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THE RISE OF THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN NARRATIVE, 1950-1975: A RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT

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Introduction

From October 18 to 20, 1979, an international and multilingual group of writers, literary critics, and social scientists met at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. to discuss "The Rise of the New Latin American Narrative, 1950-1975." In spite of the temporal limits set forth in the workshop's title, the discussion gravitated toward the theoretical and artistic production of the 1960s and 1970s, a period bounded at one end by the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and at the other by the convening of the workshop itself.

Participants agreed that the 1960s were a time of rapid modernization and revolutionary expectation. The decade witnessed the confrontation of developmentalism by dependency theory and of national bourgeoisies by armed guerrillas. It saw profound demographic changes, convulsive urbanization, the spread of the mass media, and an unprecedented growth in higher education. Several times throughout the workshop, the 1960s were compared to the 1920s. The reasons for this comparison were not made explicit, but one can conjecture that they included the drawing of analogies--whether legitimate or forced--regarding the optimism of sectors of the middle class in some, but not necessarily all, Latin American countries, and the notable renovation, activity, and optimism of the Left. Probably also determinant in such a comparison was the fact that both decades generated exceptional energy in avant-garde art and a good deal of significant theorizing about national and continental identity.

The 1970s, like the 1930s, brought an end to optimism. Although intellectual speculation and artistic creation remained intense, the tone of this production as well as the circumstances of its elaboration were altered. If the 1960s were characterized by revolutionary expectation, the 1970s, by contrast, were distinguished by the proliferation of maniacally repressive military dictatorships. In fact, Tulio Halperín Donghi, in his workshop paper "Nueva narrativa y ciencias sociales hispanoamericanas en la década del setenta," a particularly somber appraisal, went so far as to say that the most important legacy of the 1960s for continental Latin America was the invention of a new style of military authoritarianism, which made its inaugural appearance in Brazil in 1964.

Writers and critics at the workshop perceived that the literature of one decade was also different from that of the other. (Here I am speaking, in general terms, of Latin American literature in the Spanish language only.) In discussing the literature of the 1960s, they dealt preferentially, although not exclusively, with the "boom."* This focus, in turn, influenced the way in which they discussed the literature of the 1970s. The "post-boom," alternately referred to as neo-regionalism and the fluctuating constellation of the novísimos, was most often presented in juxtaposition to the boom, as being simultaneously a rejection, a continuation, and a supersession of the controversial literary phenomenon of the previous decade. The boom--which according to Angel Rama in his paper "Informe logistico (anti-boom) sobre las armas, las estrategias y el campo de batalla de la nueva narrativa latinoamericana," began around 1964 and ended even more vaguely around 1972--was seen to be in many ways a child of its times. In the 1960s, life for the middle class in Latin American cities was qualitatively different from what it had been before, and the novels that the writers of this class produced participated in this difference. Workshop participants seemed to share the judgment generally held by boom writers and their critics that the novel of the 1960s, along with its recognized precursors constituted a significant departure from the conventions of the regionalist novel of the 1930s and 1940s. They also agreed with the commonly accepted opinion that the boom novel was on the whole a legitimate and aesthetically rigorous creation. However, post-boom writers Antonio Skármeta, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Jorge Aguilar Mora, while recognizing the merits of the boom, made a point of distinguishing themselves from it. They insisted that their literary preoccupations are different, and that the world in which they write is also different.

The problem with contrasting two decades, or even with using decades as a category, is that it all too easily appears that each decade is a neat, self-contained unit that represents a break with what came before and what comes after. The equivocal fruits of modernization which matured in the 1960s, including the boom novel, are the outgrowth of an historical process that stretches backward in time. The boom novel may have been different from the regionalist novels of previous decades, but it also owed a great deal to literary experiments carried out by contemporaries of the regionalists. Likewise, the post-boom writers have not buried their predecessors but write alongside them in the present.

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*A metaphor with multiple associations, the term "boom" began to appear systematically in the early 1960s in reference to the Hispanic American novel, and thereafter it came to express the widespread perception that this novel had recently undergone an explosive transformation which had earned it universal recognition for its "sudden" brilliance, vitality, and sophistication.

The following summary attempts to give a comprehensive picture of what was said during three days of workshop discussion. Five recurrent themes which emerged in the workshop are utilized as organizational categories. (These themes, however, did not receive equal attention, and their relative importance within the discussion is reflected by the lengths of the corresponding sections of this rapporteur's report.) The five themes are:

1) The need to define the object of study and the response and responsibility of criticism in relation to the new narrative.

2) The treatment by boom and post-boom writers, as well as by contemporary Brazilian writers, of the problem of literary vs. spoken language, and the respective reading publics of these groups of writers.

3) The extent to which these groups adopted a continental, national, regional, or sub-regional perspective--the problem of the universal vs. the particular.

