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### Publication Date

2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Natural Antagonisms: Violence and the Environment in  
Contemporary Latin American Narrative

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Spanish

by

Diana Lynn Dodson Lee

August 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Raymond L. Williams, Chairperson

Dr. David K. Herzberger

Dr. Alessandro Fornazzari

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The Dissertation of Diana Lynn Dodson Lee is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to first acknowledge how grateful I am to the University of California, Riverside for allowing me the opportunity to be a graduate student in the Department of Hispanic Studies. Additionally, I am grateful to the Graduate Dean for awarding me a Dissertation Year Fellowship so that I could expand my research. Moreover, I would like to thank to all my fellow graduate students in the Hispanic Studies Department for the encouragement, laughter, and intellectual vigor they shared with me over the last five years. I would also like to recognize all of my Spanish language students who reminded me in every class why I love what I do.

Additionally, I would like to thank all the professors in the Hispanic Studies Department for their hard work and effort. I loved each and every seminar I took and I appreciate all of the preparation it required to make these experiences so beneficial. In particular I would like to recognize the three professors on my dissertation committee: Professors Raymond L. Williams, David K. Herzberger, and Alessandro Fornazzari. I would like to first thank Professor Williams for being an excellent supervisor. I am grateful for all of the numerous hours he spent reviewing my work, guiding me through the job search, and encouraging me to become the best professional I can be. I would also like to thank Professor David K. Herzberger for spending numerous hours in independent studies helping me prepare for my doctoral exams as well as reviewing my work for publication submissions. Finally I would like to thank Professor Alessandro Fornazzari for his

input and hard work on my behalf as well as for his always interesting and thought-provoking seminars.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all the people who supported me throughout the last five years. I thank my parents, Joe and Judy Dodson, for their love, financial help, and emotional support; I owe my academic success to them both. I am grateful for my sister, Emily Dodson Murphy, for being a sounding board and for teaching me how to be a better person. I am thankful for my brother-in law, Shawn Murphy, for his support, and for my Korean in-laws, Heung Joo Lee, Yong Ja Kim, and Yonghoon Lee, for their prayers and encouragement. I thank my friends in the Box Springs Outpost for always being there to listen, to inspire, and to pray for me in my cheerful and dark moments. I want to thank my friends at APC for including Yongbom and me in the community and for teaching us so much. I would also like to thank Karen Christiansen for housing me the year that Yongbom was in Ireland, which was an incredible blessing.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the one person who makes my life joyful every day, my husband, Yongbom Lee. Right before we moved to Riverside, he finished his dissertation in Britain. In his acknowledgements he thanked me for *walking across* the muddy Downs (a big, grassy, and often soggy area in Bristol) on dark, rainy winter days, after a long day of work at the college. He promised me that he would support me the same way, by *driving through* terrible Los Angeles traffic. I had no idea how prophetic that promise would be, and after two and half years of watching him commute an hour each way, I want

him to know that his task was much more arduous and proves what a lovely human being he is. Thank you, Yongbom. I could not have done this without you.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that it has been only through God's love and guidance that I have been able to accomplish all these things (Philippians 4:13). Thank you Lord.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Natural Antagonisms: Violence and the Environment in  
Contemporary Latin American Narrative

by

Diana Lynn Dodson Lee

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Spanish  
University of California, Riverside, August 2015  
Dr. Raymond Leslie Williams, Chairperson

This project explores intersections between representations of violence and the environment in contemporary Latin American narrative. I analyze the way in which specific novels represent the wider interconnectedness of a world in which humans commit violence against other humans as well as against non-human actors, and how these complex dimensions of interactions intersect within environments that comprise both the foreground and the background to these violent narratives. In Chapter One I review the literature regarding violence and literature. I also discuss the field of ecocriticism, which studies representations of the environment in literature. In Chapter Two I explore the way in which the urban environment is related to violence in three Mexican novels: *Morirás lejos* (1967) by José Emilio Pacheco, *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, and *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza. I assert that all three works correlate depictions of the urban environment with aggression against humans in order to



engage with the topic of violence. I also consider issues of gender and violence in *2666* and *La muerte me da*. In Chapter Three I analyze two Colombian novels: *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011) by Juan Gabriel Vásquez and *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. In the first section I utilize trauma theory to contend that in Vásquez's novel, the urban space is diminished in the mind of the narrator due to a violent traumatic event he suffers. I then develop a reading of the novel looking at animal studies, connecting it to Agamben's theory of biopolitics. I postulate that both animals and humans are vulnerable in the biopolitical state presented in the novel. Finally I connect the same definition of biopolitics to *Cien años de soledad* and propose that both the characters and the natural environment suffer under the state of exception. In my final analysis chapter I consider *Imposible equilibrio* (1995) by Mempo Giardinelli, an Argentine novel which consciously explores ecological issues. I incorporate the discipline of posthumanism by positing that the novel challenges traditional subjectivities of animals and denounces the environmental impact of anthropocentric systems of governance.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

In this project I examine representations of violence and the environment in contemporary Latin American narrative. I explore the way in which specific novels represent the wider interconnectedness of a world in which humans commit violence against other humans as well as against non-human actors, and how these complex dimensions of antagonisms intersect within environments that comprise both the foreground and the background to these narratives. In some sections I analyze scenes in which actors consciously commit violence against the environment; in others, I expand my purview to moments where antagonism and nature relate to each other in more subtle manners. Central to my thesis is the two-pronged focus on violence and the environment. In this introduction I will briefly examine discussions of violence as they pertain to specific Latin American narratives. I will also summarize the relevant criticism regarding environmental studies of literature (also known as ecocriticism), beginning with a broad overview of the field and then focusing specifically on Latin American ecocriticism.<sup>1</sup> I will then conclude with summaries of the three chapters of critical analysis in my work.

### **Situating violence in narrative and the Latin American context**

Violence in Latin America has been an ongoing cause for concern, dissension, and analysis. As Peter Imbusch, Michel Misse, and Fernando Carrión point out, “A high incidence of crime, the proliferation of violent youth gangs, the prevalence of domestic violence, violence related to drug trafficking or money

laundering as the burning issues of the day come on top of more historical forms of violence in the form of persistent civil wars, guerilla movements and death squads, state terrorism and dictatorships, social uprisings and violent revolutions” (88). These problematic and devastating historical occurrences have impelled people from all disciplines to engage meaningfully with what violence means in the Latin American context. This is seldom more evident than in Latin American narrative. Since narrative often reflects or challenges reality, it is unsurprising that the instances of abuses, genocides, conflicts, and wars in the region have motivated a significant cadre of authors to pen narratives in order to understand and process violence.

However, comprehending and dealing with violence in general is no easy feat. The convoluted and diverse facets of violence can be a stumbling block for anyone who wishes to proffer broad generalizations. For instance, a comprehensive analysis of violence might focus on its dominant forms, such as physical, psychological, social, domestic, religious, gender, structural, or sovereign violence. Additionally, one might also inquire who or what become the perpetrators of violence and who or what become its victims in any given scenario. Since acts of violence can be perpetrated against individuals, communities, non-human actors, and language itself by a variety of agents, the issue becomes even murkier due to the sheer number of possibilities which exist for performing violent acts.

Given this complexity of understanding violence, most scholars nuance their understandings and definitions of the term. In a seminal work on violence in war and peace, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe I. Bourgois advocate conceiving of violence in terms of slipperiness. “Violence is a slippery concept—nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive...Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality—force, assault, or the infliction of pain—alone... The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what give violence its power and meaning” (1). Nonetheless, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois concede that violence defies simplistic definitions; they suggest that perhaps the most one can affirm about violence is “like madness, sickness, suffering, or death itself, it is a human condition. Violence is present (as a capability) in each of us, as is its opposite- the rejection of violence” (2). In spite of this attempt to encircle the boundaries of the term, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois fail to mention that violence also extends to the animal world and nature itself; this expansion of violence beyond the human condition further compounds the problem of clarifying the subject.

Slavoj Žižek addresses the complexity of violence in contemporary society and advances a theory which proposes that violence takes three forms. The first form is the most visible: Žižek labels this type subjective violence. In this mode, violence is performed by a clear subject; furthermore, this violence is palpable and enacted by “social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds” (10). Žižek claims that the other two forms of

violence are objective. On the one hand is symbolic violence, which relates directly to language and the social domination which exists in our ways of communicating. On the other hand, Žižek develops the idea of systemic violence. This third type unmasks the causes and sentiments behind subjective outbursts of violence; systemic violence labels the oppression of people through economic and political policies. Žižek contends that too often the focus of studies is only on subjective forms of violence. However, in his argument, these subjective forms can only be explained when objective types of violence are also considered. He insists that the three forms of violence must be considered in relation to each other; however, this type of deep analysis requires acknowledging the entangled mess which the three types of violence comprise as well as discussing the difficult questions which arise when we include all three in our debates.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the question of the representation of violence through the written word plagues those who want to comprehend this elusive concept. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse introduce a volume on the representation of violence by purporting that two camps exist when it comes to locating violence in cultural production. On the one hand, some believe that writing is a symbolic practice through which people can either exert or resist domination; this camp believes in the extra-discursive element of writing which works to understand reality beyond the text. On the other hand, some conceptualize representation as another way in which to commit violence. Writing is one more symbolic practice which makes up cultural history and therefore writing itself can be an act of

violence. However, as these authors recognize, “we have offered a crude distinction between two modalities of violence: that which is ‘out there’ in the world, as opposed to that which is exercised through words upon things in the world, often by attributing violence to them. But our ultimate goal is to demonstrate that the two cannot in fact be distinguished, at least not in writing” (9). Hence, representing violence very possibly means exerting violence.

Interpreting the convoluted contours of brutality in narrative becomes all the more difficult if we cannot necessarily differentiate between violence outside and inside textual parameters.

Moreover, studying violence in the Latin American context offers its own particular set of challenges. For instance, does violence in Latin America differ from violence elsewhere? Does the history of violence in the region, beginning with the bloody consequences of the Spanish Conquest and continuing to the modern-day drug wars, frame violence in such a way as to render it transparent to those seeking to explain its features? Furthermore, what is the role of Latin American narrative in elucidating issues surrounding violence? There is no commonly accepted agreement in literary studies regarding the answers to these questions.

In spite of the difficulties mentioned, numerous critics have undertaken the task of analyzing violence in Latin American literature. Gabriela Polit Dueñas and María Helena Rueda asseverate that in many cases, criticism on violence in Latin America tends to espouse two opposite approaches. In their evaluation,



some studies perceive violence “as a pathological phenomenon that disrupts an established social order. Others understand it as a structural problem that shapes a social order, at both the individual and collective levels” (1). The difference between these two perspectives communicates a divergence in assumption regarding the foundations of violence in society. That is, does violence shape the structure of Latin American society or does violence disrupt that structure?

Some critics of Latin American literature accept the assumption that violence shapes the very constructions of Latin American society and that it is therefore unavoidable. One of the main proponents of this belief is Ariel Dorfman who writes that violence for Latin Americans is indeed the norm of the quotidian. According to Dorfman, violence in Latin America is not “el segundo polo o término de una dualidad, una alternativa frente a la cual uno pueda plantearse con cierta racionalidad, y aparente indiferencia. Es la estructura misma en que me hallo: no entregarse a ella significa morir o perder la dignidad o rechazar el contacto con mis semejantes.” (14) Dorfman analyzes several renowned authors from the twentieth century, including Jorge Luis Borges, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, José María Arguedas, and Mario Vargas Llosa. He concludes that the violence of their surrounding world makes it impossible for characters in novelist accounts to escape this trend. “El hombre sobrevive, pero a costa de más violencia que, finalmente, termina por destruirlo. La visión general que se tiene, a partir de un centenar de

novelas... es que el hombre está inmerso en una situación que él no controla, pero que su violencia al encarcelarlo también apunta hacia la forma de solucionar sus problemas” (37). For Dorfman, violence is inescapable in the Latin American context.

Victoria Carpenter agrees that in the tumultuous twentieth century, the common place occurrence of dictatorships and violent disputes in Latin America led to the rise of a long list of internationally celebrated authors who wrote works addressing these histories. She recognizes Gabriel García Márquez, Augusto Roa Bastos, Gioconda Belli, Juan Rulfo, and Carmen Boullosa as some key examples of these writers. Carpenter dialogues with Dorfman’s notion that violence is connected to creativity in literary production but she problematizes his idea about the inevitability of violence in Latin America. According to her, “accepting violence as an inherent trait of the Latin American character runs of [sic] the risk of desensitizing the reader to the truly disturbing imagery in these texts and of encouraging, permitting, and facilitating indifference in the face of the horror of violence” (10). Carpenter’s approach regards violence as more of a disturbance of social order than as the foundation on which social order is constructed.

Other authors have undertaken the task of exploring violent narratives and the contextualization of these in Latin America. There are a multitude of studies which address violence in Latin American literature. I have chosen to include

three examples of this type of scholarship because of their relation to the three countries of interest in my project, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina.

In the first example about violence in Mexican narrative, Christopher Harris focuses on hegemonic masculinity in several short stories by Juan Rulfo. In his opening, Harris considers William Rowe's interpretation of violence in Rulfo, arguing that Rowe believes in a psychological approach which requires readers to acknowledge the inexplicable aspects of violence in narrative. For Harris, this is related to nature; he notes that in Rowe's approach, "The reader is also asked to find in that range of possibilities one which associates the destructive power of nature symbolically with the 'natural' destructive force of human instincts, of spontaneous and unpredictable outbursts of violence" (104). In Harris' contention, narrative calls attention to the idea that nature is imbued with violence and that human violence reflects the erratic and uncertain elements of natural disasters.

Harris' main argument delves into relationships of power and masculinity in Rulfo's writing. He explores several gender relationships between characters in Rulfo's stories and concludes that, "violence precedes hegemony in an ongoing struggle to establish domination, and hegemonic masculinity is properly hegemonic only when, and indeed *if*, the active resistance of women and other men is replaced by passive acceptance. With this in mind, hegemonic masculinity, like modernity, is not an established state but a project in process" (123). Rulfo's characters, in Harris' analysis, often resist hegemonic

masculinities, and although in most cases the endings do not result in social transformation, the very act of resistance defies a typically pessimistic assessment of Rulfo's writings.

Writing about violence in the Colombian context, Margarita Serje discusses the colonial landscapes and frontier narratives in the interpretation of conflict in the country. Serje identifies the process through which the extreme violence in Colombia has often been blamed on the violent frontiers which are viewed as both the setting and the cause of violence. She analyzes several examples of frontier narratives which represent these spaces and concludes that typically the central images of these wild lands convey violence, scarcity, and anarchy. Serje surveys the widely read novels written by Alfredo Molano in the late twentieth century and discusses his representation of the *colono*, *mestizo* peasants often displaced by the violence between the State, guerrilla groups, and drug traffickers. Molano in many cases depicts these groups as prone to violence and supportive of criminal behavior against the proper authorities. Serje observes that these narratives are, on the whole, reductionist attempts to describe on a single analytical plane a diverse set of experiences. She critiques these types of writing as falling into a predetermined set of ideas about the frontier which starkly contrast the "Other Colombia", the "civilized" country which has adopted modernity and its corollaries.

Serje continues her argument by suggesting that the problem of visualizing these wild spaces as inherently violent entails ignoring the larger

project of modernization which so often demands that communities discard alternatives to modern, “civilizing” projects. By interpreting the frontiers in Colombia as wild and violent, those in “civilized” Colombia conveniently overlook the other side of the colonial coin. In other words, these images

hide the fact that the wild lands’ existence as spaces to be tamed, penetrated and domesticated constitutes both a condition of possibility and a moral justification for the particular forms of exploitation of natural resources and labour that characterize extractive or enclave economies... on the one hand are the promises and lures of modernization; on the other, the negation and exclusion of all other forms of social organization. (50)

Serje repudiates the type of thinking which predetermines these wild spaces as violent, purporting that the discourse which portrays the frontier as violent is an attempt to hide the violence caused by modernizing projects. In this way Serje assumes that violence is not inevitable in the Latin American context but is actually a perpetuation of stereotypes utilized to obscure the practices of those wishing to assert a particular social organization, i.e. the modern project.

In a book length study on violence in Argentine literature, David William Foster examines cultural responses to tyranny, focusing on literary productions relating to the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s. Foster argues that while many other literary pieces from the period deserve analysis, he chooses his objects of study because of their rhetorical significance. He claims, “Attention will be paid to the rhetorical strategies employed in the attempt to elaborate a text that proposes to explain these events and their meaning... What is especially

interesting is to observe the development of a rhetoric capable of speaking on certain still painful issues” (16).

One of Foster’s objects of analysis is the short novel by Alejandra Pizarnik, *La condesa sangrienta*. In a close reading of the novel, Foster discusses the way in which Pizarnik utilizes an historical moment of mass violence, the torture of over 600 peasant girls by the Hungarian countess Erzébet Báthory (d. 1614). Foster locates the importance of the novel in the idea that Pizarnik appropriates the story of the countess to expose the structures and power dynamics which also supported Argentine oppression and violence during the military dictatorships. Foster purports:

What serves as the central core of Pizarnik’s narrative, as it does for the narrative of the historical record she is reproducing, is the series of clashes between the powerful and the unprotected, the authoritarian figure and her protégées (in the case of the military dictatorship in Argentina, it is the state versus its citizens), absolute freedom and historical necessity (106).

One of the rhetorical strategies which interests Foster is the poetic prose in which Pizarnik narrates the tales of torture. She uses the present tense, a durative present, which gives the sense of an enduring, tenseless reality. “Báthory bespeaks the inherent coordinates of the exercise of violent power, a dynamic of horrifying oppression in which she is only a transitory agent but which she inherits and which will exist after her, as the Argentine dirty war and regrettably so many other historical circumstances have confirmed” (107-8). Pizarnik’s work parallels historical violence to expose the bloodiness of her own context.

Throughout his analysis Foster also articulates the significance of an epigraph at the beginning of Pizarnik's novel. Pizarnik notes the following observation by Sarte: "The criminal does not make beauty; he himself is the authentic beauty." Foster indicates the puzzling nature of this quote when juxtaposed with eighty pages of narrative about torture. He reconciles this quote by defining the criminal and beauty, arguing that the criminal reveals societal structures and control systems and therefore the beauty of a criminal is in the criminal's ability to make us aware of the most basic aspects of societal functions. Foster believes that Sarte's quote views "the criminal as the vivid encoding of the degrading principles of human commerce that circulate relatively unchecked in society" (111). Therefore, contrary to how humans wish to see horror, there is no world of abnormal, perverted monsters who live outside the structures of society, but rather there are criminals that perpetuate social codes of society through horror. Foster clarifies this for Pizarnik's character:

The criminal is the paradigm of all men and the persecution of the criminal derives from the threat of the eloquence with which criminality represents how the real world is. The bloody countess is, therefore, a circumstantial embodiment, but a very dramatic one, of the abusive power permitted to certain individuals in her age (111).

In this study, Foster proposes that violence in narrative allows the reader to understand better a certain conceptualization of criminal activity. People conceive of those who commit horrible acts as existing outside of the "norms" in society, but in reality society enables and confines these horrible acts and the criminal is the one who represents the power dynamics of this horror. In this way

Pizarnik metaphorically calls attention to the dynamics of Argentine society under a dictatorship, problematizing criminality, horror, and reality in her own context.

As these few examples show, there are a plethora of ways of understanding violence in narrative and whole theses can and have been written with the purpose of exploring this theme.<sup>3</sup> I have briefly explained some of the complexities surrounding violence studies; I will now summarize ecocriticism- the literary field which explores nature in cultural production.

### **Introduction to ecocriticism**

Given the multifarious ecological problems that industrialization and modernization have spawned, the topic of the environment and its maintenance has garnered attention in all sectors of society. Within this milieu, ecocriticism (also known as ecological criticism or ecological literary criticism) has become increasingly noteworthy since the 1991 session at MLA dedicated to this topic. One oft cited definition that clarifies the purpose of this literary field has been set forth by Herbert Tucker. He proposes that ecocriticism, “claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of literal horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them” (505). Ecocriticism, then, is a discipline that investigates the relationship between nature and its representation. According to one of the pioneers of ecocriticism, Laurence Buell, interpreting literature is a mode of vision which “neither simply reiterates clichés... nor simply deploys them in the service of some particular



human interest group... but rather opens itself up as well as it can to the perception of the environment as an actual independent party entitled to consideration for its own sake” (The Environmental Imagination 77). Ecocriticism strives to foster a literary environment that deeply engages with the natural environment.

As a discipline, ecocriticism traces its origins back to the 1960s. According to Ken Hiltner, if one were to ask a number of environmentalists their opinion about the most influential environmental works in the twentieth century, “there is one work that would likely appear on almost everyone’s list: Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962” (xiii). Carson’s fictional account of the potential consequences to the environment caused by modern industry was a pioneering combination of rhetoric and science which spurred others to consider from a critical perspective the environmental damages of post-World War consumer culture. The reconceptualization of the environment as a noteworthy object of study in the humanities disciplines initiated a phase of studying the environment in literature which most ecocritics denominate “first wave ecocriticism.” In first wave ecocriticism nature was often viewed as something separate from culture; many critics in this wave harkened back to authors such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Emerson, both of whom conceptualized the ideal environment as a landscape pristine and untouched. Among the most important critics during this initial movement were Leo Marx, Carolyn Merchant, Lynn White Jr., Arne Naess, Jonathan Bate, Lawrence Buell and Cheryl Glotfelty.

In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Leo Marx asserted himself as one of the first literary critics to examine the environment; he developed a model for the type of studies pertinent to literary critics of nature. As an example, in his writing he analyzes Elizabethan travel literature and the differing depictions of the New World as described by British travelers. He examines tropes involving the environment in this time period and posits that this literature contained opposing ideas about the natural world. On the one hand America was grasped as a garden: a lush place of growth and bountiful yields. On the other, many defined the land as a barren desert representing the threat of the forces of nature. Marx purports that these ideas “are not representational images. America was neither Eden nor a howling desert. These are poetic metaphors, imaginative constructions which heighten meaning far beyond the limits of fact.” (7) Marx’ early identification of the power of environmental tropes paved the way for the further scholars of ecocriticism. Ursula K. Heise remarks that in addition to Marx, other authors like Henry Nash Smith, Roderick Nash, Raymond Williams, Joseph Meeker, and Annette Kologny were precursors for the discipline.

Related to Marx’s analysis is Carolyn Merchant’s book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, which discusses the conception of nature as female. In her study she assesses authors from the Classic period to New World expansion, arguing that many of them link images of nature to female identities and characteristics. In her argument she first contends

that normative and descriptive statements about nature are not necessarily separate. In her words, "It is important to recognize the normative import of descriptive statements about nature... Descriptive statements about the world can presuppose the normative; they are ethic-laden... The norms may be tacit assumptions hidden within the descriptions in such a way as to act as invisible restraints or moral ought-nots" (12). Merchant's point about the regulative tendencies of descriptions influences her argument about the way in which people cared for the environment in the past; by regarding nature as a woman, people viewed it as a caring, nurturing, passive object that was to be treated with kindness. With the influx of machines and industry, metaphors about nature as a woman ceased. In Merchant's assessment, "The changes in imagery and attitudes relating to the earth were of enormous significance as the mechanization of nature proceeded. The nurturing earth would lose its function as a normative restraint as it changed to an inanimate dead physical system" (19). Merchant was among the first ecocritics to call attention to interwoven narratives regarding femininity and the natural environment as well as the way in which metaphors about the environment communicate unconscious values and presuppositions in specific cultural contexts.

Regarding the history of the ideological roots behind current ecological crises, Lynn White Jr. gave a foundational speech in 1966 in which he traces the problem back to the Judeo-Christian worldview of creation. In this framework, man is given dominion over nature by God the Creator; the subsequent

interpretations of this positioning historically show how the Christian West disregards nature as an object which finds its sole meaning and purpose in its function for human use. According to White, the marriage between technology and scientific theory, spawned from this Judeo-Christian ethic about nature, is the cause of our environmental conundrums. White argues that the problem lies in the religious conception of nature, and therefore, “the remedy must also be essentially religious... We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny” (46). White proposes the use of Saint Francis of Assisi as a model for an ecologically sound theoretician since Francis cared for and attempted to create a democracy between all creatures in nature.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess also debates the fundamental assumptions of a society in which human-centered interests always receive priority and he first coined the term which describes an alternative approach to this organizational system, deep ecology. In his ideology, Naess articulates eight basic principles for the tenets of the deep ecological movement: 1) All life on earth has intrinsic value independent of its uses for human purposes. 2) Richness and diversity of life add to the value of life on earth and are also values in themselves. 3) Humans do not have the right to interfere with the diversity and richness except in what is vital to satisfy human needs. 4) This richness of human life and culture requires a decrease in human population. 5) Human intrusion into the non-human world is disproportionate and continues to worsen. 6) A deep need to change policies at their fundamental economic, technological,

and ideological levels is required, and the new organizational structures will look very different from present ones. 7) The ideological shift requires considering life quality for all beings as opposed to only life quality for just humans. 8) Anyone who believes in these tenets has a responsibility to affect change directly or indirectly. (49-50)

Naess highlights several examples in which changes to policies do not necessarily connote a deep ecology approach. For instance, humans may attempt to employ technology to purify air pollution and or to export dirty industries to developing nations. However, from a deep ecology perspective, pollution is examined from a point of view which takes into account its effect on all earth life. In doing so, policies that allow pollution Naess condemns as flawed. He recognizes that this type of reassessment will result in extreme changes to industry and contemporary consumption practices. However, in Naess' framework, these alterations are necessary and welcome.

Many of the scholars who published essays during the 1970s and 1980s regarding the environment were not necessarily literary critics with a specific agenda to analyze texts from an ecocritical point of view. This began to change in the early 1990s; two important literary critics that published ecocritical studies at this time were Jonathan Bate and Lawrence Buell. As Ken Hiltner notes, "Bate was interested in Wordsworth, Buell in Thoreau. Following Wordsworth and Thoreau, both Bate and Buell were primarily interested in wilderness and other rural locales, which their texts celebrated" (2). Bate's' insightful study on

Romantic literature emphasizes the difference between Romantic authors and the discourse of their contemporaries, scientists like Darwin and Haeckel. In Bate's words, "Scientists made it their business to describe the intricate economy of nature; Romantics made it theirs to teach human beings how to live as part of it" (79). By calling attention to the dissimilarities between the writers and scientists of their day, Bate seeks to challenge a misconception about Romantic ways of thinking about the environment. According to Bate, "In sharp contrast to the 'Romantic Ideology', the Romantic ecology has nothing to do with flight from the material world, from history and society- it is in fact an attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment" (80). Bate's appropriation of the Romantic texts sets the stage for dialoguing about the importance of protecting and communing with nature.

Lawrence Buell is also recognized as one of the fundamental innovators of ecocriticism and his work, *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), is often heralded as one of the most important treatises on how to interpret representations of the environments in literature. Buell outlines a rough checklist of the aspects which often comprise environmentally oriented literature. First, he states that "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (7). In addition, he argues that in environmentally oriented works, non-human interests are legitimate. Furthermore, these kinds of texts highlight human accountability to the environment in its ethical purview. Finally, an

environmentally oriented work indicates that the environment is a process and not necessarily a static idea or a given.

In order to make his argument concrete, Buell examines Henry David Thoreau's writings and explores the Western history of thought regarding the environment, focusing specifically on the pastoral vision of nature in Thoreau's *Walden*. One of the principal arguments that Buell develops regards the capacity of literature to represent space and place. He challenges the disjunction between text and the world that the previous decades of literary scholarship had wrought. While he recognizes that fictional accounts of the real world are skewed and partial, he contends that this bifurcation between literature and reality is not only overblown but leads to dangerously anti-environmental trends in the academe. In Buell's words, "My account of the reality of these fictional realities does not deny that they can profitably be so read but focuses on the recuperation of natural object and the relation between outer and inner landscapes as primary projects" (The Environmental Imagination 88). Buell's reassessment of the environment in literature represents a pendulum swing in terms of the relationship between world and text because he refuses to abide by the notion that the real world can in no way be mediated by the written word. Buell desires to see the pendulum shift towards an appreciation for mimesis, without necessarily throwing out the important contributions of the past decades of literary critics.

In 1996 Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm edited the original *Ecocriticism Reader* to summarize the contributions to the field from the first few decades of

scholarship. In the introduction Glotfelty not only offers a picture of what had been written, but proposes a way to conceive of the relationship between human culture and the physical world. She expresses the connection between the corporeal world and literary world as such:

Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society- the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere... literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and *ideas* interact (123).

Glotfelty emphasizes the connection between literature and the ecosphere, arguing that our notion of society must expand to include the physical world which houses our literary imaginings. These introductory words by Glotfelty were published at the same moment that the ecocriticism movement was on the cusp of entering its second wave. Whereas first wave ecocriticism often examined nature writing and wilderness motifs in literature, second wave ecocriticism began to expand the spectrum of places that the field should consider (such as cities and suburbs); second wave criticism also seeks to address the environmental crises of contemporary society. Furthermore, second wave ecocritics are more wary of the tendency of first wave ecocritics to romanticize nature and are therefore determined to be more critical of rhetorical strategies which convert nature into a fetish.

Hiltner summarizes the range of issues that second wave ecocritics deem important. One of the main issues that second wave ecocritics explore is the



problem of environmental justice (“EJ”). Whereas first wave ecocritics studied the environment by focusing on pristine nature and wilderness writing, second wave ecocritics call attention to the destruction of the environment that certain marginalized groups face. Race, class, gender, sexual preference, and issues of postcolonialism currently surface as topics of great interest for ecocritics. Other ecocritics in this phase ground their discussions of nature in theoretical frameworks, taking into account especially how humans understand the nature of reality itself as well as the conception of “Nature” as environment. During this second wave of ecocritics several scholars have emerged who have impacted the discussion about the relationship between the environment and literature including Ursula K. Heise, Stacy Alaimo, Robert Bullard, Laura Wright, Rob Nixon, Kate Soper, and Bruno Latour.

Ursula K. Heise’s impressive summary of the main developments of ecocriticism classifies the main authors and ideas undergirding this branch of cultural studies and literary criticism. While some of her points are reiterations of the scholars already examined in this chapter, she proffers a convincing argument regarding the precise moment of the emergence of ecocriticism. Heise contends that literary theories in the 1960s and 1970s intended to re-examine questions of representation, textuality, narrative, identity, subjectivity, and historical discourse from a skeptical point of view, emphasizing the constructed nature of reality. “Nature,” then was purported to be a construct wielded by those in power to justify certain ideologies. In the early literary theory movements,

therefore, criticism worked to denaturalize reality. “This perspective obviously did not encourage connections with a social movement aiming to reground human cultures in natural systems and whose primary pragmatic goal was to rescue a sense of the reality of environmental degradation from the obfuscations of political discourse” (505). However, by the late 1990s the landscape of criticism had shifted into a series of diverse projects no longer aimed at grounding theory by any one framework (such as feminist, race, or queer theory). Heise argues that this intellectual climate in the last decade of the twentieth century paved the way for ecocritical studies to thrive as well as accounts for the diversity of theory that ecocritics currently utilize in their studies.

As Heise recognizes, ecocritics employ several disciplines to examine representations of nature in cultural production. For instance, ecocritics have recently incorporated feminist studies in their discussions. Gender and the environment has become a topic of great interest in second wave ecocriticism and the category “ecofeminists” is a term which denominates those who study women and the environment. Stacy Alaimo has published several books regarding the female body and the way in which the materiality of human existence has been neglected in scholarship. She and Susan Hekman argue that the contemporary linguistic turn in feminist thought, while being enormously productive for feminism in several facets, has left current feminist theory at an impasse. They contend that in postmodernism and poststructuralism contexts, many feminists have utilized social constructionist models as underpinnings for

their arguments. However, while the two authors endorse the benefits of focusing on the discourse about the female body, they assert that it has left feminist theory with a lacuna regarding theory about actual materiality. In their understanding, while postmodern thought is quick to condemn dualisms such as male/female, mind/body, subject/object, this rejection of dualisms falls short when considering the language/reality dualism. Postmodernism still privileges the textual, linguistic, and discursive over material realities. For Alaimo and Henken, therefore, the materiality of bodies, lived experience, and biological functions must be taken into consideration if feminist thought is to overcome this stalemate. This line of thinking is related to the environment in that the constructed world of human interactions and languages is now reassessed within the material world.

According to these authors:

Feminist theorists of the body want definitions of human corporeality that can account for how the discursive and the material interact in the constitution of bodies. They explore the question of nonhuman and post-human nature and its relationship to the human. One of the central topics in this approach is the question of agency, particularly the agency of bodies and natures. Material feminists explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology and the 'environment,' without privileging any one of those elements. (146)

Just as gender has risen to the forefront of ecocritical discussions, race also emerges as a topic of importance when considering environmental degradation. Robert D. Bullard's studies on race and the environment signal the fact that minority groups often suffer environmental pollution and destruction in disproportionate numbers. For example, Southern states in the US contain the

highest percentage of African Americans. However, in the past few decades in the South, cleaner industries have predominantly established their businesses in white areas; the black areas, by default, have had to accept dirtier industrial production in order to encourage economic growth and jobs in their areas. This trend is not unintentional and as Bullard points out, “Discriminatory practices occur at various levels of government and affect the location of polling places, municipal landfills, and toxic-waste dumps... Black communities and their inhabitants must defend themselves against hostile external forces that shape land-use decisions and environmental policies” (156).

Bullard’s studies of race relate to efforts by scholars to examine the effects of environmental crises on underprivileged groups; postcolonial scholars have extended these types of considerations to incorporate international concerns over the environment. On this topic, Laura Wright contends that the field of postcolonialism may be useful to overcome the binaries often set forth between nature and culture. As she highlights, many scholars utilize the rhetoric of colonial domination to parse the subordination of nature to its binary companion of culture; in doing so they attempt to critique historically Western notions of the environment.<sup>4</sup> For certain scholars, the relationship between nature/culture parallels the two-pronged categorizations of colonial references such as maleness/femaleness and colonizer/colonized with explicit and implicit hierarchies between the pairs. While Wright appreciates the attempts of these scholars to deconstruct colonial discursive practices, she deems these types of

conversations problematic because of a failure to examine expressions of environmental subjects from non-Western sources. Wright insists that by posing these questions within the framework of Western literary materials, the postcolonial/third world is rendered metaphorical, “a floating signifier for all that is ‘othered’ within this schema: landscapes, women, and nonhuman beings. Such rhetorical explorations continue to consider Western notions of nature without discussing the environmental issues that are unique to formerly colonized colonies” (7). In spite of Wright’s exhortations, however, the attempt to correlate postcolonial studies and ecocriticism has often been wrought with tension.

Regarding the division between these two fields, Rob Nixon addresses the circumstances which have prevented postcolonial studies from seriously engaging with ecological literature and vice versa. In his argument, there are four schisms between the two disciplines. First, postcolonialists have emphasized hybridity and cross-colonialization. This notion clashes with first wave ecocritical projects which tended to underscore the purity of wilderness and uncorrupted nature. Second, while ecocritics examine the importance of place, postcolonialists discuss displacement; this correlates with Nixon’s third point that postcolonialism accentuates cosmopolitan and transnational interests while ecocriticism has often been limited to national (specifically American) frameworks. Finally, postcolonialism has stressed the importance of reconfigurations of history, especially looking at borders and forced migration. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, has often ignored history as non-essential when

considering the timelessness of pristine nature and environment. Nixon critiques the fact that several influential non-Western authors and activists have been largely ignored by ecocritical studies, especially since environmental issues in many areas of the world are results of postcolonial policies. He calls for an incorporation of these figures into the canon of the field, via a focus on the postcolonial implications of our global environmental crisis. He warns, however, against simply adding on texts to solve the challenge of homogeneity in ecocritical thinking. He opposes the idea that environmentalism has a center (the West) and that the extension of activism would include the periphery (non-Western actors). As he notes, "Such center-periphery thinking constitutes both a source of postcolonialists' pervasive indifference to environmentalism and, conversely, a source of the debilitating strain of superpower parochialism that lingers among many American ecocritics and writers" (205). Instead, Nixon calls postcolonial ecocritics to provincialize American environmentalism and in doing so to move past the traditional schisms between postcolonial and ecocritical arguments.

