgeon, Fray Simón's use of the second person reflects admiration rather than disappointment and wonder rather than grief. By emphasizing the extraordinary nature of his voyage, Fray Simón elevates Don José in social status, making him an equal. His is a notion of male honor and worth based on travel to the great cities of Europe. By recalling the monuments and cities Don José visits, Fray Simón places him on equal footing; his travels make him a man of distinction despite the racial barrier that separates them. His safe return furthermore distinguishes him as a character of both extraordinary courage and luck. Finally, by suggesting correspondence between the title of distinction implied in his name ("Don José in name") and his actions as someone cultured and well traveled ("and deed"), Fray Simón calls attention to his extraordinary strength and courage. This understanding of his worth and distinction is one that carries a gendered dimension. Implicitly drawing attention to his gender as a well-traveled *man*, his newfound admiration for Don José is reflective of a conception of

homosocial relations as dialogues over the meaning of masculinity under adverse colonial conditions.

However, rather than accept the terms of Fray Simón, Don José reveals a melancholic underside to his vision of social ascendancy and triumphant masculinity. His journey halfway across the world takes a toll on him, revealing travel and exposure to other cultures not so much as a moment of mobility and gain, but rather, as an experience of pain and loss. His transnational movement and cultural exposure produce psychic wounds, underscoring the differences between European versus mestizo and indigenous forms of New World subjectivity in the novel:

I wasn't a Guiana man. I was from New Granada, and had made that long journey down the river with the Berrrios. I always had the hope that I would be able to pick my way back home from Guiana. When the settlement was abandoned, and the vecinos took refuge on the island in the river, I felt the world had changed for me. I felt I had lost touch with things. On the launch this grief grew and grew. Sometimes a child playing in the puddle after rain gets suddenly frightened by the reflected sky. I was like that. I felt I was falling into the sky, falling into the sea. I hardened my heart. And then, from being frightened by that idea of falling into the sky, I began to hold on to it. It was the only comfort I had. The thought of my own doom lifted me above people. I thought I would acknowledge no one. Even if people laughed at me, or smiled at me, because of the clothes I was wearing, I wasn't to smile back. (196)

His status as a colonial subject from New Grenada rather than from Guiana and as a mestizo rather than as a European sets the conditions for his long and trying journey. Instead of rejoicing in the discovery of new territories or regions, Don José exhibits a desire to return home. One gets the impression that the further away he finds himself from New Grenada, the more uncomfortable and unhappy he grows. Travel does not signal escape and liberation but rather a terrifying fear of the unknown. His desire to find his way back to New Grenada furthermore reflects a sense of homesickness prompted by travel and displacement.

Described as a shattering experience, the moment he is no longer able to find his way back serves as a turning point in his consciousness. No longer standing on firm ground but rather on uncertain waters, Don José loses grasp of his identity as a New Grenadian. This sense of loss is experienced a source of grief that grows exponentially the further he travels down the Orinoco (“On the launch this grief grew and grew”). Resembling a form of death, Don José’s grief is an overwhelming experience that results in a loss of self. This loss has wide-reaching consequences, transforming his very relation to reality as he knows it (“I felt the world had changed for me”) as well as his sense of experience and felt emotion (“I felt I had lost touch with things”).

The simile he uses to describe his overwhelming sense of disorientation reveals an understanding of colonial migration as a violent experience of rebirth. By comparing himself to a “child playing in the puddle [who] after rain gets suddenly frightened by the reflected sky,” Don José describes colonial migration as a moment of both identity loss and formation. Reminiscent of Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage as a shattering

moment of subject formation,¹⁰³ an image of water as a frightful reflection of a wider world that momentarily engulfs the self stands as a metaphor for his emergent consciousness. This painful moment of experiencing one's identity as loss and one's environment as disorienting at the same time prompts an emergent subjectivity for Don José.

From this moment onwards, he no longer views his identity as stable and coherent, but rather, as inherently fractured and melancholic. To cross unfamiliar territory is at the same time to mourn for a lost point of origin and to travel on water is at the same time to dwell in a space of danger and uncertainty. His emphasis on feeling like he was "falling into the sky, falling into the sea" further reflects an understanding of identity transformation as a near death experience. One gets the impression he experiences travel and displacement as a traumatic event akin to a close brush with death. Like a traumatic event too painful to overcome, he transforms it by giving it a familiarity he describes as comforting, serving as a shield to deflect harm. Conveyed as a hardening experience, Don José is reborn a subject out of the traumas of forced travel and displacement.