4) The relationship between contemporary literature and the mass media.

5) The exclusions and silences of one and possibly two decades of literature.

It should be noted that the terms "boom" and "post-boom," as used in the workshop and in this rapporteur's report, refer only to Hispanic American literature and exclude Brazil. The consensus of the workshop was that Brazil did not form part of the boom. Antonio Cândido's paper "O papel do Brasil na nova narrativa" provided a sense of the ways in which contemporary Brazilian literature coincides with, and diverges from, its Hispanic counterpart.

Antonio Cândido and David Viñas were scheduled to participate in the workshop but were unable to attend. Both, however, contributed papers that were presented in oral summary and discussed. Thus, in the text which follows, when I refer to the ideas of these men, the reference will be exclusively to their ideas as expressed in their papers.

In most cases, I have attempted only to summarize the workshop discussions and to identify specific points with their main proponents. In certain instances, however, I have commented on aspects of the papers, but usually only when I felt that it would be difficult to describe the discussions intelligibly without explicit reference to the texts that were the object of these discussions. I have attempted to be objective and thorough, although at times I have allowed myself a bit of interpretive leeway beyond that which is merely inevitable in any so-called objective report. I do not think that in so doing I have distorted the sense of the workshop and trust that it will be clear from my wording when I am interjecting my own opinions. Also, in preparing this report, I have profited from the editorial comments

generously offered by readers of an earlier draft. Some of these readers will detect their influence in this revised version.

Finally, I do not pretend to have used the term "boom" with critical precision. In the next section, I have accounted for the multiple definitions of the boom proposed during the workshop, but I am aware of having used the term loosely, at best.

Definition of the Object of Study and the Response and Responsibility of Criticism

During the course of the workshop, the participants were often reminded of their failure to define critical categories: field of inquiry, methodology, and the specific object of study (Carlos Martínez Moreno and Roberto Márquez). Nonetheless, as the sessions progressed, a certain clarification took place, at least in regard to the object of study. What was being investigated was how a period of modernization in Latin America had manifested itself in the production of novels and, tangentially, in the social sciences. Angel Rama identified this period as beginning in the 1930s and approaching its conclusion now. The literature of this period with which the workshop was concerned was designated the "new narrative," and from this broad category two aspects were singled out for closer scrutiny: the boom and the novísimos (post-boom writers).

Rama situated the inauguration of the boom in 1964, and based his choice on the fact that in that year the books of Julio Cortázar, an almost uncontested member of the boom, began to appear in new editions and to sell in considerably larger quantities than before. With less confidence, he placed the end of the boom in 1972. John Beverley said that the boom terminated on September 11, 1973. Halperín described an agony in three parts: the defeat of the pre-revolution of 1968, the failure of Cuba's ten million tons in 1970, and September 11, 1973. Whereas Rama's dates reflect an effort to define the boom as an editorial phenomenon, Beverley's and Halperín's dates correspond to a definition which makes the boom roughly equivalent to an historical period of short-lived but intense confidence in certain revolutionary alternatives.

In fact, Beverley distinguished four ways in which the term "boom" could be used:

1) The boom is a small core of four and maybe five authors. Fuentes, García Márquez, Cortázar, and Vargas Llosa are almost universally recognized as belonging to the boom. The fifth position fluctuates. Depending on the critic, it may go to Donoso, Borges, Carpentier, etc.

2) The boom is the incorporation of a group of 10 to 15 writers "into the mainstream" of western literature. Names like Cabrera Infante, Lezama Lima, and Asturias enter here.

3) The boom is an entire generation of writers or, more accurately, an entire decade of literary production. There are versions of the boom going on in all Latin American countries and in Chicano literature as well.

4) The boom is symptomatic of a whole process of change occurring in the 1960s, and it includes the social sciences, literature, movies, music, etc.

Rama used the term a fifth way. He said that the word "boom" pointed toward a marketing process. It described a brief period in which a number of factors felicitously conspired to allow the internalization of literary products and, for the first time in Latin American letters, the genuine professionalization of a group of novelists. It also opened the possibility of publication and diffusion to a larger number of writers than before. Rama described this process as it had occurred in the Latin American publishing industry. By the 1960s, a series of elements which had been developing since approximately 1930 coalesced to bring about a qualitative change in the sociological articulation of literary practice. A process of modernization had begun in the 1930s which was based on import substitution for internal consumption. Some 30 years later this process produced a sudden expansion of the market and a hitherto unknown demand for literary products. Because of a dramatic growth rate in population, massive urbanization, and an increased access to education, a new and qualitatively different reading public appeared. Before, Latin American authors had written for an elite; now, by comparison, they were confronted with a massive readership ("massive" only in relation to their previous readership but certainly not in relation to the total population). The appearance of this new literate sector explains in part the sudden explosion in the size and number of editions. Other factors that contributed to this phenomenon, according to Rama, were the willingness of small publishers to risk bringing out texts chosen for their literary merit rather than for their obvious saleability, the reemergence of Spain as a publisher and distributor of Hispanic American literature, and the creation of a fragile and ephemeral open space in the book industry in which small publishing houses were able to respond to, and benefit from, the new demand.