While many ecocritics examine the applications of studying the environment in cultural production, some also place great emphasis on the philosophical underpinnings of nature in modes of thinking. Kate Soper in particular has contributed significant theories regarding how to define and interpret "nature." Soper illustrates several reasons why nature is difficult to define, signaling the conflicting conceptions of the term in distinct spheres. Soper

begins her argument by pointing out that in one common use, nature refers to the parts of the environment in which humans had no part in creating. In conjunction with this notion, many attribute the most value in natural processes to places where human intervention is minimal, asserting that the more human admixture in any given situation, the more nature is devalued. In this notion of pristine nature (as opposed to human-corrupted spaces), the ideal place would be any natural environment untouched by human societies and processes. However, in reality, the actual areas on earth untouched by human hands are scant in number; in the minds of deep ecologists, then, this conundrum reveals the great obliteration of nature caused by human occupation of the planet. However, the fallacy with this mode of conception relates to the fact that other non-human actors also impact the environment; non-humans also consume natural resources and in some way destroy these resources. Soper calls attention to the problematic emphasis on humans standing apart and separate from nature, even when other non-humans actors participate in similar behaviors.

Soper also points out that the idea of nature as untouched by humans is belied by the way in which humans also employ the word nature to human-made environments such as parks and fields. In these contradicting descriptions of nature, Soper identifies the difficulty of delineating what the term means.

There is perhaps something inherently mistaken in the attempt to define what nature is, independently of how it is thought about, talked about and culturally represented. There can be no adequate attempt, that is, to explore 'what nature is' that is not centrally concerned with what it has been *said* to be, however much we

might want to challenge that discourse in the light of our theoretical rulings. (270)

Soper then examines the variegated discourses on what human “nature” has represented in history. Again, many opposing ideas exist about what it means to be humans *in* nature and *apart* from nature. As Soper purports, two main camps have emerged in their response to this issue. On the one hand, culture is seen as the remedy for natural instincts, and therefore “the natural” is meant to be subdued. On the other, philosophers have touted the benefits of nature as a place where we can find asylum from the corruptions and deformations of culture and where wisdom and moral guidance are ever present. Soper links these two views with Enlightenment and Romanticism, respectively; ultimately, she argues that these divisions between culture and nature continue to be played out in debates as people often adopt either a ‘nature-endorsing’ or ‘nature skeptical’ response in their discursive practices.

Soper’s analysis of the uses of the term nature alerts us to broader conversations regarding the linguistic and discursive practices that materialized in literary criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was during this time period that Foucault’s question of the knowledge-power-discourse became very important; cultural studies scholars and literary critics examined the basic assumptions of “the nature of things” on which humans base reality and on how governance structures are founded on these presuppositions. One consequence of this type of scrutiny was that many critics deemed reality subjective and condemned all approaches which claimed that objective reality existed.



Nonetheless, while the social sciences deconstructed notions of gender, race, class, and power structures, the natural sciences claimed to be able to maintain the hypothesis that its objects of study were verifiably objective. In the 1980s and 1990s, a debate between natural scientists and social scientists arose in which the latter group declared that conclusions based on natural sciences were just as constructed as any other reality. Proponents of this type of thinking were called constructivists. Scholars in the natural sciences were, however, vehemently opposed to the idea that their “facts” were anything but real, quantifiable markers of reality. This debate, labeled “the science wars,” finds resonances within the field of ecocriticism given that the natural environment and science are closely linked; in this way the question of the “nature” of nature is pertinent to ecocritical studies. Within this milieu, scholars of science studies have offered their assessment of ways to contend with, at the foundational level, the implications of science discourse as constructed.

One of the foremost thinkers in the field of science studies, Bruno Latour, has broached the topic of how to treat the environment in an intellectual context in which the very notions set forth by science are under question. Latour rightly recognizes that if science is constructed, then people may dispute the reality of what science purports about the current state of the environment. The biggest challenge, therefore, is finding avenues to move forward and create policies that protect the environment in spite of the skeptical mindset of those who resist scientific “truths.” Latour gives a convincing example of this kind of challenge by

asking how our contemporary societies can undergo the radical changes necessary to address global climate change if influential policy makers quarrel about whether it is actually reality that such a phenomenon is presently occurring. On the one hand, Latour favors an approach which “emancipates the public from prematurely naturalized facts” (Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? 227), meaning that he advocates for notions of reality in which discourses of science cannot be accepted as objective “facts” without analyzing the underlying assumptions of the field. However, he boldly critiques those intellectuals who have totally discarded objective facts. Latour proposes a different approach, one in which these types of problems are not matters of fact, but matter of concern. In an article about the task of criticism, Latour proposes that the impetus of criticism, while still analyzing the foundational biases, prejudices, and constructedness of reality, should not be for the purpose of destroying; rather, the disciplines of analysis should cautiously enable cultural phenomenon to be understood and addressed. He argues,

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution. (Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? 246)

Latour calls for scholars to stop analyzing “matters of fact” and instead consider “matters of concern.” In this paradigm, issues like climate change can be addressed without having to accept the idea that science is always objective

reality. In his foundational book, *The Politics of Nature*, Latour further outlines the thrust of his argument by reminding his readers that articulating extreme distinctions between fact and value is not effective for establishing systems to resolve the ecological problems in contemporary society. From a political perspective, these issues will only be addressed, in Latour's proposal, by eliminating "nature" as a category; only through the arduous work of re-thinking all assumptions about nature can the political scene begin to actually rework environmental interests as part of the juridical order. In part this type of philosophical reconfiguration is required because of the consequences that the modern category of "nature" enables. Non-human actors become hidden behind the inclusive determinative framework of "nature" and are silenced in political considerations. Only human actors maintain agency and therefore a new type of procedural and philosophical order is the only way to overcome this division between humans and non-humans. This shift will be hard work and Latour recognizes this labor in the conclusion to his book:

[I]magining a 'State of law of nature,' a *due process* for the discovery of the common world, is not going to make life easier for those who claim to be sending back to the nonexistence of the irrational all the propositions whose look they do not like. They are going to have to argue and come to terms, without skipping any of the steps we have covered in the preceding chapters. But... by losing nature, public life also loses the principal cause of its paralysis. Freed from transcendences that are as inapplicable as they are beneficial, politics breathes more freely. (*Politics of Nature* 224)

Latour's recommendations for the philosophical and political changes required to address contemporary environmental concerns represents

groundbreaking work. His is one of several voices in the second wave of ecocritics that call for an arduous reworking of the way that we currently approach the environment. All these theorists recognize that we cannot continue to do the same things and expect different results and that the environmental crisis can no longer be ignored if humans want to continue inhabiting the planet.

### **Latin American ecocritics**

As many postcolonial ecocritics claim, the field of ecocriticism has a history of focusing on the North American context and ignoring texts of the developing world. In order to fill this void in the field, recently ecocritics have begun to dialogue about the representation of the environment in Latin American cultural production. In the last few years, certain scholars have decreed that the field of ecocriticism can and should enrich the landscape of critical analysis of Latin American trends and culture. As Laura Barbas-Rhodan notes, “Questions of land, water, and resource use loom large over Latin American history... A growing Latin American-oriented ecocriticism can marry work in cultural studies to new theoretical elaborations from beyond and within Latin America to make a substantial contribution to the international conversation ongoing in ecocriticism” (6). Jennifer L. French, Jorge Marcone, Laura Barbas- Rhoden, Ana Maria Vara, Scott M. DeVries, Mark D. Anderson, Mauricio Ostria González, Jonathan Tittler, and others have explored the environment and literature in Latin American scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

Jennifer L. French examines Spanish American regionalist novels by first referencing Mario Bello's 1826 poem, *La agricultura de la zona tórrida*. French posits that this foundational text reveals two connected trends which have been advanced in Latin American literature. The first is that neo-colonialism, particularly with regards to the effect that Great British policies had on the region, was occluded in nineteenth century discourse. This is related to the second trend which *La zona tórrida* develops. French claims that the second pattern established by *La zona tórrida* is that "in Spanish American cultural discourse the tensions created by neo-colonialism are consistently displaced onto a discourse on nature...If Bello does not address the British directly, however, he implicitly argues for a specific kind of relationship with Britain (nonexploitative) through the relationship he envisions for Spanish America (bucolic, noncapitalist)" (7). French ties the discussion of nature in the Spanish American regional writers to neo-colonialism by arguing that nature is essentially the space in which these authors address post-colonialism. These texts, in French's position, belong to a larger canon of international, postcolonial texts in which access to land and natural resources became a major global issue in the last half of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century.

Jorge Marccone also undertakes the task of ecological criticism in Latin American narrative by analyzing the *novelas de la selva*, written in the first half of the twentieth century. In his analysis he traces the journey of the protagonist in *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier and makes the argument that the novel, while

seemingly a natural, telluric work, actually problematizes the relationship between nature and culture. While the narrator finds peace and creativity in his journey to the jungle, he ultimately returns briefly to the city to tie up loose ends in his relationships and career. However, upon his arrival back to nature, the narrator has lost his access to the rural, simplistic life he left behind. According to Marcone, this vacillation between seeing nature as salvation to modern, urban woes and seeing nature as blocked by those allegiances to the metropolis reveal a complex, interrelated system in which nature does not represent one thing but embodies many responses to the disillusionment of modern life. In his analysis, Marcone contends that these types of novels are paradigmatic for later Latin American cultural productions by arguing that they foreshadow specific ideas about nature which more contemporary authors also employ.

Laura Barbas-Rhoden also discusses the way in which Latin American environmentalism and postcolonialism thought are interlaced. She maintains that first wave ecocritical models are irrelevant to ecocriticism of Latin American texts because the history of the ecological imagination in the region takes on different forms from Western traditions. For instance, Romanticism for European readers often registers nature as an escape, whereas Romanticism in Spanish American literature inscribes nature in its historical context, that is, as a battleground between the rights of those vying to exploit land, resources, and people for neoliberal interests, and those who would resist these conquering forces. Barbas-Rhoden posits that second wave ecocritical approaches are significantly

more akin to the types of intellectual work required by the history of the ecological imagination in Latin American literature; as she argues, Latin American ecocritical work has the potential to reconcile ecocentric and anthropocentric concerns.

With this impulse to reconcile concerns, Barbas-Rhoden studies several novels from Latin America and levies the following argument: “in the late twentieth century a growing number of Latin American authors produced texts preoccupied with natural spaces and... they did so as part of a broader critique of economic systems of subjugation. Their discourse of nature represents a specific literary response to neoliberalism in Latin America” (7). In her discussion she brings an interdisciplinary approach which recognizes the cross-hybridization both of plants and of people in the Latin American region and the interpretative richness that these blends may hold for those studying environments.

Additionally, Barbas-Rhoden examines the question of the human/non-human distinction. She purports that in Anglo-European debates, the human/non-human dichotomy has been awarded much critical consideration, but she questions whether such a substantial distinction ever existed in Latin America. Indigenous movements and epistemological frameworks from Latin America call attention to the notion that human and non-human beings may not necessarily reside on a binary plane of reference. Barbas-Rhoden employs this questioning of dualistic thinking as one example to bolster her argument that Latin American ecocriticism has unique historical processes to summarize and critique and that

therefore Anglo-European ecocriticism should not impose its own categories onto these types of studies. Barbas-Rhoden also emphasizes the socially-conscious activism elements in the writings she examines. She notes, “the novels included here all draw on history to promote an agenda of environmental and social justice. They express strong misgivings about the economic order of the world, and they historicize the marginalization of minority groups and the exploitation of ecological wealth” (11).

In a very similar vein to Barbas-Rhoden, Ana María Vara focuses on the way in which narratives about the environment highlight unjust power structures in Latin America. Her argument explores the long tradition of protest in the literature of Latin America regarding environmental exploitation and neocolonial economic structures. Vara first brings to light a contemporary case of environmental protest; in 2003, on the shores of the Uruguay River, situated between Uruguay and Argentina, two transnational companies with European headquarters vied to install two large paper pulp plants. A protest arose from the Argentines about the construction of these industrial factories; in general the controversy followed two opposing lines of discourse. On the whole, Uruguayan public opinion adopted a discourse regarding progress and productivity and Argentine public opinion adopted an environmentalist outlook. Vara argues that in the debate about these issues, those involved appropriated past cycles of protest to understand and give meaning to the current crisis they faced. She proposes that this is common for present-day instances of environmental protest



and that it is in the literature of the region where the spark of protest is most widely re-appropriated.

El origen del marco interpretativo que hoy está sonando tan fuerte en las protestas ambientales en América Latina está en la literatura. En la mente creativa de novelistas, poetas, cuentistas, y periodistas inspirados, comprometidos, que en las primeras décadas del siglo XX elaboraron, colectivamente, una manera de contar ciertas historias locales que llegaría a constituirse como una forma radicalmente alternativa para entender la situación de la región. Un discurso de denuncia anti-imperialista que encarna un sistema, al que hemos dado en llamar *contra-discurso neocolonial de los recursos naturales*, aproximando las nociones de imperialismo y neocolonialismo. (15)

One of Vara's main objects of study is the book-length essay entitled *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971), by Eduardo Galeano. She contends that Galeano's passionate exposition on the how developed nations have exploited natural resources in Latin America remains the quintessential work regarding the voice of protest against ecological injustice in Latin America. She summarizes Galeano's work by pointing to the two stages of exploitation he describes, the extraction of precious metals during the colonial period, and the exportation of natural products during the imperial era. In both of these stages, Galeano observes persistent injustices to people groups in Latin America forced into poverty or oppression to serve the interests of those obtaining raw materials from the region. Galeano also tackles the issue of free markets, another form of imperialism which allows those in power to freely take resources from the poor who actually work the soil in Latin America. Vara's analysis of this work emphasizes its historical significance and its depth of insight:

*Las venas abiertas* puede ser pensado como un enorme trabajo de recopilación con fines argumentativos: con el propósito final de demostrar que una misma situación de explotación se repite en distintos lugares y momentos de la historia de América Latina, en función de su relación con naciones europeas y los Estados Unidos, sin que esta reiteración se interrumpa tras la independencia de las naciones. La fuerza evocativa del título es otra de las razones del poder persuasivo de la obra: la metáfora de <<las venas abiertas>>, con su alusión a la sangre, acerca hombres y materias primas, equiparando la doble explotación de naturaleza y personas. (29)

For Vara, Galeano is the author *par excellence* who articulates protest regarding environmental injustice in Latin America.

Scott M. DeVries also traces the history of environmental thinking in Spanish American literature in his comprehensive survey on the subject of ecology in narrative; his work represents a broad historical study of authors who have written about the environment from the region. Upon assessing this history, DeVries proposes that in recent novels, themes of ecology have become more pronounced. Among the most important new literary contributions related to the environment DeVries recognizes Mexican author Homero Aridjis' two apocalyptic novels about Mexico City, Nicaraguan Gionconda Belli's work of environmental science fiction, *Waslala*, Costa Ricans Anacristina Rossi and Fernando Contreras Castro and their novels about national park conservation, Argentine Mempo Giardinelli and his ecologically themed *Imposible equilibrio* (which I consider in Chapter Four), and Giardinelli's pseudo-sequel, *Final de novela en Patagonia*. One of DeVries' main goals is to demonstrate the continuity of environmental awareness between recent and earlier texts in Spanish America.

He contends: “What I have attempted to document is the way in which environmentalist discourse in these later novels represents a culmination from ecological movements in earlier texts” (297). In his analysis, earlier texts from the nineteenth century political nation-building projects, the twentieth century *novelas de la tierra* and *novelas de la selva*, and early indigenous literature share similar concerns with post-Boom texts such as “political ecology, the contaminating tendencies of industrialized extractive practices, concerns about deforestation, desertification, and species extinction” (297).

Mark D. Anderson has discussed environment in literature in Latin American narrative by analyzing disaster writing and the importance of disaster narratives in cultural politics. Anderson remarks that disasters are critical junctures which reveal underlying assumptions about nature and political responses to nature. He begins by pointing out that many scholars have argued that humans define themselves through nature, particularly by conceiving of nature as “other.” Even for those cultures which hold closely to more pantheistic models of perceiving nature, some species of substances are always on the outside, and so in Anderson’s assessment, “‘nature’ is always defined in opposition, whether to the human, the rational, or some other criterion” (4). In spite of the fact that nature in many cases represents the opposite to human culture in our modes of thinking, Anderson purports that due to our human interactions with nature on a daily basis, a third space emerges which mediates the relationship between the human and the non-human, which can be called

“normal nature.” Anderson gives the example of landscaping as one type of space in which nature is normalized through human interaction. This “normal nature”, however, is socially defined, and not natural. When a natural disaster occurs, then, normal nature is undermined and the negative disaster thwarts human kind’s supposedly benign relationship with the non-human world. In Anderson’s terms, “disaster represents the inversion of the normalized relationship between humans and their environments, both ‘natural’ and human made. Disasters unmake landscapes, estranging nature from the human” (5).

Anderson fleshes out his remarks by writing about the historical perspectives on disaster in Latin America. During the pre-Colombian periods, gods and religious rituals both represented the power to wage natural disasters as well as the power to ameliorate the damage these cause. During the colonial period the Catholic religion was wielded to explain disasters and often the Spanish incorporated elements of indigenous beliefs to reinforce their arguments. In the modern epoch, the Western world began to re-conceptualize danger and security, removing them from religious discourses onto human domains of probability. Anderson’s main argument, however, goes beyond historical instances of disasters and looks more closely at the way that disaster narratives have been used to support political agency. Anderson maintains that the very act of narration shifts the power dynamic between the force of nature and human activity. By narrating disasters, humans reassert their control over the event in an effort to return to normalcy.

Anderson continues to explore this theme and offers examples of disaster writing in relation to regionalist novels written and published in the 1920s in Latin America. He argues that it might seem that disaster writing from the 1920s and onward contradict the attempt by regionalist novels to portray a positive relationship between human and the environment in which humans dominate and cultivate nature. Anderson suggests, however, that disaster writings actually correspond to the ideology of regionalist agendas because they too seek to “focus on the risks that underdevelopment and marginalized environments entailed for the nation” (20). Anderson connects disaster writings with political dialogue, showing how these narratives both shape and are shaped by *how* people write about disasters and by *who* in society has access to what others will hear about the natural events. Anderson theorizes that in the novels he discusses in this project, a key mechanism is the focus on politics.

By representing disasters as political rather than natural or divine events, human agency over nature is restored, even in a nuanced way. Through narrative, humans are able to harness disaster, converting destruction and mortality into matters of human error (vulnerability) and channeling it to political ends in contesting autocratic political orders or engaging in nation building. (20)

Ultimately, Anderson argues convincingly that both the term *disaster* and the term *nature* are constructed by humans and that Latin American literature of the twentieth century portrays natural disasters as part of an effort to augment political projects by the authors.

While the above writers generally focus on doing close, ecocritical readings of particular cultural productions, Mauricio Ostría González tenders a

broad overview of the principal Latin American texts with strong elements of ecological consciousness from the latter half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. He argues that the most important novelists with an emphasis on the natural environment are Miguel Ángel Asturias (*Hombres de maíz*), Mario de Andrade (*Macunaíma*), Augusto Roas Bastos (*Hijo de hombre*), Juan Rulfo (*El llano en llamas*, *Pedro Páramo*), Gabriel García Márquez (*La hojarasca*, *Cien años de soledad*), Francisco Coloane (*Cabo de hornos*), Rosario Castellanos (*Balun Canan*), Mario Vargas Llosa (*El hablador*), Patricio Manns (*Memorial de la noche*), Luis Sepúlveda (*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, *Mundo del fin del mundo*), and Darío Oses (*Chile en llamas*). He also lists several poets whom he considers important leaders in advocating ecological awareness such as Nicanor Parra, Ernesto Cardenal, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Homero Aridjis, José Emilio Pacheco, Gioconda Belli, Roberto Juarroz, Raúl Zurita, Juan Pablo Riveros, Clemente Riedemann and Rosabety Muñoz. Octavio Paz and Eduardo Galeano also figure as central essayists in his summary of Latin American ecocriticism. Ostria González, like many scholars of Latin American literature and culture, underscores the connection between Latin American ecocriticism and social and political protest. He presents the following quote from Octavio Paz as evidence of this interconnectedness:

El tema del mercado tiene una relación muy estrecha con el deterioro del medioambiente. La contaminación no solo infesta al aire, a los ríos y a los bosques sino a las almas. Una sociedad poseída por el frenesí de producir más para consumir más tiende a convertir las ideas, los sentimientos, el arte, el amor, la amistad y a las personas mismas en objetos de consumo. Todo se vuelve cosa

que se compra, se usa y se tira al basurero. Ninguna sociedad había producido tantos desechos como la nuestra. Desechos materiales y morales. (102)

Although Ostria González traces obvious examples of environmental writing in the twentieth century in Latin America, he proposes that ecocritical readings of texts should go beyond analyzing noticeable portrayals of nature in literature: “Me parece... más razonable y productivo, abordar, desde un enfoque ecocrítico, cualesquiera prácticas textuales, buscando indagar en ellas, la presencia (explícita o implícita) de la naturaleza, en tanto sujeto-objeto en constante dinamismo, y del ser humano en interacción (positiva o negativa) con ella” (107).

Jonathan Tittler examines several classic texts from Latin American narrative from an ecocritical perspective. He begins by discussing Horacio Quiroga’s “El hombre muerto”, which relays the story of a man who accidentally falls on his own machete while working in the fields. As Tittler remarks, this story parallels the reality of humankind’s relationship with its surrounding environment: “Mankind seeks to dominate nature and almost convinces himself that he succeeds. But it is nature that has the last word: mankind carries nature within himself and, no matter how hard he tried to postpone the moment of truth, his connection with the natural world always returns to the fore” (16). Tittler purports that Quiroga, who wrote in the first half of the twentieth century, was a forerunner to later green movement leaders. Tittler follows the trajectory of writing in Latin America narrative from Quiroga by examining a more contemporary text, *Historia*

*de Mayta* by Mario Vargas Llosa. He points out that the beginning and the end of the book follow the narrator as he runs along the banks of a cliff face sullied by garbage dumped onto the descending cliffs. In the opening of the novel, the narrator decries the trash heaps and wishes for a change in behavior. However, at the end, when the utopian project of the protagonist has failed and the narrator feels disillusioned, he discusses the garbage piles with an almost defeatist attitude. Tittler points out that an ecocritical reading should criticize the narrator (and perhaps the author) for his participation in anthropocentric systems which ruin the environment and for his lack of conviction that humans can actually change their destructive habits.

Tittler also contends that Latin American literary portrayals of nature take their cues from an early twentieth century debate in literature regarding the relationship between nature and culture. He gives the examples of *La vorágine* by José Eustasio Rivera and *Doña Bárbara* by Rómulo Gallegos. In the first novel *Cova*, the main character, flees to the plains and then to the Amazon jungle to avoid arrest for seducing a young girl. Cova is a promising poet before he leaves and in his journeys he deeply desires to be the protagonist of his own story. Tittler calls attention to the fact that he actually plays the role of the *infrahero*, or someone who fails to achieve centrality; instead, it is nature who is the central character in the story. Cova ultimately ends up being swallowed by the jungle and he and those travelling with him disappear. Tittler asserts the following about how this ending frames the debate between nature and culture:



“setting aside the cultural achievement of the novel itself, in the nature-versus-culture wars of early twentieth-century Spanish America reflected within its covers, nature wins, hands down” (23). *Doña Bárbara*, on the other hand, is a novel which champions culture in this debate. The protagonist, doña Bárbara, is a wild woman and her malicious actions in the novel stress the tension between civilization and barbarity, with her baser emotions representing the latter. The novel progresses to its conclusion that only through civilization can barbarity be overcome, even in wilderness settings. In Tittler’s words, “Culture is thus reaffirmed, not only by its triumph over mankind’s confused, dark side, but also through the use of the Venezuelan plains as a grand symbolic stage upon which a nation’s identity is forged” (26).

Tittler ends his analysis with a consideration of *El hablador* by Mario Vargas Llosa. In this novel Vargas Llosa explores the issue of ecoindigenism. In the story, two radically different cultures- urban Peruvian culture and indigenous Machiguenga groups- are negotiated in complicated ways. In the course of the story, the narrator finds out that his friend, Saul, has renounced the dominant culture to become a storyteller for the Machiguenga people. The oral stories of the Machiguenga become interlaced with Jewish biblical narratives, bringing to the surface questions of cross-culturalization and competing epistemologies. Tittler interprets this book as an example of postmodern encounters in that two fundamentally distinct cultures are upheld without making judgments about the value of one above the other. Furthermore, Tittler finds the environmental attitude

of the indigenous groups to be something which can enrich Western notions of natural resources. According to him, highlighting ecoindigenism in novels like this “would entail the possibility of entering into a fertile relationship with non-Western cultures- ones that were not technologically advanced, not globalized, not conspicuous consumers of diminishing natural resources of our biosphere- in order to learn from them what our limited perspective does not allow us to see” (30).

In addition to the above authors, two important volumes of essays about ecocriticism in the Latin American context have been published in the last decade. In 2005 Elizabeth M. Deloughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley edited a volume which explores Caribbean literature and the environment. Underlying the volume is the idea that few areas in the world have been as radically altered as the Caribbean region in terms of human and botanic migration. The purpose of their volume is to analyze the history of transplantation and settlement in the region and discuss how this history has shaped the idea of place and ecology in the Caribbean. The essays in the collection deal with four entwined issues: “how Caribbean texts inscribe the environmental impact of colonial and plantation economies; the revision of colonial myths of Edenic and natural origins; connections between the process of biotic and cultural creolization; and finally, how Caribbean aesthetics might usefully articulate a means to preserve sustainability in the wake of tourism and globalization” (2).

Many of the essays in the volume examine the general Caribbean context or non-Spanish speaking countries. In Antonio Benítez-Rojo's discussion of the natural history of Cuba, the first native settlers to Cuba (i.e. non-European indigenous groups) did little damage to the natural system; when Spain colonized the island, however, the production of sugar for export caused heavy soil damage. This type of destruction became wider and more common after the country adopted a communist system in the twentieth century. Cuba began to frantically produce sugar in large quantities for the purpose of receiving financial aid from the Soviet Union. This production included the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and the pumping of underground and surface waters. Furthermore, the focus on sugar production meant the elimination of other fruits and vegetables, causing scarcity and hunger in Cuba. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union meant the concomitant collapse of the push to export so much sugar, Cuba still suffers the consequences of these policies on its land. Benítez-Rojo points out that this is one example of the way in which the Caribbean islands have suffered environmental degradation at a disproportionate level.

Today...the archipelago's ecosystems are fighting for their lives against the threats of desertification and poisoning of the waters, of poverty and unhealthiness, of cheap technology and the requirements of tourism. It is the lamentable payoff left behind by colonialism, economic dependence, and the plantation system, bequeathed to an island world already geographically subject to hurricanes, coastal floods, droughts, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. (49)

Another recent and important contribution to the field of Latin American ecocriticism is the volume edited by Adrian Taylor Kane and published in 2010.

According to Kane, the volume addresses two critiques which have been aimed at the field of ecocriticism in general. The first is one brought by the editors of the volume of the Caribbean volume discussed above; they argue that ecocriticism has often been bound by national boundaries, despite the physical fluidity of the environment. Taylor Kane argues that his anthology “transcends national boundaries by presenting analyses of literary and cultural production ranging from Patagonia to Amazonia to the Chihuahua Desert, and in doing so attempts to convey a sense of the ecological, cultural, and linguistic diversity of Latin America” (5-6). The second criticism that the book attempts to overcome is from an observation by Ursula K. Heise who observes that the field is often limited to monolingual analyses. Taylor Kane points out that the essays explore texts in Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, and Classical Quiché in an effort to be somewhat more inclusive of the different languages spoken in the region.

The chapters in Taylor Kane’s volume represent the largest compilation of ecocritical examinations of Latin American literature to date. In his essay in the volume, Taylor Kane discusses avant-garde literature from the early twentieth century. He argues that the discourses of modernity and the desire to be modern reflected in these writings offer insight into the manner in which nature was subordinated in order to modernize the continent; this phenomenon bears witness to the historical underpinnings of the ecological crossroads of our current crises.

In the same volume, Raymond L. Williams surveys nature the twentieth-century Latin American novel *Cien años de soledad* (Gabriel García Márquez, 1967) and emphasizes its ecological wisdom. Williams frames his argument around the idea that there are significant differences between oral and writing cultures and the way they view the environment. He argues that nature and technology in *Cien años de soledad* relate to the disparate notions that oral and writing cultures uphold about these two concepts. In the same volume Gustavo Llarull develops a thesis regarding three novels from Latin America: *María* (Jorge Isaacs, 1867), *Cien años de soledad* and *Mantra* (Rodrigo Fresán, 2001). In his evaluation, *María* and *Mantra* mirror each other in terms of the use of nature and technology. In the former, all of life is described using natural images while in *Mantra* all of life is described in technological images. *Cien años* stands in between the two novels and in Llarull's assessment, "contains ironically disguised references to the language of *María*, and at the same time foreshadows the use of language presented in *Mantra*" (89). I will examine both Williams' and Llarull's articles in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Although the field of ecocriticism was, at its inception, inextricably linked to Anglo-speaking contexts, I have attempted to demonstrate that Latin Americanists also have begun to seriously consider the role of the environment in cultural texts. Authors in Latin America have, for centuries, included reflections on nature in their works and recently critics have produced appropriate analyses which recognize these elements. Furthermore, the history of the environment in

Latin America lends itself to a study which also focuses on the mechanism through which natural resources have too often been usurped: violence.

The preceding paragraphs underline some of the significant theoretical underpinnings for both studies of violence and studies of the environment in Latin American narrative. As I argue in the first section, violence has ambiguous definitions; furthermore, as many ecocritics underscore, nature has a similar quality of slipperiness to it. By narrowing down the scopes of both violence and nature in literature, I demonstrate in the following chapters that examining the intersections of the two adds an interpretative richness to the study of both.

In the following chapters I incorporate the theoretical frameworks discussed above and analyze specific narrative pieces relevant to the topic. I situate my own project within second wave ecocriticism for two specific reasons. First, a large section of my thesis examines the role of built environments and urban spaces in novels, thus moving beyond discussions about nature as something necessarily rural and “pristine.” Second, I explore how the environment is connected to violence against marginalized others, thus integrating discussions related to environmental justice.

In Chapter Two of this dissertation I look at intersections of violence and the environment in three novels where the setting is largely urban. In *Morirás lejos* (1967), by José Emilio Pacheco, I discuss built environments in largely city zones. I examine three urban areas: sewers, ghettos, and parks, and contend that violence against humans directly degrades these spaces. Pacheco’s novel

combines historical elements with contemporary moments of violence, particularly against the Jewish people. As the novel progresses, violence also becomes the uniting factor between time periods; throughout these scenes the environment suffers in solidarity with humans. In the second section of Chapter Two, I compare *Morirás lejos* with *2666* (2004), the immense novel by Roberto Bolaño. In *2666* violence is a leitmotiv which pervades both the lives of the main characters and the lives of women in the fictional city of Santa Teresa. While violence against humans directly affects the environment in *Morirás lejos*, in *2666*, the degradation of the environment is actually a symptom of a larger, pessimistic vision of the role of violence in post-modern, industrial society. In this conception, women's bodies are lifelessly thrown in the desert as disposable objects and the environment serves as the backdrop of the consequences of a bored society. I finish the chapter by comparing *La muerte me da* (2007) by Cristina Rivera Garza with the previous two novels. In Rivera Garza's novel, the action centers on a series of cadavers that, similarly to the bodies in *2666*, are thrown lifelessly onto the streets of the city. Whereas the bodies in *2666* are female and mutilated, the bodies in *La muerte me da* are castrated males. The novel is a counter-thesis to the violence against women in *2666* as it explores violence against men and questions traditional boundaries of gender and the possibilities of conceiving of bodies in new ways. I also briefly discuss the poetic use of language in *La muerte me da* with regards to the representation of urban spaces and violence.

In Chapter Three I focus on two Colombian novels, *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011) by Juan Gabriel Vásquez and *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. In the first section I utilize trauma theory to contend that in *El ruido de las cosas al caer* the urban space is diminished in the mind of the narrator due to a violent, traumatic event he suffers. As Cathy Caruth argues, those suffering trauma are unable to process the actual event of trauma during the moment of violence. In order to understand the trauma, sufferers need to have a moment of departure in which they recur to the communal process of surviving violence. The protagonist follows these steps and in the process again expands his perception of the city space which he inhabits. In the second part of the chapter I develop a reading of the novel looking at animal studies. I utilize Aaron Gross' idea that humans have viewed themselves through the lens of their animal companions throughout time and history. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, the narrator understands his story through the parallel story of what happens to a family of hippos. After discussing the role of the hippopotami in the novel, I correlate these ideas to Giorgio Agamben's theory of biopolitics by arguing that both animals and humans are vulnerable in the biopolitical state presented in the novel. In the last section of the chapter I connect a similar definition of biopolitics to *Cien años de soledad*. I discuss a concept inherent in Agamben's model of biopolitics: the state of exception. In the state of exception, the law specifically grants the sovereign power the ability to decide between whose life is important and whose life is disposable. Agamben argues that in this state of exception, the



sovereign power defines biological life and disposes of vulnerable bodies to maintain its own authority. I advance the idea that in *Cien años de soledad*, the history of the city of Macondo reveals this state of exception and that the novel decries this type of power structure because of its potential to destroy those weakest in society.

In Chapter Four I examine the Argentine novel, *Imposible equilibrio* (1995) by Mempo Giardinelli. The work examines responses to an environmental imbalance brought about by human industry. *Imposible equilibrio* identifies two threads of discourse which propose solutions to the ecological problem. In the first discourse the government and the media propose a solution to the environmental imbalance which is based on a humanist framework. In the second discourse a group of resisters work together to challenge the anthropocentrism of the authorities. They resist these structures by robbing a group of hippos; their resistance brings up issues of animal subjectivity and human centrality. Throughout the novel, the resisters represent a more posthumanistic approach to perceiving the environment. In this chapter I employ Cary Wolfe and his conception of posthumanism to discuss how the novel explores non-human subjectivities. I then posit that the novel connects ecological damage and human industry. Finally I demonstrate that *Imposible equilibrio* examines human/animal relations and ultimately critiques the anthropocentric structures which caused the environmental imbalance in the novel.

Ultimately all of the novels in this project have been chosen for a specific reason. They are significant examples of how analyzing the environment and its representation enriches the interpretation of the topic of violence in these pieces.

## **Chapter II: Intersections of Violence and the Urban Environment in**

### ***Morirás lejos, 2666, and La muerte me da***

In this chapter, I will examine three contemporary novels: *Morirás lejos*, a Mexican novel first published in 1967 by José Emilio Pacheco; *2666*, a novel related to Mexico, written by the Chilean author Roberto Bolaño and published in 2004; and *La muerte me da*, published in 2007 by the Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza. For *Morirás lejos*, I will employ ecocriticism to develop the idea that violence against humans in the work extends to the natural environment. In *2666* I will also use ecocriticism to explore the role of violence as well as discuss briefly repetitive articulations of violence in the massive work and its relationship to the nature/woman binary of traditional thought. Finally I will examine the question of gender and violence as well as discuss the urban environment in *La muerte me da* in an introductory fashion.

#### **Morirás lejos: the destruction of the natural world through violence**

##### *Ecocriticism and the city*

As I discussed in my introduction, ecocriticism has developed a field of inquiry which seeks to analyze the role of the natural environment in cultural production. However, in spite of the heavy emphasis it awards to nature, the field of ecocriticism has not produced an equally developed theory about the urban natural environment. The topic of urban ecology inevitably exists as a gray-area in the field of ecocriticism since the city is perceived as a human construction and not as something “natural.” On this point, Michael Bennett and David W. Teague

suggest that ecocriticism should develop studies about the city. These authors point out that there is a large amount of literary criticism which deals with the city in literature. However, there has been relatively little scholarship which combines a treatment of the metropolis with a study of ecology in order to found the basis for a cultural criticism of urban ecology. The field of ecocriticism, as these authors contend, lacks a significant body of literature regarding built environments in the urban setting.

David R. Shumway attributes the lack of discussion on the city in ecocriticism to the traditional binary definitions of nature and culture. He quotes Kate Soper who argues, “for the most part, when ‘nature’ is used of the non-human, it is in a rather more concrete sense to refer to that part of the environment which we have no hand in creating” (255). Culture, on the other hand, is what remains that relates to humans, particularly in the urban space. However, for Shumway, this binary is unhelpful “because it renders unnatural human beings and the spaces we occupy and create” (255). Rather, ecology must help us to challenge this conception and move towards a framework that understands humanity as part of nature, reintroducing our role in the chain of being and beginning, “with the assumption that human activities are no less natural than are those of other species” (256). The volume of essays compiled by Bennett and Teague, including the article by Shumway, is an attempt to rectify this binary and move toward an ecocritical understanding of the city; these authors believe they have the task to “remind city dwellers of our placement

within ecosystems and the importance of this fact for understanding urban life and culture” (4).