This sense of rebirth through traumatic experience acquires the form and function of melancholia. Don José's arrival in England tests the limits of his psychic integrity even further. Over the course of his journey down the Orinoco and then across the Atlantic, Raleigh takes a liking to Don José and a close friendship develops between the two men, the former even teaching the latter English. Forced to witness the execution of Raleigh upon their arrival in London, Raleigh's death signals a moment of homosocial loss. This moment of witnessing the death of a close friend is described as a source of an interminable mourning:

'When we came to the land and traveled to the general's house I was seized by a great melancholy. It overpowered me. It ran through me like a cold fluid. It broke into my sleep. It was at the back of everything I did. It was like a spirit on my shoulder. Just as, on the launch coming down river, the dream of falling into the sea and the sky had lifted me above men, so this grief now cut me off from everything and everyone. I wanted to die. In the room the general's people had given me in his house I tied a cloth around my forehead to feel that tension above my eyes, as though I was a child again, and I turned my face to the wall. I wanted to turn away from all that was around me. I looked at the wall and never closed my eyes. It was like looking at the sky I had seen as a child. I looked hard at that and longed to cease to feel and think. (208)

Shifting between first and third person narration, and between the object of his grief and his efforts to cope with it, Don José is well aware that his friendship with Raleigh will soon come to an end. Their arrival on English soil signals the end of a friendship forged under trying circumstances and along with it goes the very solace and comfort it affords Don José over the long and treacherous transatlantic journey. This ending is rendered in explicitly melancholic terms. He describes himself as "seized by a great melancholy," thereby conveying a sense of helplessness and passivity before the pending threat of his

¹⁰³ "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits*. Routledge: New York, 2001.

friend's execution. One gets the sense of a grief so powerful that it defies his will to master it and find a new love object ("It overpowered me").

Don José's melancholia affects every aspect of his identity, from his bodily constitution ("It ran through me like a cold fluid") to his unconscious ("It broke into my sleep"). Likening it to a spirit or ghost ("It was like a spirit on my shoulder"), his melancholia haunts him, influencing him from every waking hour to the darkest recesses of his unconscious ("It was at the back of everything I did"). His use of the third person to refer to his grief furthermore gives the impression of an illness that has taken a life of its own, attributing it with a form of agency greater than his own. Reflecting the painful and traumatic conditions under which New World colonials forge bonds of friendship and sympathy, Don José's grief is transformed into form of kinship that exceeds racial, regional and cultural boundaries. By refusing closure and completion, Don José's melancholia reflects a conception of kinship as an in-between state of unfixed affinity and belonging.

Similar to his fear of being engulfed by the Orinoco River earlier, his melancholic dread of witnessing his friend meet his death by execution paradoxically gives him the strength to withstand their painful separation. Signaling a moment of castration, the loss of a male friend occasions a crisis in homosocial relations in the chapter. Similar to moments of tension and friction between male figures in the authors previously examined (Marti, Conrad and Carpentier), this crisis in homosocial relations is resolved through a moment of recognition. In each instance, a male protagonist confronts the necessarily fleeting or temporary character of moments of male bonding. In Don José's case, however, rather than redirect his desire toward a new love object, he incorporates his object of grief into his own subjectivity. Don José finds a way out of this crisis by embracing and incorporating the very source of his melancholic grief into his own subjectivity. It is as if by making his grief a source of strength and resilience rather a loss to successfully mourn or overcome, Don José is reborn a subject. The recurring image of a child in his account of grief is for this reason all the more revealing. It recalls the mirror stage in Lacan's conception of subject formation as a moment of painful recognition of one's identity as inherently split or fractured. Perhaps more to the point, it suggests his identity as colonial migrant subject is predicated on a melancholic logic of painful rebirth.

This painful account of displacement and loss presents his interlocutor Fray Simón with a distinct set of narrative problems. As Spain's chronicler of New Grenada he plays the role of what Roberto González Echevarría calls "the inner historian"¹⁰⁴ in archival fictions. His task, as he understands it, is to record events in their naked or most elemental form: 'I was hoping to get something else from you, I must confess. My feeling now is that as a historian I should deal as simply as possible with the moment of news. I should present only the facts.' (197) Fray Simón's conundrum reflects an archival moment in the novel that aims to rethink the past not as the mere recital of events, but moreover, as felt experience or emotion. Revealing the limits of traditional modes of historical representation, this moment in the novel signals an effort to recover the past from the perspective of its forgotten or overlooked historical actors.