The 1970s have seen a dramatic rearticulation of the publishing industry and a closure of the opening that constituted the boom. The process of modernization rushes forth to a new stage in the reproduction of metropolitan structures--the progressive monopolization of the book industry by multinationals, guided only by the profit motive and consequently ill-disposed to risk publication of texts whose success is not guaranteed beforehand. Thus, boom novels--proven commodities--appear in the multinationals' catalogues next to titles by Jacqueline Susann, and the untested production of non-boom authors (e.g., young novelists and other proverbial bad risks, such as serious women writers) is reduced to an almost pre-boom situation of limited access to tiny artisan-like publishing enterprises

with a restricted domestic network for distribution. Both Alistair Reid and Gregory Rabassa remarked on a similar crisis in the United States and the retreat of serious literature to small local presses that have recently appeared to offer an alternative to the multinationals.

Remarks by Saul Sosnowski and Luis Rafael Sánchez were more optimistic than the sobering picture drawn by Rama. They stressed that the boom writers, by their success, had guaranteed the saleability of Latin American fiction, thus making it possible for writers after them to be published. I pointed out the discrepancy between these statements and Rama's. Rama observed that the small Argentine press that published Sánchez's La Guaracha del Macho Camacho in 1976 would no longer be able to risk bringing out a first novel.

The issue of translation shifted the discussion to the presence of the boom in the non-Spanish-speaking world. Sara Castro-Klarén who presented a paper entitled "Translations, Editions, Sales, Stars: A Not So Booming Boom?" maintained that consecration in the metropolis was a requirement for inclusion in the boom: one had to be translated and recognized by metropolitan critics. To belong, in fact, an author had to be translated into at least three languages. If translation was part of the chemistry of the boom, then Borges, considered by some a mere precursor, was certainly a member. This led Castro-Klarén to conclude that the boom was not a generation, nor a school, nor a movement, but rather a group. Borges, in fact, has been so widely translated that he even has multiple translations of single works. García Márquez is the only other boom figure to have received comparable attention from translators. Part of the boom phenomenon, then, appears to have been a boom in translation. However, contrary to what one might think, there has not been a comparable boom in foreign sales. Castro-Klarén remarked that the editions of these translations have generally been small. The only exception is García Márquez, the English translations of whose works (Coronel, 100 Years, Leaf Storm, and The Autumn of the Patriarch) have sold some half million copies in paperback. For English language paperbacks, however, this is still modest.

Whereas Rama pronounced the boom in Latin American literary publication defunct, Alistair Reid said that English-language publishers still consider the boom a gold mine of best sellers, which it is not. He said these publishers are, on the whole, poorly informed. They frequently buy publishing rights to books they have not read, and hire translators arbitrarily. This lack of seriousness toward translation is dangerous for literature. James Irby pointed out that there are also limits to publishers' eagerness to translate foreign books. Copyrights and the probability of limited sales obstruct the necessary re-translation of important works. A case in point is Pedro Páramo, which languishes in a sub-standard translation.

Ileana Rodríguez discussed another aspect of the international promotion of the boom: the boom of Spanish departments in the U.S. academic community during the 1960s and the concomitant institutionalization of a certain corpus of literature. These departments held

sway over a relatively captive audience, and the ideological preferences of those who decided what was to be studied legitimized certain authors and, by exclusion, discredited others.

It was generally agreed that if the boom meant the consecration of some, it also meant the exclusion of others, and that these exclusions were frequently undeserved. Brazilians were excluded from the boom, women were excluded, and a number of good male writers were also excluded. David Viñas, in his paper "Pareceres y digresiones en torno a la nueva narrativa latinoamericana," asked: "¿[F]ue acaso el búm la voz privilegiada que le otorgó el oído metropolitano al cuerpo de América Latina? . . . fue el búm la única voz, privilegiada e impuesta o manipulada, que el imperialismo cultural y la academia metropolitana querían escuchar de América Latina?" He also suggested that the term "nueva narrativa" betrayed an ignorance of the rest of Latin American literature: new for whom?