The importance of developing a cultural criticism of urban ecology is especially pertinent for studies of novels where the action takes place in the city but the natural environment still emerges as a significant element for the interpretation of the work. The novel *Morirás lejos* by Jose Emilio Pacheco fits this description. The narration moves from one space to the next, and the majority of these spaces are urban. However, the natural environment springs forth as a quintessential aspect of the work: the representation of the environment is directly related to the main theme of the work, violence. Violence is the direct cause of the degradation of the natural environment in the urban spaces in this novel. Three very different urban spaces in particular reveal the denigration of the natural environment in this work: the sewer, the ghetto, and the park. Analyzing these spaces distinguishes the manner in which Pacheco treats the natural environment in his urban novel.

*Morirás lejos* is an experimental novel in which the narration shifts in both space and time. Russell Cluff suggests that in order to discern the various plotlines in the novel, “lo más certero sería hablar de cuatro distintos relatos como lo hace la crítica Livia Soto: ‘Jerusalén, 67 A.D.; Toledo-Salónica, 1492-1527; Alemania, 1939-1945; Vietnam, 196-: cuatro relatos de cuatro mundos distintos durante cuatro épocas, en cuatro idiomas’” (20). Joel Hancock disagrees slightly with this time frame by indicating that the narrations about

Germany stretch further back than just World War II: “the last of the major divisions gives a surrealistic dimension to the story by concentrating on two specific events in the life of Adolf Hitler, his birth and death” (17).

What Cluff does not mention when he categorizes the different epochs included in *Morirás lejos*, however, is the “present” voice of the novel, which takes place in a park in Mexico City in the 1960s. The narration of the scenes in Mexico reveals a game of gazes. One man, eme, spies on another man in the park across the way from behind his curtains. As the novel progresses, it seems that it is actually the man in the park who spies on eme. Although the novel never lends itself to a definitive reading<sup>6</sup>, eme likely was a doctor for the Third Reich during the Second World War and the other man (later referred to as Alguien) is a figure who represents justice; Alguien’s role is to exercise judgment against the criminals of the holocaust. The movements in narration relate to eme: they deal with historical moments of violence, many of which are acts perpetrated against the Jewish populace. Inserted into the novel are distinct narrative voices: a report penned by Josephus Flavius regarding the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD; a segment narrating the uprising of the Jews against the Nazis in the ghetto of Warsaw, Poland; episodes of eme’s life focusing on his work as a torturer and doctor in concentration camps. The novel intercalates narratives from the past and present in a collage of bloody images.

Violence is ubiquitous in *Morirás lejos*. Furthermore, the novel directly links violence to urban spaces: each narration of violence communicates aspects

about the interconnectedness of human society and the environment. Violence in this novel is the impetus for the degradation and distortion of the natural world in the urban setting. Sewers are the first example in the text which demonstrates this concept.

### *Sewers as a space of resistance*

Urban ecosystems, though constructed, demonstrate the complex and symbiotic nature of biological systems. Similarly to the way that living beings have organic systems of waste excretion, metropolises also have mechanisms for eliminating biological waste: subterranean spaces. Joanne Gottlieb identifies the association between urban life and underground systems: “Even before the full development of technologies like the railroad and the underground railway, which both defined modernity and later promised the improvement of urban life, there was a connection between underground and urban qualities, a connection that expressed anxieties around modernization” (234). One space in particular that produces anxieties and pertains to this discussion is the sewer.

At first, articulating a theory regarding sewers in a discussion about ecocriticism is not apparent. However, as Raymond L. Williams has observed, sewers are comparable to urban rivers.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the basic purpose of any sewer is to establish a site in which excrement is discarded. Excretion is a basic biological process that every living organism undergoes. Thus, in several ways sewers are part of the urban ecological system. Integral to the argument for a theory of ecocriticism is the notion that, no matter how much humans might wish

to avoid or ignore our biological realities (through technology and innovation), it is only an attempt to escape from certain natural truths. As Stacy Alaimo purports, “Forgetting that bodily waste must go somewhere allows us to imagine ourselves as rarefied rational beings distinct from nature’s muck and muddle” (Bodily Natures 8). By conceptualizing ourselves as apart from messy nature, we intellectually circumvent the processes by which human biological life contributes daily to the accumulation of waste. However, we cannot elude our scatological necessities. Nature continues to impose these realities on our bodies, even when we live in cities that are removed from rural areas. Sewers offer us the illusion that we live in harmony with nature because the dirtiest aspects of these subterranean spaces are hidden for the large majority of city-dwellers; the existence of these concealed systems procures a clean and healthy environment for human beings.

Throughout *Morirás lejos*, sewers figure prominently. Sewers are not only spaces of human control built to separate humans from natural waste; in this work, they become spaces of resistance against forced violence. The first example of the sewers appears in the sections written by Josephus (entitled “Diáspora”). Josephus describes the siege against Jerusalem by the Romans and he focuses on the repugnant and supremely atrocious details that typify Roman fighting tactics. The attack on Jerusalem causes great devastation to the natural environment: Romans kill or torture the Jews without pity. However, their attack is not solely against humans: they also destroy nature to fulfill their



mission. In their zeal to raze the Jewish capital, the Romans devastate the environment: “para construir sus nuevas máquinas de asalto los romanos talaron todos los árboles que crecían noventa estadios en derredor de Jerusalén. Bosques y huertas quedaron convertidas en páramos. La guerra transformó en desierto uno de los paisajes más hermosos de Oriente” (33).

In addition to destroying natural beauty around Jerusalem, the Romans' attacks also signified noxious and unhygienic conditions for those dwelling within its walls: “las calles se poblaban de muertos y de hombres como fantasmas. Nadie tenía ya fuerzas para enterrar a los cadáveres, ni siquiera para arrojarlos a los barrancos de extramuros- y los vivos codiciaban su paz. El olor de la corrupción torturaba a sitiados y sitiadores” (32). As the Romans assail their city, the Jews bear witness to the many consequences for the environment that war wages, both for flora and fauna.

In Josephus' account, violence against the natural world is evident, and it is within this violent destruction that sewers garner importance. Since it was impossible to exit the sieged city without encountering a painful death at the hands of the Romans, in some cases, people fled to subterranean spaces. “En cloacas y subterráneos descubrieron los cuerpos de dos mil que pactaron darse muerte unos a otros o se suicidaron o se consumieron por hambre. Aunque el olor del pudridero los rechazaba los romanos bajaron en busca de tesoros ocultos. Su ambición quedó satisfecha” (43). Violence is indeed the impetus for the flight of the Jews to these rancid and fetid regions. While meant to maintain a

separation between a clean setting and a dirty one, sewers are now the only space available for resistance. The reeking subterranean fail to function as they should- as places that separate humans from natural waste- and the presence of combatants within them symbolizes the degradation of the Jewish people. Also noteworthy is that the Romans, who in that time period supposedly modeled the paradigm of high culture, descend to the sewers to dispossess treasures off the dead bodies of their victims. The Roman presence in these putrid plots proves how sewers in this section incarnate the degradation of the natural environment in the city and how this degradation is the result of violence.

Josephus' sewer scenes are not Pacheco's own creation, a fact which enhances the fascination of the novel with violence since it highlights the continuity of environmental degradation across borders, languages, and technologically diverse periods of history and cultures. Sewers maintain their execrable properties in any place, and the inclusion of these historical passages underlines the way in which *Morirás lejos* conceives of violence as a natural enemy to nature.

Sewers also function as spaces of resistance in the accounts of the uprising of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust. Similar to the scenes of the siege of Jerusalem, in Warsaw the sewers are converted into areas for refugees and resistors. According to the testimony of one survivor, "el mismo 16 de febrero de 1943 en que se expidió la orden secreta de Himmler comenzamos a cavar un gueto debajo del gueto: una red subterránea de

fortificaciones, arsenales, refugios, comunicados entre sí mediante el Káanal: el laberinto de las cloacas” (53). This space of resistance reveals an intensification of the degradation of the environment as the subterranean nexus demarcates a ghetto within a ghetto (which in itself already represents the degraded city). On this occasion, nevertheless, the sewer at first seems to promise the possibility of defying the helplessness that the Jews are experiencing. In the sewers the Jews plan attacks and organize themselves in order to fight for their survival; indeed, they achieve certain success. The sewer-renegades resist the onslaught of violence from the Germans for many days. Despite their efforts, eventually the escalated violence reaches the depths of their subterranean lairs. “Con detectores de sonido y perros amaestrados los SS encontraron túneles y refugios. Ponían cargas de dinamita y una vez volado el reducto arrojaban gases a su interior para que nadie sobreviviera” (68). The sewer in Warsaw is the only space open for the Jews; it is a ruinous plot, and yet even there the Jews suffer the onslaught of violence from Hitler’s minions. The resistance formed from the heart of the sewer therefore accentuates the critical position of the novel, which suggests that humans’ capacity to thrive in cities is distorted and twisted when violence threatens the natural environment.

The scenes of destruction reach a climax when they detail the real ecological crisis caused by this violence. “Se anubló el aire, llovieron cenizas sobre la ciudad, miles de combatientes se calcinaron en los refugios, las densas aguas del Káanal hirvieron durante muchos días. Los reflectores continuaron

escudriñando las ruinas y los cañones consumaron la destrucción” (63). The image of a city on fire, choking from the conflagration, corresponds to the argument of the book about the effect of violence on the natural urban environment. This post-apocalyptic portrait of the ghetto of Warsaw underscores the intensity of the representation of the effects of violence. Interpreting the sewers in *Morirás lejos* within an ecological context signals the relationship between violence against humans and violence against the environment, a point which the novel painstakingly highlights. The fact that humans flee to sewers as spaces of resistance indicates a concern on the part of the novel for condemning violence as a degradation of nature.

#### *The ghetto as a human zoo*

Ghettos are another urban space of ecological interest in this novel. Michael Bennett quotes John Carter and Trevor Jones who define the relationship between the ghetto and the rest of the city: “the ghetto may be interpreted as the ‘Third World within,’ a space existing in the same economic relationship to the surrounding... city as does the colony to the metropolis” (170). The dynamic of submission which characterizes ghettos reveals a structure of power and oppression. What is striking about the Warsaw environs in *Morirás lejos* is the portrayal of the ghetto as a human zoo. According to the testimony of Ludwig Hirshfeld, the Germans themselves envisaged the ghetto in this way. “Atraviesan el gueto autobuses turísticos. Por sus ventanillas se asoman rostros que la curiosidad desfigura. Para los alemanes se trata de una visita al

zoológico. Göbbels les ha enseñado qué significa el poder y cómo hay que despreciar a las otras razas” (47). In the minds of the German oppressors, the ghetto serves the same purpose as a zoo.

Looking at this idea through an ecocritical lens, a zoo is a built environment in an urban locale that bestows the opportunities to humans to observe savage animals and therefore experience nature without having to leave the confines of the civilized city. Few people have a problem with enjoying a nice day out at the zoo, so the image of a despoiled space such as a ghetto representing a zoo may at first cause cognitive dissonance. This problem is resolved by understanding that zoos, in the eyes of many critics, are enclosures that perpetuate cruelty and imperialism. In a review of a book by Randy Malamud about representations of animals in captivity, Carol Adams incorporates the thesis of the work to confirm the following:

Zoos present a restricted, imperialistic, supremacist view of the natural world. Zoos are cruel. They inflict pain. Zoos steal not only the physical animals but also "their more metaphysical essence and integrity" (325). Zoos are not, despite their claims, mimetic of a larger macrocosm (325). Animal captivity therefore is harmful to the captive animal and to the human spectator. "People imprison animals, and pretend that they are bettering themselves by such actions" (27). Zoos want us to misread them as they inculcate in us a spectatorship of voyeurism. (161-162)

In the light of this theory on zoos, it is not difficult to perceive the significance of a zoo in an analysis of the natural environment in *Morirás lejos*. The problematization of zoos in this case bridges the gap between these urban recreational locales and a ghetto in Poland during World War II. The urban

space of the ghetto is much like a zoo in the sense that the control over caged-in bodies enables human beings to subdue those who are imprisoned. Malamud asserts, "Zookeepers possess extensive traditions of oppressing animals without being called to account; the voice-less victims cannot expose them" (179). Achieving this spatial power facilitated the German frenzy for committing violence in Warsaw, something which *Morirás lejos* addresses. In the section incorporating testimonies from survivors, one man expounds upon the connection between violence and the ghetto: "Al tiempo que se concentraba en guetos a los judíos se multiplicaban los actos de sadismo: violaciones colectivas en sinagogas, prender fuego a las barbas de los rabinos, obligarlos a tragar carne de cerdo arrodillados en la plaza pública ante una multitud gozosa y hostil" (49). The control over these bodies in such a cramped enclosure proliferates the acts of violence against the Jewish people. In the novel, two types of violence emerge from this section: physical and psychological violence.

Again, Malamud contends that a zoo in and of itself is a degradation of nature because it enslaves animals and compromises their natural freedom. Similarly, the Warsaw ghetto is a cage that transgresses human autonomy and exhibits the physical damage that a ghetto represents in the urban space. The following narration confirms, "Separados de Varsovia por muros y alambradas cuatrocientos mil seres poblamos el gueto: de cinco a ocho en cada habitación. Recibimos doscientas calorías diarias: una décima parte de lo que el ser

humano necesita para vivir” (46). This section illuminates the horrendous physical conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto.

In addition to the physical violence in these passages, there are also dire consequences for the Jewish victims' psyches. With regards to the deleterious nature of zoos on the mind, Malamud affirms that the zoo is a locus of pain: “Its cruelty reveals itself most obviously through the range of barbarities that captive animals suffer. Strains of psychological torment and cultural sadism...often accompany this physical anguish directly, or emanate metaphorically from the zoo” (179). The comparison between the ghetto and a zoo reveals a deprivation of human dignity, worsened by the fact that the Germans actually treat animals better than they treat their fellow human beings. For instance, one witness asks a Jew, “¿Qué quisieras ser?- Me responde:- Un perro, porque a los centinelas les gustan los perros” (47). While the Jews don't even figure in the food chain, animals *do* receive compassion from the Germans. This sharp contrast between the treatment of humans and dogs furthers the psychological violence that the ghetto space propagates, impelling some Jewish people to wish to trade their own humanity for a dog's life in order to avoid so much affliction.

To reiterate, the ghetto in the novel reveals the treatment of human beings as animals. This human zoo is a horrific degradation of the natural environment. The over-crowding, unsanitary conditions, and extreme indigence render a place completely robbed of its beauty and health: the human zoo is nothing more than a portrait of misery of an entire city of people. Ultimately, the ghetto is another

example of the way the novel critiques violence as a cause of degradation of the natural environment in the urban sphere. Very much like Josephus' writings, the section about the Warsaw ghetto uprising is not an original piece from the author but rather the testimony of witnesses who experienced the event. The use of witness testimony from an historical episode fosters a sense that the natural destruction of the environment is not limited to the page of fiction but is a real-world phenomenon outside of any created plot by the author. In this sense, the ghetto as a zoo takes on an extra-textual essence, making the theme of violence against nature even more striking in the novel.

#### *The park as a contaminated and barbaric space*

The final urban space important to the framework of the text is the neighborhood where the present voice of the novel occurs. In all of the passages entitled "Salónica," a man sits on a Mexico City park bench while another man observes him from behind the curtains of an adjacent house. The park is a significant space in the development of a literary critique of cultural urban ecology. Bennett and Teague offer this insight regarding parks: "the word 'nature' usually calls to mind open spaces, perhaps with a few trees, wild animals, or bodies of water. We often forget that these gifts from Mother Nature are also found in the midst of the cities" (5). A park is the paradigmatic zone which extends the boundary of what constitutes nature within the city. Furthermore, in *Morirás lejos* several scenes take place within this park, converting it into an important place for this study of urban ecology.



The specific park in *Morirás lejos* is particularly noteworthy because the novel mentions this space more than any other. Since this is the case, how does it correlate to the theme of violence? The answer to this quandry emerges in the first paragraph of the work, “[E]n el parque donde hay un pozo cubierto por una torre de mampostería, el mismo hombre de ayer está sentado en la misma banca leyendo la misma sección, ‘El aviso oportuno,’ del mismo periódico... Todo huele a vinagre” (11). Although an apparently trivial detail, the smell of vinegar is in no way insignificant. The description about vinegar appears in the park space no fewer than thirty eight times throughout the novel and the repetitious nature of the allusion warrants examination. Clearly vinegar smells quite bitter. This harsh odor, without a doubt, impedes one’s ability to enjoy being in a park; the escape that a park ought to offer in the middle of urban industrialization is converted into a reminder of the toxic by-products of the city. What stands out as significant regarding this reference is that with almost every mention of the man in the park, the refrain about vinegar promptly follows. The juxtaposition of the character with the experience of a soiled environment suggests that the smell represents something symbolic about the life of the man. Slowly but surely the novel develops the possibilities regarding the links between the man and the odor. One possibility relates to the criticism of many ecocritics about the dangers of industrial urbanization. According to the suppositions of the narration, the man returns to the zone where his house used to be and he sees the environmental degradation of the area:

Y ya no están las casas, los jardines donde siempre era otoño, las calles empedradas, el montículo central por el que pasaba el tranvía, la corriente una vez límpida y luego corrompida a fuerza de basura, lodo, escombros; sus orillas de musgo. Apenas quedan árboles y ya no hay casas, no hay jardines, no hay río: sólo avenidas abiertas sobre la destrucción y automóviles incesantes, siempre en aumento. (27)

The city has advanced at a high price: the cost of its natural beauty. The whiffs of vinegar could represent the loss that the man feels and his nostalgia for a cleaner and more natural setting. With the reference to the forfeiture of trees and gardens, the novel could very well be lamenting the replacement of a serene, spotless environment with a lesser, more vile version of the natural habitat.

While we certainly cannot rule out the above theory, the narrative weaves another possibility even more probable that may explain the connection between the vinegar and the man. The games of gazes between eme (from behind the curtains) and the man in the park may be much less innocent than it seems at the beginning of the work. One likely option is that the man, who in this section becomes known by the alias “Alguien,” quite possibly has been spying on eme in order to demand justice for atrocities he has committed. The relationship between the two transforms into one between judge and condemned:

Nadie tiene derecho a censurar lo más humano que hay en Alguien: la desesperación de haber caído sin culpa en todas las regiones del infierno- la esperanza se incluye- desde el momento en que llegó a los campos hasta el segundo cuando acecha a eme; de la época en que fue torturado y vio morir a los suyos, a la tarde que lo encuentra sentado en la banca de un parque con olor a vinagre, bajo un chopo ahíto de inscripciones, a unos catorce o quince metros del pozo. (109)

In this scenario, we perceive a very strong relationship between the contamination of the natural environment and violence. Eme symbolizes, for the man in the park, all of the destruction that has devastated his world, that has killed his people, and that has eliminated everything he held dear. Gustavo Lespalda proposes that *Morirás lejos* also supports the notion that it is survivor's guilt which plagues Alguien. In his analysis of the novel he compares Pacheco's writing to common themes of discussions on the Holocaust. "Es casi una regla que los culpables de estas atrocidades proclamen su inocencia y que las víctimas se sientan culpables. Culpables de haber sobrevivido, ahogados de angustia y vergüenza por lo que fueron obligados a vivir" (242). In addition to bereaving everyone he held close, Alguien could also feel guilty for being the one able to sit in the park and read a newspaper, a fact which corresponds to his complicated relationship to the man behind the curtains. The smell of vinegar is the symbolic reminder that no matter how much he might enjoy life, the bitter loss of his loved ones will never be erased.

Ultimately, the odor of vinegar reminds Alguien of violence. All of the damage eme caused is embodied by the stench in the air: the Holocaust in this moment in time has ended, but the aroma of past viciousness looms over them both like a wretched, bitter cloud of vinegar. Here the degradation of the park, a natural environment in an urban space, is linked with violence, especially the sadistic, brutal kind that typified the Holocaust. The novel again demonstrates the

connection between violence and the ruination of nature. Even a supposedly attractive locale is marred when the legacy of violence permeates its limits.

Vinegar is not the only element expressing overtones of sadism in the park space. Towards the beginning of the novel, there is a peculiar blip about insects that evidences a trend in nature which parallels the human violence chronicled in the work. The insect interactions correlate with a special branch of critical analysis which probes the way in which animals are represented in narratives. In his discussion on this topic, Aaron Gross argues that animal studies starts with “the basic observation that *across time and across cultures humans imagine themselves through animal others*” (5). The idea that humans envision themselves in animals correlates directly with the scenes regarding insects in this novel. *Morirás lejos* offers an unusually humanistic picture of the insects at the feet of the poplar tree nearby the bench where Alguien is seated:

[L]as hormigas acosan a un gorgojo, la huida es imposible: está solo, sitiado entre las hierbas altísimas- escarpaciones, contrafuertes-; las hormigas lo llevarán al centro de la tierra por galerías interminables, lo arrastrarán a sus depósitos o salas de tortura; por ahora, sin comprenderlo (los gorgojos no piensan: ¿los gorgojos no piensan?), el gorgojo está solo, cercado por la tribu solidaria. (54)

Without any context, this insertion of a colony of ants carrying a weevil to their torture chambers would seem like a preposterous anthropomorphization of bugs. A first-time reader might especially wonder at this depiction since it comes at beginning of the novel before any hints towards the nature of eme’s apparent history as a Nazi officer. Nonetheless, considering the novel in its entirety, it is

not difficult to find out “what bugs” here. The weevil’s struggle foreshadows themes to come: the ants, with organized, efficient machinations hoist the unsuspecting weevil to the recondite depths of their lairs which will function as a den of violence. The solitary tribe, of course, alludes to the discourse of the Third Reich about the supremacy of the Aryan Race, a concept that not only inspired millions to kill, but also to torture those of “inferior races.”

The allegory of the insects records the procession of this unified group in their quest to carry out their mission. In the same way the novel registers the procession of the helpless Jews who are ushered in trains to the concentration camps, all under the command of the Nazis, and eme in particular. Once there, many are forced to unclothe and head towards the “showers.” Pacheco’s description of the gas chambers ends in a fragmented flurry of horror:

“Entran...Se apaga la luz en el interior de la cámara. Los cristales de ácido prúsico descenden por las columnas. El *Zyklon B* emana por las hendiduras del piso y las paredes. Entonces la confusión el azoro el terror la búsqueda de aire y los gritos/ sobre todo los gritos...” (90-91).

The statement converted into a question: “los gorgojos no piensan- ¿los gorgojos no piensan?” unites the terror of the two experiences especially when evaluating the linguistic link between thought and word. While the question of whether a weevil has sentient thought remains interesting, the allegorical nature of the bug’s suffering ultimately eludes any scientific explanation and boomerangs the narration back to the Jewish prisoners at the moment of their

mass death. As the massacre occurs, thoughts become jumbled: there is literally no way to describe in words something so atrocious. Coherent thoughts cede to instinctual panic, making reality abstruse and language beyond screams nearly impossible. Lespalda remarks on this idea of the inenarrable nature of violence in *Morirás lejos* by comparing this idea to the testimony of one survivor, Primo Levi. According to Lespalda,

*En Morirás lejos se repite que las palabras son sólo vanos intentos ni siquiera de expresar sino apenas de sugerir lo que pasó, que no sabemos siquiera la mitad de cuanto ocurrió en los campos de exterminio. El carácter de inenarrable del horror, la incompatibilidad del orden fáctico con el orden del discurso es una constante en los testimonios de Levi. (239)*

The parallels between the weevil's suffering at the hands of the ants and the extermination of the Jewish nation at the hands of Nazis concatenates the biological activities of nature with humanity's violence. Generally speaking, insects do not torture by nature: they eat other insects only out of survival and do not have the sentient capacity to purposely abuse other creatures for pleasure. As a result, both the human and animal worlds are inverted: humans are animalized as they methodically carry out unfeeling acts of torture, thereby ignoring humanity's moral capacity, and insects are humanized, which in this case does not denote a step up in the ethical chain. This microcosm of violence, a few feet away from where Alguien sits on the park bench, once again connects nature to the main theme of the novel. Even insects are not left unaffected by the overarching degradation that violence causes. The park space with its polluted

air and pitiless insects evokes an image of a natural world in the urban sphere vilified by the ever present violence in human culture.

The weevil's tragic fate is not the only instance where the animals on the lower end of the food chain are mentioned in conjunction with torture. Apropos of his role as Nazi tormentor, eme develops a fixation with the worms that are ubiquitous in the park area:

[E]n ciertos meses aquellos gusanos torturables... que eme, nostálgico, primero vivisecciona con una hoja de afeitar y luego aplasta, o bien arroja al bóiler [sic]. En él los gusanos evocan, coruscantes y a punto de precipitarse por la rejilla, entre la ceniza aún moteada de fuego, la imaginería católica del infierno. (15)

In a blatantly explicit fashion the novel juxtaposes the death camps of the Jews with eme's current fixation. Worms, a defenseless invertebrate, stand in as representatives for the Jews that, similarly to these lesser life-forms, helplessly encountered death at the hands of an uncaring tyrant. Not surprisingly, the burning worms remind eme of the eternal pit of fire from the Catholic tradition. While the religious nuances of such a reference go beyond the scope of this chapter, it is prudent to indicate that the place evoked by this passage- hell- stands out as the one place in which the natural world is degraded beyond all recognition. Eme's violent treatment of humans and worms is associated with the complete and total degradation of any environment suitable for living beings.

As the novel demonstrates, the park, with its stinking smell, woeful weevils, antagonistic ants, and wretched worms stands as an urban space in which violence has diminished and corrupted ecological life. *Morirás lejos*

therefore maintains its emphasis on violence and continues to prove that this human problem affects the natural world.

In spite of the fact that the narration of the novel takes places almost exclusively in cities, there is reason to speak about ecocritical issues in terms of their importance in this work. The novel deals with degradation of the natural environment and proposes that this degradation is caused by violence; indeed, the novel represents violence against human beings as a violence that directly affects the ecosphere. Three urban spaces- the sewer, the ghetto, and the park- all demonstrate this connection between violence and nature. Consequently, an urban ecocritical reading of *Morirás lejos* reveals the concern on the part of the novel for condemning human violence not simply because of its negative consequences for the human species but also for the damage it causes the natural environment; in this way, *Morirás lejos* does not simply limit the implications of its story to the human realm, it also endorses the environment as an important character in the living biosphere.

### **2666: Urban toxicity, desert images, and repetitive violence**

2666 is seminal to any discussion of violence in Latin American narrative. The multitudinous scenes of murder, fights, and war in the text correlate to my reading of *Morirás lejos*. Similarly to Pacheco's emphasis on violence in *Morirás lejos*, Bolaño strives to highlight violence as an integral component of his narrative. In an article on the violence in this author's writing, Carlos Burgos argues that Bolaño's vision of violence can be summarized by this quote from his



short story *El Ojo Silva*: “De la violencia, de la verdadera violencia, no se puede escapar, al menos no nosotros, los nacidos en Latinoamérica en la década de los cincuenta, los que rondábamos los veinte años cuando murió Salvador Allende” (123). Burgos argues that Bolaño conceptualizes violence as something ineludible and something with which all Latin Americans of his generation must wrestle. In accordance with Dorfman’s understanding of the inescapability of violence, Bolaño also registers this topic as an unavoidable phenomenon in Latin America.

The instances of violence in *2666* are so numerous that entire theses could be written on this one topic alone. However, for the sake of brevity, I will focus on two particular aspects of violence. First, as I did in *Morirás lejos*, I will explore the relationship between the environment and violence in the novel, using ecocriticism as the basis for my theoretical groundwork. Furthermore, I will expand into a discussion about the excessive violence against women in Part Four of the book and how their lifeless corpses are related to an ecocritical reading of the novel.

The book is divided into five parts, each of which maintains a separate cohesiveness that allows it to stand alone as a narrative; these parts vary greatly in terms of location, characters, and emphasis. However, there is a connection between all these parts as Jorge Volpi explains: “En *2666*, la inacabada novela póstuma de Bolaño a la que no puede asignársele otro adjetivo que <<colosal>>, Ciudad Juárez transforma en Santa Teresa, el lugar en el que confluyen las mil

historias de la novela y que constituye, como el propio autor lo insinúa, <<el centro del mundo>>” (417). In some way each section finds its axis converging in Santa Teresa, Mexico, the fictional representation of the real Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

In the first section of *2666*, entitled “The Part about the Critics,” four European literary scholars, Frenchman Jean-Claude Pelletier, Spaniard Manuel Espinoza, Italian Piero Morini, and Briton Liz Norton strike up a close rapport when they discover their similar passion for a mysterious German author named Archimboldi. The four critics end up searching for this author, whom some speculate to be a candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. In the process of their investigation, three of the four of them voyage to Santa Teresa, Mexico, the last known location where Archimboldi was rumored to have traveled. The section also explores the scholars’ own love-lives and desires, which are intertwined with their relationships to one another and their hunt for their literary obsession. Both Pelletier and Espinoza have a sexual relationship with Liz Norton simultaneously, but it is ultimately Morini who becomes her lover. The overarching theme of Part One- the search for the elusive Archimboldi- ends in disappointment: the section concludes with the critics’ utter failure to locate the author, but their certainty that he was indeed present in the city. In Part One a few references begin to make manifest that something odd is happening in Santa Teresa, a fact which will become much clearer in later parts of *2666*.

The second section of the book, “The Part about Amalfitano,” relates the story of Óscar Amalfitano, a Chilean professor who marries a Spanish woman named Lola with whom he has a daughter, Rosa. When Rosa is still a toddler Lola abandons them both in Barcelona under the ostensible excuse of visiting a poet living in a sanatorium in Mondragón. What ensues is Lola’s epistolary communication with Amalfitano, detailing her journey throughout Spain as a vagabond; years later she returns to Barcelona to inform Amalfitano that she has a son in Paris and that she has contracted AIDS. Amalfitano decides soon after to move with Rosa to Santa Teresa, Mexico to teach at the university there. The remainder of the section narrates Amalfitano’s slow descent into madness in Santa Teresa as he hears voices that profess to be those of his deceased grandfather and father and he becomes obsessed with a geometry book that he can’t remember where he bought and which he hangs up on his clothes line, “para ver cómo [el libro] resiste la intemperie, los embates de esta naturaleza desiértica” (246). The underlying threat in Santa Teresa to young, vulnerable women is a phenomenon that, while not in the absolute foreground of the book, certainly becomes more explicit in Part Two.

“The Part about Fate” marks the third segment of the novel which centers on an African American journalist named Quincy Williams, who goes by his nom-de-plume, Oscar Fate. When the sports columnist of the magazine for which he works suddenly dies, Fate is assigned an article on a prizefight in the city of Santa Teresa. During his trip he hears about the series of unsolved murders of

women in the city and he offers to help a female reporter who enjoins him to accompany her in a visit to a detained American citizen in the Santa Teresa jail. The night before Fate leaves, he goes to the boxing match and meets Rosa Amalfitano with whom he flees from suspicious activity at an after-party at a Mexican journalist's house. They go to Rosa's house and Óscar Amalfitano advises them to cross the border to Arizona and then to get Rosa on a flight to Barcelona. That morning they meet the female Mexican journalist and visit the American in prison who turns out to be a gargantuan and intimidating figure. The section ends with Fate and Rosa crossing the border; Óscar Amalfitano's destiny is left unknown.

The fourth part of the book, "The Part about the Crimes," is the longest unit of the novel and details the pernicious succession of assassinations of women in the city of Santa Teresa and the police investigations of these crimes. Intercalated between the stories of these murders are narratives about the police officers' personal lives. While some officers seem interested in solving these cases, in many instances the novel emphasizes the ineptitude of law enforcement as a factor in the lack of justice. The novel highlights the impunity of those committing the crimes in conjunction with police complicity as factors for the lack of indictments for these murders.

Part Five, "The Part about Archimboldi," travels back historically further in time than the previous sections as it starts at the end of World War I with the marriage of a disabled German veteran to a woman blind in one eye. They have

two children, Hans and Lotte Reiter. Part Five follows Hans' childhood and adulthood as he transitions from a rural, untutored young man to a self-educated author. His experiences as a soldier on the Eastern front in World War II and his subsequent move to Cologne, Germany mark the first part of his adulthood in which he begins his career as an author and changes his pen name to Benno von Archimboldi. After his partner Ingeborg dies, he lives and travels throughout the European continent and keeps in touch only with his editor, who faithfully publishes anything he sends. The end of Part Five relates the story of Lotte, Hans' sister. She marries and has a son, Klaus Haas, who immigrates to America and then disappears. After Lotte's husband dies, she hears news from America that Klaus has been detained in a Mexican prison, accused of the murders of several women in Santa Teresa. Lotte does everything in her power to help Klaus but eventually she is too frail to continue traveling to Mexico and so she beseeches Archimboldi to take on Klaus' problem. The novel ends with Archimboldi's departure to Mexico.

As I argued in my analysis of *Morirás lejos*, in 2666 the environment also collides with the city in a variety of ways. The material presented in these five sections is so immense that it would be prudent to spotlight the most important urban space in the work: the city of Santa Teresa. Bolaño's envisioning of the natural environment in 2666 includes many spaces of interest in Part Four. In particular, maquiladoras and trash dumps emerge as significant markers of the cost of industrialization. Additionally, the desert plays an enormous role in the

interpretation of the work. Just as in *Morirás lejos*, the natural environment in the urban space collides with violence in 2666 underscoring the way in which Bolaño envisions the city and bloodshed.

*Maquiladoras and trash dumps: the dark spaces of modernity*

When speaking about nature in the city, one point of great interest is the way in which industry affects the urban environment. In 2666 the preeminent urban centers of industry are the maquiladoras, factories generally owned by international corporations but which employ Mexican laborers for their cheap labor. The promise of a good job attracts thousands of Mexicans from all over the country in this book. Officials tout the amazingly low unemployment rate in several places and the idea of a city whose industry is “pujante” is a notion that other characters also believe. Some characters who recognize the danger for women in Santa Teresa still begrudgingly admit that the maquiladoras allow for a better life for most women:

¿Sabes cuál es la ciudad con el índice de desempleo femenino más bajo de México?.. Pues sí, Santa Teresa... Aquí casi todas las mujeres tienen trabajo. Un trabajo mal pagado y explotado, con horarios de miedo y sin garantías sindicales, pero trabajo al fin y al cabo, lo que para muchas mujeres llegadas de Oaxaca o Zacatecas es una bendición. (710)

However, while several characters may view the maquiladoras as their economic saving grace, the descriptions of these places exemplify a discrepancy between the hopeful economic milieu and their negative impact on the surroundings areas. In several instances when maquiladoras are mentioned, they are associated with toxic waste. In one particularly repulsive occasion, the

insufficiencies of the maquiladora severely pollute the nearby neighborhoods: “Las salidas del parque industrial... son deficitarias tanto en el alumbrado como en la pavimentación, así como también en su sistema de alcantarillas: casi todo los desperdicios del parque van a caer en la colonia Las Rositas, donde forman un lago de fango que el sol blanquea” (469). The lake of sludge is startlingly disgusting. Moreover, the factory itself is deficient; its sewer systems fail to properly separate waste from human society, thus breaking down the natural ecosphere which allows humans to live in urban places without facing serious health consequences. While these maquiladoras are the most important economic urban spaces in the city of Santa Teresa, their promise of employment comes with a corollary: ruination of the habitat where the laborers live and breathe.