¹⁰⁴22.

IV. Friendship in Translation

If mourning and melancholia offer windows into new world colonial subjectivity and historical representation through felt experience and emotion in *A Way in the World*, hatred and hysteria come to bear upon characters in the novel through similarly transformative means. Shifting from one historical period to another (early seventeenth versus late eighteenth century) and from one doomed expedition to another (Raleigh's versus Miranda's), hatred and hysteria emerge as distinct yet related emotions that reflect a wider experience of postcolonial frustration and disappointment in the novel.

Similar to Raleigh's exchange with his surgeon and Don José's with Fray Simón, the novel's chapter on Francisco Miranda is structured primarily as a dialogue between men. The dialogue that develops between Miranda and the English colonial governor of the Trinidad, Hislop, serves to offer an understanding of New World plantation societies as spaces besieged by racial forms of hysteria. As Hislop recounts to Miranda the difficulties of governing a society marked by rival ruling factions, a mutual understanding develops between the two men:

'In my three years here I have seen more of human turpitude than in the rest of my life.'

Miranda said, 'Turpitude. I know the word. But I've never heard anyone use it in conversation.'

'I suppose it's because I've spent three years framing that sentence. I constantly speak it in my mind. It comforts me. The French aristocrats we've assembled here have tainted everybody. You've been to France, you've been a general in their army. I am not telling you anything you don't know. The French aristocracy don't come out well, General. I can't understand them. They feel rich only if everybody else around them is in rags. They feel secure and well-bred only if everybody else is degraded. I understand now why they had the revolution in France. Then they had the same revolution all over again in Haiti, but a much nastier one. And now they've almost had one here. And they've involved me in it.' (277)

Centered around the meaning of one word (turpide), the dialogue between Miranda and Hislop signals a moment of translation that conveys a pattern of social behavior not readily intelligible from one culture to another. By indicating his knowledge of the word but at the same time revealing he has never heard it used in a conversation, Miranda highlights its rarified, almost entirely literary quality. Designating moral wickedness or depravity, its rare use in conversation furthermore gives it a refined and formal quality. It is as if its formal nature further conveys a form of depravity perfected over many years. At the same time, it reveals Hislop's initial inability to express in language the kind of society he inherits. As if lacking the grammar to describe what he witnesses, Hislop spends three years searching for the right language that captures the precise ways in which human relations are distorted under slavery.

At the root of this distortion in human relations lies a social system based as much on humiliation as on violence. Tracing this system to the slaveholding aristocracy of

Trinidad, a refined form of cruelty (*turpide*) serves as the structuring principle that governs its multilayered society. By singling out the *French* aristocracy, in particular, Hislop draws attention to its role as a slave-holding class whose brutal efforts to control other factions (namely, free people of color) virtually transformed Trinidad into a colony in a state of perpetual insurrection during the late eighteenth century. Describing them as “feel[ing] rich only if everybody around them is in rags” and “secure if only everybody else is degraded,” Hislop’s low opinion of the French aristocracy on the island reveals a logic of domination that targets all subordinate factions as enemies and employs physical as well as psychological forms of warfare to degrade them. Hislop essentially describes an environment where emotions run high but remain carefully suppressed, leading to sudden and violent outbursts in the form of widespread rebellion. Recalling the French and Haitian revolutions, Hislop stresses the central role of emotions in the production of social unrest. In the case of slaveholding societies, these heightened emotions lead to more violent manifestations of unrest. And as Trinidad’s colonial governor he can no longer remain impartial in a society that grows every day torn apart.

Miranda’s empathy for Hislop is reflected in moments of translation that create ties of friendship between the two men despite belonging to competing colonial powers (English versus Spanish). In a previous moment of translation embedded in the dialogue, Hislop forms another carefully sentence—except this time in Spanish:

“*Mi cama aquí...*”

“General!”

“Let me practice my Spanish, General. *Mi cama aquí...*”

“...*no ha sido...*”

“...has not been...”