The exclusions and silences were not the only negative effects of the boom. Rama, commenting on Viñas's paper, spoke of how the boom had created an extraordinary fragmentation in Latin American discourse, causing people to lose sight of the richness of literature produced in other periods. (In a different context, Rama recognized that the boom did help to promote a literary production which had been accumulating for some 30 years prior to the market's expansion. When the inner circle of the boom proved unable to produce at the rate of demand, publishers looked to the recent past for their material.) He also praised Viñas for pointing out that sacralized over-writing had come to vitiate the boom. Sánchez further developed this point. He said that the boom's great pitfall was the expectation that each new novel would be an ever-more-daring tight-rope act. Flashiness came to be the criterion by which an author was judged exceptional. This distortion of critical judgment produced a loss of innocence: it became all too tempting to forget that writing is a serious and difficult enterprise.

Flashiness was, of course, one response to the dynamics of the consumer market which had now taken literature into its province. A further deleterious effect of this process had to do with the pressure exerted on the writer to accelerate production to meet increased demand. This pressure generated a contradiction between the artisan-like nature of literary work (even prolific writers, try as they might, found it difficult to bring out more than one substantial novel every two years) and the rhythm of production--dominated by the assembly line and rapid duplication--in which contemporary consumers had been socialized. Consequently, according to Rama, the demands of a voracious market led some authors to compromise the quality of their work for the sake of quantity.

Many of the participants saw the distortion or failure of critical judgment as another characteristic of the boom. In fact, Sánchez, in his paper "De la nueva novela a la novísima: asterisco prescindible," was one of the few defenders of boom criticism:

"[F]omentó la aparición de una crítica incisiva, urgente, acosadora, nueva." Viñas, on the other hand, denounced the apologetic nature of this criticism, which he also described as aggressively ahistorical and provincially aestheticist. Aguilar Mora said that, with few exceptions (e.g., Josefina Ludmer's study of Cien años), the boom had failed to generate responsible literary analysis. According to him, the criticism of these novels was frequently found in the works, themselves: a number of novels included propositions for their own exegesis. A parallel phenomenon was that the novelists, through statements both within and beyond their books, had usurped the task of literary critics and "created" their own tradition, indicating to readers what texts and authors had influenced them. (In his paper, Rama also discussed this phenomenon, although he did not see it as negative.) Martínez Moreno claimed that no study of the boom has yet been made which employs an historical criterion. In fact, the workshop itself was organized on the premise that the new narrative of which the boom was a part continues to be shrouded in confusion. (To quote the preliminary agenda of the workshop: "There is now ample agreement among specialists that the avant-garde phenomenon of the new Latin American narrative [1950-1975] has come to a close. However, we continue to work with a literary category that is at best cloudy, that expands and contracts with every critic who uses it and which fails to answer to any of the basic questions of aesthetic coherence, generational change, articulation of cultural project, etc.") The workshop's express objective was to dispel this confusion as much as possible.

The problem of finding workable definitions also came up when the novísimos were discussed. Just as with the boom, the matter of who belonged was controversial. Also, how was one to define "newness," and was this novelty a function of youth; if so, how to define youth? Similar to Rama on the broader concept of the new narrative, Sosnowski, in a paper entitled "Lectura sobre la marcha de una obra en marcha," stressed that regional distinctions should take precedence over global generalizations: "Si bien la situación de Latinoamérica puede ser analizada en su totalidad en su relación con el desarrollo del capitalismo, es obvio que varían los papeles que juegan (o no) diversos países o regiones. Esta variación, claro está, contribuye a alterar las manifestaciones culturales que en ella se producen." Sosnowski thus chose a regional approach for his description of the novísimos. He also indicated that most of the "new" writers have an "urban ideology." In this, and in other points, he coincided with Skármeta. Both agreed, for example, that historical imperatives weigh more heavily on these writers than literary models. To Skármeta, the conditions of production have changed dramatically from what they were during the boom: now writers create against a backdrop of death and violence, in which existence is no longer a given. To Sosnowski: "Junto con la magnificación de la historia concreta, ese viejo problema de la responsabilidad del escritor ante la sociedad adquiere matices más urgentes, acorta las mediatizaciones e impone obligaciones más inmediatas. La solución (o su ausencia) se dan mediante una mayor conciencia del ejercicio literario y del valor y los alcances del texto mismo."

More problematic perhaps than even the "boom," the term novísimos is inherently unstable. Sosnowski pointed out that some of the writers discussed in his paper as "new" now constituted their own establishment--Puig, for example. I correlated the problem of "established" vs. "new" to the configuration of the publishing industry described by Rama. I suggested that those younger writers who had been able to take advantage of the editorial success of the boom were now established as publishable, and that this distinguished them from subsequent waves of writers who now find themselves at a serious disadvantage with regard to a radically altered market.