The maquiladoras are also linked throughout the novel to another key metropolitan space: trash dumps. The waste products of the maquiladoras fill several landfills throughout the area: “En el basurero donde se encontró a la muerta no sólo se acumulaban los restos de los habitantes de las casuchas sino también los desperdicios de cada maquiladora” (449). By connecting the maquiladoras ideologically to the trash dumps, the novel implicitly relates the development of city industry with the significance of the trash dumps in the urban space.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, trash dumps are mentioned on several occasions; the “*basurero*” figures prominently throughout Part Four. Some of the scenes with garbage dumps are poignant reminders of the dark side of industrialization. In the

case of the El Chile, a clandestine landfill close to the Hermanos Corinto brick factory, the depiction of the inhabitants of this place reinforces the extreme degradation of human life associated with these industrial dumps:

Los habitantes nocturnos de El Chile son escasos. Su esperanza de vida, breve. Mueren a lo sumo a los siete meses de transitar por el basurero. Sus hábitos alimenticios y su vida sexual son un misterio. Es probable que hayan olvidado comer y coger. O que la comida y el sexo para ellos ya sea otra cosa, inalcanzable, inexpresable, algo que queda fuera de la acción y la verbalización. Todos, sin excepción, están enfermos. Sacarle la ropa a un cadáver de El Chile equivale a despellejarlo. (467)

Much in the same way that *Morirás lejos* emphasizes the moral collapse of nations polluting their environment, the impact of human actions on the environment degrades certain marginalized people who seek refuge in the very plots meant to separate refuse from society. While the Jews in *Morirás lejos* faced more direct persecution from those in power, the inhabitants of El Chile share a common concern: society in some way has degraded them so much that they cannot even imagine normal human behaviors; eating and procreating are off limits. These natural biological processes are interrupted by the inundation of industrial waste throughout the city. The trash dumps demonstrate the degraded environment of the urban area. Yet, they do not stand in isolation. The novel portrays them as vivid contrasts to the maquiladoras. Industry in this city may shine brightly in the minds of some, but the darker side of growth casts a shadow over the promise of an optimistic economic future. T.V. Reed suggests that this type of degradation of the land historically is linked to colonial relationships. “The colonizing process that labeled some people (and some economic practices)



'primitive,' 'under developed,' and 'inferior' justified, rationalized, and enabled degradation of the land. Neocolonial processes continue to do so today in somewhat more subtle but just as deadly ways" (27). El Chile is a stark example of the way in which the production of capital, a marker of neo-colonial economic structures, continues to perpetuate these types of toxic relationships.

The subtle, more deadly ways that Reed mentions are spotlighted in 2666 as the demand to produce for mass consumption entraps those who are deemed inferior in the cycle of violence. Related to this topic, Vandana Shiva offers an explanation of how neo-colonial practices threaten women and children in developing countries. She argues that Western ideologies push for development universally, professing that economic growth will eliminate poverty; in reality, women and children are actually in more danger of impoverishment for two reasons. First, the push to produce robs women of natural resources that they might use for non-commercial production. Second, the market mechanism only takes into account the maximization of profits and capital accumulation, thereby failing to value any work outside of commercial production (such as child care or the sustainable production of items for the household like homegrown produce, or homemade clothing and furniture). Shiva points out that the precarious position of women is exacerbated by the fact that the participation of women in the market economy was enforced by power structures against which they had little recourse to fight. All of these factors lead Shiva to contend, "Development and dispossession augmented the colonial processes of ecological degradation

and the loss of political control over nature's sustenance base. Economic growth was a new colonialism, draining resources away from those who most needed them" (181).

In *2666*, this battle between economic development and the environment features the plight of numerous women who risk their lives to partake in the promise of a life a step above poverty, a poverty caused by the same mechanisms that advocated the development of the maquiladoras. Ensnared in the concealed areas of trash dumps, poorly lit areas, sewer pipes, waste grounds, shacks, and abandoned buildings are the lifeless bodies of women, many of whom were employed by the maquiladoras before their demise. The tragedy of finding these bodies thrown away in these urban spaces of environmental degradation points to the connection the novel demonstrates between urbanization, violence, and the natural environment. *2666* captures the perils of neo-colonial structures and environmental degradation, and links contemporary society to obscene prospects of urban violence. In this way, Bolaño's conception of urban space parallels Pacheco's notion that violence against humans and against the environment are inextricably linked.

Although in both Pacheco's *Morirás lejos* and Bolaño's *2666*, there is link between violence against humans and violence against the environment, a more nuanced reading highlights the dissimilarities in the overall vision of violence between the two authors. In *Morirás lejos* the destruction of the environment is a direct result of wars raged against human beings. The condemnation of violence

against the environment in Pacheco's novel connects more with the notion that this damage is unavoidable when human beings are systematically targeted for violence. *2666*, however, approaches this subject from a related but distinct perspective. The ruination of the biosphere in this work is not a direct result of violence against humans, but rather symbolic of a larger trend of pessimism in Bolaño's work. New modes of production in modern society degrade everything in their path, and enable humans to assume new forms of violence. Destruction of the environment is not a result of violence in *2666*; it is a symptom of the larger framework of depravity that the novel establishes. Nowhere can this phenomenon be more clearly seen in *2666* than in the desert space.

*The desert as a trope of terror*

Considering that all parts of *2666* converge in the arid city of Santa Teresa, it is logical that the desert landscape plays a central role in Bolaño's massive novel. In fact, before the novel even begins, the epigraph suggests that the topography of the desert will be pertinent to the work: "Un oasis de horror en medio de un desierto de aburrimiento" (Epigraph). This quote from Charles Baudelaire evokes the idea of horror as remedy to boredom and introduces the violent tenor of the entire work. Interpreting the epigraph within the context of *2666*, it seems that the desert is symbolic for the ennui of contemporary life and that the respite from such monotony is practiced through the infliction of suffering. The presence of the desert habitat in the novel creates a complex

dynamic in which both the literal desert and its figurative connotations intertwine and thus create a physically and spiritually dry order, plagued by dread.

When taking into account the role of this natural environment in Bolaño's epic novel, basic questions about the significance of a desert emerge. What images does a desert evoke? How does the setting of desert emerge as both its own figure in the work as well as the natural backdrop to human life? In his book on the representation of the desert in American literature and art, Teague offers an insightful differentiation between the desert as a geographical construct and an ideological concept, announcing that the philosophical framework regarding deserts is as important as ecological characteristics. On giving a definition of what a desert is, Teague clarifies, "I will simply take *desert* to mean 'a place where habits learned in humid areas are bound to fail' ... A desert is, as Mary Austin suggested, a region where 'not the law, but the land sets the limits'" (5).

Inherent in this definition are two key points: one, geographical characteristics (i.e. aridity and difficulty of cultivating crops) define the desert; two, ideological traits also provide us with a conception of this space (i.e. the inflexibility of the land towards human institutions such as law). Teague develops the idea that in the past, deserts have often symbolized spaces void of life or other elements which provide vitality for human beings. A desert can communicate the idea of an environment outside of civilization because it does not sustain a comfortable ambient for humans. Synonyms like wasteland,

barrenness, and wilderness often bolster the typical imagery conjured by the desert zone.

Be that as it may, Teague replies that in the history of the Southwest U.S., the desert image has transformed given America's changing relationship with the region, which coincides with the development of cities and towns in the area.<sup>9</sup> The desert no longer denotes just wilderness but now connotes an arid space in which several populations have settled. Teague's acknowledgement that the desert area has evolved, at least conceptually, from a barren wasteland to a dry space certainly points to the reason for the existence of a city like Santa Teresa in which a large population is able to subsist in the desert space. However, an examination of *2666* reveals that although the desert space is "modern" and therefore represents a contemporary arid urban center, in many ways the desert in *2666* also upholds the traditional conceptualization of the space as hostile, unforgiving and wild.

The Sonora desert in *2666* is indeed an ideological construct. On the one hand, it is a space separate and opposed to the urban city of Santa Teresa; on the other, it is also completely inextricable from the city. On this first point, there are many examples when the desert is very clearly detached from the urban locale. For instance, when one police officer goes to the crime scene of a murdered woman, he looks out over the city of Santa Teresa and the description is as follows:

Por el este vio la carretera que llevaba a la sierra y el desierto, las luces de los camiones, las primeras estrellas, estrellas de verdad,

que venían con la noche desde el otro lado de las montañas. Por el norte no vio nada, sólo una gran planicie monótona, como si la vida se acabara más allá de Santa Teresa, pese a sus deseos y convicciones. (452)

Here the desert is isolated. Life in the city ends at the boundary marker, and the vastness of the monotonous plain impedes the city from disrupting its border. The remoteness of the space not only conveys a sense of separateness, but also elicits a sense of enmity in this passage. While those living in Santa Teresa would wish to see their life reflected back to them by the desert, the region seems to abruptly cut off life, despite all of the desires and convictions of Santa Teresa's inhabitants. In this passage a more traditional sense of desert arises as the pervading presence of wilderness hampers the development of human culture.

Nonetheless, in other occurrences, the border between desert and city becomes more blurred in the narrative: throughout the novel the desert encroaches on civilization and civilization encroaches on the desert. In some occasions, the city expands outward into the vast wasteland: "La segunda semana de marzo de 1997 se reanudó la ronda macabra con el hallazgo de un cuerpo en una zona desértica del sur de la ciudad, llamada El Rosario, que entraba en los planes urbanísticos municipales y en donde se pensaba construir un barrio de casas al estilo Phoenix" (681). However, in other moments, the city defines its identity based on the inherent desert space it occupies. For example, when retired American FBI agent Kessler visits the city, he receives the best suite in his hotel, which is not the honeymoon suite or presidential suite, but

rather the desert suite, “porque desde su terraza, que estaba de cara al sur y al oeste, se apreciaba en toda su extensión la grandeza y soledad del desierto de Sonora” (731). Evident in this representation of the desert is the idea of symbiosis: the city and the desert feed off each other. However, it is the city which ultimately finds itself subordinate to the desert because the desert can stand alone while the city cannot escape the desert space. In many ways, the desert as an environment is more central to the story than the city itself because it not only frames the narrative, but it infiltrates the space of Santa Teresa, a city which takes on ethereal qualities in *2666* because of the horror and fascination it holds for all the characters.

How then to construe this symbiotic relationship between the city and the desert in *2666*? Very much like the narrated natural environment in *Morirás lejos*, the centrality of violence indicates how an ecocritical understanding of the desert space add meaning to the interpretation of the novel: the wasteland aura of the desert invades the city while the monotonous boredom of life pervades the desert. The absolute point of encounter between these two spaces is represented by one essential image: a pile of lifeless, broken corpses. It is the bodies of the mutilated, tortured, and assassinated women that further refine the definition of the spaces in which they appear. Bieke Willem identifies the connection between the city space and the dead bodies:

Mediante la sustitución de descripciones de lugares urbanos por descripciones detalladas de los cuerpos femeninos torturados, Bolaño crea la impresión de que esa 'ciudad infecta' (2004: 258), como la llama Amalfitano, el profesor fracasado de Santa Teresa,

es un cuerpo enfermo, cubierto de llagas. Por la metáfora de la ciudad como cuerpo enfermo y caníbal (el cielo, al atardecer, parecía una flor carnívora (2004: 172), Santa Teresa parece reflejar todas las infamias que tienen lugar en ella. (80)

The desert ceases to be just a space where life cannot be sustained because of its natural characteristics and now functions as the space where death occurs, not because of its own hostility but because of human malevolence. The city, an environment which *can* sustain life ordinarily is now the mass grave where hundreds of women rot. The two spaces are warped into one by their shifting boundaries of evil.

Yet these boundaries, while they are certainly physical, go beyond literal definitions. The desert space, in its most powerful form, functions symbolically in this novel. It is the same space in which the population is trying to live life and escape from the tedium of existence. Furthermore, this land represents the transformation of a vitalizing civilization into an arid environment, lacking in security and compassion, the necessary resources for life. Metaphorically, the desert is the natural environment of the souls in Santa Teresa: scorched, hostile, and unable to sustain human life. The city now serves as the mass grave of helpless, broken women in an oasis of evil in which many women “quedaron fuera de la lista o [jamás] nadie las encontró enterradas en fosas comunes en el desierto o esparcidas sus cenizas en medio de la noche...” (444). In ecocritical terms, the desert ceases to be just the background for human action but now amasses its own importance, thus taking seriously Buell’s challenge that the natural environment is “an actual independent party entitled to consideration for



its own sake” (77). Again, this environment stands in both as the physical and symbolic reality of the violence against women in Santa Teresa.

While the environment is certainly a key element in understanding violence in *2666*, the immense scope of the novel with regards to this theme demands a broader discussion of the aggression and bloodshed in the work. There are a plethora of violent moments in the work, but it is really how Bolaño frames the book around the assassinations of women in Santa Teresa which requires attention. The descriptions of femicides in Santa Teresa are excessive, and it is this excess of violence which merits further development.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Mutilated bodies and the testimonial power of a corpus of narration*

Although *2666* infuses violence throughout each book section, the instances of gore which for many are the most memorable and disturbing occur in Part Four, aptly titled “The Part about the Crimes.” The image of the tortured, lifeless corpse of a young woman mandates special attention within the purview of this study and begs the questions: in what ways do these bodies determine the importance of the representation of violence in *2666* and how does the female body in the novel correlate to notions of nature and culture?

In her article on the violence in the northern part of Mexico, Paz Balmaceda García-Huidobro discusses literary depictions of horror and assays Bolaño’s representation of violence in Part Four of *2666*. She begins by enquiring “¿Cómo narrar la violencia?” (327). What follows is an argument (in line with many significant theorists such as Deleuze and Baudrillard) that the written

recitation of violence breaks down the system of mimesis essential to narration because one cannot seem to preserve the dangerous content or the possibility of producing an identification. For Balmaceda and others, the difficulty lies in this: “la imposibilidad de recrear el peligro verdadero. De amenazar” (328). Due to the difficulty of recreating the real threat of violence, Balmaceda believes that it is impossible to narrate violence in a way that can encompass, in any real fashion, the lived experience of terror. Similar to Lespalda’s statement about the nature of testimonies from the Holocaust and the narration in *Morirás lejos*, Balmaceda contends that violence is inenarrable.

However, if violence is inenarrable, what is the significance of a novel like *2666* in which three-hundred and fifty page sections delineate a dizzying succession of murders in minutia? It would seem in this case that Bolaño missed the memo. Considering the author’s prolific sojourn into the abysmal world of evil and violence, Bolaño must believe that while violence in writing may not be able to precisely embody the horror of torture, pain, and murder, it can serve a purpose higher than a representative lack of accuracy; there must be a reason that the body count continues to accumulate.

Balmaceda’s article elucidates this matter by identifying the effects of attempting to represent violence in such specificity and quantity. While this author never utilizes the verb “desensitize” in her argument, she essentially purports that Bolaño’s narration creates a spectacle of horror that acclimates us to the human cadavers, thereby further removing us from the visceral impact of

these crimes. Per Balmaceda, “En ‘La parte de los crímenes’ la amenaza...brota con una fuerza descontrolada que pretende el efecto contrario: acostumbrar al lector a los cadáveres; hacer de una situación del todo descabellada y excesivamente violenta una situación normal en su reiteración, controlada” (332).

While Balmaceda does much to explain the process of what happens when violence becomes the centerpiece of narration, this is one point which deserves elaboration: the excessive reiteration of violence. On this subject, Balmaceda incorporates Baudrillard’s theory about how tautology robs subjects of their presence. Per Balmaceda’s reading of Baudrillard, “Nada (ni siquiera Dios) desaparece ya por su final o por su muerte, sino por su proliferación, contaminación, saturación, y transparencia, extenuación y exterminación, por una epidemia de simulación, transferencia a la existencia secundaria de la simulación” (335). Central to the author’s argument is that the repetitious enumeration of the mutilated bodies of women habituates us to violence and therefore, to a certain extent, robs the narration of an ability to produce presence. However, this reading abridges the potential of Bolaño’s offering unnecessarily. Is the only option for readers to become voyeurs, both horrified and attracted to the seemingly endless list of corpses and their forensic details, unable to truly grasp the terror of the lived experience of violence?

It may not be possible to avoid our voyeurism while analyzing *2666* (can any reader really avoid voyeurism while purposely snooping on the lives of

others, fictitious or not?); we should not, however, assume that the bloodshed is so excessive that the reader is inoculated against the negative impact that violence causes. I argue that the body of the tortured women is precisely the point in which Bolaño's narrative moves beyond desensitizing us to violence because it is juxtaposed with the completed body of writing that represents the testimony of these women.

The mutilated cadaver of the female is the central motif in *2666*. In each and every report about the dead women, the novel takes special pains to illuminate the cause of death, the location in which her body was found, the manner in which her body was violated and tortured, the clothing she was wearing when she was found, and any further investigations that the police undertake to solve the mystery of how and why she was murdered. In total, there are one hundred and seven distinct narratives regarding the mutilated, dead bodies of women found in Santa Teresa<sup>11</sup>. In the line of thinking which Balmaceda eloquently explicates, these stories should fatigue us and make us less responsive to the shock of reading about so much carnage. It is at this point, however, when the image of the broken bodies becomes crucial to consider. Bolaño's complete body of stories about these women serves as a linguistic counterpoint to the motif of the mutilated bodies of women. The reader may get fatigued with the violent tales of death throughout Part Four of *2666*; nevertheless, the novel shows absolutely no sign of narrative truncation. The first

victim's story is as important as the last victim's story and is as important as every story in between.<sup>12</sup>

Confirming the idea that repetition is significant for these women's stories, Ángeles Donoso Macaya writes, "el narrador repite una y otra vez el crimen perpetuado sobre las víctimas, al tiempo que las nombra y describe de modo detallado sus fisonomías. Mediante la repetición el relato logra restituir la identidad perdida del cuerpo desaparecido y posteriormente encontrado" (132). The sheer quantity of stories about these dead women does not immunize the reader to their violent end. Instead, the completed whole of the stories of violence against women stands in as a testimony to the horror of the crimes, and gives voice to the voiceless.

Yet there is a problem with unequivocally arguing that Bolaño's creation of this body of narrative grants testimonial power to women. Part Four's excessiveness calls attention to issues of sexism, which hinder the power of women to express their voices. Furthermore, the problem of misogyny relates to an ecocritical reading of the novel because it stresses the traditional binary of women/nature which has plagued conventional thought. On this point, Stacy Alaimo surveys the way in which the concepts of nature and women have been entangled in misogynistic cultural codes. She clarifies:

In a dauntingly impermeable formulation, woman is not only constituted as nature, but nature is invoked to uphold the propriety of this very constitution... The dual meanings of nature converge at the site of woman, fixing her in a vortex of circular arguments: woman is closer to nature and is thus inferior; woman is inferior because nature has made her so. (Undomesticated Ground 2-3)

As I highlighted previously, the degradation of locales consistent with industrialization and the lack of regard for the environment in neocolonial relationships is connected to violence against the “inferior” other. Alaimo indicates that the inferior other in this case is the female body. Furthermore, woman’s subservience and identification with nature is predicated upon the idea that nature, in the same closed system of patriarchal dominance, is subservient to culture.

Drawing upon a similar vein of criticism, Glynis Carr quotes Carolyn Mechant who argues, “the global ecological crisis of the late twentieth century... is a result of deepening contradictions generated by the dynamics between production and ecology and by those between reproduction and production” (16). According to Carr, it is important for critics of this system to emphasize “the mechanisms by which the privileging of production over reproduction and ecology intersects with and reinforces sexism, symbolically (in language and discourse) and actually (in social practice)” (16). Carr’s analysis brings to the forefront the gender dynamic in *2666*, inspiring the following question: does the novel actually dispel the traditional conception of women and nature as inferior, passive objects in their respective binary frames (i.e. men/women and culture/nature)?

Problematically, the manner of narration and the inclusion of other stories in *2666* seem to envision women under a particularly masculine gaze, limiting the ability for this oppressed group to speak. For instance, as Balmaceda discusses,

the methodical, scientific nature of the representation of the dead body accounts, contrasted with the inept and corrupt police force, underscores the masculine gaze and *machista* culture which pervades Mexico. This culture pervades Bolaño's novel as well. The quintessential scene which depicts this endemic problem occurs during a police breakfast as officers share with one another patriarchal-positioned jokes:

Los chistes. Y abundaban aquellos que iban sobre mujeres. Por ejemplo, un policía decía: ¿cómo es la mujer perfecta? Pues de medio metro, orejona, con la cabeza plana, sin dientes y muy fea. ¿Por qué? Pues de medio metro para que te llegue exactamente a la cintura, buey, orejona para manejarla con facilidad, con la cabeza plana para tener un lugar donde poner tu cerveza, sin dientes para que no te haga daño en la verga y muy fea para que ningún hijo de puta te la robe. (689)

This scene features the supremely sexist attitudes of the very people who are meant to be enforcing laws designed to protect every citizen, regardless of gender. The masculine components in *2666* reveal oppression and violence against women, indicating the role of women as objects instead of subjects on their own accord. Furthermore, despite the fact that these women are the objects of male "protection," these masculine subjects fail to provide justice for the women.

Related to the idea of women as objects, psychoanalytic terms may clarify the issue of what exactly is meant by feminine objectivity. On this point, Laura Mulvey's critical feminist theory summarizes how the body of a woman in a patriarchal worldview is limited to objectivity:

The function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she firstly symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end... Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning. (59)

Balmaceda corroborates the lack of feminine agency by pointing out, “quien narra y mira es un ojo masculino que exagera el carácter misógino de los asesinatos... No interesa la voz de la víctima, esa voz apenas aparece como un cadáver mutilado mientras los policías miran y comentan desde una especie de atracción y espanto” (335). Agency in this case, according to Balmaceda, belongs solely to males.

The question of agency is a pressing issue because it would seem that the novel contains only voiceless victims (women) and speaking perpetrators (men). Furthermore, these bodies are not just women in general but they are women who are mutilated, incomplete, and deceased. The sole protest these women can raise is now their silent decay: the only testimony dead women can offer are their broken bodies. With the women’s silence, Balmaceda, Mulvey, and others could very well dismiss the ability of the novel to grant subjectivity to women and conclude that men are the only ones possessing the power to act and create meaning.

However, this reading of the work would lack sensitivity to the subtleness with which the author indicts this masculine gaze. In order to capture this



subtlety, we must again emphasize the excessive cataloguing of bodies. These stories serve to undo the masculine voice and to subvert the *machista* attitude in a very particular way. The corpus of stories about women partnered with the utter ineptitude or complicity of the police leave the reader with the sense that the masculine gaze is flawed, uncaring, and evil. While many novels can be decidedly branded as upholding the patriarchal system, the gaze in *2666* is not so obvious. True, the world depicted in Santa Teresa is sexist (as is the real city of Ciudad Juarez). However the very depiction of this male-centered world which allows for such horrific and excessive violence against women calls attention to its defects and highlights the very real lack of voice that the victims have in the matter, indicating that the novel does not intend to uphold such a power dynamic. The excess of violence against women is intentional and further substantiates the testimonial power of the body of writing in Part Four.

Furthermore, by questioning the violence against women, the novel also challenges the systems of productions that spoil the land and ruin the environment for those unfortunate enough to be in harm's way. The novel maintains the idea that women and nature are related, but not necessarily as a method for preserving the subjugation of the two. Rather, in its critique of the devastation of the environment and its portrayal of the endless violence against women, *2666* encourages a reading that challenges the structures which oppress both.

Ultimately, it does not matter that the author uses a narrator with the scientific, cold gaze of a forensic observer while describing these violent acts, nor does it matter that the women themselves cannot cry out in pain as a testimony. What does matter is the excess; because in its excess, the narrative body of stories finds completion and subverts the patriarchal dialogue and its insistence on treating men and culture as superior to women and nature. This completion is particularly poignant when considering the victims who are decidedly incomplete because their bodies have been torn to shreds, cut into pieces, or violated in the most obscene ways. The women's technical accounts are all that they possess but they form an entire corpus: one that is complete and unmarred, a large body of writing that in its wholeness stands in stark contrast to the decaying, deformed, bruised, beaten bodies of the women in the desert.

As I have shown, in both *Morirás lejos* and *2666* acts of antagonism against the environment emerge as an important element in understanding violence in their contexts. *Morirás lejos* envisions an urban setting in which violence decays and destroys the very environment which supports human life. Pacheco's novel subverts the notion of humans remaining at the top of the moral chain of being as violence animalizes both perpetrators and victims of aggression. In *2666*, the environment emerges as an abysmal wasteland where dead bodies lay strewn across the most desolate and polluted spaces of an urban desert. Additionally, in Bolaño's work the deliberate repetition of violence demonstrates a narrative strategy which seeks to give a voice to those lost to the

incessant waves of viciousness against women in Northern Mexico. These authors may emphasize different aspects of violence but this theme remains central to the argument of both works.

***La muerte me da: Gender blurring and the environment as a poetic device***

*La muerte me da*, by Cristina Rivera Garza, also explores topics of violence and the urban environment. The novel, very much like *Morirás lejos*, is difficult to summarize because of its insistence on ambiguity. As Valerie Hecht notes, “The reading of this novel is not easy due to Rivera Garza’s... tendency (to fragment the narration), but this only serves to further intrigue” (68). The narration begins in first-person, with the account of a woman who stumbles upon the dead, castrated body of a young male in an alley. Spiraling from this encounter, the story shifts back and forth between narrators and time, centralizing the work around the series of desexed male cadavers who are dumped in public spaces alongside quotes from the Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik. The jumps in narration harken back to *Morirás lejos* while the accumulation of mutilated cadavers resemble Bolaño’s pile of bodies. *La muerte me da*, however, deviates from both novels in the way that it presents violence. In comparing this work to the two previous novels, *La muerte me da* is more akin to *2666*; however, it moves beyond Bolaño’s creation by more explicitly chartering the problem of gender. Rivera Garza’s work battles diligently to question, subvert, and undermine the very same structures that exist in *2666* by inverting the gender roles of the victims and calling attention to sexual identities.

Surpassing Bolaño's subtle critique of gender violence, *La muerte me da* consciously abrades the man/woman binary which pervades traditional thought in the Western tradition. By doing so, Rivera Garza's novel emerges as an experiment determined to re-examine conceptions of gender and violence. In the following section, I will utilize feminist theory to consider the implications of the gender discussions in the text. Additionally, I will include a discussion of the role of nature in the novel. Unlike *Morirás lejos* and *2666*, the environmental position of the novel is subtle. The urban space assumes an ethereal quality which parallels the ambiguity of the work. Examining nature in the *La muerte me da* demonstrates that the focus of the novel is on human action and thought and that the environment is secondary to explorations of language and identity.

#### *Castration and blurred identities*

Raymond L. Williams contends that Cristina Rivera Garza's "transgeneric, transnational, and interdisciplinary writing puts into question conventional understandings of gender, genre, and human relations" (The Columbia Guide 303). One of the ways the author questions conventional understandings of gender is by exploring sexual violence against men- a topic that is often overshadowed by discussions of sexual violence against women. The striking example of this from *La muerte me da* is the persistent violence against male sexual organs. By framing the narrative around dead men who have had their genitalia removed, Rivera Garza calls attention to the psychoanalytical concept of castration. As I mentioned in the section about *2666*, traditional

psychoanalysis postulates that woman is represented by a lack: the absence of a phallus. In determining to understand sexual difference, Sigmund Freud originally coined the term “castration complex” to describe this process whereby unconsciously boys are threatened by the fear that they will lose their masculine sexual article and assume the very same lack as woman. Girls, according to Freud, recognize their own lack of a phallus and therefore feel envy towards their male counterparts. Jacques Lacan, in a close reading of Freud, also posits a thesis for how to understand sexual difference. Parveen Adams summarizes Lacan’s re-appropriation of Freud and subsequent deviation on this topic:

Lacan’s own response reflects the ambiguity of the theoretical situation; he produces two accounts of difference in succession. In the first model, as in Freud, the woman is different from the man. In the second, the woman is different from *herself*. This excess, the difference within herself which makes herself, is itself conceived as beyond the reach of the phallus and therefore of speech and beyond interpretation. (184)

Several feminists have harangued both Freud and Lacan for their theories regarding sexual difference, claiming that the real lack is in the construction of a theory that fails to question the centrality of male experience. As Toril Moi observes, “Both Freud and Lacan appear to think that psychoanalytic theory can get along fine without a theory of masculinity. In this way, *femininity* and *sexual difference* come across as synonymous terms. Men become the norm, women the problem to be explained; men embody humanity, women remain imprisoned in their feminine difference” (844). As Moi makes explicit, traditional psychoanalysis highlights a male-centric theorization of sexual difference.

Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Michel Foucault are among the many scholars that have toiled to deconstruct the male-centric underpinnings of psychoanalysis and cultural norms.

Judith Butler has also produced a large body of work arguing for new ways to perceive the construction of gender. Butler links sexual difference with the problem of subjectivity. In her seminal work on the subject, Butler recurs to Foucault's notions of power and juridical law, claiming that it is essential to understand that juridical law actually produces subjects. Per Foucault, the subjects of any legal systems are formed, produced, and reproduced by the same structures that were set up to give these subjects access to the juridical structures. The circular nature of the construction of subjectivity in legal models is highly problematic for feminist thinking according to Butler because,

The juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as 'the subject' of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. (2)

Butler utilizes the problem of the discursive boundaries of gender inherent in the production of subjects to bolster her notion that the universal category of "women" is problematic for feminist agendas because it attempts to enclose women within categories that may or may not actually represent their real subjectivity in culture. She contends that "the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Indeed, the premature insistence

on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category” (4). Butler’s solution to this quandary lies in her determination to encourage feminists to critique any totalizing claims of phallogocentric structures while at the same time critiquing any totalizing claims by feminist discourses. Her contribution seeks to “think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power” (33-34). Furthermore, she endeavors “to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (34). According to this scholar, gender categories must be subverted and confused in order to expose the ways in which they are fictitious classifications determined to control and perpetuate current structures of power.

Similarly to Butler, Teresa de Lauretis enunciates the way in which feminist theory both embraces the distinction between men/women in order to consider the problems with this difference as well as concurrently deconstructs the very terms which facilitate the discussion. In de Lauretis’ understanding, feminist theory resides in the paradox of the fact that it remains inside its social and discursive determinations while also being located outside of them. In her summation,

This recognition marks a... moment in feminist theory, which is its current stage of reconceptualization and elaboration of new terms:

a reconceptualization of the subject as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference; a rethinking of the relations between forms of oppression and modes of formal understanding of doing theory; an emerging redefinition of marginality as location, of identity as dis-identification; and the hypothesis of self-displacement as the term of a movement that is concurrently social and subjective, internal and external, indeed political and personal. (116)

De Lauretis' description of the contradictions characteristic of defining gender identities, in conjunction with Butler's desire to make gender trouble, upholds a view that feminist theory should not arrive at conclusions about the character of gender but rather embrace as its task the dissolution of categories of identity which maintain a fixed narrative about the constitutive practices which dictate the classifications of "women" and "men." *La muerte me da* strives to produce similar deconstructions of gender throughout the novel. The point of departure for these exercises of exploration is the castration of men.

*La muerte me da* opens with an epigraph by Renata Salecl that sets the tone for the exploration of the topic of castration.

[C]astration should not be understood as the basis for denying possibility of the sexual relation, but as the prerequisite for any sexual relation at all. It can even be said that it is only because subjects are castrated that human relations as such can exist. Castration enables the subject to take others as Other rather than the same, since it is only after undergoing symbolic castration that the subject becomes preoccupied with questions such as <<what does the Other want?>> and <<what am I for the Other?>>. (13)

The author's inclusion of this epigraph is simultaneously pertinent and peculiar. It introduces the castration process as something which enables sexual relations between two subjects because symbolic castration allows one person to



become the object for the other; in this way, it participates in the psychoanalytical dialogue about sexual difference. Still, what is peculiar is the idea of symbolic castration being used in the context of literal castration. The men in the novel are not symbolically castrated- they are purposefully and violently mutilated in the flesh. The first person narrator (here given the same name as the author, Cristina) recognizes that there is a strange reversal with regards to gender, a reversal that probes even the very language of usage to describe reality. “Pensé en el término *asesinatos seriales* y me di cuenta de que era la primera vez que lo relacionaba con el cuerpo masculino. Y pensé- y aquí pensar quiere decir en realidad practicar la ironía- que era de suyo interesante que, al menos en español, la palabra víctima siempre fuese femenina” (30). Irony in its basic definition describes something that happens which is unexpected; the expectation that a victim of sexual violence will be female indicts the language structure which cannot encapsulate a masculine victim. This dichotomy of thinking, that females are the objects/victims of sexual violence and males the subjects/perpetrators of sexual violence, is uprooted by the narrator who begins to think differently about gender. This realization for the narrator is one piece in a series of narrative segments which indicate an interest in challenging the traditional notions of subjectivity and objectivity in sexual relations.

As the novel progresses, so too does the dialectic about castration and gender. In the third chapter the narration switches to a heterodiegetic narrator, which focuses on the female detective who investigates the crimes against the

dead males. In the search to find the killer, the detective interviews the lover of one of the men who was killed. Analyzing the lover's tears, the detective observes the disjunction between the actual loss of the Other and the real focus of the woman's suffering. "Hay algo ahí, en su manera de dolerse, que no le corresponde a la muerte del hombre sino a sí misma. La Mujer Llorosa llora por la mujer abandonada en un apartamento solitario, la mujer soltera, la mujer sin marido... La Mujer Llorosa no puede ver más allá de sus narices, no puede salir de Sí" (131). If, as the epigraph contends, the symbolic castration of oneself allows for a person to give up his/her subjectivity to enter into relationship, this picture of a woman who mourns for herself after her lover is castrated and murdered defies that idea. Has she given up her subjectivity to take hold of the Other, or does she clings tightly to her own needs and desires therefore making her lover the object in her relationship?

In this situation a tension emerges concerning the question of who exactly is castrated. The epigraph is ambiguous and therefore may indicate that both males and females are castrated symbolically in order to convert others into the Other. However, as the above mentioned feminist theorists point out, the very idea of castration as the point of departure already centers agency on the male anatomy.<sup>13</sup> Women cannot be castrated literally, a point which seems to be in the background of the series of crimes against men. Here the novel overtly undermines the assertion that in a relationship both people give up subjectivity in order to accept someone else as Other. In the traditional thought of the castration

complex, women are able to be castrated; however, as this novel suggests, it is really only men who can suffer this loss and therefore from the outset it is only men who actually have a subjectivity to give up. This calls attention to the fallacies of traditional paradigms of psychoanalysis which block access to subjectivity for women since they are unable to surrender their phallus. However, in this passage, it is clear that the lover does indeed exercise agency as she places her own desires and suffering above the personhood of her lover. Unable to see past her own nose, while a selfish act, also connotes an act of appropriation. The woman assumes her own subjectivity, albeit a sad one; furthermore, the literal castration of her lover moves her into a position of power as she is not the one who suffers mutilation and death. The positioning of her character in this way signifies another instance in which the novel undermines conventional notions of gender by confusing traditional subjectivities about men and women.

Shortly after her visit with the bereaved lover, the detective confers with her assistant, Valerio, about the rationale behind the castration of the victims. She asks him why someone would want a penis and he replies that perhaps it is penis envy, but adds a twist on the Freudian assertion:

-Tal vez estoy hablando de la envidia que no es tan famosa... La del pene mismo, por ejemplo. -¿Un pene quiere un pene? Es eso lo que me quieres decir? ¿Que un pene quiere un pene? -¿Por qué no? Un hombre, por ejemplo. Un hombre engañado. Un hombre al que dejan por otro. Un pene por otro pene. -Un hombre al que han vuelto mujer, ¿eso dices? -Un hombre que quiere recuperar algo que es suyo-concluye. (145)

Valerio's suggestion introduces a new possibility regarding the series of assassinations. Whereas the detective and Cristina had been assuming that the perpetrator of the violence was a woman because the attacks were concentrated against men and their genitalia, Valerio challenges the idea that this is necessarily the case. On this topic, Ella Shohat, while discussing European colonialism in the American continent, argues that colonial discourse has used gendered language to propagate its agenda, privileging the narration of sexual violence against white women over the same violence towards women of indigenous races. Given the colonial insistence on maintaining traditional notions of power, Shohat asks, "is it a coincidence that stories of the sexual violence committed against "Third World" women are relatively privileged over those of violence toward "Third World" men, including sexual violence?" (57). Shohat's logic uncovers a taboo- that it goes unspoken that men can also be the victims of sexual violence and that men can also be the perpetrators of these crimes. In this instance, Valerio seems to be externally processing the options about the murderer and through the questioning of traditional assumptions of gender realizes that gender boundaries are more fluid than the constructed narratives which continue to dictate thought and action. Again, the point that a male could seek out a penis for his own reasons signals the confrontational approach of the novel towards gender borders and assumptions.

While the conversation between Valerio and the detective sparks further issues of gender and power, perhaps the most striking point is actually the

positioning of the speakers who wrestle with these issues. Indeed, it is a female detective who is in charge of the investigation with Valerio, a male underling, aiding her. This is an unusual shifting of traditional detective genre paradigms which normally feature male protagonists. Furthermore, the novel adds several layers of confusion as to the relationship between the two and which of them maintains subjectivity throughout the narration. At first it may seem that Valerio is the one who is given agency; he is the one who is actually named, seemingly granting him a more substantial claim to personhood as opposed to the detective's anonymity.