“...*una de rosas.*”

“...one of roses. ‘Mi bed here has not been one of roses. It has not been a bed a roses for you.’ (276) [emphasis original]

Shifting between Spanish and English, and between Hislop’s words and Miranda’s translation, the full meaning of the passage is revealed through a relation of verbal exchange that conveys the grief and sorrow of the former through the language of the latter. Translation is here understood not simply as a question of linguistic equivalences, but moreover, as an occasion for empathy and mutual understanding. By utilizing dialogue as a strategy of translation, a relation of friendship between Hislop and Miranda is established. Miranda’s reply to Hislop’s complaints later in the chapter further confirms the function empathy plays in cementing their friendship: “Your bed has certainly not been one of roses. *Claro que su cama no ha sido una de rosas, como ha dicho.*¹⁰⁵” Juxtaposing English and Spanish versions of the same sentence, this moment of translation reveals Miranda’s concern and empathy for a man whose struggles to govern a racially mixed society are all too similar to his own thwarted efforts to foment a revolution in Venezuela.

V. Dangerous Emotions on the Spanish Main

¹⁰⁵ 287.

Miranda's own disillusionment with the cause of Spanish American independence is further explored through his relation with Venezuelan royalist Level de Goda. Despite their political differences, Level de Goda feels compelled to visit Miranda in prison in Puerto Rico before he is sent to Cadiz where he will spend his last days. During his visits, the two men arrive at a mutual understanding about the effects of Spanish colonialism about their own outlook on the world, specifically citing hatred as one of its most enduring and pernicious aspects:

Level says, "Our hate, General, our hate. It isn't like the hate of other places."

"The Spanish empire damaged us in that way. It kept us backward, gave us very little to do. It gave us as men no way of proving ourselves. It never made us believe in human achievement. It made us believe only in luck and birth and influence and theft and getting patents from the king. It made us cringe before authority and mock it at the same time. It made us believe that all men at bottom were worthless..."

Level says, "At one time I used to think the jealousy you talk about was harmless, like the jealousy of a grocer for a man who comes and sets up a shop next door. After the revolution this jealousy turned to hate. We've all surrendered to this hatred. People won't stop now until they see the white bones of the enemy." (339)

Miranda and Level's dialogue reveal hatred and hysteria as the logical correlatives of the few opportunities Spanish colonialism offered its subjects for social advancement. In a system where virtually all positions of power were reserved for Spanish-born elites, emotions among those excluded from it at once acquire a heightened and suppressed state. Offering an image of a wounded subjectivity—one hampered by a relation of dependency before a central and unquestionable authority—Miranda understands Spanish colonialism as presenting his revolutionary aspirations with a distinct set of challenges. His is a vision of colonial ideology as creating a vicious cycle of subjection. By recognizing the cycle of subjection of which he forms a part, Miranda articulates the inner workings of colonial domination. Making its subjects "cringe before authority and mock it at the same time," Spanish colonial ideology creates an environment wherein relations between colonizer and colonized, and between superiors and subordinates, are defined by a constant state of tension and distrust. As Level de Goda demonstrates, this constant state of tension and distrust turns into open hostility after the wars of independence, creating an atmosphere of perpetual insurrection that engulfs the region into a protracted period of civil war. Despite formal independence, the learned habits and felt emotions of centuries of Spanish colonialism manifest themselves in violent outbursts of widespread hatred among the entire population.

A negative sense of affinity and a precarious conception of belonging thus bring Miranda and Level de Goda together. They arrive at shared understanding of Spanish colonialism's effects and view each other's predicament as related. Yet there is more to their late and counterintuitive friendship. In Morro Castle, the Puerto Rican prison where he pays him regular visits, Level develops an admiration for a man who has achieved in his lifetime the status of legend. Viewing Miranda as living history (an

archive in his own right), Level asks him questions about events of his life that made him famous—his close friendship and rumored love affair with Catherine the Great, his period as a general in the French and American revolutionary armies—so as to recapture glimpses of a man held in high regard by many.

Level bids Miranda farewell before he is sent to Cadiz, where he spends his last days in prison. As the chapter draws to a close, however, we learn Miranda dies a slow and painful death, is buried unceremoniously, and knowledge of his grave site is soon lost. Foreshadowing a second archival moment in the novel, the narrator shifts from the precise conditions of Miranda's death, toward those of his son and widow, finally focusing on his papers that were lost but miraculously recovered more than one hundred years later:

In 1922 the sixty-three volumes of Miranda's papers were identified by Robertson in the Bathurst library in Cirencester in Gloucestershire. Perhaps a speck or two of Venezuelan dust still adhered to them from the two three-hour journeys they had made more than a hundred years before on cart road between Caracas and La Guaira. The papers were acquired by the Venezuelan government, and then made their last journey to Caracas.