Another problem in appraising the novísimos as well as the boom is that of perspective. Richard Morse remarked that there is often a delay in understanding historical phenomena, and wondered if perhaps it was not still too soon to understand the boom. This observation could also be extended to the novísimos. Another caution came from Nélida Piñón, who detected that certain remarks by the novísimos concerning themselves and the boom were informed by a broader generational struggle. The will to distinguish themselves from a previous and imposing generation might color certain of their protestations. Rama was perhaps implying something similar when he said that there are writers who treat the issue of plurality as if it were a new discovery. Joan Dassin perceived a bias operating in the opposite direction when she suggested that perhaps Antonio Cândido's remarks on on the profusion of experimental forms in contemporary Brazilian literature betrayed a certain nostalgia for traditional literary values.

Language and the Reading Public

Is there a single reality adequately represented by the denomination "Latin America," or are there many disparate realities whose peculiarities are neutralized by the continental label? This issue of homogeneity vs. heterogeneity was debated from different angles throughout the workshop. Initially, it crystalized around the problem of literary language.

Martínez Moreno asked if the reality of a new Latin American narrative represented a project of commonality; that is, if, indeed, the multiple areas of Latin America, each with its particular spoken language (parole), were formulating a common literary language, and if so, whether this uniform continental language sacrificed the richness of linguistic specificity. He said that Carpentier's definition of Latin American literature as baroque was a theory proffered as a continental literary project which in fact was simply Carpentier's personal esthetic.*

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*Presumably, he was referring to Carpentier's statement, "El legítimo estilo del novelista latinoamericano actual es el barroco." "Problemática de la actual novela latino-americana," Tientos y diferencias, México, 1964.

In the discussion that ensued, the issue of the tension between literary and spoken language underwent the following trifurcation:

1) The relationship between contemporary narrative language and a previously hegemonic standardized Spanish: the problem of purism.

2) The on-going creation of a distinctly American Spanish, which is taking place first in literature and not in speech.

3) A tendency of literary language to exaggerate its literariness, to seek its renovation in self-referential experimentation which results in progressive estrangement from the commitment of spoken language to express the real world. (The danger in such self-referential experimentation is a crisis in communication and a reduction in what is already a comparatively small reading public. The issue becomes whether literature should be a progressively elitist enterprise or a progressively democratic one.)

In the discussion of the first point, the focus quickly shifted from the narrative project to create a continental language to the phenomenon of regionalism, sub-regionalism, and idiolects in literary language. The continental linguistic project was associated with specific boom writers (e.g., Fuentes) and/or fellow travelers (e.g., Carpentier), while linguistic regionalism was frequently associated with the new post-boom writers.

Rama cited a new sense of security among writers who use regional language. He said that this constitutes a change with respect to previous literary practice. The days are past in which a hegemonic linguistic norm can force writers to be self-conscious about the use of regionalisms and to call attention to their deviation by the inclusion of a glossary at the end of their text. This new sense of security indicates the displacement or "pulverization" of purism, which until as recently as 10 or 15 years ago imposed a standardization upon written language that necessarily divorced it from speech.

This reference to a temporal demarcation coincident with the boom suggests that the latter helped to foster linguistic independence among writers. Certainly, a cliché in boom criticism (e.g., Carlos Fuentes's La nueva novela hispanoamericana) is that this literature consciously and successfully transgressed linguistic convention. Some papers presented at the workshop (Aguilar Mora, Viñas on Cortázar, Skármeta) at least partially supported this assertion. Yet Aguilar and Skármeta were the two "new writers" who most aggressively sought to disassociate themselves and their generation from the boom. According to Skármeta: "Mi generación siente una gran distancia con respecto a los grandes del boom." In his paper "The Perspective of the Novísimos on the New Narrative," Skármeta spoke of a coincidence between his generation and the writers of the 1960s in terms of their simultaneous

appropriation of conquests in linguistic freedom made earlier by vanguard poets. He stressed, however, the notion of coincidence and not that of influence, and made it clear that his generation's linguistic identity was already established when the boom occurred. Aguilar, in his paper "Sobre el lado moridor de la 'nueva narrativa' hispanoamericana," referred to "esta libertad con que el boom ridiculizó los moldes retóricos de la narración tradicional y respetuosa de los estilos definidos," but he also said that "con la nueva narrativa no cristaliza una independencia linguística, ya que por otro lado no se debe precisamente a esta narrativa una re-evaluación del lenguaje español como tal (con excepción de Cabrera Infante en Tres tristes tigres)." During the workshop, Aguilar maintained that the problem of language was never properly formulated during the boom. He distinguished two basic antagonistic positions: that of Fuentes, who claimed that the boom was creating a revolution through language, and that of Retamar (in Calibán), who judged the problem politically, in terms of the language of the oppressed and that of the oppressor. According to Aguilar, neither correctly analyzed the problem, which has to do with the historical development of the Spanish language: Spanish never acquired a referential capacity because it was never a language with power. (This refers tangentially to the problem of ontology in Hispanic America, as well as to the relationship of the Hispanic world to the Euro-centric/bourgeois/rationalist tradition, which will be discussed in the next section.) This historic poverty in part explains what he saw as an abuse of direct oral language (the first person) by boom novelists, which contributed to the referential insufficiency of their language by exempting them from the obligation to make judgments. Aguilar claimed that this historical limitation of Spanish continues to plague those who write in the language. Rama disagreed, stating that all languages have a referential capacity, and any responsibility for referential weakness is to be placed with the writer and not with the language.