In spite of this ostensible indication that Valerio assumes the dominate position in the relationship, the actual power dynamic between the two is more nuanced. Throughout the narrative, Valerio is engrossed with the detective's mysterious aura and concentrates much of his energy on unravelling her enigmatic identity. To a certain extent Valerio's very existence in the novel is meant to be one which constantly calls attention to, analyzes, and explores the detective's presence. Meanwhile, the detective gives very little thought to Valerio except in her relationship with him as her assistant. The impression left is that Valerio is actually subsumed by the detective's character. One particular passage captures this unique positioning of the detective in Valerio's mind: "Años después, cuando reflexionara acerca de todo eso... pensaría que había seguido a la Detective hasta su casa, que la había desnudado y besado y penetrado y abrazado porque estaba seguro de que ella tendría un secreto. Porque quería

compartirlo. Porque pensaba que lo compartía” (230). By focusing on Valerio’s fixation on extricating the detective’s secret, the novel emphasizes that their intimacy is in part a result of Valerio’s obsession with trying to get at the personhood of the detective. In this way the novel portrays Valerio as the one willing to give of himself while the detective hardly notices Valerio. Hence, the detective emerges as the more central figure, granting her the position of importance and dominance in the relationship.

Furthermore, certain passages parallel the relationship between the detective and Valerio, calling into question Valerio’s agency as male. This is clearly observed in Valerio’s discussions with the detective about the gender of the perpetrator of the assassinations. In their conversations they decide that if the assassin were a woman, then the rationale behind the castrations would be motivated by emotions like jealousy, rage, spite or impotence. If the assassin were a man, however, it would be a sexually motivated crime, a question of possessing or snatching the masculinity of another. However, both decide that there is a third possibility: “Con frecuencia pensarían incluso en la posibilidad de que el asesino fuese un asesino y una asesina combinados: un caso extremo de identificación en el que él o ella intentaba alcanzar a su contrario o a su igual, rápida y por ello violentamente, a causa del deseo de alteridad. Por fuerza del deseo alterado” (243). Two points surface from this quote. First, the passage demonstrates Rivera Garza’s creativity in moving past traditional boundaries of gender by contending that the one perpetrator could be *both* male and female.

The characters, like the novel, move beyond the two-dimensionality of gender definitions and visualize a less rigid possibility of identity. Second, the quote demonstrates the parallel between the assassin who could be both man *and* woman and the relationship of the two who are theorizing about these alternatives. The term alterity drives home the idea that Valerio is searching and seeking to know the detective, who for him represents the Other, the mysterious, unknown person. Although Valerio does not go to such extremes as mutilating bodies, his own obsession seems to be the subtext for the assassin's fascination with the Other. By linking the assassin's desire for new gender conceptions with Valerio's desire to know the Other, the text again emphasizes the process of subverting stiff gender definitions and boundaries.

The insistence of the novel on questioning gender boundaries also explains why Valerio is named while the detective remains in anonymity. In an analysis of another novel by Cristina Rivera Garza, Lila McDowell Carlsen discusses some principles behind using multiple names for characters, similar principles which apply to not using names at all: "The idea of multiple names contrasts with modernity's onomastic principles and corresponding ideals of fixed identity, uniformity, and singularity. To paraphrase Toril Moi, masculine mentality privileges reason, unity, and order while silencing irrationality, chaos, and fragmentation, which femininity symbolizes" (234). By having one specific name, Valerio receives the stamp of approval in the fixed identity category; alternatively, the detective's lack of name indicates the chaos and fragmentation of femininity.

However, as previously mentioned, it is the detective who holds power over Valerio, both in her capacity as boss as well as in her mysteriously alluring character which captivates his attention. The novel in this way privileges the detective's power, undermining modernity's favoring of order and again threatening traditional gender distinctions.

The questioning of names is a topic of particular interest towards the end of the novel when Cristina receives a published book of poems from a mysterious author; the poems are all related to the investigation of the castrated cadavers. The collection of verses evokes a sense of dread among Cristina, the detective, and Valerio because it seems to have been written by someone with intimate knowledge of the investigation of the crimes; however, earlier in the book the police claimed that they had captured a man who confessed to the murders. The writer figure of the book calls herself Anne-Marie Bianco but neither the publisher nor the other characters are able to identify the secretive figure. While discussing the new information with the detective, Valerio remarks that Anne-Marie Bianco is “-un nombre que es muchos nombres escondidos. Un nombre que no quiere ser asociado a nada concreto todavía... Sabes lo que significa eso, verdad?” (348). The detective responds by emphasizing the obscurity in which the character wishes to remain: “-Significa, Valerio, que el nombre, el otro, el escondido, el original si cabe el término, no quiere ser enunciado...Eso significa. Que no quiere que la encontremos” (349). Valerio's comment, that the name encompasses various hidden names and eludes concretization, supports



McDowell Carlsen's argument regarding the importance of multiple names in literature since it demonstrates the fluidity of identity represented by the name. As McDowell Carlsen contends, "the use of multiple names prioritizes the unfixed nature of the characters' identities. This represents a postmodern disassociation of the signifier and creates a space of doubt with regard to meaning and language" (234).

While Valerio's words again highlight the muddying of identity categories, it is actually the detective's response to Valerio which is more important for the overall work. The detective recognizes, in line with the propulsion of the novel, that the identity of the person obsessed with the genitalia of men is ambiguous, complex, and in many ways inscrutable. The detective's words about the author of the book of poems are analogous to what happens with the resolution of the case. While the police find a man supposedly professing guilt, the crimes could also be the act of a woman who may or may not be a man in reality. The lack of certainty about the murderer at the end of a detective novel subverts genre, and in doing so also calls attention to the way in which many times gender boundaries are also unable to be completely defined, captured, understood, or known. As I have contended, *La muerte me da* works to challenge the man/woman binary which pervades traditional thought by exploring the question of sexual violence against men, subjectivity, and fluid identities. In doing so, the text upholds a more nuanced conception of gender and agency.

### *Poetic imagery and the environment*

Like the previous two novels, *La muerte me da* takes place in a city. However, the urban environment in *La muerte me da*, when compared to the emphasis of the text on human language and reflection, remains a lesser concern. In both *Morirás lejos* and *2666* the environment garners importance in its own right; in Rivera Garza's novel the urban space is circumscribed within the limits of the characters' imaginations and wanderings. The portrayal of the metropolis exists in large part as a reflection of the chaotic and ethereal world of the characters struggling to understand the violence against men and their genitalia. The poetic tint of the narration erupts into imagery about nature and the urban space which are closely linked to human thought and not necessarily to physical reality.

The first mention of the word city is used in the second chapter after Cristina finds the castrated man on the street. She poses the question, "¿Es una ciudad un cementerio?" (17). The image of the city as a cemetery is repeated six times throughout the novel, and is always associated with Cristina's character. Sometimes it is a question, but sometimes the narrator is absolutely sure of the answer. For instance, in one chapter Cristina details the art exhibit entitled "Great Deeds Against the Dead," a large painting in which three castrated men hang crucified from trees. In commenting on this piece Cristina affirms, "Una ciudad siempre es un cementerio" (24). It is not surprising that a person would associate dead bodies with a cemetery, but it is unexpected that the narrator would identify

the entire city space as the resting place of the dead. After interpreting *Morirás lejos* and *2666*, it might seem almost inevitable to conclude that the city space as cemetery represents a degradation; after all, a cemetery represents the literal decay of bodies.

However, although comparing the city to a cemetery may at first appear to indicate degradation, the poetic qualities of *La muerte me da* supersede more literal interpretations of the metaphor. Paired especially with the image of artwork featuring the dead, the city as a necropolis does not indicate ruin, but rather artistic creativity on the part of the narrator. Indeed, death is everywhere but identifying the urban space with a graveyard also means an opportunity to use language and art to expand the boundaries of thinking about the city. As my discussion of gender proposed, the novel aims to push readers to analyze old categories with a new perspective. Related to this idea Victor Shklovsky points out that poetry and other art allow people to see the mundane in different ways. According to him, "After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it- hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes object from the automatism of perception" (13). Here the narrator removes the city from commonplace awareness and transforms it into a morbid but dynamic image. The physical city is not degraded; rather, the narrator uses her mental capacity to conceptualize a place that enables her to explain the presence of a dead body on the streets. A cemetery functions as an appropriate imaginary framework within which to

artistically encapsulate such a gruesome find. Thus, the cemetery space is less a physical reality and more an imagined locus centering on the narrator's experience.

The use of metaphors and nature imagery continues throughout the novel as the characters begin to immerse themselves in a fantasy world to cope with the mystery of the dead men. One trope with environmental resonance surfaces in the middle of the novel; on several occasions the novel mentions the idea of needing a forest. The mention of the forest relates to a peculiar series of scenes. As the murders continue, first Valerio and then the detective begin to have conversations with an incredibly small woman who is the size of a doll. This perplexing figure, in surrealist fashion, swims with the fish in their tank and plays with a bird in its nest. Enigmatic as a character, the incredibly small woman is a figment of Valerio's imagination but becomes more for both him and the detective. Throughout the segments about this tiny figure a phrase surfaces regarding forests. Several times the character herself or the other characters express her need for a forest. The idea does not always follow logically from the conversation and in many cases is a non-sequitur. For instance, on one occasion Valerio is discussing with her the idea of her being his sister and she says "Te digo que necesito un bosque" (232). While the ambiguity of the character eludes a definitive reading of her meaning, one of the elements that her presence brings to attention is her freedom from the worries of trying to solve the case of the castrated men. Her distance from reality is mirrored in her illogical responses

to conversations. An oddity, she does not really belong in the city with those trying to solve the case. This is related to her need for a forest: the forest could signify the idea that the character belongs in a setting more attuned to her innocent person. Alternatively, the forest could imply the idea of being ensconced and hidden; a forest is a place where one can go undetected, which might be necessary for the protection of a woman so small. The novel lends itself to more than one possibility concerning why the incredibly small woman needs a forest.

While the reason behind the need for a forest is vague, nevertheless, the poetic force of the statement is key to interpretation. Again, the forest is not actually a space in the novel but rather the characters' conceptualization of nature. Much like the cemetery, the forest is an image, a tool of poetry used to express an idea or a set of ideas. In reality, there is no forest in the novel and therefore it is linked more to human thought than to physical space. In this way the forest idea underscores the fact that the novel emphasizes ideas about nature more than it actually represents physical nature.

In this sense, *La muerte me da* ties us back to the beginning of this chapter by calling attention to Shumway's discussion regarding the study of the urban environment. The novel utilizes poetic language to represent ideas about the city and nature. Just as Shumway points out, however, the novel is not necessarily irrelevant to ecocriticism just because nature is linked more to language than to physical reality. Indeed, poetry is a part of human culture, and culture and nature are not separate elements in a binary relationship. Humanity's

actions and culture are part of the larger scheme of the activity of the natural world. The images of the cemetery and the forest in the novel highlight how the environment plays a key role in human imagination. Rivera Garza's novel may limit its discussion on the urban environment but it demonstrates the capacity of poetic language to evoke mental images about nature, a fact which correlates to the study of ecology in literary representation. In this way the urban environment is arguably an important element for interpretation in this novel.

### **Conclusion**

In the three novels I have analyzed in this chapter, space, gender, and language dictate conceptualizations of the intersections between violence and the urban environment. In some ways the novels are quite disparate. *Morirás lejos* was first published in 1967, forty years before *La muerte me da*. *Morirás lejos* and *2666* take place in various continents and across a series of years; *La muerte me da* takes place in one city and focuses on a relatively short span of time. Regardless of the differences, however, all three novels explore issues of violence, gender, and the urban environment. *Morirás lejos* focuses on the manner in which the environment is negatively affected when humans wage violence against each other. *2666* does not necessarily associate violence against humans with violence against nature but instead visualizes a world where violence against both are symptoms of a dismal reality in which life in a globalized, modern society paves the path for new practices of depravity. *La muerte me da* exposes the way in which gender is involved in crimes and

challenges traditional perceptions about violence against men and women. All three novels utilize the city space as a departure for discussing violence and, therefore, are excellent examples of how ecocriticism can be employed to foster a deeper understanding of representations of the urban environment.

### **Chapter III: Trauma, Urban Spaces and Vulnerable Bodies in**

#### ***El ruido de las cosas al caer* and *Cien años de soledad***

Continuing the discussion on the intersection between representations of violence and depictions of the natural environment, in the current chapter I will analyze two Colombian novels, the relatively unstudied *El ruido de las cosas al caer* by Juan Gabriel Vásquez and the celebrated novel *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez.<sup>14</sup> Both novels demonstrate an interest in the topic of violence and both portray nature in ways which relate to that topic. In the first section I will discuss how *El ruido de las cosas al caer* connects its description of urban space with the traumatic experience of its protagonist. In the next two sections I will analyze how both novels expose the danger that modern biopolitics poses to vulnerable bodies and the environment.

*El ruido de las cosas al caer* examines violence by focusing on the national trauma caused by the drug trade in Colombia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In a recent interview on the centrality of violence in the lives of people who grew up during this time in Latin America, Vásquez lays out the core of what he explores in his work: “No, I don’t think my generation is lost, but my last novel is in part an exploration of that question: how did those years of extreme violence shape us?” (Dorkofikis). Vásquez does not stand in isolation; his voice mirrors the trials of his generation and their experiences with the impact of violence on their society. Although he was born in the 1970’s, Vásquez has been associated with both the McOndo Generation and the Crack



Generation, two groups of authors that were generally born in the 1960's and who started publishing in the 1990's. Additionally, Vásquez has been linked to Colombian authors such as Jorge Franco and Santiago Gamboa, as well as younger writers recognized as the Bogotá 39, the title given in 2007 at the Feria Internacional del Libro de Bogotá to thirty-nine up-and-coming Latin American authors under the age of forty.

Vásquez has not been a reluctant advocate for the type of narrative that he wishes to create, especially when discussing the role of violence in Latin American literature. As he has noted, "I want to forget this absurd rhetoric of Latin America as a magical or marvelous continent. In my novel there is a disproportionate reality, but that which is disproportionate in it is the violence and cruelty of our history and of our politics" (E. White 1). Given the intensely felt consequences in Colombia of the drug trade, it is no surprise that writers like Vásquez often represent real-world events during this time period as a critical component of their writing. As I have established in the previous chapters, I again argue that a useful way to analyze violence is through the rubric of an ecocritical framework. There are two particularly striking elements of the environment in this novel which warrant analysis. The vision of the urban space is noteworthy, especially while examining violence. I will briefly look at the relationship between the urban space and trauma theory as a way to illuminate the nuances of the novel. Secondly, I will discuss the way in which the novel envisions animals, maintaining that biopolitics explains the danger to vulnerable bodies in

contemporary society. Given the recent date of publication, there is relatively little critical scholarship written about Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer*.<sup>15</sup> As a novel, it deserves more critical attention and this chapter seeks to address the absence of analysis on this book while, more importantly, demonstrating its pertinence for discussion about violence and the environment.

*The urban environment: dynamic social space or static object*

To reiterate, in *El ruido de las cosas al caer* the topic of violence is related to trauma, which is linked explicitly to city space. Understanding the robust relationship of the city to the consequences of violence provides a clearer picture of the composition of the narrative. Henri Lefebvre's idea of social space and Cathy Caruth's theory regarding trauma inform my reading of the novel as I claim that the narrator's perception of space directly relates both to a traumatic experience in his life and the corresponding journey to understand that trauma.

*El ruido de las cosas al caer* charts the journey of a Colombian man attempting to find meaning in a world of senseless violence. The narrator, Antonio Yammara, soon after 2009, recounts an important period of his life starting around 1996, when he meets a man named Laverde playing billiards; while walking on the street Yammara unintentionally gets caught in the crossfire of a shooting aimed at Laverde. The narrator survives the assassination attempt but is left wounded and in pain for several months. Laverde is not as fortunate and dies. For several months Yammara faces the physical and emotional consequences of the incident, which also cause intimacy issues between him

and his partner, Aura. In an effort to make sense of the post-traumatic stress symptoms which he endures, as well as understand the person who inspired the shooting, Yammara undertakes a journey at the request of Laverde's daughter, Maya, to a rural area of Colombia a few hours outside of the capital, leaving behind Aura and his toddler.

The city of Bogotá is the main locale for the first half of the novel, and its metropolitan qualities are relevant to this study. The city is more than just the background to a story; urban space is key to the narration. On this line of thought, Gary Roberts argues that to properly interpret urban spaces in literature, one should theorize the spatial aspect of the metropolis as a way to avoid the pitfalls of understanding representations of place as literal. According to him, "critics of urban poetry need to consider ways of defining environmental space other than by reference to landscape if they are to avoid unwittingly hypostatizing notions of place in terms of natural fact (and/or wish) rather than analyzing them in terms of social process" (40). Roberts continues his argument by proposing that Henri Lefebvre's work on urbanism facilitates a deeper comprehension of how to construe representations of the city in literature. According to Roberts' reading of Lefebvre, our conception of space should be:

A contingent totality made, excreted, projected by collective human endeavors. This argument resists the Western and capitalist tendencies to think of space as an already present emptiness filled by things and data... Instead, Lefebvre builds process and motion into his theoretical description of urban space by designating it as 'social space' (40).

Social space accounts for the human actions and dynamic shifting of perception of space; in this model, space is no longer a static object but the compilation of perception, progress and action. In the words of Roberts, “the move from seeing space as a container or remainder to understanding it as the continual result of actions (including linguistic actions) is, I would suggest, crucial for critics interested in the relationship of literature to environments” (41).

Considering this idea in the context of *El ruido de las cosas al caer* nuances the way in which Bogotá can be read; indeed, the narrator’s conception of the Colombian capital actually reveals a shift from a depiction of the city as dynamic social space that subsumes everything in it to a diminished space more like a static object. It is only after Yammara suffers from a violent attack that such an alteration is perceptible. This change in representation is best observed by comparing two passages. The first appears towards the beginning of the story, when the narrator initially parts ways with Laverde on the streets, days before the attack. In a segment evoking a strong sense of vibrancy and movement, Yammara monitors the receding figure of Laverde through the Bogotá thoroughfares:

Lo vi sortear los corrillos de esmeralderos y meterse por el callejón peatonal que lleva a la Carrera Séptima, luego doblar la esquina, y entonces no lo vi más. Las calles comenzaban a adornarse con luces navideñas: guirnalda nórdica y bastones de dulce, palabras en inglés, siluetas de copos de nieve en esta ciudad donde nunca ha nevado y donde diciembre, en particular, es la época de más sol. Pero de día las luces apagadas no adornaban: obstruían la mirada, ensuciaban, contaminaban. Los cables, suspendidos por encima de nuestras cabezas, cruzando calzada de un lado al otro, eran como puentes colgantes, y en la plaza de Bolívar se

encaramaban como plantas trepadoras a los postes, a las columnas jónicas del capitolio, a las paredes de la catedral. (24)

The focalization first on the figure of Laverde points to the energetic push of action required to navigate these busy streets. The man must wade through the cliques of emerald vendors, and proceed to a pedestrian walkway in order to arrive at his destination. The character does not just fill up space; the space itself is the progression of the action of the character, the narrator's observation of him, and the hustle and bustle of the city. Furthermore the emerald vendors connote a sense of commotion in which people both earn their living as well as gild the lives of those buying their merchandise. The depiction of space in this passage emphasizes the collective nature of spatial relationships. On this point, similarly to Lefevbre's argument, Doreen Massey purports that space is essentially constructed out of social relations. In her words, "what is at issue is not social phenomenon in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'. The fact is, however, that social relations are never still; they are inherently dynamic." (2) The procession of Laverde through the emerald vendors evokes this sense of dynamism in the mind of the narrator.

The jewel markets are just one feature of the streets which the narrator spotlights; the newly hung Christmas adornments also take center stage. By focusing on the holiday lights- which are adorned, regardless of their impact on the cleanliness of the city or on the anachronism of their snowy advertisements- the narrator illuminates the social space of his city. Their obstructive presence

denotes something more than just annoyance: it underlines the heavy activity of the city and the people within its borders. As much as the Christmas light cables are meant to illuminate and decorate empty space, their manifestation points to the numerous hours of action and work of the metropolitan inhabitants.

Furthermore, the ambiguous nature of these lights brings to the forefront their multi-dimensionality. Are they decorations? Are they bridges? Are they plants? These questions underscore the idea that the lights are more than static objects- they are also the subjects of a complex social network of action that the urban space induces.

Yammara sets in motion a series of similes about the nature of these Christmas ornaments, and in the process, he reveals the set of practices and actions of the metropolis in the representational realm. The snaking lights do not just fill up a static background; they convey a brilliant series of social progressions which combine to give Bogotá its distinctive traits. This idea again summons Lefebvre's analysis, which contends that social space "is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object... Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73). The lights are not merely place holders. Rather, they are symbols of a place in which social space and its activity compose the representation of the urban environment.

In stark contrast to this image is how the narrator's vision of his city drastically transforms after he has been wounded in the shooting. Throughout this section of the novel, the narrator delineates his journey of catharsis, as he searches for tools to apprehend the violence which has affected his physical well-being and ruined his emotional equilibrium. As his journey of memory progresses, there is also a shift in the portrayal of the city space after his traumatic experience. This alteration becomes palpable when comparing the exuberant city and the description below of Yammara's unadulterated fear of the city:

No volví a pisar la calle 14, ya no digamos los billares (dejé de jugar del todo: mantenerme de pie durante demasiado tiempo empeoraba el dolor de pierna hasta hacerlo insoportable). Así perdí una parte de la ciudad; o, por mejor decirlo, una parte de mi ciudad me fue robada. Imaginé una ciudad en que las calles, las aceras, se van cerrando poco a poco para nosotros, como las habitaciones de la casa en el cuento de Cortázar, hasta acabar por expulsarnos... Después de la calle 14 me fuera robada- y después de largas terapias, de soportar mareos y estómagos destrozados por la medicación- comencé a aborrecer la ciudad, a tenerle miedo, a sentirme amenazado por ella. (66)

Before the unfortunate incident with Laverde, Yammara was king- a precocious young professor adored by his students who had the luxury of playing billiards most afternoons. During those moments, the city seemed to him to encompass all that Lefebvre suggests it does: the action, the process, and the vitality. However, once his fragile nature is unveiled, Yammara now sees the city as something to be possessed: the space has literally been robbed from him as if it were a static object, as if it were something that he could own. The envisioning

of the city space as a forbidding and foreboding object triggers the narrator's evasion of the public space. Ultimately, Lefebvre's theory elucidates the reductionist alteration in the narrator's sense of place. Yammara's imagination pictures the streets slowly folding in on themselves and closing themselves off, as if the process which Lefebvre describes were slowly but surely reversing itself.

Acknowledging the shift in the narrator's perception of Bogotá as social space to a static object links us back to the topic of violence in the novel; the shift is integral to this problem because it is indicative of the trend in which ordinary people shirk away from vibrancy and movement of certain urban spaces when faced with the threat of harm. *El ruido de las cosas al caer* is an exploration of how violence affected a generation of people who were indeed forced to eschew the public arena out of terror. In many ways, Yammara is a metonym for his contemporaries in Bogotá who were forced to deal with daily violence while growing up. He articulates this communal feeling of helplessness of his generation:

La gente de mi generación hace estas cosas: nos preguntamos cómo eran nuestras vidas al momento de aquellos sucesos, casi todos ocurridos durante los años ochenta, que las definieron o las desviaron sin que pudiéramos siquiera darnos cuenta de lo que nos estaba sucediendo. Siempre he creído que así, comprobando que no estamos solos, neutralizamos las consecuencias de haber crecido durante esa década, o paliamos la sensación de vulnerabilidad que siempre nos ha acompañado. (227)

The phenomenon which the reader witnesses in the psyche of the narrator here solicits a discussion about the nature of trauma, a topic which many scholars have associated with violence.<sup>16</sup> In her seminal work on trauma Cathy



Caruth writes: "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations or other intrusive phenomenon" (Unclaimed Experience 11). Yammara's own symptoms are not phantasmagoric in nature but do include uncontrollable bursts of emotion: "En cualquier momento, sin que mediara una causa clara, me ponía a llorar desconsoladamente. El llanto me caía encima sin aviso: en la mesa del comedor, frente a mis padres o a Aura, o en una reunión de amigos, y a la sensación de estar enfermo se unía la vergüenza" (59). This recitation of the narrator's lack of control over his symptoms parallels Caruth's assertion in another article about the way in which a traumatic event takes hold of the person suffering from its consequences. Per Caruth, the traumatic event, "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Introduction to Trauma and Experience 4-5). Yammara displays the indicators of someone who is indeed possessed by the memory of the shooting. His trauma becomes the center of the narration.

Trauma in this novel is important in its own right to foster a better understanding of how humans (and Yammara specifically) process violence psychologically and physiologically. However, it is also pertinent to the discussion of city space. The trauma of violence undermines an interpretation of the city as a process and instead provokes a withdrawal of the narrator into agoraphobic

living. In addition to his weeping, resonances of Yammara's trauma are made manifest in his fear of the city streets. A naïve man in his prime before the incident, Yamma plunges into an acrid emotional state, one in which not only his innocence is lost, but the city space he held so dear is also bereaved. Furthermore, this trauma happens to an individual but represents the type of violence Yammara's entire generation also endures. In this sense violence reduces the narrator's (and his generation's) capacity to properly appreciate urban space in its fullest sense.

Through an examination of the passages detailing the narrator's response to violence it becomes evident that the city space is downgraded from a vibrant social process to a static object after Yammara's trauma occurs. Furthermore, Lefebvre's argument indicates that the narrator's trauma causes him to misunderstand the city space, denying it the three-dimensionality inherent in the French philosopher's model. However, Caruth's trauma theory juxtaposed with the argument for city as a social process may lead to a Hegelian-like thesis/antithesis/synthesis when we consider the narrator's reconstruction of history throughout the narrative. At the end of the novel, when the narrator has excised some of his terror of the city through historical exploration, the city space again takes on the essence of an environmental process and not just a space-filler.

Caruth's claims regarding trauma facilitates an understanding of the narrator's transformation. For this author, history is the recurring articulation in

the present of a trauma lived in the past. Furthermore, notions of history reveal the importance of a departure to reclaim the understanding of an experience that trauma inhibits for the sufferer at the moment of the incident. Caruth also emphasizes the communal aspect of this exploration. She contends that history is like trauma in that it is not an individual experience. Rather, she states, "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (Unclaimed Experience 24). In *El ruido de las cosas al caer* the narrator's search to understand his trauma exhibits formulations about the recollection of history that correlate to Caruth's arguments. Yammara desperately tries to piece together the reality of events which led up to the attack on the street since he is incapable of penetrating the experience from his conscious memory of the moment. In his case, the psychological need to express his experience is conjoined with a physical departure to the countryside to visit Maya Fritts; this journey is the literal representation of a psychological exodus initiated at the moment of violence. It is no surprise then that the weekend spent with Maya is an attempt to get at his experiences- *through the traumas of others*.

During the weekend he spends with Maya, with the help of Maya's memory and the familial letters she has collected, Yammara reconstructs the story of the trauma suffered by Laverde's family. He learns that Laverde's wife, Elaine Fritts, was a Peace Corp volunteer in Colombia during the 1960's. As part of her service training, Elaine moves in with a local family and subsequently falls in love with their son, Ricardo Laverde. Elaine and Laverde get married, move to

rural Colombia and after a couple of years, welcome Maya. While living in the countryside, Elaine continues her work as a Peace Corps employee and takes care of her daughter; Laverde is enticed to use his vocation as a pilot to aid in the newly burgeoning drug trade, transporting drugs from Colombia to the Caribbean and US. Laverde's illegal activities are successful enough to allow them to build a house of their own, yet Elaine's growing anxieties compel Laverde to promise to abbreviate his drug-smuggling career. On the flight that would have allowed him to become extremely rich and retire, he is caught by drug enforcement agents in the US and sent to jail for two decades. Elaine is forced to raise her daughter as a virtual widow (and lies to Maya telling her that her father did indeed die), experiencing both the pain of losing her husband as well as the fear of protecting Maya in the increasing violence of a Colombian state at war with itself.

There is a marked change in the way Yammara interprets information after he hears the stories of Elaine, Ricardo, and Maya and revisits the tragedy of the Laverdes. His individual experience transforms into one that slowly expands to include the Laverde family, and then inflates even further. Yamarra begins as an isolated figure who must bear the responsibility of narrating the occurrence of violence. However, as he continues to express his trauma, the boundaries of his isolation push outward, encompassing others in addition to his own self. On this point, Adam Morris points out that it is the connection between the individual and the larger community that drives this novel and others by Vásquez:

Laverde becomes, for both Yammara and Vásquez, the fulcrum-character whose life explains the ways in which individuals and historical phenomenon mutually shape one another. These fulcrum characters emerge in all of Vásquez's novels: although he is obsessed with the far-reaching contingencies of history, he is even more interested in portraying it through his characters' manias, affects, and personal tragedies. (Morris)<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, the exploration of Laverde's trauma is what assists the narrator in processing the event itself and creating a history, and therefore comprehension of the event. The departure Yammara has undergone is useful for revisiting the discussion of social space. Upon his return to Bogotá, there is a perceived transformation in the narrator's perspective. Whereas the city space was reduced to a static object before he left, now there is a renewed sense of its dynamic texture. When Yammara enters the parking garage of his apartment building, he feels attracted to the smells of construction and beautification. As he progresses through his description of the space, a feeling of optimism surfaces that seemed long forgotten before his trip:

Entré al parqueadero de mi edificio como si volviera de una prolongada ausencia... Olía a cemento (el cemento tiene un olor frío), y olía también a pintura fresca: estaban haciendo unos trabajos que yo no recordaba, los habrían empezado durante el fin de semana. Pero los obreros no estaban, y allí, en el parqueadero de mi edificio, ocupando el lugar de un carro que había salido ya, había un barril de gasolina cortado por la mitad, y en él restos de cemento fresco. De niño me había gustado la sensación del cemento fresco en las manos, así que miré alrededor- cosa de asegurarme de que nadie me viera y me tomara por loco- y me acerqué al barril y hundí dos dedos cuidadosos en la mezcla casi endurecida. Y así subí al ascensor, mirándome los dedos sucios y oliéndolos y disfrutando ese olor... (256)

As with the earlier description of the city during Christmas time, here the movement of the space- the workers who build, the materials needed to construct and revamp buildings, the journeys of people in cars away from their homes- is emphasized. The process and work of the space is again part of the representation of Yammara's environment. Furthermore, the narrator now finds himself deeply entrenched in the experience of this social process. In order to reconnect with the urban space, he dips his fingers into cement, a sign of not merely wanting to smell the life of the metropolis, but also an indication that he wants to return to a simpler time when as a child the city was not lost to him. Symbolically, the narrator cements himself into the new vision of history, one in which he is better able to cope with the trauma of violence as well as understand the city in its proper dimensions. Yammara inserts himself into the trauma of the Laverde family, and by articulating his experience in the context of his generation, his psychological departure is now intertwined with that of Maya's and her parents' experience. In this way, history is re-understood in terms similar to Caruth's; history is the manner in which this generation of Colombia is inserted into each other's traumas.

This vision of a narrator transformed, nevertheless, is problematized in some parts of the work. For instance, at the beginning of the novel Yammara himself seems to reject the idea that revisiting the past through the articulation of trauma is a useful endeavor. When he first begins to recall the events surrounding Laverde's life he states:

Me sorprendió el poco esfuerzo que me costaba evocar esas palabras dichas, esas cosas vistas o escuchadas, esos dolores sufridos y ya superados; me sorprendió también con qué presteza y dedicación nos entregamos al dañino ejercicio de la memoria, que a fin de cuentas nada trae de bueno y sólo sirve para entorpecer nuestro normal funcionamiento, igual que a esas bolsas de arena que los atletas se atan alrededor de las pantorrillas para entrenar. (15)

Yammara's pessimism towards understanding history through memory at the opening of the novel, however, seems to be undermined through his own affirmations when he is with Maya. It is during his trip that Yammara's understanding of the attack he suffered broadens. This expansion is best conveyed during his conversations with Maya regarding Colombia's national trauma due to the violence of their generation. Maya relates to Yammara the fear she and her mother endured during her youth due to this violence and explains,

<<Evitábamos los lugares públicos. Casas de amigos, de amigos de amigos, casas de conocidos remotos, cualquier cosa era preferible a un lugar público. Bueno no sé si entiende lo que estoy diciendo... Igual para usted no fue así.>>. <<Fue exactamente así>>, dije. Ella giró la cabeza para mirarme. <<¿Cierto?>> <<Cierto.>> <<Entonces usted me entiende>>, dijo Maya. Y yo le dije unas palabras cuyas alcances no alcancé a determinar: <<Le entiendo perfectamente>>" (230).

As Yammara discusses the trauma of his generation and Maya reciprocates in kind, they both sense the way in which violence has shaped them and others. The sensation of collective trauma binds them together as the reiteration of shared experiences permeates their interactions, in spite of Yammara's earlier negativity towards the process.<sup>18</sup> Yammara senses in Maya someone who shares a common culture of trauma; as such, this communal

aspect of trauma eventually leads the two into bed together. They share a memorial intimacy through trauma, leading them to consummate this intimacy physically.

Additionally, the end of the novel also produces doubt about the narrator's ability to entirely overcome his trauma. After Yammara leaves the parking structure and enters his own apartment, he discovers that while he was gone, Aura had moved out with their daughter. Aura leaves a message on the answering machine informing him that she cannot bear the stress on their relationship anymore. The peculiar way in which the novel ends leaves room for multiple interpretations: Yammara sits on his daughter's small bed and looks up at the ceiling pondering what he would say if Aura called him back, wondering if he would ask her where she was or if he had the right to wait for her. He also wonders if he would instead remain silent so that she could realize that it had been a mistake to abandon their lives. Finally, he asks himself, "¿O trataría de convencerla, de sostener que juntos nos defenderíamos mejor del mal del mundo, o que el mundo es un lugar demasiado riesgoso para andar por ahí, solos, sin alguien que nos espere en casa, que se preocupe cuando no llegamos y pueda salir a buscarnos?" (259). This final sentence may at first seem to undermine any argument which stresses that the narrator's journey has helped him process his trauma, because it reveals that he still views the world as dangerous and evil. However, the mere reiteration of a world of violence does not signify that Yammara has not undergone some change. His emphasis on being



with and protecting Aura parallels Caruth's conceptualization of trauma; Yammara clings to the idea of community as integral to the path to overcome the past and forge a less violent future.

Furthermore, the ending should be considered in light of Yammara's opening statements when he explains why he feels compelled to narrate the period of his life related to Laverde's death. "No, yo no contaré mi vida, sino apenas unos cuantos días que ocurrieron hace mucho, y lo haré además con plena conciencia de que esta historia, como se advierte en los cuentos infantiles, ya ha sucedido antes y volverá a suceder" (15). Much in the same way that fairy tales or children's stories are told repeatedly, for Yammara, the story of his trauma takes on the repetitious quality necessary for survivors to process their traumatic experiences. The ambiguity of the ending, and the vacillating optimism and pessimism of the narrator himself does not detract from a reading that acknowledges progress through the exploration of trauma. If there were no hope for Yammara and his generation, then the narration of the novel itself and the exploration of Laverde's death would be meaningless. This does not seem to be the case as the novel deals directly with trauma, revealing the beneficial nature of the repetitive articulation of trauma. The fact that Yammara is ready to come back to his life and be with those he loves in order to continue living, in spite of fear, allows for a more positive reading of the work. This reading calls for a renewed sense of the city space at the end, one which encompasses action and movement. Furthermore, it reveals the purgative aspects of the repetition of

trauma placed within the context of a communal sense of history. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, therefore, the city space calls attention to the narrator's journey to understand the trauma that both he and his generation endured during the conflict in Colombia in the last few decades.

### *Human-animal studies*

In addition to the depiction of the city space in Vásquez' novel, another particularly relevant topic for an ecocritical analysis of this work lies in its representation of animals. Animals are significant in the novel from the very first line of the book which reads: "El primero de los hipopótamos, un macho del color de las perlas negras y tonelada y media de peso, cayó muerto a mediados de 2009" (13). The opening sequence of the text demands a closer look at the role of animals.

In my discussion of this topic in Chapter II I examined the way in which José Emilio Pacheco employed imagery of insects, analogizing their actions to Nazi torture chambers. This served as a brief introduction to animal studies, a field which greatly concerns our reading of *El ruido de las cosas al caer*. Aaron Gross argues that the responsibility of those investigating animal studies is not only to convince readers, "that 'animals matter' as subjects in their own right (a point still in need of emphasis), but also that animal subjects and ideas about them are critical sites through which we imagine ourselves" (4). There has been much debate about the way in which humanity does and should conceive the relationship between humans and animals. Theorists such as Augustine,

Aristotle, and more recently, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and Agamben have explored this subject and offered reflections on interpreting the existential as well as essential components which comprise the two categories. Agamben's ideas are quite useful in our analysis because they are also associated with his considerations about biopolitics, an interrelated topic, especially within the context of *El ruido de las cosas al caer*.