The first volumes, heavily edited, with many things suppressed or omitted, were published in Caracas in 1924. The final volumes were published in Havana in 1950 for the bicentenary of Miranda's birth. These Havana volumes, in which the papers appear just as Miranda preserved them, the ephemeral mixed up with more formal things, without editorial gloss or interference, seem still warm with the life of the man. (351)

The recovery of Miranda's papers dramatizes what Derrida has called "a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive." By dwelling on the precise conditions in which his papers were found and then transferred, the narrator reveals an investment in the archive as a space of absolute beginning. The lengths to which the narrator goes to give the name of the person who found them (Robertson), as well as the region (Gloucestershire), town (Cirencester) and place (Bathurst library) in England where they were found further gives the impression of someone with a bookish proclivity and deep familiarity with British culture. By speculating, moreover, about the possible traces of Venezuelan dust left over from over hundred years before, he reflects a desire for the archive in its most complete and ordinary form. It serves to give readers the impression that in those papers lies Miranda "as he really was."

At times wishing to distance him from the archive, the narrator here strives to maintain it. By contrasting what he sees as the partial and distorted versions of national narratives with an image of his papers "without editorial gloss or interference," he simultaneously privileges an idea of the archive as a verifiable object of truth without calling into questions the omissions and distortions inherent even in original documents. Thus the Havana volumes, "in which the papers appear just as Miranda preserved them," acquire an unassailable quality for the narrator. It is as if by wishing to extract Miranda from the instrumentalist aims of the Venezuelan state, the narrator reveals his own will to truth or power.

VI. Casualties of the Postcolonial State and the Unfinished Task of Mourning

A similar strategy of creating a veneer of truth through detail and of creating the illusion of historical accuracy by claiming access to an unmediated archive of knowledge is employed in the novel's final chapter. Set in an unnamed newly independent East African nation, the narrator describes it in terms strikingly similar to those of Miranda and Level de Goda's Venezuela: "The country was full of a special hate."¹⁰⁶ Instead of endowing it with hope and expectation, as its newly independent status might suggest, he finds an environment that can only lead to violence and destruction:

The hate was in the newspapers, in the parliament, in the compound, in the university. It was open; it was licensed; it brought about no retaliation. Expatriates dealt in it to show their own commitment to the country. Some political people saw it as part of the business of building socialism, and gave it a doctrinal gloss. (359)

By tracing hatred to the very institutions that give credence to a state's legitimacy—a free press, a system of representation, a foreign presence in the form of aid or investment, and a university—the narrator deprives of the country of any hope for redemption. By specifically targeting institutions of archival significance—institutions responsible not only for recording and generating new knowledge, but moreover, for sustaining a nation's growth and survival—the narrator paints a picture of a society besieged by a destructive form of archive fever. In this bleak picture, he spares no one—not even the expatriate community and foreign politicians whose show of solidarity further fan the flames of antagonism and hostility. Doomed from the start, he offers little in the way of hope and redemption for this newly independent nation.

Yet for a narrator who goes to such great lengths to retrace what he sees as the source of postcolonial dysfunctions, rarely does he apply the kind of critical scrutiny toward his own views and experiences. Perhaps more than any other feeling, his own depictions of his beginnings as a writer are characterized by self-pity. Comparing his own sense of possibility in the world to Blair's whom he meets again for the first time since his young days as a clerk in Port of Spain, he describes his period living in Africa as one filled with doubt and professional disappointment:

And then over the years things had evened out for us. My life abroad, so brilliant to think about in the Red House of Port of Spain, had turned out to be hard and mean. My career had taken many years to get started. I had had to learn to write from scratch, almost in the way a man has to learn to walk and use his body again after a serious operation. And even then after ten years I couldn't feel secure, worrying always about finding matter for the next book, and then the one after that. (364)

¹⁰⁶ 358.