It is clear that neither the papers nor the debate corroborated the boastful assertions of certain apologists that the boom could claim full credit for the renovation of literary language in Latin America. What was generally accepted was that a change had occurred, and that the boom had functioned as a catalyst to hasten it.

Aguilar Mora, who along with Rama took the lead in insisting that the new regionalism signified greater security on the part of writers, nonetheless maintained that this linguistic phenomenon did not represent a change but rather a continuity. (He suggested that the change, or that which had interrupted a tradition, was the boom. This idea will be returned to in the next section.) Aguilar defended his assertion that regionalism or particularism was the dominant tradition in Latin America by questioning that there had ever existed a single hegemonic linguistic standard ("El español no trató de imponerse . . . La Gramática de Nebrija nunca se reeditó . . . Aquí no se usó"), thereby implicitly disagreeing with Rama's discussion of purism. Rama agreed that there had never

been an established (institutionalized) standard Latin American Spanish, but his statements suggested that in the absence of such a standard, purism, or the peninsular standard, had hitherto fulfilled the role of a universal criterion.

Aguilar did concede that there had been a change in the reception of regionalism by the public: "Cuando Azuela usó el regionalismo, no había ningún público que legitimara eso. Ahora el cambio es de perspectiva. Ahora el público lector le dice al escritor--Esto es nuestro." This brings up two questions: (1) who is this public that the new regionalist authors write for and from whom they get support, and (2) why is this public more receptive than before? Aguilar insisted that the new writers direct themselves to an immediate public. They are not thinking about an abstract international or even a national public, nor about an anonymous readership responsive to the seductions of the market, nor about a particular social class. When asked for whom he writes, Skármeta said that, even in exile, he continues to write for his "vecino chileno."

Several observations made during the workshop cautioned the new writers about the pitfalls in such a definition of their reading public. Halperín said that even though novels like El vampiro de la Colonia Roma utilized a sub-regional language, this idiolect was still accessible to an Argentine reader like himself. This indicated that the author had performed a literary operation on the spoken language, making it conform to a sort of linguistic "deep structure" with continental legitimacy. Halperín suggested that this "deep structure" corresponded to a project for a Latin American Spanish, a linguistic system which does not yet exist but which is being created in literature. This "universalizing" transformation which sub-regional spoken language undergoes in a literary product modifies the "new" authors' protestations that they are only writing to an immediate public.

Sánchez offered another qualifier, which was further developed by Roberto Márquez. They suggested that the reading public for neo-regionalism, which Aguilar recognized as coming from the middle class, was attracted to popular language not because it was theirs (nuestro) but precisely because it was not. That is, it invited them to make an aesthetic descent into a world which remained for them exotic. To the extent that this was true, neo-regionalism was not an affirmation of power ("una toma de poder," in the words of Aguilar)--a vindication of one's own perspective and language by the writer and reader respectively. It was not, to stretch a concept from Viñas's paper, an achievement of alteridad or of otredad dialectizada. Or to paraphrase Márquez, it did not supersede the historical crisis of political and linguistic hegemony but rather continued to be a part of it. The middle-class reader, in consuming the literary avatar of popular language and reality, was reproducing the center-periphery relationship.

Several participants sought to explain neo-regionalism and its public within a broader historical context. Rama said that sub-regionalism* could never have developed if the process of urbanization associated with the 1950s and 1960s had not significantly increased the size of the reading sector; thus, the issue of a changing social structure lay behind the problem of language. Beverley insisted that the question of who currently reads novels in Latin America is a function of the region's class structure. Rama said that the new novels probably have a readership of about one thousand each. Aguilar claimed that the Mexican novel El vampiro de la Colonia Roma, an exceptional success, had sold forty thousand copies. However, even this, he admitted, is not really a large figure.

As usual, the participants were cautioned to account for regional differences when discussing the readership of these new novels. Halperín pointed out that there are areas, such as Argentina, in which there has been no recent expansion of the reading public. An author like Puig is not talking to a newly formed or enhanced sector but instead is saying something different to an established one. Roberto Schwartz, paraphrasing Cândido's paper on Brazilian literature, reiterated the suspicion that a growing emphasis on colloquial language might respond more to a middle-class market's intrigue with the exotic than to pressures from a new class that its voice be heard. It should be noted that neo-regionalism was not discussed in relation to Cuba, where the formation of different social structures and a dramatic increase in literacy would pose different problems for interpretation of such a phenomenon.