Agamben's book, *The Open: Man and Animal* explores the relationship between humans and animals in religious, artistic, and scientific thought from ancient Greek and Christian thinkers to contemporary philosophers. Assaying the formulation of this relationship, Agamben argues that humanity has always understood the animal-human divide through the lens of what he labels, "the anthropological machine." Agamben purports that there are two periods of the anthropological machine: the modern and pre-modern forms. According to his argument, the modern version "functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus*, or the ape-man" (The Open 37). The pre-modern anthropological machine functions symmetrically to the later one. This philosopher expounds the distinction between the two by indicating that the pre-modern does not animalize humans but rather humanizes animals, stating that in the pre-modern model, "the inside is obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave,

the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form” (The Open 37). In Agamben’s assessment, however, both of the modes of this machine are dangerous ways of conceiving the boundary between human and animal.

Why exactly does this author find these historical modes of thinking about the human-animal distinction so problematic? The answer to this question correlates to Agamben’s idea of biopolitics. In Agamben’s work, *Homo Sacer*, biopolitics is understood by first examining the terms about life that classical Greek thinkers put forward. He argues that *zoe* for the Greeks was natural (bare) life and that *bios* was the particular life that dealt with politics. As Agamben points out, Michel Foucault first takes into account the way in which the modern state now interferes with the bare life of the human body, imposing a system in which both aspects of life are now part of the state. Agamben argues that, although Foucault dealt with the topic of bare life and the state, he never reached the necessary conclusion that bare life (*zoe*), which in the past was situated at the margins of the political order, now coincides with the political order and is part of an irreducible, indistinct zone with politics and particular life (*bios*). Undine Sellbach summarizes this argument in her article as follows: “Agamben argues... that biological life... is now the main focus of power. The intensified management of natural life has given rise to a form of *biopolitical* existence- an existence where the problem of *whose or what life counts* becomes urgent to the point that life itself seems perturbed by the question of its legitimacy” (324).

Related to biopolitics is the idea of the state of exception. According to Agamben, “bare life remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion” (*Homo Sacer* 13). In his first chapter of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben expands this notion by maintaining that the role of the sovereign is something excluded in the law and is, at the same time, included in the law. The law itself gives power to the sovereign who thereby is exempt from the law. Upon discussing this “exception” of the law, Agamben concludes that if the exception is the structure of sovereignty, then sovereignty is not an exclusively political concept, a power external to the law, nor the supreme rule of the juridical order, but rather it is the ordinary structure in which the law refers to life by both including it in the law while simultaneously suspending it.

The Italian philosopher’s idea of biopolitics is related to the way in which he condemns humanity’s conception of animals. Matthew Calarco’s analysis of Agamben’s work elucidates the way in which Agamben’s biopolitical theory underscores his denunciation of the anthropological machine. Calarco maintains:

As Agamben has argued in *Homo Sacer* and elsewhere, contemporary biopolitics, whether it manifests itself in totalitarian or democratic form, contains within it the virtual possibility of concentration camps and other violent means of producing and controlling bare life. It comes as no surprise, then, that he does not seek to articulate a more precise, more empirical, or less dogmatic determination of the human-animal distinction. Such a distinction would only redraw the lines of the ‘object’ of biopolitics and further define the scope of its reach. Thus, instead of drawing a new human-animal distinction, Agamben insists that the *distinction must be abolished altogether*, and along with it the anthropological machine that produces the distinction. (94)

The underlying discussions in Agamben's work are by nature reflections on how society draws the lines of exclusion and inclusion when trying to organize its structures. In this way, he expands Jacques Rancière's idea of organizational governance. Rancière proposes, "Politics is the construction of a specific sphere of experience in which certain objects are posited as shared and certain subjects regarded as capable of designating these objects and of arguing about them" (3). Rancière posits that politics is the articulation of the relationships between people who share spaces and common objects. Agamben advances this idea by problematizing the subjectivity of humans in the formation of society. Agamben's concern is in that the current organization of society, biopolitics places all those who are considered incapable of designating and sharing objects in great jeopardy. This includes both animals and certain groups of humans. The crux of Agamben's theory about the relationship between the animal-human distinction and biopolitics is that in the present configuration of the social order, both humans and animals are at risk of physical violence perpetuated by the state of exception. The sovereign power through the law is excluded from having to abide by boundaries set by the law. Ultimately, Agamben is arguing for an elimination of the structures that enable and lead to institutions such as concentration camps where the bare life of humans and animals is controlled under the umbrella of the very institutions created to protect life.

Agamben's radical call to abolish the human-animal distinction is not something that is easily understood without the context of *why* this demand

would be deemed necessary. *El ruido de las cosas al caer* offers an exemplary demonstration of the problematic consequences of the anthropological machine in contemporary society. Representations of animals in this novel corroborate the concerns which have compelled Agamben to decry the anthropological machine.

Again, the novel commences with the announcement that a male hippopotamus colored like a black pearl, and weighing a ton and a half, fell dead in 2009. Furthermore, the details of the disposal of the hippo's dead corpse are striking: "y allí, frente a las primeras cámaras y los curiosos, debajo de una ceiba que los protegía del sol violento, explicaron que el peso del animal no iba a permitirles transportarlo entero, y de inmediato comenzaron a descuartizarlo" (13). Why are a hippopotamus and its mutilated carcass the center of attention at the beginning of the work? This inquiry invites an ecocritical reading of the story of the hippo, which only comes to fruition at the end of the novel. The bull is gunned down as part of an effort by the Colombian government to rid themselves of three hippopotami that had escaped from the Zoológico Napolés, the former wildlife park that Colombian drug lord, Pablo Escobar, had maintained until his death.<sup>19</sup> The narrator's introduction to the novel sets the stage for the animals' plight as well as connects Yammara to Laverde for the first time.

Supe también que el hipopótamo no había escapado solo: en el momento de la fuga lo acompañaban su pareja y su cría- o los que, en la versión sentimental de los periódicos menos escrupulosos, eran su pareja y su cría-, cuyo paradero se desconocía ahora y cuya búsqueda tomó de inmediato un sabor de tragedia mediática, la persecución de unas criaturas inocentes por parte de un sistema desalmado. Y uno de esos días, mientras seguía la cacería a través de los periódicos, me descubrí recordando a un hombre que

llevaba mucho tiempo sin ser parte de mis pensamientos, a pesar de que en una época nada me interesó tanto como el misterio de su vida. (13-14)

The man whose mystery fascinated Yammara is Laverde, a detail which not only opens the book but also links him in an intriguing way to animals. At first Yammara does not indicate why the at-large mammals remind Yammara of his acquaintance but throughout the novel it becomes clear that Yammara ideologically links Laverde with the Zoológico Napolés, proof that Gross' theory holds true in this work: the *El ruido* parallels the animals with Laverde's own plight, thus viewing the hippos as critical sites through which human society is imagined. The importance of Laverde's relationship to animals in the novel is an example of the concerns underlying Agamben's call to dismantle the anthropological machine.

One aspect of Laverde's connection to animals is obvious. The first words that Yammara hears the older man express are comments of compassion for the animals in the zoo that had been left to their own devices after Escobar's death: "<<A ver qué van a hacer con los animales.>>, dijo. <<Los pobres se están muriendo de hambre y a nadie le importa.>> Alguien preguntó a qué animales se refería. El hombre sólo dijo:<<Qué culpa tienen ellos de nada>>" (20). Clearly, Laverde himself takes an interest in the animals. The juxtaposition of the story of the massacred hippo at the beginning of the novel with Laverde's empathy for the abandoned animals points to the dichotomy that underscores Agamben's anthropological machine. On the one hand, the novel calls attention to the



problematic relationship of humans and animals when zoos are involved, a topic which surfaced in earlier discussions about *Morirás lejos*. In this case, animals are humanized when they are placed in settings that control their environment and enslave them to human whims. Zoos entrap animals in an organizational structure decidedly anthropocentric. As Randy Malamud argues, “In zoos, people dominate animals, relegating them to bounded and confined habitats, and contextualizing them in ways that reflect how we overwrite the natural world with our own convenient cultural models and preferences” (57). By forcing the animals into cages and subjugating them to eat at prescribed times, their ability to fend for themselves, something which is innate in the animal kingdom, is obviously compromised. The first part of the dichotomy is, indeed, the way in which society visualizes animals as belonging in human structures, a fact which endangers animals, especially in the setting so remarkably indicative of this problem- the zoo.

On the other hand, the act of violence against the hippo shows the alternative possibility for the conception of the animal other. This is true because the hippo’s death seems to allude to Laverde’s own end. The threads of the novel conceal the immediacy of this connection due both to narrative strategies and plot differences. The hippo’s falls occurs at the beginning of the novel while Laverde’s takes place later in the novel, many years before the hippo’s demise, in an analepsis utilized by Yammara to recall his past. This narrative jump impedes an instantaneous recognition of the relationship. Furthermore, in terms

of similarities, it would seem that their deaths and their fatherhood are the only ostensible links between the two. Laverde is culpable in some ways as he is targeted by an illegitimate power for some (never revealed) wrongdoing. The hippo, as Laverde so aptly points out, is innocent; its only crime is its presence within a state that is unwilling to give it protection. Still, the way in which both die reveals the biopolitical structures at work: the death of the father-figure hippo correlates to the death of the human-figure father in that both are casualties of a certain type of war. This is the war to control bodies in order to garner power for the organizing body. For Laverde, it is the organized criminals who shoot him in order to exercise their sovereignty when they perceive their rules being broken. For the hippo, it is the government who shoots the creature in order to protect the beings that it deems more worthy of life (i.e. humans). By tying the hippo together with Laverde, the novel reveals the modern anthropological machine at work: Laverde is animalized and his bare life is unprotected in this scheme, in the same way that the hippo is also marginalized.

The concept behind biopolitics is not limited to established, “legitimate” states: legitimate and illegitimate powers are determined by the subjectivity of the individual, but both types have in common that they exercise control over others and view bodies as disposable. While some might eschew the drug trafficking organizations as illegitimate and therefore exempt from analyses of modern political structures, drug rings may actually demonstrate more convincingly the potential pitfalls for vulnerable bodies in society. In his analysis of Mexican drug

cartels, Hector A. Reyes-Zaga uses theory from the authors Hardt and Negri who argue that in our current globalized society, the list of organizations that exert mass-scale control over the population has expanded beyond just the nation state. Reyes-Zagas states:

For Hardt and Negri, the state is no longer the single imperial political machine capable of reducing the human being to a mere disposable body or administering it as such; the global advent of neoliberalism has led to the emergence of legal or illegal economic elites so powerful that, like the state, they can transform the capital body into a superfluous body in an instant. The human body, they point out, is now exposed to violence from both the state and the economic powers. These considerations show that, as posited by Agamben, the figure of *homo sacer* (the individual experiencing bare life) is increasingly widespread throughout the world. One of the elites of which Hardt and Negri speak—and the one with the greatest biopolitical potential—is undoubtedly the drug trafficking industry. (194)<sup>20</sup>

The drug trafficking industry, therefore, is one type of illegal entity that endangers vulnerable bodies in order to achieve goals; since this is the case, the death of the hippo and the death of Laverde can be interpreted as parallel stories. Both of these bodies are set against the backdrop of an overarching war between the drug lords and the Colombian state. The state (legitimate power) and the drug trafficking industry (illegitimate elite) dispose of life as they see fit. For those people who are excluded from the law, life becomes even more dangerous when the two groups are at odds. The war between drug traffickers and the state imperils vulnerable bodies, making Agamben's concerns all the more convincing. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, the boundaries between animals and humans are indistinct and precarious. For both the hippo and

Laverde, the structures that exercise control over their lives ultimately also exercise the control to snuff them out.

The denouement of the hippopotami story is noteworthy with respect to the human-animal distinction. On their last day together, Maya and Yammara decide to take a journey to the place that symbolizes so much for them and their generation: the Zoológico Napolés. Upon arrival, they see the zoo in a state of deterioration with most of the exotic animals now gone. They silently peruse the grounds in disarray until it begins to pour; as they sprint to the car they come face to face with a hippopotamus. Maya describes her feelings of sympathy for all the animals and wonders how they will survive; Yammara tells her that Laverde had the same reaction to the plight of the creatures.

<<Me imagino>>, dijo Maya. <<Los animales le preocupaban.>>  
<<Decía que no tenían la culpa de nada.>> <<Y es verdad>>, dijo  
Maya. <<Ése es uno de los pocos, de los poquísimos recuerdos de  
verdad que tengo. Mi papá cuidando a los caballos. Mi papá  
acariciando al perro de mamá. Mi papá regañándome por no darle  
de comer al armadillo. Los únicos recuerdos de verdad. (238)

Once again, Laverde is linked to the fate of the animals. In this case, Laverde is the champion of treating animals properly and assuring their well-being. In a foreshadowing of his animalization, Laverde understands all too well the system that mistreats both animals and humans. By caring for the animals, he shows his revolt against that same structure which will eventually lead to his own death, a structure which only protects the life of humans and animals if their bodies do not get in the way of what the sovereign power wants. The story of the

hippopotamus intertwined with Laverde's story is powerful proof of the dangers of modern biopolitical rule.

Human-animal studies give us an access point into how we understand our own *animalitis* as well as how we understand our place in the world. Agamben's thinking regarding the political control over bare life is a call to rethink the way that sovereignty, law, and life are currently understood, because the ultimate consequences of biopolitics are bloody and violent. The anthropological machine reveals humanity's anthropocentrism and our inability to grant subjectivity to animals. Agamben's call for a reevaluation of this machine is an effort to transform the current political consequences of this system. Utilizing these ideas while reading *El ruido de las cosas al caer* demonstrates the difficulties of this fallacious perception of the animal-human relationship by highlighting structures that continue to perpetuate violence, not just against humans but also against animals. Laverde and the hippo reveal the ugly truth that it is both the animal other and humans who suffer when bodies are disposable.

*Cien años de soledad: Sovereign exception and the natural environment*

*Cien años de soledad*, the renowned Boom novel by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, pertains to the discourse regarding the juncture between representations of the environment, violence, and biopolitics. The work spans an entire century of Colombian life, expressing through the characters a variety of worldviews about nature, traversing the spectrum from oral-tradition

cultures to modern, scientifically-centered cultures.<sup>21</sup> Considering the length of historical background, it is no surprise that the organization of society differs during the disparate time periods and that therefore biopolitics manifests itself in multiple forms throughout the book. With this in mind, I will explore the progression of the novel through the lens of Agamben's argument focusing on the initial stages of Macondo's formation, the outbreak of civil war in Colombia, and the banana-workers' strike. Similarly to *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, resonances of Agamben's biopolitical theory abound in this work; however, in the analysis of this section I will not examine the perils of the anthropological machine, but rather the way in which the sovereign power is an exception to the law.<sup>22</sup> I will also explore the way that the novel connects these manifestations of the sovereign exception with the natural environment.

*Cien años de soledad* chronicles the life of the Buendía clan over the course of one hundred years; the family's story takes place in Macondo, the town that José Arcadio Buendía and his wife Úrsula help establish. The narrator reveals that the pair, along with several intrepid friends, undertook a twenty six-month journey through uninhabited nature in order to find a route to the ocean from the town of Riohacha. Unable to find this route and unwilling to make the return journey back, the wayfarers set up camp at the edge of a river. Idyllic and simple, Macondo is the happy result of their months of meandering. The town takes on an Eden-like quality in its initial stages as the young, robust families live

in harmony with each other and their environment, paralleling the sublime vision of nature in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

At first glance it would seem that the novel supports the Romantic idealization of nature, in which simplicity and separation from both large urban areas and modern technology are the way to happiness; however, as Gustavo Llarull contends, this simpler version of organizing society is not as untainted by technology as it appears. "In *Cien años de soledad*... a Macondo created by people who want to 'flee' from urban culture and 'return' to a simpler, more 'natural' way of life cannot be but an ironic use of the old Romantic theme of 'the return to Nature'" (96). Llarull's rationale for using the term ironic is based on the idea that technological know-how is used in the creation of Macondo, negating a supposed "pure" natural state. This coincides with Jonathan Tittler's point about the origins of science and technology; Tittler argues that while people often equate the two, historically they have not always been on the same trajectory: "Science, originally an offspring of natural philosophy, was always urban, aristocratic, and abstract. Technology, in contrast, has its roots in the countryside, where it was the domain of humble practitioners. It is not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the spread of democracy permits these two currents to flow together" (13). Even from the outset of the town, technology is connected to the manner in which the inhabitants organize their society; furthermore, life, while harmonious with nature, is not removed entirely from cultural advancements. According to Llarull, "there *is* a technical use of

architectural design applied to natural resources in Macondo's construction-guided by an ethical, social invention, revealed by the just, equitable distribution of sunlight and access to fresh water" (96-97). Llarull's argument correlates to the discussion about biopolitics in that he emphasizes how the founders value justice and the individual right to support biological life. Furthermore, this fairness does not come at the expense of progress: technique and technology are not regarded negatively by the narrator since both are guided by a moral foundation for the members of society.

What surfaces from this discussion is a picture of the way in which Macondo in its early stages is both connected to nature as well as based on certain ethics in human culture; the town maintains an equitable grounding even in its search to live in harmony with nature and utilize the wisdom of those who use technology to enhance life. The presentation of Macondo at its inception, represents a society distanced from the structures of power which view human life as disposable as Agamben theorizes in his treatise of modern biopolitics and the sovereign exception.<sup>23</sup> On this point, Gareth Williams elaborates on what exactly a sovereign exception entails: "The sovereign decision institutes the law and suspends the law at will, and with utmost impunity; that is, the essence of sovereign power is located in the miraculous ability of the sovereign to legally suspend the laws that his subjects are legally banned from suspending or even transgressing" (5-6). Macondo at this point in the narrative does not seem to need a sovereign power able to dispose of life under the law by exempting itself



from the law. Instead of this type of power structure, the town of Macondo is organized by families that value human life and establish a simple, just way of living. This life, however, does not exclude the possibility of technology but rather places it within the parameters designed to protect human life. In the opening chapters, *Cien años de soledad* describes a town established with a firm ethical ethos for dealing with biological life. This biological life is intertwined with nature and the surrounding environment, upholding the idea that humans should have access to natural resources in order to thrive.

The first few years in the town of Macondo are picturesque; however, much in the same way that the story of Eden is spoiled by humankind's transgression, Macondo's expansion and progress eventually pave the way for those wishing to implement the type of power that Agamben associates with the modern state and biopolitics. The first hints of this arrive along with don Apolinar Moscote, the government representative who alights in town and dictates that everyone paint their houses blue to celebrate Colombia's anniversary of independence. José Arcadio quickly confronts the new presence of the government:

Ante la impavidez de don Apolinar Moscote, siempre sin levantar la voz, hizo un pormenorizado recuento de cómo habían fundado la aldea, de cómo se habían repartido la tierra, abierto los caminos, e introducido las mejoras que les había ido exigiendo la necesidad, sin haber molestado a gobierno alguno y sin que nadie los molestara... No se dolió de que el gobierno no los hubiera ayudado. Al contrario, se alegraba de que hasta entonces los hubiera dejado crecer en paz, y esperaba que así los siguiera dejando, porque ellos no habían fundado un pueblo para que el primer advenedizo les fuera a decir lo que debían hacer. (75)

José Arcadio's calm discourse hinges on the fact that it was the families who not only looked out for the citizens, but also divided up the land and subsequently completed the tasks that the town required to make life work. His message to Moscote is clear: any intrusion is unwelcome, not only because the town does not need help, but also because the government should not benefit from the hard work of the founding families now that everything is well established. A week after their chat, issues of power, sovereignty, and violence surface when Moscote brings six soldiers with guns as well as his wife and seven daughters to live in Macondo. José Arcadio's response to the news demonstrates his commitment to the value of life. He approaches Moscote and tells him that he and his family are welcome to stay, but he adds these two conditions: "La primera, que cada quién pinta su casa del color que le dé la gana. La segunda: que los soldados van en seguida. Nosotros le garantizamos el orden" (77). The ostensible reason for José Arcadio's concern (his desire to have a white house) underscores his deeper apprehension: once he allows the government of Colombia to exercise control in his town, then he will have to live under a state where the sovereign is exempt from abiding by the law, something which threatens the current system. Until the arrival of Moscote, life has been protected by the founding families, but the entrance of a new sovereign would cease to guarantee such protections. By sending away the military force, José Arcadio at the very least determines to limit the ability for Moscote to implement any such type of power.

His ploy to rid the town of soldiers initially solves the problem (as well as allows him to choose the color of his house). However, Macondo's entrance into the dominion of the Colombian state is not so easily avoided. Within a few years, Macondo finds itself caught up in the very same fight over principles that disrupts the entire nation. Civil war erupts and José Arcadio's fears are realized as the government sends troops to Macondo, sets up a state of martial law, and begins to act under its sovereign exception to kill with impunity. The nature of the government power is epitomized by its right to decide over the bare life of its citizens, exemplified by the military's first act of violence: "Se impuso el toque de queda a las seis de la tarde. Se hizo una requisita más drástica que la anterior, casa por casa, y esta vez se llevaron hasta las herramientas de labranza. Sacaron a rastras al doctor Noguera, lo amarraron a un árbol de la plaza y lo fusilaron sin fórmula de juicio" (127).

What this passage indicates is an intensification of the type of power that is unleashed when the sovereign is exempt from following the law and appropriates the right to decide who lives and who dies. Furthermore, it displays one of the key weapons in the sovereign's arsenal: an organized executive force. In the case of *Cien años de soledad*, the force is called the military, but the idea behind their organization is very similar to Gareth Williams' argument regarding the role of police in a biopolitical state<sup>24</sup>: "State violence is the product of sovereign commands issued as a result of specific interests just as much as it is a response to the police allocation and regularization of ways of doing, being,

and saying. The everyday workings of police cannot be separated from the sovereign state of exception...*police* is central to the exercise of sovereign exceptionality” (13) Indeed, state violence in this example is a product of the sovereign command to maintain order and safeguard the special interests of the Colombian government.

This specific incident represents a chain of progression from the Eden of Macondo’s early years. As the state gains a foothold in the town, so too do the power structures that allow for the sovereign exception, including the ability to decide who lives and dies and the capability to enforce those decisions. The death of Doctor Noguera at the hands of the state, without due process, reveals the slow but sure advancement into a modern biopolitical state, which will eventually strike very close to the Buendía family.

Furthermore, the natural environment plays a role in the conflict between the military and the townsfolk. The people of Macondo are forced to give up their working tools, and the soldiers therefore present a threat to the livelihood of those people who work to till the soil and grow food. Appropriating the implements of the civilians is an act that indicates not only a fear of uprising, but a fear that the people of Macondo will continue to be the decision makers of their own life-styles, life-styles that are directly connected to the land and nature. The intrusion of the armed forces is perilous for the civilians because it threatens the harmony between the people and their natural environment.

A striking example of this hazard arises shortly after the soldiers take control of the town: “Las decisiones las tomaba un capitán del ejército que todas las mañanas recaudaba una manlieva extraordinaria para la defensa del orden público. Cuatro soldados al mando suyo arrebataron a su familia una mujer que había sido mordida por un perro rabioso y la mataron a culatazos en plena calle” (127). The image of soldiers beating a woman to death is powerfully poignant, but symbolically it goes beyond the problem of violence and calls attention to the natural environment. Getting bitten by a rabid dog represents the always unstable relationship between the forces of nature and humanity’s susceptibility to the elements. Within this very political passage the novel inserts a natural image, prompting the reader to remember that the power of nature stands in stark contrast to the executive presence of the military. The military attempt to control nature- by resolving that a woman who has been infected by a disease is ready for death- communicates hubris on the part of the sovereign power. The determination of the sovereign to take over all forms of control, even control over nature, demonstrates the all-pervasiveness of a body of power dogged in its attempt to subsume everything under its hegemony. In this section of the novel, a tension develops between the sovereign force and the natural elements; this tension affects the community of Macondo, leaving the people in the middle- with no choice over their situation- to deal with the fallout of this opposition. The sovereign is not the one who must deal with the repercussions of the natural

threat; it is the people of Macondo who suffer, a scenario which will resurface towards the end of the novel.

The consequences of the sovereign exception continue to amplify in later generations of the Buendía family. Several decades after the founding of Macondo, and several decades after the civil wars in Colombia, an American, Mr. Herbert, arrives in Macondo and is invited to lunch at the Buendía household. During the meal he eats a banana and then asks for another. The description of Mr. Herbert's methodical examination of a bunch of bananas signals another important moment when the scientific world view comes into contact with the more traditional mindset of the community, causing surprise on the part of those who are more connected with their natural environment:

Con la incrédula atención de un comprador de diamantes examinó meticulosamente un banano seccionando sus partes con un estilete especial, pesándolas en un granatario de farmacéutico y calculando su envergadura con un calibrador de armero. Luego sacó...una serie de instrumentos con los cuales midió la temperatura, el grado de humedad de la atmósfera y la intensidad de la luz. Fue una ceremonia tan intrigante, que nadie comió tranquilo esperando que Mr. Herbert emitiera por fin un juicio revelador, pero no dijo nada que permitiera vislumbrar sus intenciones. (273)

The innocence of this scene- the Buendía family watching a foreigner examine a banana during lunch- belies the seriousness of the occasion. While the family looks on, Mr. Herbert assiduously assesses the capitalistic properties of the banana. The family stares in wonder not at the banana but at the man who is captivated by such a simple, common object. The narrator's comparison of the banana to diamonds accentuates the disparity between Mr. Herbert's

understanding of bananas as commodities to be marketed with the Buendías' more earthy version of bananas as sustenance. In this moment a new threat is born to the inhabitants of Macondo who live so closely allied with nature: the entrepreneurial enterprises of the American banana company. This lunch foreshadows the ways in which the inhabitants of Macondo will feel the effects of a new manner of approaching the environment, one which sees the environment as something to be exploited for profit. Furthermore, this approach will further underscore the modern biopolitical apathy towards vulnerable bodies, one where production is prized above biological life. Mr. Herbert's presence also points to the beginning of a new power dynamic; whereas the people controlling Macondo have at least always been fellow Colombians, the explosion of immigration of American managers and their families in the town generates a scenario in which the interests of multi-national corporations now take precedence over the interests of the locals who have lived in Macondo for generations.

An ecocritical reading of the presence of the American banana company demonstrates the anthropocentrism inherent in imperialism and unfettered capitalism. The American/Western view dismisses the mystical, active quality of the natural environment, placing agency on human interests and consigning nature to the category of object. Nowhere is this more evident than in the description of how several Americans take up camp after Mr. Herbert's discovery of the banana. These foreigners create for themselves a separate housing area with their own set of standards, designing a zone built for comfort, and purposely

ignoring the repercussions for the surrounding fauna: “El sector estaba cercado por una malla metálica, como un gigantesco gallinero electrificado que en los frescos meses del verano amanecía negro de golondrinas achicharradas” (274). The swallows, electrocuted to death overnight, represent the Americans’ apathy towards the environment; only profits count, not life. As I presented in the section on *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, the moment that the lives of animals are in jeopardy, human life also becomes endangered. Again, this set up of society brings to the forefront the sovereign exception and its authority to decide which life counts, something that becomes extremely evident after the banana company stakes its claim in Macondo.

With the banana company firmly entrenched in the life of the town, José Arcadio Segundo, the great-grandson of the man who dissuades don Apolinar Moscote from using violence, begins to organize the Colombian banana workers in order to ameliorate some of their working environments. In chapter fifteen of *Cien años* the narrator details José Arcadio Segundo’s involvement in the banana-worker’s strike against the American corporation that owned the plantations; the summary of the workers’ complaints reveals that most of these grievances deal with the biological problems that the laborers suffer due to poor working conditions:

Los médicos de la compañía no examinaban a los enfermos, sino que los hacían pararse en fila india frente a los dispensarios, y una enfermera les ponía en la lengua una píldora del color del piedralipe, así tuvieran paludismo, blenorragia o estreñimiento... Los obreros de la compañía estaban hacinados en tambos miserables. Los ingenieros, en vez de construir letrinas, llevaban a



los campamentos, por Navidad, un excusado portátil para cada cincuenta personas, y hacían demostraciones públicas de cómo utilizarlos para que duraran más. (359)

Here the American conglomerate denies basic rights to hygiene for those who actually deliver the service that makes the company profitable. José Arcadio Segundo's community organizing represents a marked turn-around from the peaceful days of Macondo's formation. Whereas the founding families guaranteed a fair distribution of land and access to biological healthfulness, now the townspeople have to protest simply to exercise basic biological functions in hygienic conditions. In order to fight against the American banana company policies, workers decide that they must strike to achieve their goals; however, their resistance makes their already vulnerable bodies even more exposed.<sup>25</sup>

The workers' strike reveals a concept that Agamben considers inextricably tied to biopolitics, the idea of *homo sacer*, or sacred man. In his use of the term, Agamben harkens back to archaic Roman law in which *homo sacer* is a person who is included in the juridical order solely through exclusion. Agamben contends, "Behind the long, strife-ridden process that leads to the recognition of rights and formal liberties stands once again the body of the sacred man with his double sovereign, his life that cannot be sacrificed yet may, nevertheless, be killed" (Homo Sacer 13). How does Agamben conceptualize the idea of sacrifice in a secular, modern society? Davide Panagia suggests that for Agamben the sacredness of life does not necessarily denote a link to a divine power. "Rather, the sacredness of homo sacer refers specifically to the characteristic feature of

sovereignty that allows for the possibility of killing without requiring the divine overtones usually associated with sacrifice. In this regard, sovereign power and bare life are linked precisely because it is sovereignty that constitutes a life as bare through the foundation of a zone of indistinction” (3). To put it in more basic terms, the idea of sacrifice is not a divine one, but a legal one; being sacrificed means being included in the proceedings of the legal system. Therefore, someone who cannot be sacrificed is someone that cannot participate in the juridical order because the juridical order has included a stipulation that they will be excluded.

The figure of *homo sacer*- one who lives both in the zone of inclusion and the zone of exclusion- is profoundly paradoxical but nevertheless identifiable in *Cien años de soledad* as the mass of workers who strike against their banana overlords. When the people of Macondo bring their complaints up to the highest level of the court, the official response verifies their precarious position under the law:

Fue allí donde los ilusionistas del derecho demostraron que las reclamaciones carecían de toda validez, simplemente porque la compañía bananera no tenía, ni había tenido nunca ni tendría jamás trabajadores a su servicio, sino que los reclutaba ocasionalmente y con carácter temporal. De modo que se desbarató la patraña... [de] las píldoras milagrosas y los excusados pascuales, y se estableció por fallo de tribunal y se proclamó en bandos solemnes la *inexistencia de los trabajadores*. (360, italics mine)

The spectral figures of the workers- people who certainly exist physically but apparently do not exist under the stipulations of the law- are hereby

condemned to a reality in the indistinct zone between biology and politics; the sovereign power denies them their right to life within the law but at the same time exploits their bodies as a means of production. The workers may not be sacrificed in the sense that the state cannot formally deny them rights because they are not legally included within the law. Yet they may be killed. Indeed, the mass of workers discover that their destiny ultimately lies in the most definitive exclusion from the law and society: death. After the workers stage a strike, the response from the military is swift and merciless. Everyone refusing to back down from their demands is summarily executed en masse. In the entropy of the bloodbath, José Arcadio Segundo is shot and loses consciousness for several hours. He awakens to find himself in the midst of thousands of dead corpses on a moving train. The narrator summarizes José Arcadio Segundo's testimony of the hellacious experience on the locomotive, focusing on the way in which the dead bodies parallel the very object in nature they were meant to be harvesting: "Tratando de fugarse de la pesadilla... se arrastró de un vagón a otro...veía los muertos hombres, los muertos mujeres, los muertos niños, que iban a ser arrojados al mar como el banano de rechazo" (367).

In the narration of the massacre, the novel demonstrates how the modern biopolitical state assumes the fullness of its potentiality for harm as it transforms into the entity capable of perpetrating mass murder all the while using the juridical order to negate the biological existence of these people. Unsurprisingly, when José Arcadio comes back to give voice to his horror, the state and fearful

family members deny that anything even happened, putting on full display the ability of the sovereign power to devalue the biological life of vulnerable bodies. In tandem with this political degradation, the natural environment symbolizes the ruination of life: dead human corpses become objects carted away like rotten bananas.

After his escape from the death throes that entrap his fellow laborers, José Arcadio Segundo becomes the biopolitical figure *par excellence* in the story: a man trapped in the indistinct zone between life and death, inclusion and exclusion; he returns to his ancestral home and the military searches for him. However, he hides away in the enchanted room in which Melquíades used to obsess over his parchments. When soldiers come to apprehend him, they are unable to see him in the room and José Arcadio Segundo realizes that he will remain in this state of limbo, caving into the temptation to be safe from the dangers of defying the sovereign power:

La noche en que los militares lo miraron sin verlo... no entendía que hubiera necesitado tantas palabras para explicar lo que sentía en la Guerra, si con una sola bastaba: miedo. En el cuarto de Melquíades, en cambio, protegido por la luz sobrenatural, por el ruido de la lluvia, por la sensación de ser invisible, encontró el reposo que no tuvo un solo instante de su vida anterior, y el único miedo que persistía era el de que lo enterraran vivo. (373-374)

His defiance of the sovereign power places José Arcadio Segundo in the category of *homo sacer*, dooming him to a life separated from society, existing in the shadows; yet in that very exile he finds his greatest peace, not because he

has overcome the sovereign power but because he has tricked it by salvaging the very thing which that power wishes to eliminate: his life itself.

The banana massacre further underscores the emphasis of the novel on the opposition between nature and the sovereign exception. Right after the incident it begins to rain in Macondo and does not stop for four years, eleven months and two days. The narrator ironically underplays the mass destruction which the torrential deluge wreaks on the town by inserting half a sentence about its supposed cause: “[Aureliano Segundo] había ido a la casa por algún asunto casual la noche en que el señor Brown convocó la tormenta” (375). This remark exhibits a worldview which believes that the scientifically-superior Americans (represented by the former manager of the company, Mr. Brown) are able to manipulate even the mighty weather systems. The Americans’ revenge through the storm and their prompt disbandment of their camp indicates something already felt by the townsfolk: it is the people who are most vulnerable, those without power who are left to suffer the consequences of natural disasters. Gary Elbow also discusses the way in which climate here parallels the political happenings:

The endless rain follows on the heels of government denials that 3,000 striking workers were killed by the army... If the government can invent fiction at Mr. Brown’s behest and substitute it for reality, then even the rules of nature are vulnerable... Interpreted in this manner, the account of almost five years of steady rain followed by a ten year drought seems to be a clear attempt to parallel through a violation of rules of nature the government’s ability to deny the massacre witnessed by José Arcadio Buendía. (79)

After the hyperbolic rains finally cease, Macondo is left in a state of devastation from which it never really recovers. The Buendía line eventually comes to an end as its last member is destroyed along with the town in a hurricane. The very last line of the book indicates the way in which nature exacts its revenge on Macondo: “Sin embargo, antes de llegar al verso final ya había comprendido que no saldría jamás de ese cuarto, pues estaba previsto que la ciudad... sería arrasada por el viento y desterrada de la memoria de los hombres” (495).

Macondo's utter annihilation at the end of *Cien años de soledad* is a far cry from the tranquil, happy town of Macondo at its inception. The sovereign power has killed many of the townspeople, camouflaging their deaths with a lie, and nature has ruined the town and the Buendía family, erasing them from human memory. Ultimately the conclusion of the novel is the fitting end to a progression of history which pessimistically views the dangers that the sovereign exception wreaks on vulnerable bodies. As the story develops and the sovereign power gains momentum, the biological life of the people is treated increasingly with less dignity until eventually their bodies are imagined as disposable. The novel ends on a note of warning: sovereignty and nature collude to extinguish the weaker bodies in Macondo; in many ways the Buendía history is a cautionary tale about the end result of biopolitics in modern society.

This chapter has explored the connection between violence and the environment in two Colombian novels. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, the

trauma of violence limits the narrator's perception of the urban space; it is only through a departure to explore his trauma that he is able to process his experience and recapture a sense of space as process. In both *El ruido de las cosas al caer* and *Cien años de soledad* biopolitics explains the relationship of vulnerable bodies in modern society. In Vásquez' novel, biopolitics is linked to Giorgio Agamben's idea of the anthropological machine since the novel explores the animal-human distinction to get at the problem of violence. In García Márquez' work biopolitics clarifies the way that the sovereign exception limits the protection of those who are trapped outside of the juridical order. Both of these works connect the issue of violence to nature in a way that enriches the understanding of the two topics.