Naipaul's depiction of his struggles as a writer might strike one as disingenuous and melodramatic. At the age of 31, he had already published *A House for Mr. Biswas*, a novel that catapulted him to international fame as one of the leading novelists of the English language. By describing his struggles to begin his career as a writer in the language of physical injury and near death experience, one gets an image of a histrionic and overly anxious personality. In sharp contrast to what he sees as his own uncertain beginnings as a writer, Naipaul describes Blair's professional prospects as promising and his career as brilliant:

Whereas for Blair the world, so constricting when he had started, was soon to change dramatically. Even before I had published my first book, the new liberating politics of a Trinidad soon to be independent had come—with constant night meetings, like religious occasions, in the old British-Spanish colonial square next to the Red House—and Blair had been swept up to the heights swept out of that government department where I had got to know him, swept out of that kind of government employment altogether, and into ministerial office: travel, ambassadorships, United States postings, and now this job for the president, reporting on the outflow of money. He had been born at the right time, after all. (364)

We learn that Blair's career prospects are, of course, dashed, presumably by the hatred that is endemic to the postcolonial state he sees as flawed from the start. At the same time, Blair's death anticipates and makes possible the novel's completion, framing its final passage as a melancholic meditation on postcolonial kinship as a shared space of incomplete mourning. Here the narrator imagines a stately funeral honoring Blair upon his return to Trinidad. Instead, he finds out that his body was transferred and then laid to rest in less-than-ceremonious circumstances:

The truth would have been simpler. The body would have been in a box, and it would have been placed in a refrigerated part of the aircraft's hold. The body would have been embalmed in Africa; that meant the internal organs would have been removed. At the airport in Trinidad the flaps of the hold would have opened, and when the time came the box would have been transferred to a low trailer, and perhaps in some way hidden or covered. There would have been formalities. Would the embalmed body in its box then have been transferred to a hearse? The hearse didn't seem right. I made enquiries. I was told that the box would have been taken away in an ambulance to Port of Spain, and then the shell of the man would have been laid out in Parry's chapel of rest. (380)

Blair's death signals the last and most definitive moment of incomplete mourning in the novel. By revealing that Blair was not entitled to the formalities of a state funeral, the narrator offers an image of an improper burial. At the same time, his attention to the details of the disposal of his internal organs gives the scene a morbid and uncomfortable feeling. The secretive and routine handling of his remains further gives the impression of a body that must be handled so as not gain notice or attract attention. Never fully mourned, then, Blair's body stands as a melancholic reminder of the bonds of kinship and

affinity available in the novel and its cast of characters. Standing as a metaphor for the available means to forge bonds with one other, the large disconnect between Blair's brilliant diplomatic career and his modest and unceremonious funeral reflect a melancholic understanding of kinship and belonging in postcolonial societies—and understanding that refuses closure and completion and instead incessantly recalls the casualties of postcolonial modernity.

Conclusion

A longing to recover a political legacy feared as lost and a desire to renew bonds viewed as broken informs the literary writings of José Martí's, Joseph Conrad's, Alejo Carpentier's and V.S. Naipaul. An abiding concern for the *res publica*—or common good—structures their works, giving rise to fictions about efforts to create modern republics in societies still struggling with the effects of colonial violence. In each author herein examined, the perception of dwelling in a paradoxical republic where the ties that bind individuals are broken and where hard-won political ideals have been squandered prompts a broader reflection about revolutionary modernity in the Caribbean. By mourning the loss or absence of civic forms of community and revolutionary consciousness in the Caribbean, the aforementioned authors forge a poetics of longing in their writing.

An underlying element of this poetics of civic longing can be found in a recurring fantasy of the republic as a homosocial pact between men. José Martí creates the enabling fiction of this fantasy by reinventing the language of civic virtue as a space of male friendship and companionship. Joseph Conrad operates under this homosocial vision yet reveals its tensions and contradictions. Alejo Carpentier makes a conscious effort to move beyond the exclusionary dimensions of this republican vision, yet struggles to include women as viable political actors. V.S. Naipaul returns to a notion of the republic as a space of male friendship and companionship except that he recreates it against a backdrop of tragedy and disappointment. Yet regardless of the exclusionary gender dynamics inherent in their writing, these authors strive to redraw the boundaries of the Caribbean. From Martí to Carpentier, and from Conrad to Naipaul, the Caribbean is imagined as a geography defined less by distinctions inherited from European colonial powers and more by a shared paradoxical experience of revolutionary modernity.

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