Márquez connected the issue of neo- or sub-regionalism to a contemporary crisis in political hegemony. (This crisis became a leitmotif in most of the discussions and will be discussed below at greater length.) As regards language, Márquez suggested that there was now an absence of any authority compelling enough to establish a single binding criterion for acceptable or desirable expression. He related this to an ongoing crisis in the concept of nationhood, which elsewhere in the workshop was referred to as a crisis in class hegemony. The assumption here is that a language organizes and is in turn organized by a political project. When the legitimacy of this project is questioned, so is the language associated with it.

Both Juan E. Corradi and Daniel Levine also spoke of how political crisis invalidates the descriptive power of established language. Corradi dealt with the inadequacy of the vocabulary of social science to describe the current Argentine crisis, and Levine

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*The new regionalism or sub-regionalism was identified as dealing primarily with urban as opposed to rural groups. See the papers of Sosnowski and Skármeta. Also, for the Brazilian case, see Antonio Cândido's paper on the "realismo feroz," "uma das tendências salientes do momento," which he associates with a "violência urbana en todos os níveis."

claimed that both the boom and dependency theory were attempts to create a new language for new realities.

A final issue concerning literary language was that of self-referential experimentation. Even though Martínez Moreno initially raised a question as to whether Latin American narrative was not moving in the direction of literary experimentation at the expense of communication, the discussion quickly conspired to associate this danger with the boom writers and to accept, to varying degrees, that post-boom literature constituted a return to realism. When Jean Franco summarized her paper "Storyteller, Author and Superstar: Latin American Narrative in the Age of Mass Culture," she described the literary vanguardism of the 1960s as a crisis in realism. The boom dramatized the failure of the democratization of literature, and writers, disillusioned about the social role that their colleagues had claimed for themselves in the nineteenth century, retreated to a position of mandarinism from which they spoke only to an educated minority.

Rama cautioned against too facile an association between experimentation and incommunicability. He pointed out that sometimes what appears to be self-referential experimentation may be an effort in the direction of verisimilitude. In these cases, language may be straining to adapt itself to new technological developments in a rapidly changing society. Along the same line, Edmundo Desnoes remarked that in Cuba profound changes in values and political behavior had also modified linguistic patterns.

The Universal vs. the Particular

The central theme which emerged from the workshop was the tension between the universal and the particular. A cluster of words gradually formed around the concept of the universal: cosmopolitan, metropolis, abstract, unified, homogeneous, ontology, myth, hegemony, dominant, bourgeoisie, imperialism, purism, classical, humanist, rational (these last three from Desnoes's paper "A falta de otras palabras"), and--most persistent of all--Latin America and the boom. The avatars of the particular were plurality, transcultural, reality, historical, anomic (Corradi's paper, "Prova d'Orchestra 1950-1975: Argentine Modernization at the Breaking Point"), surrealista e histérico (Sánchez's paper), myopic (Skármeta), neo-realism, regionalism, sub-regionalism, idiolect, social class, and the silenced and excluded. All these words represented values and positions. The same word was praise for one person, while it was anathema for another. Some saw both the universal and the particular as positive, while the majority of those most vocal at the workshop seemed to favor one over the other* or to insist,

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*To paraphrase a remark by Skármeta, for example: "Los del boom hacen sus carreras en Europa y conciben a América Latina en visión de mito universal, mientras que los jóvenes viven y se forman adentro. Se abstienen de disgregar la realidad para reformarla en un símbolo, una abstracción, un mito universalista. Ellos son abarcadores nosotros somos miopes. Sólo nos interesa la realidad inmediata."

as did Schwartz and Márquez, that the issue represented a false dilemma: a falsification of the intellectual process, which is not binary but dialectic (Schwartz), or an improper formulation of what is really a problem of who has the power to define such categories (Márquez). The words listed above came both from proponents and adversaries. They formed the discourse of the debate, but cannot be ascribed, in their totality, to any single individual.