## Chapter IV: Hippopotami, Humans, and Habitat: Ecological Imbalance and

### Posthuman Subjectivities in Mempo Giardinelli's *Imposible equilibrio*

El territorio argentino está siendo arrasado, Señora. Lo recorro año a año; veo el deterioro. Cambia nuestra geografía, peligran las aguas, los bosques, ahora las montañas. La minería a cielo abierto es un crimen y en muchos países está prohibida. Igual que la soja transgénica. Por eso me siento en el deber de decir esto cuando veo cómo en este país –que tantos argentinos critican sin conocer– la naturaleza es cuidada como lo que es: una madre. Lo cual no quita que la mayoría de sus empresas cuando salen al mundo depredan o lo bestia.

-Mempo Giardinelli, *Carta abierta de Mempo Giardinelli a la Presidenta*

While many contemporary Argentine authors have published narratives with strong natural elements, Mempo Giardinelli stands out as internationally recognized author who has published significant works of fiction detailing environmental degradation and ecological imbalances.<sup>26</sup> Comparing him to other Argentine writers, Martín Camps argues, “perhaps Giardinelli is the author who most clearly represents the ecological conscience in his precautionary tone and denouncement of ecological devastation” (155).<sup>27</sup> Giardinelli’s *Imposible equilibrio*, a novel of ecological importance, is the focus of this chapter. Published in 1995, the novel weaves together two opposing discourses: in one discursive thread, the government and media represent humanist efforts to address human-made ecological threats to human culture. In the other, a group of resisters combats the anthropocentrism of the authorities and moves closer to a posthumanist framework for approaching the environment. I argue that *Imposible equilibrio* uses these two discourses (1) to signal the ecological imbalance in the



environment caused by anthropocentric actions and (2) to propose that solutions which continue to be based solely on human-centered interests will fail to adequately address the systemic causes of ecological destruction.

In order to support this project, the novel describes in detail the effects of human industry on the environment. Furthermore, it links the ecological imbalance with the treatment of animals; the act of resistance against the authorities revolves around the theft of four hippopotamuses imported to Argentina by the government. Giardinelli incorporates the hippo characters to examine the relationship between humans and animals, questioning traditional conceptions of subjectivities and calling attention to posthumanistic modes of thinking. In this chapter I will first review Cary Wolfe's engagement of posthumanism to explain the critical framework I employ to assay the way in which the novel conceives of non-human subjectivities. I will then analyze the link between ecological damage and human industry in the novel. Finally I will demonstrate that through its exploration of human/animal relations, *Impossible equilibrio* critiques human-centered subjectivities and in the process condemns the environmental imbalance that such epistemologies have engendered.

#### *Subjectivity, posthumanism and animal studies*

In order to understand the importance of posthumanism for this project, the term subjectivity must be defined. I employ "subjectivity" to indicate the ability to act and possess control over self. My conception of subjectivity is similar to the idea of agency; however, Susan McHugh argues that in literary analyses of

animals, the two terms are not necessarily interchangeable. To her, agency (as opposed to subjectivity) communicates a broader approach to the representation of animals since the term acknowledges a more complex interdependence between species. McHugh gives the metaphor of chemical interactions in which there is no straightforward subject between interacting elements. She argues that this is pertinent to literary studies of animals because, “This extremely localized registering, or interaction of what happens between at least two properties, provides an altogether different problematic for companion-species relations, helping to explain how other creatures become important not as supplements to human subject forms but rather as actors joining us in continuously shaping this one alongside a range of other narrative forms” (3). However, McHugh admits, “Although...animal narratives prove critical to aesthetic explorations of others’ contributions to the fiction of the human subject, I hesitate to claim that distinguishing agency from subjectivity simply resolves concerns about deconstructive and other refutations of the foundational discourses of the humanist subject” (2). McHugh recognizes the difficulties in separating the terms, even as she defends the importance of moving beyond the reductionism of humanist thinking. For the purpose of my argument, I will use the word subjectivity, although I have in mind a broader definition of the word which includes the idea of exercising agency.

Posthumanism has ambiguous and opposing definitions. As Francesca Ferrando argues, “The label ‘posthuman’ is often evoked in a generic and all-

inclusive way, to indicate... different perspectives, creating methodological and theoretical confusion between experts and non-experts alike” (26). Ferrando explains that there are several categories of confusion but that the two which are most often muddled are that of transhumanism and posthumanism.

Transhumanism refers to the discipline which focuses on scientific and technological advancements that may in the future eliminate human physical limitations. Posthumanism, on the other hand, explores a post-anthropocentric and post-dualistic approach to critical studies, philosophy and culture. In Ferrando’s assessment, “Posthumanism can be seen as a post-exclusivism: an empirical philosophy of mediation which offers a reconciliation of existence in its broadest significations. Posthumanism does not employ any frontal dualism or antithesis, demystifying any ontological polarization through the postmodern practice of deconstruction” (29). In his notions about posthumanism, Cary Wolfe falls in line with Ferrando’s delineation of the category and its goal to deconstruct the centrality of humanistic understandings of reality.

Wolfe expands his treatise on posthumanism by rejecting popular definitions which conceptualize the subject as exceeding the bonds of materiality and the physical body. In his counterargument to this current of thought, this author proposes posthumanism as a field capable of dispelling certain myths of humanism by recognizing the very inescapability of human centrality. According to him, “Posthumanism in my sense isn’t posthuman at all- in the sense of being ‘after’ our embodiment has been transcended- but it is only posthuman/*ist*, in the

sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited from humanism itself” (What is Posthumanism? xv). Wolfe opposes the Cartesian way of conceiving of materiality in which reason and logic supersede the physical body and its place within the environment precisely because this type of thinking enables the centering of the human as the normative subject and relegates non-human actors (such as animals) to the periphery of consideration. Undine Sellbach understands this problem as the following: “Our accounts of animals are always, to a certain extent, anthropomorphic for they are mediated by human perceptions, concepts, gestures, feelings, and imaginings” (308). Wolfe insists that it is possible to overcome this type of human/animal binary by first recognizing our limitations and then overcoming them through interdisciplinary studies.<sup>28</sup>

Wolfe applies his ideas about posthumanism to animal studies by discussing how new subjectivities in some branches of posthumanist thought do not always move past classic ways of perceiving anthropocentric subjectivity. In his posthumanistic framework, the author rejects dualistic assertions about human/animal relationships which assert the supremacy and subjectivity of the former over the later in all instances. Wolfe identifies two levels of studying animals in representation, arguing that both levels are essential to analysis if theorists are to go beyond traditional human-centered paradigms.<sup>29</sup> According to him, this field “can be addressed adequately only if we confront them on not just one level but two: not just the level of content, thematics, and the object of

knowledge (the 'animal' studied by animal studies) but also the level of theoretical and methodological approach (*how* animal studies studies 'the animal')" (What is Posthumanism? 99). The precautionary implications of Wolfe's categorization indict any reader who, while appearing to legitimately analyze animal subjectivities at the first level (content or theme) of animal studies, may end up with anthropocentric conclusions. It is at the second level, that of methodology and theory, where the scope of the humanistic and posthumanistic approaches are more clearly evident in animal studies.

Wolfe's critique of the subject/object dualisms is directed at Western cultures in particular. However, as Tim Ingold points out, this binary opposition does not necessarily describe how non-Western cultures conceive of the world; for instance, hunter-gathering cultures do not share this perception of nature and animals. According to him, the perception of the social world in hunter-gatherer societies is one of intimacy with nature and non-human actors which "is grounded in the direct, mutually attentive involvement of self and other in shared contexts of experience...But in Western anthropological and psychological discourse, such involvement continues to be apprehended within the terms of the orthodox dualisms of subjects and objects, persons, and things" (40-41). Ingold nuances the discussion about the subject/object divide when regarding humans and animals. However, as *Impossible equilibrio* presents a society with a historically Western framework, this subject/object binary requires analysis.

To regard animals as focal points in literature marks a shift of subjectivity away from human actors. Since posthumanism also emphasizes the deconstruction of classic anthropocentric subjectivities, Wolfe's discussion of the field and its connection to animal studies facilitates a comprehension of the role of hippos in *Impossible equilibrio*. Using this framework, I will argue that the novel situates the hippopotami at the forefront of discussion via two contrasting discourses: from the point of view of the government and media, the hippos are objects, beings under the dominion of human interests and desires. The resisters, however, challenge this situation in an attempt to grant the hippos subjectivity and undermine the government's actions. By examining these two frames of reference I will demonstrate that at the thematic level animal subjectivities are integral to the novel and that at the methodological level the resisters challenge traditional dualisms between humans and animals.

#### *Ecological imbalance and human industry*

Giardinelli's story begins with an anxious group of friends in Resistencia, Argentina observing from a distance a celebratory crowd awaiting the arrival of four African hippopotamuses by boat. The narrator, Cardozo, explains that an engineer working in the Chaco province of Argentina has convinced the authorities to acquire these hippos from Africa and import them to the area in order to help with the purification of dirty rivers and streams.<sup>30</sup> The engineer is under the scientific supposition that the beasts-by eating the aquatic plants and reeds which are threatening the ecological equilibrium of the region-will

decontaminate the waterways. After much fanfare, the hippos disembark the water vessel in a trailer. Once they arrive on land, a series of bombs planted by Cardozo's friend, Victorio Lagomarsino, explode and distract the crowd. The ensuing tumult provides Victorio the opportunity to seize the vehicle containing the hippopotami. As he is fleeing, Clelia Riganti, a young woman in the city, boards the trailer unexpectedly, deciding that she wants to participate in the action. Victorio, with Clelia now in tow, drives to meet Pura Solanas and Frank Woodyard, a couple who have committed to aiding Victorio in achieving his goal of liberating the hippos. The remainder of the novel relays the group's journey through the interior of the Chaco and the governmental pursuit of the resisters.

Giardinelli's novel conveys in several passages the origins of the ecological difficulties facing the Chaco. In the opening chapter, Cardozo summarizes an environmental imbalance, articulating the problem in the same way that the media and the government understand it- from a humanist point of view. From this human-centered perspective Cardozo clearly links the ecological imbalance with human industry and production in the region.

Era un hecho... que el Chaco hacía ya muchos años que venía sufriendo excesivas lluvias y las inundaciones eran crónicas. Vastas selvas taladas insensatamente, en veinte años se habían convertido en desiertos- de millones de hectáreas- mientras que las zonas más húmedas y fértiles eran ahora inmensurables espejos de aguas podridas, lagunas y bañados, esteros y charcos. En todas esas manchas sobreabundaban carrizales y camalotes...aunque nunca la fauna chaqueña había sido cordial, últimamente en esas formaciones pululaba todo tipo de bichos peligrosos: víboras, arañas, yacarés, palometas y demás alimañas acuáticas, además de nutrias y carpinchos, jejenes, y mosquitos. El avance de esas estructuras vegetales era tal que, incluso, se decía

que podía haber riesgo para el enorme puente que une Resistencia con Corrientes. (15)

In Chapter One, *Imposible equilibrio* hints at the flaw in the plan to address the environmental problems. The growth of wetlands, while problematic for human society, may not necessarily be considered environmental devastation since the plants are native to the area. Bringing non-native species, however, has the potential to cause serious consequences for the habitat. In a scientific journal Simões Vitule et al. refute an article which supports the importation of non-native species to solve ecological imbalances. Simões Vitule et al. argue that it is difficult to predict the long-term effects of the introduction of non-native species and that without caution, there could be serious consequences for the environment. The authors cite the example of the introduction of kokanee salmon and lake trout into a Montana river in the early twentieth century. Due to the fluctuations in quantities of different types of fish, other species such as the bald eagle and grizzly bear suffered declines and the lake's population of bull trout faced extinction as of 2011. These authors argue that those who support importing non-native species to solve ecological imbalances downplay the danger of species introductions and that not planning for long-term consequences of non-native species introduction "could encourage decision makers...to approve introductions that carry a high risk of adverse consequences" (1154). Scientifically, the decision to introduce non-native species does not necessarily guarantee ecologically sound results; the short term approach by decision makers in *Imposible equilibrio* demonstrates the same



approach which these scientists contest. In the short-term these policy makers only seek to alleviate the ecological problems because they are having a direct effect on the Chaco's human population.

At the outset, therefore, the novel describes the crisis to human society from an anthropocentric approach. The damage is caused by humans; it is human society which now suffers the magnitude of the consequences and the solutions to these problems do not take into account the long-term effects for the environment. As Simon C. Estok points out, many times initiatives to repair the environment reveal a human-focused paradigm mired in self-interest because “a failure to engage in preservation of the natural world will invariably cause suffering to humanity” (207).<sup>31</sup> In several sections, *Imposible equilibrio* exposes the behaviors of a society entrenched in humanist modes of thinking about the environment. For instance, in this passage, with the exception of the descriptions of the *symptoms* of destruction (such as the decimated forests), the narrative centers on how the crisis threatens the amenability of the region to human life and modernity, and is not actually concerned about habitat loss.

Still, despite these humanist tendencies, the novel strongly criticizes the types of actions which have led to environmental imbalances. In the above quote, the use of the word *insensatamente* (senselessly) notifies the reader of a concept central to *Imposible equilibrio*: the novel inculcates human industry for the imbalance of the environment; by doing so it reveals its adherence to the type of ideology supported by those in the field of ecocriticism. Regarding the topic of the

environment in literature, Ursula K. Heise argues that the proponents of ecocriticism “aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically...This domination strips nature of any value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence” (507). Cardozo parallels these ideas by highlighting the irresponsible actions of people who decimated vast forests, insinuating that the ecological threat to human infrastructure was precipitated by human exploitation of natural resources.

Cardozo views the chopping down of vast forests as unwise, expressing a negative judgment against those who caused the crisis. However, his description of the consequences of the environmental crisis remains relatively detached; Cardozo’s enumeration of the swarming flora and fauna engages a scientific register. Furthermore, although he links the threat of the ecological crisis to the potential damage it could cause to a bridge between two cities, the consequences for human society and even the natural world seem relatively remote. The ecological imbalance in the opening chapter begins as an abstraction that, while threatening, does not seem to have potency as a real disaster. J. Andrew Brown purports that the question of the balance of the Chaco ecosystem serves as more of an excuse for the subsequent development of the novel than as a major element. According to him, “the far from equilibrium system that the Chaco natural environment represents shifts then to the group of friends

at the bar La Estrella that comes to symbolize this same non-equilibrium system through a metonymic identification fueled by their constant discussion of the hippopotami. In a sense, they become what they discuss” (30). Brown is correct in recognizing that the opening chapters serve as a backdrop for the action of the plot, however he does not appreciate the full significance of the environmental themes for the novel. The ecological danger is a central point for Giardinelli’s novel.

The importance of the ecological imbalance becomes more obvious as *Imposible equilibrio* progresses. Whereas as in the opening chapter, there is a certain detachment in the descriptions of the crisis, the intensity of the discussion shifts during the resisters’ trek through the interior of the province. The theoretical problem of environmental damage becomes a concrete issue when the team witnesses first-hand the ramifications of deforestation and industry. In one clear example the group traverses an area filled with quebracho tree trunks, signposts of the despoilment of the region. Victorio explains to Clelia that quebrachos require several years to mature and that the indiscriminate cutting and pillaging of the trees have condemned them to extinction. By caring about the loss of the habitat, Victorio begins to hint at the way in which the resisters value non-human interests as well as human culture.

After seeing the quebracho stumps, Clelia only feigns interest; her apathy gives way to real compassion when she sees the people in the town nearby the destroyed forest. “Casi toda la gente se ha ido y muchas casas están vacías,

como en todo el interior del Chaco... En algunas pocas casas se ve gente: personas flacas, demacradas, tristes. Tienen caras de muertos. Quizá muchos ya lo sean” (98). Victorio informs Clelia that this is just a sample of what is happening in the entire Chaco, to which Clelia responds that one would have to be a horrible person not to become depressed at the sight. Victorio replies, “-No creas. No te imaginás la cantidad de contentos que pasan por aquí sin darse cuenta de nada” (98). Victorio’s tirade against those who ignore the consequences of felling vast forests adumbrates his general opinion about those in power: not only do they not care about the environment, but they also turn a blind eye to the suffering that industrial waste causes to humans.

The descriptions of the deforestation of the environment in Giardinelli’s novel consistently link environmental imbalances with human endeavors. Giardinelli’s fictional images are founded in solid scientific study. In a scientific report Boletta et al. address the very phenomenon occurring in the actual region where the action takes place in *Imposible equilibrio*:

The Argentine Chaco, a semi-arid region with a xerophytic deciduous forest, has been affected by extensive deforestation. A representative area (the Moreno Department in the province of Santiago del Estero covering more than a million hectares) was surveyed using LANDSAT MSS and TM satellite imagery from 1975 to 1999. In the 7 years from 1992 to 1999, more than 273,000 ha were found to have been deforested at an annual rate of 5%. A physiographic analysis of change identified the reduction of the area of native trees and the increase of agricultural land, the degraded areas of abandoned agricultural land and the unproductive shrub land. (108)

Deforestation is just one human-made environmental threat prominent in the novel. The passages about the journey through the countryside are also littered with examples of industry poisoning the environment; the scenes underscore a panorama of ubiquitous destruction. For instance, as the group journeys, they observe a tanning factory which once was an industrial emporium. The factory, now barely surviving, “es la única actividad que todavía no ha muerto, aunque su contaminación lo mata todo. A la entrada misma del pueblo, el puente sobre lo que fue el río Negro muestra un zanjón de color borravino, putrefacto y oloriento a azufre y tanino” (62). The characters grieve this degradation, yet they are not the only witnesses to the destruction. Human-engineered development also cooperates in the censure of industrial pollution: “Hasta las calles polvosas están teñidas de rojo, como si quisieran denunciar inútilmente los años, las décadas, de incesante depredación de bosques” (62). The novel forcefully condemns the consistent demolishing of forests for industrial production as well as the industrial waste contaminating the environment. Still, in spite of the inclusion of the streets in the above example, as the narrative develops and the crisis shifts from an abstract problem to a concrete one, the focus of the issue lingers on the repercussions of the ecological changes to human culture. The narrator’s reprimand of the destruction of natural habitat is still humanist in approach. However, the novel problematizes this interpretation by including hippopotami in the plot in the form of characters and beings with their own subjectivity. The hippos disclose a more nuanced method of

understanding subjectivity as the work moves towards a posthumanistic approach in theorizing the environment.

*Hippopotami and the chaqueño imaginary*

The centrality of the hippos in the narration facilitates an interpretation of the novel which addresses the way in which *Imposible equilibrio* represents animal subjectivity. From a thematic point of view, Giardinelli's work reinforces Aaron Gross' point which I have discussed in previous chapters, that is that across cultures and time, animals are critical sites through which humans imagine themselves. Furthermore, in his discussion about animals and the human imagination, Gross outlines his goals as twofold. First, he wishes to contribute to the conversation about the shifting boundaries between the animal and human divide by bringing new perspectives of agency into question. Second, he desires to avoid the problem of rendering animals "absent" with approaches that are too narrowly focused on aspects of humanity related to animals. By maintaining a critical attitude towards literary exercises which fail to make "present" animal subjectivity, Gross echoes Wolfe's insistence on methodological approaches that push past anthropocentric modes of thought regarding animals.

The novel very explicitly addresses the idea of animals becoming anthropomorphized, particularly the way in which the media and the government attempt to humanize the hippos. By exploring the mediated representation of the hippos, *Imposible equilibrio* depicts the way that these beasts become involved in

the national political discourse, demonstrating how these hippos are objectified by the government and media in the process.

Originally the administrators who decide to import the hippopotamuses envision a mechanical/ utilitarian purpose for the animals (i.e. they are meant to purify the water systems in the area); however, as the discussion regarding their advent continues, the hippos begin to take on a personified existence, both in the way in which individuals and the media perceives them. Several sections of Cardozo's narration weave a colloquial picture of the manner in which he and his friends spend their evenings chatting about the topic of hippos in the local bar, *La Estrella*. Adjacent to the public's conversations about these animals are the ploys of the media and government to popularize the image of the hippo. In his descriptions, Cardozo accentuates the frivolous quality of the national discourse. In one amusing example he relays an attempt by the government to foster enthusiasm for the upcoming arrival of the animals:

El gobierno auspició un verdadero bombardeo de anuncios en los diarios, en radio y televisión, en afiches pegados en las calles, y en camisetas que se regalaban en los actos públicos y que en el pecho llevaban escrita la leyenda "Bienvenidos al Chaco" sobre el dibujo de una descomunal y roja boca abierta, de dientes blancos y cuadrados como enormes panes de jabón, y debajo otra frase: "Yo amo a los hipopótamos, ¿y usted?". (27)

The picture of an ambiguous, enormous red mouth with square, white teeth lends itself to more than one interpretation. The mouth could be a human mouth; it could be the mouth of a hippopotamus; or it could be one which has been altered to resemble both types. By connecting the hippos to a large, open

mouth and the word “love”, the creatures are sexualized, much in the same way that the media sexualizes pop culture figures. By appealing to the sexual desire of the general populace, the government disseminates visual icons that anthropomorphize the animals. In this way the authorities blur the boundaries between animals and humans, insinuating that the hippos resemble human culture and desire.

The state authorities are not the only agents clouding the distinction between animals and humans by using pop culture to exploit the event. Bar owners rename their properties with titles involving the new additions to the country and a soda called *Hipo-cola* is marketed. For the narrator, however, “el colmo fue que el Club Atlético Chaco For Ever jugó todo ese año en la Segunda División del fútbol nacional con una camiseta que tenía estampada, sobre los gloriosos colores blanquinegros, la fotografía de dos hipopótamos haciendo el amor” (28). The infusion of sexualized hippos in the media signals the tactics that authorities and vendors employ in the hopes that chaqueños will accept the hippos into their culture, thus dispelling any doubts about the importation of these creatures.

In many ways, the governmental aspirations are effective. The mediated depictions of the hippos grant them a unique position in the imaginary of the people: the animals assume a visual and representational significance which would otherwise be difficult to produce in a region without an autochthonous species of hippopotamuses.<sup>32</sup> The push to inculcate the chaqueño community



towards one of acceptance and appreciation for the hippos succeeds, as Cardozo observes that “los hipopótamos pasaron a formar parte de nuestras vidas” (30). The animals become familiar in the minds and hearts of the people in El Chaco through ubiquitous advertising in pop culture. Indeed, the connection between human life and hippo life concatenates into an ambience which personifies the four beings in such a way as to incorporate them into the daily life of the region; throughout this process, the hippos take on a presence of their own and become integral members of the Chaco region.

The sexualization of the hippos, however, problematizes the idea that they are subjects in their own right. Their mediated images call attention to the critique very often brought forth by those who discuss gender and the media. As many feminist scholars have argued, in the case of women who are sexualized in media representations, the fetishized body of woman becomes a signifier (i.e. object) for male subjects who are able to live out their fantasies and desires in the patriarchal order. Laura Mulvey discusses the issue of female objectification in the context of women in the media. She contends:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (62-63).

In this fashion society places male/female in a subject/object dichotomy, and although women are humans, they become objectified in the media for the

purpose of producing desire. The hippos too are converted into objects of desire, leading to consumption of products with their likeness. A feminist reading of the novel exposes how the government machinations foster a desire between humans and the hippos by objectifying the latter, much in the same way that media often objectifies women. Along the lines of Wolfe's argument, the hippos become the object of human observation and consumption in this framework but they do not in any real fashion become subjects in their own right. However, as I will discuss shortly, the actions of Victorio and his crew demonstrate a resistance against this type of objectification.

The glorification of the hippos in the provincial media also relates to the political implications of their arrival. This is the case not merely because they become the focus for policy adjustments, but also because their story becomes a metaphor for human conflict and interests. In an illustration which demonstrates the way in which humans project their culture onto animals, the government calls for a contest for children under twelve to name the beasts. The results unmask the friction between proponents of globalization and critics of foreign influence in Latin America, a human concern which now involves the hippos:

La votación fue anulada porque al gobierno le pareció que sería un papelón internacional dar a conocer los nombres más votados, que fueron Christian, Jonathan, Jennifer, y Vanina, 'lo que demuestra el grado de colonización cultural de nuestra niñez', como dijo Victorio cuando se comentó el asunto en *La Estrella*. Lo cierto fue que, con exactitud, nadie supo quién ni por qué llamó a los adultos Alberto y Lidia, y a las crías Pepe y Josefina. (29)

The irony of the incident (i.e. that four animals imported from another continent would cause an international embarrassment if they had foreign names) does more than just make the reader chuckle. It also establishes a rhetoric in which the animals not only take on human names but also human-defined nationalities. There is no doubt that with names like Alberto, Lidia, Pepe, and Josefina that these creatures are Hispanic. By bequeathing both names and nationalities, the novel distances the animals from their functional condition as ecological tools and it appears that they have subjectivity at the national register. This corresponds to Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities.<sup>33</sup> While few are ever likely to meet or see these hippos, the nation imagines them as part of the community, and as Anderson argues, this makes them part of an emotionally powerful milieu. (50) Within the novel, the outpouring of enthusiasm for the arrival of the hippos in conjunction with the manhunt to find their captors is proof that the issue of nationality evokes deeply seated sentiments when people imagine themselves connected with these animals that they have never even seen in person. However, the act of naming is inherently problematic in terms of the relationships between humans and animals: this gesture exposes a failure to ponder whether the hippos have ways of naming themselves or perceiving themselves as individuals. Naming is indicative of a subject-object relationship; in naming, humans visualize themselves as capable of bestowing individuality to animals. Without our intervention, they are only a class-"hippos." This mindset once again neglects considerations of animals which recognize that they do not

need human names because they are fully capable of establishing their own frameworks of identity.

Ultimately, the attempts to make the hippos welcome in the Chaco region succeed; still, this welcome does not necessarily mean a recognition of the hippos' subjectivity. Linking their images to sexual desire and naming the creatures removes them from positions as subjects and relegates them to the objects in the minds of those buying and selling their likenesses. It is this very situation which the resisters seek to remedy.

#### *Subjective resistance*

*Imposible equilibrio* dedicates a great deal of space to describe the manner in which the media and the authorities maneuver to integrate hippos into the chaqueño imaginary. The personification of the hippos may seem to grant them a certain degree of political agency: they have names, nationalities, and community recognition. However, in spite of the ubiquitous presence of hippopotami in the media and public discourse, the novel both stresses the process by which the creatures are objectified as well as challenges this objectification by emphasizing the significance of the act of resistance against the government. The resisters steal the hippos to defy the anthropocentrism of a society which caused environmental damage and now wishes to exploit animals to solve that problem. While Victorio and his colleagues are not opposed to solutions to the environmental crisis, they do voice a fierce opposition to the governmental manipulation of the situation.

For Victorio and his colleagues, the story of the hippos correlates to the history of oppression exercised by the Argentine government, especially during the military dictatorship and upheavals of the 1960s-1980s.<sup>34</sup> Victorio's concern harkens back to the days in which the government usurped mass communications to promulgate their own agenda while simultaneously committing atrocious violations of human rights. Marguerite Feitlowitz argues that during the military dictatorship between 1976-1983, the ruling junta appropriated language as part of its strategy to maintain control over the people's perceptions: "From the moment of the coup, there was a constant torrent of speeches, proclamations, and interviews... Newspapers and magazines, radio and television all were flooded with messages from the junta" (20). She argues that the regime used language to accomplish these five goals: "(1) shroud in mystery its true actions and intentions, (2) say the opposite of what it meant, (3) inspire trust, both at home and abroad, (4) instill guilt, especially in mothers, to seal their complicity, and (5) sow paralyzing terror and confusion" (20). During the military dictatorship, the government systematically exploited mass communication for its own purposes, an antecedent that explains Victorio's wariness about the ostensible innocuousness of the importation of the hippos. In a debate with his friends, Victorio argues that the original idea of bringing the hippos was fine and even noble; however, just like all ideas in Argentina during his lifetime, the state apparatus appropriated the event and perverted it for the government's own interests, which for Victorio, are quite clear: "Si el gobierno le

llega a dar manija a este asunto es porque le encontró el costado utilitario: van a hacer circo político y, además, negocio” (20).

In response to his pessimism, one of his friends asks Victorio whether, according to his own logic, it isn't better to forgo having any ideas at all. Victorio's response is forceful and grim: “Lo que yo digo es que a nuestra generación primero le sobraron ideas y después le sobraron muertos” (53). Victorio connects the past violence of the state to the current usurpation of the popularity of the hippos because, just as in the past, the government utilizes media and popular discourse to obscure their own self-seeking intentions. In some ways *Imposible equilibrio* may seem to support the idea that the resisters are simply exercising a kind of nostalgia for their former Marxist guerrilla activity: indeed, both Victorio and Pura Solanas served as resistance fighters during the Reorganización Nacional. However, the novel moves past mere political activism and lays out a web of moves in which Victorio and his colleagues prove that conceptually the resisters do value the hippos as subjects who deserve the freedom to exert their own agency.

Victorio's desire to do what is best for the animals is clear from the beginning when he discusses his get-away driving tactics with Clelia after commandeering the hippo trailer. She becomes concerned that the animals will have difficulty surviving Victorio's erratic steering and scolds him saying, “Vas a matar a esos pobres animales” (36), to which he responds, “Peor hubiera sido dejarlos en manos de esos buitres” (36). For Victorio, it is actually the human

players who take on characteristics associated with animality as he links them with vultures, a bird known for feeding off the death and suffering of other animals. In Victorio's mind, the animals deserve the freedom to live without government involvement; the hippos should be their own agents. The metaphor of birds of prey demonstrates Victorio's rejection of paradigms of animal-human relationships which maintain a strict separation between the two groups. Vultures feed off dead animals and for Victorio this animal kingdom scenario aptly depicts the morality of the government. The resisters are the voice of opposition against the use of animals for selfish human endeavors; they rob the hippos to undermine the promulgation of an animal/human binary which relegates animals to objectivity and oppression.

Victorio's diatribe against governmental dealings emphasizes the absurdity of the situation and brings up the idea of a highly problematic human-centered institution, infamous for its mistreatment of animals: the circus. In his second mention of the idea of a circus Victorio purports, "Yo todo lo que quiero es dejar a esos animales en libertad y joderles la fiesta a los mercaderes... No podemos impedir que los traigan de África, arrancándolos de su hábitat, pero sí podemos evitar que hagan un circo. Y no me parece que mi idea sea más absurda y extravagante que importar hipopótamos" (54). The use of the word circus evinces the issue of animals in captivity. As I mentioned in previous chapters, Randy Malamud contends that exhibitions of animals in captivity represent the paradigm of anthropocentrism and objectification of the animal

other. In Malamud's perspective, when society destines animals into locations for the purpose of satisfying human desires, humans subsume these places "and their captive animals within various anthropocentric social structures and systems of culture, thus misrepresenting the realities of animals' existence and their role on this planet" (1).<sup>35</sup> Victorio's antagonism illustrates his concern for the well-being of the animals in this tyrannical climate; although they seem to be free, in reality the importation of the hippos and subsequent diffusion of their likeness in society symbolizes their subjugation in anthropocentric social structures as well alludes to the history of state violence against the Argentine people. The circus, with its sparkle and shine, obscures the reality of caged-in animals whose existence is limited to entertaining ignorant customers. Victorio's rescue plan aims to free the animals and undermine those who seek to consign the hippos to subjugation under anthropocentric power structures.

It is within this context that Victorio and his team justifies the violence against people that they commit during the bombing; Victorio, Frank, and Pura are not misanthropes, nor do they relish bloodshed. Rather, they have created a new paradigm in which animal lives matter as much as human lives. They all share a conviction that freeing the hippos is the right thing to do for the creatures and that the hippos should be granted consideration apart from human-driven interests. The group's struggle relates to the idea of control of the animals and not necessarily to any anti-environmentalism. Victorio and his colleagues consistently articulate that they recognize the disparity between what seems to



be best for the area ecologically and their dissatisfaction towards those who exercise domination over the bodies of the hippos. What surfaces from the act of resistance against the subjugation of the hippos is a narrative questioning the relationship between humans, animal others, and violence. On this topic, Cary Wolfe comments that “violence against human others (and particularly racially marked others) has often operated by means of a double movement that animalizes them for the purpose of domination, oppression, or even genocide- a maneuver that is effective because we take for granted the prior assumption that violence against the animal is ethically permissible” (Human: All Too Human 567). While the bombing is morally questionable, the act itself calls into question what *is* ethically permissible. The willingness to use violence against humans to save the hippos starkly contrasts a world in which human lives are valued over other entities in nature. The novel here undermines classic binary oppositions and calls into question the supremacy of those who have threatened nature within these traditional frameworks.

The team’s efforts to undercut human-centered structures culminate with the release of the hippos into the wild. In this brief but meaningful passage the hippos are not only freed but they are also granted the type of subjectivity which identifies them as actors in the scenario. Right after they are let out of their cages and led to a river, the hippos begin to swim away while the humans bear witness to their new-found liberty. “Los cuatro siguen mirándolos, emocionados, y los saludan con las manos. Uno de los hipopótamos les hace una especie de caída

de ojos como agradeciéndoles el haberles salvado la vida, y luego se sumerge. Después de unos segundos ven que reaparece muchos metros más allá, hacia el Sur... los cuatro se sienten como si hubieran parido grupalmente algo grandioso” (122). The hippo’s signal towards the humans is a symbolic nod towards their overall resistance; together the four have contested anthropocentric structures which pollute the environment and objectify non-human actors. The four feel that they have birthed a new paradigm, one which values animal lives and resists the insidiousness of corrupt government institutions.

The plot of *Imposible equilibrio*, while quite humorous, depicts a darker side to the difficulties of solving ecological crises brought on by human production. The novel insists on the connection between the destruction of the environment and industry in order to contextualize the crisis within its anthropocentric modes. The authorities calculate a way to ameliorate the damage but the resisters’ act of opposition exposes the human-centered approaches to thinking which ultimately led to the ecological threat in the first instance. The theft of the hippos demonstrates the objectification of the hippos in pop culture and calls attention to the corruption of a government that actually cares very little for environmental issues. In this way the characters involved in the resistance exemplify the line of posthumanism which advocates a more nuanced way of perceiving the relationship between humans and animals in order to avoid environmental damage.

My study of Giardinelli's novel shows that it addresses both levels that Wolfe identifies in his treatise. By thematically including hippopotami, *Impossible equilibrio* poses the question of shifting subjectivities in animal and human relationships. Moreover, by establishing the question of animal subjectivity within the context of resistance against organizational systems which objectify the animals, the novel exhibits the type of methodological thinking which Wolfe champions. Throughout the novel the resisters go beyond just discussing animals and attempt to give them subjectivity in the face of the narrow, destructive anthropocentrism of those in power. The power struggle between those who wish to objectify the hippos in pop culture and those who wish to grant them subjectivity exposes the epistemological bases of both groups. *Impossible equilibrio* explores new ways of perceiving subjectivities and in the process offers an alternative to the attitudes which continue to see the environment and non-human actors as secondary to human-interests and as objects to be exploited.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

One of the pioneer scholars of ecocritical approaches to Latin American literature, Jorge Marcone, has published about the past and future of the environment in the literary imagination of Latin America.<sup>36</sup> Marcone argues that in this region, authors and texts are receiving increasing attention for their representations of the environment. Furthermore, he connects environmental themes with violence and repression. On this subject he offers this conclusion:

I believe it would be useful to read these authors and texts as well as other books in dialogue with a working hypothesis for Spanish American literature that summarizes the environmental vision in it around the following themes: stories of political ecology- including the self-critiques of environmentalisms; recording of the unsustainability of rural life under development; the lure of and posterior disillusion with the city; the oblivion, nostalgia, or redemption of life in an 'original' rural environment; the opening to environmental complexity or the epistemological crisis due to environmental change and conflict; the awareness of the embodiment and environmental embeddedness [sic] of the subject. Finally, these authors' books and those of others are good opportunities for realizing the 'ecology' of issues to which environmental ideas are linked: the trauma of violence in the twentieth century, the criticism of utopianism and millenarianisms, and the unearthing of modern and more-than-modern beliefs and values that have been repressed by modernity. (20-21)

In Marcone's summary, the trauma of violence in the twentieth century is an integral part of discussing ecological issues in contemporary Latin America and will continue to be part of the discussion of environmental issues in the future. Given my analysis in this dissertation, I find Marcone's argument to be valid. The interweaving stories of violence against people and violence against

nature in Latin American literary production are critical for those who study the connections between narrative and the environment.

In this thesis I have explored intersections of violence and the environment in six contemporary Latin American novels. In the analysis of these works I have posited that juxtaposing violent narratives with an examination of nature fosters a more thorough analysis of interpretation. This is true not only when agents directly destroy the environment but also in instances when natural settings serve as discursive or symbolic backgrounds to bloodshed and antagonism.

In Chapter One I introduce the two important foci of this thesis, violence studies and ecocriticism. Violence is a slippery concept to define because of the manifold forms which it can assume. I demonstrate that many scholars shape broad definitions of violence in order to encompass the multiple questions which surround the topic. In the Latin American context, dialogues about violence have often centered on the question about whether violence is an inevitable element of life. Generally speaking, scholars often argue either that violence shapes the structures of society or that violence perverts the structures of society. There is no agreement on whether violence is unavoidable, but there is agreement by most scholars that it is a cause for concern and discussion.

I also outline a brief history of ecocriticism in Chapter One, indicating that the field grew out of the North American and British contexts; at its inception ecocriticism mostly analyzed pastoral and rural landscapes. However, in the past

few decades, the field has expanded in terms of the types of environments it examines; it has also moved well beyond North American environmental representations. The current state of ecocriticism is in its second wave. Second wave ecocriticism analyzes more than just representations of “pristine” wilderness; it has broadened to include discussions of how environmental policies affect the least powerful in societies. It also acknowledges that city and urban landscapes are crucial environments to discuss. Furthermore, Latin American scholars have begun to engage with the discipline of ecocriticism by examining natural representations in literary production. Many of the themes in Latin American ecocriticism deal directly with issues of postcolonialism and industrial pollution. Most Latin American ecocritics argue that ecocriticism takes on more diverse forms than North American ecocriticism because of the history of exploitation of natural resources and the unequal distribution of wealth for the inhabitants of this region.

In Chapter Two I discuss three novels, *Morirás lejos* (1967), *2666* (2004), and *La muerte me da* (2007). *Morirás lejos* portrays violence from a trans-historical perspective, intercalating accounts of viciousness against the Jewish people from diverse time periods. In this novel, the natural environment suffers in tandem with the Jewish people. The bulk of *Morirás lejos* does not take place in a rural setting; rather, urban spaces represent the majority of backgrounds in the novel. I postulate that the representation of three particular city locations- sewers, ghettos, and parks- reveals the way in which Pacheco depicts violence. Sewers

become spaces of resistance for those fleeing violence, which demonstrates the degradation in the quality of environmental life for these resisters. Ghettos reflect the way in which the control of spaces for violent purposes further degrades human environments. The park space in *Morirás lejos* connects industrial development with human acts of genocide, calling attention to manner in which violence impacts the environment just as it impacts humans. These spaces verify that in Pacheco's narrative, when humans commit acts of antagonism against each other, urban locales and surrounding environments are directly affected.

The narration in *2666* also pivots around several urban centers. However, in contrast to *Morirás lejos*, environmental concerns do not flow out of violence. Bolaño instead positions the degraded city spaces as backdrops to an evil reality. *2666* poignantly reveals how mass production and capitalist interests affect the most vulnerable in industrial metropolises. Maquiladoras, trash dumps, and the desert are three locations which unmask Bolaño's pessimistic attitude towards the ills of contemporary society. The representations of maquiladoras and trash dumps link industry to pollution and show that the discourse which purports to improve the quality of life for women hides the cost to the environment of those who live near those places. The desert space in *2666* is both the physical location of the city of Santa Teresa as well as the symbolic state of the society. I argue in this chapter that the typical conceptions about the desert- a space of barrenness, a wasteland- become the characteristics of a city which enables atrocious acts of violence against women.

I discuss this topic further by exploring how Bolaño's lengthy work emphasizes certain dynamics of gender relations when discussing violence. The novel relates the investigations of some of the hundreds of mutilated and rotting corpses of women found in the arid territories in and around the city of Santa Teresa. *2666* demonstrates the sexist attitudes which demean women, highlighting the types of thinking which enable such violence. Bolaño's writing in Part Four of his novel, by expressing a complete narrative about the women's bodies, symbolically resists the image of the broken, incomplete, and dead body which typifies the violence in Santa Teresa. These horrific stories of violence against women also serve as poignant reminders to real-life events currently occurring in that general area, i.e. the femicides in Juarez, Mexico. Bolaño's novel opens a dialogue about the way in which environment and violence continue to be important issues for contemporary Latin American realities.

Cristina Rivera Garza's *La muerte me da* also represents gender violence. However, this novel dismisses traditional modes of discussing gender and brutality. The author creates a disjuncture in terms of preconceived notions about victims, perpetrators, and the gender of those involved in crime by highlighting violence against men. *La muerte me da* challenges assumptions about "the nature" of gender, utilizing violence as the framework for this ideological exploration. I consider feminist ideas about castration and the Other in order to explain how the novel experiments with and undermines gender binaries and presumptions.



Like the other two novels in the chapter, the action in *La muerte me da* takes place in an urban area. However, I argue that the images of spaces are largely poetic in the novel. The environment in the work revolves around playful use of language as opposed to solid, realistic representations of space. I discuss two radically different kinds of spaces- cemeteries and forests- to highlight the manner in which the environment is mostly an imagined concept for the characters in Rivera Garza's novel. While the cemeteries and the forest are not realistic representations of place, I argue that they demonstrate the way in which nature in representation is often more an imagined concept than an actual space.

In Chapter Three I examine the Colombian novels *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011) and *Cien años de soledad* (1967). In Vásquez' *El ruido*, I establish the idea that the narrator's traumatic experience in the city disrupts his ability to interpret his environment as dynamic social space. I discuss Cathy Caruth's theory regarding the cathartic journey that trauma survivors undertake to process the moment of trauma, a moment which is inaccessible as they experience their trauma. I connect Caruth's ideas with Henri Lefevbre's assessment of social space in the city and posit the idea that the narrator's journey out of the city to process his trauma allows him to return to the city and again appreciate the metropolis as a dynamic social process.

In this chapter I also introduce a subset of environmental studies, animal studies, and discuss how *El ruido de las cosas al caer* employs hippopotamuses as a metaphor for the life of one of the characters. I incorporate some of the main

points from Giorgio Agamben's discussion of animals and humans and then transition into how this relates to Agamben's theory on biopolitics. Agamben aptly denounces the type of sovereign power which exempts itself from following the law, demonstrating that this type of power leads to violence against those who are vulnerable and who stand in the way of the interests of the authorities. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer* Laverde and his hippo counterparts are examples of these types of vulnerable bodies. Their lives are deemed disposable and they suffer death at the hands of state and illegitimate authorities because they do not serve the interests of those in power.

I continue to weave Agamben's definition of modern day biopolitics throughout my argument in order to examine the historical progression of leadership in the town of Macondo in *Cien años de soledad*. I argue that at its inception, Macondo is an idyllic, romanticized space in which the founders and inhabitants live in an Edenic-like community. The characters are linked to nature through their way of life and the community is firmly established in mores and values which uphold justice. However, once the Colombian government and political forces become involved in the life of the community, the same dynamic of power from Agamben's model takes hold of the community. Those who are most vulnerable, i.e. the banana strikers, are executed with impunity, under the principle of the state of exception. I examine how this progression of modern politics leads to violent consequences.

In my final analysis chapter, I discuss the novel *Impossible equilibrio* which relates the humorous tale of resistance against a governmental decision to combat an ecological crisis. The novel interlaces topics of national discourses, the media, and morality to support its ecologically-friendly agenda. *Impossible equilibrio* narrates the environmental crisis for at least two purposes: to describe the degradation to the earth caused by anthropocentric actions and to indicate that solutions based on human-centered interests do not address the underlying causes of environmental degradation and therefore may not be real solutions. The novel links the ecological crisis with animals; the resisters steal four hippos from the government. *Impossible equilibrio*, in its exploration of human-animal subjectivities, challenges notions of nature which give predominance to corrupt human institutions since they often cause detriment to the ecosphere.

In my discussion of subjectivities, I utilize Cary Wolfe's conception of posthumanism and its relation to animal studies. I propose that the act of resistance in the novel is meant to expose humanistic ways of viewing the environment. In their act of resistance, the group rejects the objectification of the hippos in pop culture and the corruption of a government that cares very little for environmental issues. In this way the characters involved in the resistance exemplify the line of posthumanism which advocates a more nuanced way of perceiving the relationship between humans and animals in order to avoid environmental damage.

This dissertation is a focused study on six specific pieces of narrative that I have selected to explore in ecocritical ways. I have analyzed novels which take place in three particular countries: Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina. Time and space has limited my ability to more inclusive and explore narratives from other settings. This study is not meant to be an all-encompassing approach to violence and the environment in these three countries. However, I believe that these novels contain significant elements which relate to a broader discussion of violence and the environment. I recognize that much more needs to be considered about violence and about the environment in each of these works and that there are also several other novels which I could have included in the dissertation.<sup>37</sup>

I hope in the future to address these limitations by further analyzing the way in which violence and the environment intersect in Latin American narrative. I believe that this topic will only continue to be more important given the current state of our global environment. As the consequences of our global environmental catastrophes burgeon, we will also witness more violence resulting from the clash over natural resources and human-caused environmental degradation. This is the case for the entire globe, but in the Latin American context many of these problems are felt even more acutely, given the richness of natural resources in the region. Consequently, I believe ecocritical approaches to violence in literary production will continue to remain an area meritorious of study in the foreseeable future.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Buell, a pioneer of ecocritical studies, defines ecocriticism as “an umbrella term... used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice” (The Future of Environmental Criticism 138). Buell argues that the term may not necessarily be the best way to encompass all of the studies that deal with environments in literature. As he observes:

Insofar as ecocriticism gestures toward biological science and to the ‘natural’ as against the ‘built’ environment, it might be thought too restrictive to encompass the actual range of critical practices, relative to such terms as literature-and-environment studies (which does not explicitly signal ‘natural’ environment) or environmental criticism (which better implies the wide interdisciplinary range of methods so-called ecocritics employ). (The Future of Environmental Criticism 138)

Despite its limitations, Buell reminds his reader that ecocriticism is the preferred term for describing environmental literary studies worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> In his approach to violence Žižek also insists on a dispassionate analysis of the topic and asserts that the answer to global violence is to first study the phenomenon and then to sit and wait to see what happens. He reaches this conclusion by discussing how liberal culture wields a discourse of urgency to address violence in society and arguing that this discourse represents an ersatz ideology which fails to take into account violence in its multiplex facets. According to him, those who contend that violence must be addressed in tangible, active, and immediate ways do not grasp how post-modern liberal ideology is built on the foundations of capitalist society; Žižek argues that this foundation makes it impossible for liberal ideology to remove itself from current global systemic and symbolic violence, in spite of any philanthropic efforts made to alleviate these tensions. In Žižek’s words, “What if the true evil of our societies is not their capitalist dynamics as such, but our attempts to extricate ourselves from them- all the while profiting- by carving our self-enclosed communal spaces, from ‘gated communities’ to exclusive racial or religious groups?” (27). Furthermore, he states that true examples of evil today are not ordinary consumers who pollute the environment and live in a world of disconnected social relations, but rather those who “while fully engaging in creating conditions for such universal devastation and pollution, buy their way out of their own activity, living in gated communities, eating organic food, talking holidays in wildlife preserves, and so on” (27).

Žižek’s exposition about the ills of global capitalism should not be discarded out of hand; his discussions of the consequences of an unjust global

economic system and the causes of religious fundamentalisms are extremely thought-provoking. However, while I particularly value his three categories as helpful for conceiving of violence in contemporary culture, I disagree with the premise that there is no urgency required when dealing with the topic of violence. It may be that those of us in the Western world (or in academia especially) are benefiting financially from systemic and symbolic violence. However, it seems the epitome of hubris to affirm that since our system is complicit in perpetuating violence that our only course of action is to sit back and study because any action we take will not address every aspect of violence.

<sup>3</sup> For general studies on violence see these works: Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*; Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory*; Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. For more on studies of violence in Latin American literature see the following works: Donny Meertens, *Ensayos sobre tierra, violencia, y género: hombres y mujeres en la historia rural de Colombia 1930-1990*; Rory O'Bryen, *Literature, testimony and cinema in contemporary Colombian culture: spectres of La Violencia*; *Violencia y Literatura en Colombia*, edited by Jonathan Tittler.

<sup>4</sup> Wright cites Kate Soper, Val Plumwood, and David Mazel.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to these authors, Scott M. DeVries mentions scholars who have published Latin American ecocritical pieces which focus particularly on the nineteenth century. He includes the volume *Ecocríticas: Literatura y medio ambiente* edited by Carmen Flys Junquera, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, and Julia Barella Vigal as well as the volume *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape* edited by Beatriz Rivera-Barnes and Jerry Hoeg.

Gabriela Nouzeilles has also contributed to the discussion regarding land and the conceptualization of nature in Latin America. She edited the volume, *La naturaleza en disputa. Retóricas del cuerpo y el paisaje* which examines the polemics surrounding the articulation of nature, culture and sexuality in Latin America. Nouzeilles has also published works which deal with the conception of Patagonia as an alternative space, including the article "Patagonia as Borderland: Nature, culture, and the idea of the State" 35-48, and the forthcoming book *Of Other Places: Patagonia and the Production of Nature* (Duke University Press).

<sup>6</sup> As Adrian Taylor Kane argues, the plot of *Morirás lejos* is framed by a hypothetical structure which inhibits the reader from drawing any definitive conclusions. According to Kane, "the effect of this hypothetical structure and open ending is to produce an uncertain reality within the text... the reader is

unable to discern what is real and what is not” (Vanguardia and Postmodern Fiction 152). While the structure and equivocality of the novel certainly hamper an attempt to pin down the “reality” of what is happening, this particular problem does not figure into the purview of this study because whether or not the plot or the characters are called in question, the sections that depict environmental damage caused by violence leave their mark on the theme of the work as a whole. Since the question of the verisimilitude is not pertinent to this discussion, I shall simply indicate here that the plot of *Morirás lejos* is difficult to confirm but that its emphasis on violence is not.

<sup>7</sup> The topic of sewers is not entirely foreign to modern Latin American narrative. Raymond L. Williams writes, “the novel *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) by Leopoldo Marechal is a voluminous work that delves into a new urban understanding of rivers: the underworld of ‘cloacas’ (sewers) and associated subterranean spaces” (Rural and Urban Rivers 200). Williams argues that sewers in works like *Adán Buenosayres* are basically metaphors for modern, urban rivers. They serve as spaces of transportation and urban flow, just as the real and imaginary rivers did in the *novelas de la tierra* of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. According to Williams, a significant number of urban novels from the mid-twentieth century begin to associate subterranean spaces with the idea of rivers. For other examples of works that depict subterranean spaces see: Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill, *Los Pichiciegos: Visiones de una batalla subterránea*, 1983; Leopoldo Marchel, *Adán Buenosayres*, 1969; Ignacio Padilla, “El año de los gatos amurallados” (1994).

<sup>8</sup> For another example of a literary depiction of trash dumps in a Mexican border town see Luis Alberto Urrea’s *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Although Bolaño’s novel *2666* takes place in Mexico, the shared border with Arizona and the discussion of the Sonoran desert warrants using literature written about the Southwest U.S. to discuss the Mexican desert since it is in many ways parallel, both geographically and ideologically, to the development of states like Arizona.

<sup>10</sup> While I have only been able to discuss the desert motif above because of its centrality to Santa Teresa, other natural environments are also featured as part of Bolaño’s extensive foray into the violence of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One striking example of nature’s place in the novel occurs in Part Five, in Poland during World War II. Leo Sammer relates to Han Reiter (Archiboldi) what happened to him when he was serving as the deputy director of an organization charged with supplying workers to the Third Reich. One day,

because of an administrative error, fifteen hundred Jews arrived in his town and Sammer was at a loss as to what to do with them. He finally receives an order to execute them, despite the fact that he doesn't have many resources to do so. He decides to have them all shot in groups of fifty and buried in a hollow outside the town. The relationship between violence and the natural environment is noteworthy because of the way that the environment hides human actions. When Sammer goes to the hollow to see the mass grave he remarks, "Allí la nieve era blanda, incluso excesivamente blanda. Durante unos segundos me pareció que caminaba sobre un gran plato de nata. Cuando llegué al borde y miré hacia abajo me di cuenta de que la naturaleza había hecho su trabajo. Magnífico. No vi rastros de nada, sólo nieve" (957).

Here nature plays a much more important role than simply being the background to human actions. The environment destroys all evidence of the crimes and covers the dead bodies with a substance that not only hides them, but also gives the appearance of purity. The ability of the earth to hide human atrocities emphasizes its own power apart from the world of human beings. Everything is swallowed up by nature, which often remains as the only and ultimate witness to violence and destruction.

<sup>11</sup> This number only represents the narratives which actually include recovered bodies in Santa Teresa. It does not include the plethora of women who were reported missing or just simply disappeared. For instance, a long narrative in Part Four centers around PRI representative Azucena Esquivel Plata's conversation with journalist Sergio González regarding the mysterious disappearance of her friend, Kelly Rivera Parker. Rivera Parker's body is never found, something which greatly concerns Esquivel Plata, especially considering that the case was investigated privately for over two years. Rivera Parker's disappearance is not included in the number count since her body was not found and the image of the mutilated, found body is the motif which Bolaño strives to highlight in the novel.

<sup>12</sup> It is true that some reports about the bodies are shorter than others, but this is not necessarily because of an abeyance of interest on the part of the narrator. Rather, the reason why some accounts are shorter is due to the lack of identifying markers on the bodies which would enable the police to investigate further the appearance of the cadaver. The novel strives to give every detail possible about the dead bodies; it is lack of information, not lack of importance which makes these narrative blips short.

<sup>13</sup> Here I use "gender" to refer to the characteristics that are ascribed to men and women; I use "sex" to identify the biological traits that are ascribed to males and females. Many scholars, in addition to questioning gender



constructions, have also argued that sex and biological determinations are artificial categories. Anne Fausto-Sterling argues that doctors daily make decisions regarding biological sex based on culturally defined norms. She gives the example of a person born with both female and male reproductive organs and asks what determines their biological sex. According to Fausto-Sterling, “most doctors declare the child a girl, despite the penis, because of her potential to give birth, and intervene using surgery and hormones to carry out the decision. Choosing which criteria to use in determining sex, and choosing to make the determination at all, are social decisions for which scientists can offer no absolute guidelines” (5). Butler agrees with this hypothesis when she states, “it is already clear that one way the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured is by casting the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain. The production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*” (7). Ultimately both scholars question the biological maxim that there are only two sexes. The question of biology plays a role in the novel given the emphasis on physical castration of penises; however I have chosen not to discuss biological sex due to space constraints of this chapter. While this idea could certainly be examined in light of the argument in *La muerte me da*, I focus on the persistent thrust of the novel in questioning gender constructions.

<sup>14</sup> Since its publication during the Latin American literary Boom of the 1960's, *Cien años de soledad* has continued to be a widely read and distinguished novel. Furthermore, García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Literature Prize in 1982; given these factors, it is no surprise that a plethora of literary criticism has been penned to discuss both the novel and the author. Nevertheless, there have been a comparatively small number of scholarly studies which have focused on an ecocritical analysis of the novel. Four articles in particular are relevant to the ecocritical discussions in this chapter: Raymond L. Williams's "Nature in the Twentieth-Century Latin American Novel (1900-1967) and in *Cien años de soledad* of García Márquez," 66-88; George McMurray's "Climate in Twentieth-Century Spanish American Fiction," 55-64; Ursula K. Heise's "Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place," 126-52; and Gustavo Llarull's "The Long and Winding Road of Technology from *María* to *Cien años de soledad* to *Mantra*: An Ecocritical Reading," 89-110.

For more general readings, the following works comprise a useful, though non-exhaustive, list of critical studies on *Cien años de soledad* and Gabriel García Márquez: Mario Vargas Llosa, *Historia de un deicidio*; Raymond L. Williams, *Gabriel García Márquez*; Bernard McGuirk and Richard Cardwell, *Gabriel García Márquez: New Readings*; Carlos Fuentes, *Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America*; Robin Fiddian, *García Márquez*; Gene H.

Bell-Villada, *Conversations with Gabriel García Márquez*; Williams, Raymond L. Williams, *A Companion to Gabriel García Márquez*.

<sup>15</sup> *El ruido de las cosas al caer* is a piece that is worthy of critical attention, but the only full-length article published on the work to date is by Fernández Luna, 29-39. There are also several online book reviews and some interviews with the author. For further study, please see: White; Clothier; Baldwin; George; LeClair; Parra; García Ramírez; “Juan Gabriel Vásquez presentó ‘*El ruido de las cosas al caer*’ en Perú”; Morris.

<sup>16</sup> Much has been written on the subject of trauma. The principal theorists of trauma theory are well known and so it is unnecessary to rehearse the entirety of their theories here. Certain authors are particularly foundational for how I approach the study of trauma in this novel. The following is a list of the texts which were most influential for this article: Cathy Caruth, *Trauma, Narrative and History*; Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*; Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching” 13-60; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; David Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma: Loss, Literature and Psychoanalysis*; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*; Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle” 61-75; Petar Ramadanovic, “When ‘To Die in Freedom’ Is Written in English: Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History by Cathy Caruth” 54-67.

<sup>17</sup> Paola Fernández Luna echoes the idea that Yammara is an individual who represents a collective sentiment. She interprets the meaning of the characters Yammara and Maya, focusing on their analogous nature as representatives of memory (*memoria*) and grief (*duelo*), respectively. In her argument, the focus on the intimate fears and traumas of ordinary Colombians (as opposed to those involved more directly with the drug trafficking industry) enables a remembering of the past that does not cripple the future because it bears testimony to the sentiments of those who have suffered trauma and proposes the need for resistance to the structures which cause violence. In Fernández Luna’s words:

Si la violencia derivada del narcotráfico continúa generando una fascinación cultural extraordinaria, tanto en la creación como en la recepción, *El ruido de las cosas al caer* ofrece la lectura consciente de la Historia del narcotráfico en Colombia desde la alternativa de la reflexión y la intimidad sensible, desde la necesidad de revuelta, desde una política en conflictividad permanente con el sistema de valores establecidos. (37-38)

<sup>18</sup> On this point, Kai Erikson has discussed the phenomenon of how shared traumas tie individuals into a larger communal experience, not necessarily by strengthening bonds that link people together but by shaping culture and worldviews. He suggests that “traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its prevailing mood and temper, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another” (190).

<sup>19</sup> Pablo Escobar was killed on December 2, 1993 during an attempt to escape from a Colombian military squad tasked with his capture.

<sup>20</sup> It may certainly be argued that with regards to drug trafficking, the Mexican and Colombian contexts are different. However, on this point Reyes-Zaga is simply making a general case that the drug trafficking industry is a force that wields authority over vulnerable bodies. The history of the Colombian drug trade is example enough to prove that this statement is correct. Laverde’s death in the novel accentuates that point further.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond L. Williams argues that in *Cien años de soledad* the representation of nature deals with these two types of cultures as well as other human and non-human sources of nature. According to him, “García Márquez... constructs an elaborate and complex web of nature and multiple sources, many of which are human rather than non-human parts of nature. Of the human sources, three of the most noteworthy with respect to the representation of nature are other literary texts, oral tradition, and the visual arts” (Nature in the Twentieth-Century Latin American Novel 68). In discussing oral tradition, Williams identifies the differences between the worldviews of characters like José Arcadio and Úrsula, the former representing modern culture with his obsession for the latest gadgets and the later representing oral-tradition through her insistence on a pragmatic, less scientific approach. As Williams points out, the classic example of their differences is epitomized in their reactions to a scientific approach to the world. “Úrsula... reacts negatively to José Arcadio’s scientific understanding of the world, as the narrator explains, following José Arcadio’s explanation ‘El mundo es Redondo, como una naranja’ with ‘Úrsula perdió la paciencia’” (Nature in the Twentieth-Century Latin American Novel 77).

<sup>22</sup> While the emphasis of this discussion about *Cien años de soledad* focuses on biopolitics in general, there are still several cases relating to the human-animal distinction which could be examined. Ursula’s constant fear that her descendants will be born with a pig’s tail is a leitmotif and underscores the way in which the anthropological machine animalizes humans who fail to abide by the societal prohibition against incest.

<sup>23</sup> Snoek points out that Agamben, as opposed to Foucault, believes that biopolitics is not a modern concept but rather a phenomenon that spans back much further in history. Snoek summarizes,

Foucault argues that the regime of power that emerged from the *seventeenth century* onwards involved a fundamental reversal of the principle of power's operation: 'for the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence.' Against Foucault, Agamben claims that bare life has long been included as the 'original-if concealed-nucleus of sovereign power,' such that biopolitics and sovereignty are originally and fundamentally intertwined. (47)

For Agamben, biopolitics is not a new form of organization; however *modern* biopolitics is the intensification of this form of governance, and the cause for concern according to this theorist.

<sup>24</sup> Williams' argument in this case discusses the Mexican state. However, his generalizations about the police fit the type of actions in this Colombian novel, and are therefore apposite to the discussion.

<sup>25</sup> While the focus of this chapter is not on the historicity of *Cien años de soledad*, it is worth noting that the banana strike was an actual event in Colombian history. With regards to the organization of banana workers, Raymond L. Williams points out, "the strike of the banana workers, which is related as one of the most fantastic events in the novel, is in fact one of the most historical. In November, 1928, Colombian workers declared a strike against the United Fruit Company, and the massacre of several hundred workers ensued. García Márquez was among the first to relate and popularize this lamentable episode" (The Twentieth Century Spanish American Novel 141). The conversion of an historical event into a fictional account demonstrates García Márquez' interest in the interplay between reality and fiction.

While discussing the historicity of the work, Anna Marie Taylor argues that *Cien años*, through its fantastical narration, intends to make an explicit political statement about the way that history is remembered in the development of a society. She writes that the reader of the work "becomes systematically initiated into the fact that its fabulous, vital and entertaining characters live in a world which is not as it seems, and that structures about which they have no awareness undermine and determine their future. The idea of the imperative of historical consciousness, while often metaphorical in expression, functions as political discourse" (111). Ultimately, the focus on José Arcadio Segundo during the massacre uses his experience as a metonym for Colombia's historical affliction due to the sovereign exception.

<sup>26</sup>For examples of contemporary narrative with strong environmental themes see Osvaldo Soriano, *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and *La hora sin sombra*; Héctor Tizón, *La luz de las crueles provincias*; Juan José Saer, *Las nubes*.

<sup>27</sup> Born in Resistencia, Argentina in 1947, Giardinelli's authorial career spans the gamut of literary genres: he has published novels, short stories, poetry, and essays. He is perhaps best known for his narrative and in particular his novel, *Santo oficio de la memoria* (1991), which won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize in 1993. His literary works also include the novels *La revolución en bicicleta* (1980), *El cielo con las manos* (1981), *¿Por qué prohibieron el circo?* (1983), *Luna caliente* (1983), *Qué solos se quedan los muertos* (1985), *Imposible equilibrio* (1995), *El décimo infierno* (1999), *Final de novela en Patagonia* (2000), *Visitas después de hora* (2001), and *Cuestiones interiores* (2003), as well as several volumes of stories and selected essays.

Much critical attention has been given to Giardinelli's earlier novels, especially *Santo oficio de la memoria*. Kerstin Bowsher suggests that *Santo oficio* is an exploration of the use of memory in forging national identity, especially when dealing with a violent and bitter past. Karl Kahut's *Un universo cargado de violencia* examines Giardinelli's published work before 1990, arguing that the author's experience during the painful Dirty War period in Argentina elucidates the violent and conflictive scenes of his narrative. Regarding *Imposible equilibrio* J. Andrew Brown in *Test Tube Envy* purports that Giardinelli's discursive strategy appropriates scientific discourse by paralleling the chaotic twists of the plot with scientific theories about chaos; Brown's point of departure is the epigraph which quotes Nobel Prize winning chemist Ilya Prigogine and his ideas on equilibrium and complex structures. Gustavo Pellón explores the connections between Giardinelli's earlier novel *Luna caliente* and *Imposible equilibrio*, contending that later novel reworks the former, both in terms of narrative and ideology.

Besides *Imposible equilibrio*, Giardinelli's *Final de novela en Patagonia*, also portrays ecological crises. In this novel, the narrator figure travels throughout the region of Patagonia and in the process expresses his criticism of the Argentine government for its inability to protect the country's natural resources. Furthermore, he condemns practices such as leaving garbage dumps exposed to wind and allowing private business to build oil pipelines in order to exploit Argentina's abundant natural reserves. The novel champions sustainable development in the Patagonian region and protection from nature's worst enemy: human beings.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfe continues his discussion regarding posthumanism by emphasizing the idea that the path to transcending anthropocentric models of

subjectivities involves incorporating several fields of studies into critical approaches. Specifically with regards to animal studies, Wolfe emphasizes the idea that the most enriching way to study alternative subjectivities is by “the ongoing differentiation of disciplines” (What is Posthumanism? 116). In this way transdisciplinary studies, by “taking seriously the phenomenon of self-reference and autopoietic closure in disciplinary systems leads... to the ability for the system to increase environmental contacts and, in the process, produce more environmental complexity for other systems, which in turn challenges other disciplines to change and evolve if they want to remain resonant with their changing environment” (What is Posthumanism? 117). In his paradigm of analysis, using interdisciplinary methods facilitates a broader interpretation since diversity of thinking can, in some ways, compensate for the limitations that physical reality imposes on humanity’s ability to move outside its own subjectivity.

<sup>29</sup> The field of animal studies encompasses a broad spectrum of issues. The discipline addresses many aspects of the relationship between humans and animals, and one of the principle philosophical queries of animal studies is the matter of the existential nature of humankind within the animal kingdom. This query analyzes the following questions: to what extent should humans be considered separate from other animal species and to what extent should humans be considered as just one species in a wider web of terrestrial life? The proposed answers to this question are legion. Due to the complexity of the issue, I will not enter directly into this discussion but rather concentrate on one topic that is a subset of this debate, the matter of human and animal subjectivities. For further discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of the ontological question of the human/animal distinction, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*; Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*.

<sup>30</sup> Cardozo is the first person narrator in the odd-numbered chapters. In the even-numbered chapters a heterodiegetic voice narrates the adventures of Victorio Lagomarsino and his group of resisters. The shifts in narration to an omnipresent voice maintain the realist effects of the novel since Cardozo, who does not participate in the group’s escapades, would not have had access to the details of their journey. The emphasis on realist effects is notable because it abruptly ends in intertextuality and meta-fiction in the epilogue. Victorio and Clelia escape the police with the help of characters from another novel by Giardinelli who assure the pair that: “-Aquí nunca, nadie, los va a joder. Están entrando en la literatura” (212). The unexpected ending problematizes the reading of the novel since it greatly diverges from the narrative cadence of the previous fourteen chapters. Gustavo Pellón’s reading of the work offers an

explanation for the ending by arguing that it relates to a similar technique present in Giardinelli's *Luna caliente*. According to Pellón,

Both *Luna caliente* and *Imposible equilibrio* set out in a realist mode, meeting readers' stylistic expectations of the hard-boiled novel and the road movie respectively, but as the action develops these novels abandon the conventions of realism. In both cases (and this is absent in the rest of Giardinelli's novels), an event of an unbelievable nature suddenly frustrates the reader's attempt to continue to read in a realist mode. Gradually the allegorical reading, which up to then had been barely insinuated, becomes more and more insistent. (106)

Pellón's insistence on the allegorical nature of the work supports my argument since I propose that the novel goes beyond mere plot by offering an indictment of humanistic ways of action which despoil the environment.

<sup>31</sup> Estok is well known for his rebuff of anthropocentric hierarchies, claiming that these expose an epistemological problem he entitles "ecophobia," a term he defines as contempt for the natural world. Estok contends that the field of ecocriticism often fails to properly theorize its own assumptions because of its fear of granting agency and rights to non-sentient beings in nature. He purports, "If ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to recognizing that control of the natural environment, understood as a god-given right in western culture, implies ecophobia, just as the use of African slaves implies racism, as rape implies misogyny, as 'fag-bashing' implies homophobia, and as animal exploitation implies speciesism" (207-208). Estok's plea for theorizing the field of ecocriticism relates to my discussion of posthumanism since he, like Cary Wolfe and others, calls upon theorists to discard anthropocentric modes of thought in favor of new models that include non-human subjectivities.

<sup>32</sup> A reminder that the novel was published in 1995, before the widespread use of the internet, contextualizes the impact of these mass media efforts since the characters would not have had access to global electronic data regarding the appearance and habits of hippopotami.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson's treatise discusses the idea of nationality and argues that the best definition of a nation "is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (49). In Anderson's words, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it

possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (50).

<sup>34</sup> In his discussion on this time period in Argentina, Benjamin Keen remarks, “From 1955 to 1973 a hard-line military dominated Argentine political life, setting the rules for the game of electoral politics, ousting the presidents whose policies displeased them and replacing them with governing military *juntas*” (349). These dictatorships ended in the re-election of Juan Domingo Perón in 1973 to the presidency. However, Perón died in 1974, leaving his vice-president and wife, Isabel, in charge of the country. Her ineptitude eventually led to another military takeover in March 1976. Daniel Altamiranda comments about the consequences of this military junta, affirming that the junta maintained the validity of the National Constitution, but suspended individual guarantees. Altamiranda emphasizes the escalating violence in their policies: “Combatieron a sangre y fuego a las ‘fuerzas de la subversión’ pero pronto cualquiera que manifestara públicamente alguna forma de oposición era considerado subversivo; afirmaron la necesidad de recuperar los valores de una sociedad ‘occidental y cristiana’ pero torturaron, asesinaron e hicieron desaparecer a más de diez mil personas” (23).

This military dictatorship retained control during the period known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional or Dirty War and ended in 1983 when the growing unrest of the people finally culminated in democratic elections. The newly elected President commissioned a group known as CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas) to publish a report of their investigations of the violations of rights committed by the military junta. The report, entitled *Nunca más* lists in great detail the testimony of witnesses who experienced torture, or who had friends and family members assaulted, assassinated, or disappeared. Regarding the number of people who were executed surreptitiously, the Latin American Herald Tribune purports, “While the initial report from the 1984 investigative commission cited a dirty war death toll of 9,000, officials subsequently updated the figure to 18,000, and most human rights activists in Argentina say the true number is closer to 30,000” (Argentines Argue Over How Many Were Killed by Junta).

<sup>35</sup> Malamud’s argument focuses specifically on zoos; however his reprobation of the culture of spectatorship applies directly to circus culture as well. See Malamud, 225-267.

<sup>36</sup> Jorge Marcone has several publications which take an ecocritical approach to Latin American literature. His publications focus on literature written during heightened environmental awareness due to economic growth and modernization. For instance, Marcone has published several articles on *novelas*



*de la selva*, which were written between the 1880s-1930s, when Latin America was experiencing an increase in industrial growth. His publications on this topic include “Nuevos descubrimientos del gran ‘Río de las Amazonas’: la ‘novela de la selva’ y la crítica al imaginario de la Amazonía” 129-40; “Jungle Fever: Primitivism in Environmentalism: Rómulo Gallego’s *Canaima* and the Romance of the Jungle” 157-72; “The Politics of Cultural Criticism and Sustainable Development in Amazonia: A Reading from the Spanish American Romance of the Jungle” 281-94; “De retorno a lo natural: La serpiente de oro, la ‘novela de la selva’ y la crítica ecológica” 299-308. He also has analyzed works from later dates, focusing particularly on the second-half of the twentieth century and issues of environmental awareness in more contemporary contexts, including Latino/a and Chicano/a Studies. Some of his publications on these topics are: “Latin American Literature at the Rise of Environmentalism: Urban Ecological Thinking in José María Arguedas’s *The Foxes*” 64-86; “El hablador de Mario Vargas Llosa y la imagen de la Amazonía en el Perú contemporáneo” 134-40; “A Painful Pastoral: Migration and Ecology in Chicana/o Literature” 194-209; “Mexican and Chicana/o Environmental Writing: Unearthing and Inhabiting” 93-111.

<sup>37</sup> The following contemporary Latin American novels represent a preliminary list of significant examples where violence and environmental concerns intersect: Gabriel García Márquez’s *La hojarasca* (1955); Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (1963); Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La casa verde* (1966) and *Sueño del Celta* (2010); Carlos Fuentes’ *Terra Nostra* (1975); Luis Sepúlveda’s *El viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1989); Pedro Ángel Palou’s *Memoria de los días* (1995); Gioconda Belli’s *Waslala* (1996); Juan Jose Saer’s *Las nubes* (2006); and Homero Ardijis’ *Esmirna en llamas* (2013).

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