A Latin American vs. a Regional Perspective

During the workshop it was both stated and implied that writers of the boom as well as several workshop participants had a universalist perspective because they postulated the existence of a single reality named Latin America. Rama suggested that an approach which focused on cultural areas was more fruitful than one which sought a global solution. Halperín said that Rama carried the idea of cultural areas too far. There had been periods in which culture was more legitimately Latin American than regional; in this context, he mentioned Pedro Henríquez Urena. Lleana Rodríguez suggested that Halperín's paper went too far in unifying Latin American reality. Halperín answered that all the writers associated with the boom had functioned both inside and outside their national context. The idea of Latin America (in part, promoted by Cuba) offered them a chance to escape from the limitations of their respective countries; they, themselves, wanted the continental perspective to take precedence over the national. Rama said that Viñas, in his paper, interpreted Latin American literature from a regional (Argentine) bias, setting out to discuss a continental phenomenon but spending most of his time on Argentine authors. (In fact, an implicit content of the workshop was the tendency of the Argentine perspective to generalize itself, to attempt to convert its own experience into a valid criterion for the rest of the continent, to reproduce a center-periphery relationship in regard to other Latin American realities.) Bolívar Lamounier accused academics in the United States of forcing a unity on Latin America which does not exist. He said they found it difficult to accept the complexity of the area, and he questioned that there exists any unified sense of self in Latin America. Daniel Levine rejoined that there both <u>is</u> and <u>is not</u> a common ground among Latin American countries.

A Metropolitan or a Latin American Perspective?

Aguilar, Skármeta, and Sánchez agreed that the boom writers had looked toward the <u>metropolis</u> (Europe and the United States) for validation. Márquez remarked on the appropriateness of the book title <u>Into the Mainstream</u> in that it suggested that the boom authors, themselves, had viewed their work as contributing to Latin America's entrance into the mainstream of civilization. All of these judgments (perhaps excepting that of Sánchez) were intended to imply an element of alienation in the boom, the persistence of a Euro-centric perspective, a fundamental insecurity on the part of writers who required approval from an external authority.

Aguilar and Skármeta also maintained that the boom had attempted to create myths which would explain Latin America as a totality. They felt uncomfortable with this ambition; since both considered that Latin America, itself, is a myth, an abstraction. If this debate over the universal vs. the particular was, as it often appeared, a new variation of the old polemic between europeización and americanismo, then their conjoining of "metropolitan" and "American" into a single negative position seemed an interesting innovation. Nonetheless, this merger was consistent with their advocacy of neo-regionalism, which, they claimed, achieved greater verisimilitude because of its expression of the particular and the immediate; the boom, which abandoned history in its search for transcendence and the mythic, was less close to reality than neo-regionalism.

At one point Aguilar suggested that the boom had constituted an exception in the evolution of Latin American literature, whose real tradition was rooted in the particular. Rama redefined conventional concepts when he included both the "metropolitan" and the "particular" under the rubric of "American" and claimed that both the cosmopolitas (i.e., the metropolitan and modernizing perspective) and transculturales (i.e., the regionalist or particularist perspective which often retrieves the legacy of the past) were "vanguards," that indeed, Latin American literature had two distinct vanguard traditions. He absolved the metro- or cosmopolitan tradition of the stigma of inauthenticity, and said that since its origin Latin America has been characterized by a polarity between those groups identified with "modernization"--which is always imported from an external metropolis--and those sectors more directly rooted in the internal development of the continent. Both poles are parts of the American reality; they are simply different parts. Rama insisted that the metropolitan impulse of the boom was nothing new or exceptional. He chose to integrate the boom into a larger period of modernization which began in the 1930s and which he saw as coming to a close now. This period is, in a sense, a repetition of the conflicts experienced by Hispanic America at the end of the nineteenth century, when rapid transformation found literary expression in modernismo. Since the sixteenth century, every moment of modernization has been accompanied by a "counter-conquest," a creative response from the transcultural sector. What makes the present conjuncture different and alarming is that modernization now threatens to destroy this polarity and become the exclusive cultural force, therein neutralizing Latin America's richness and diversity. Franco, in her paper, also alluded to this threat, saying that by the late 1960s "[n]ovelists . . . faced the era of mass culture which destroyed any notion of an original national culture. . . ."

At the end of the workshop, however, Rama seemed more optimistic about the strength of plurality than pessimistic about the spectre of a monolithic culture. He said he could not detect a common parameter in contemporary literature, nor did he see the emergence of a new homogeneous "Latin American" expression. He celebrated the recent liberation from conventional constraints and

its replacement by an enhanced plurality, and asserted that Latin American writers were now far more independent than they had been in the past.

Creative, Bewildering, and Destructive Plurality

During the workshop Corradi used the concept "plurality" in two antithetical ways. Referring to the current Argentine crisis in his paper "Prova d'Orchestra 1950-1975: Argentine Modernization at the Breaking Point," he described a tragic "negative pluralism," an "extreme anomic behavior" which "poses a fundamental problem of societal coexistence." However, in a global reference to Latin America, he said that dependency had created an enormous creative autonomy. He proposed an alternative, positive reading to Jean Franco's interpretation of Hegel (rough paraphrase: "Latin America lacks a history because it lacks an ontology; therefore it is insignificant. . . .") by suggesting that precisely what was creative about Latin America was that it could not be reduced to a single ontology. This constituted a vindication of plurality.

Perhaps the issue of ontology provides the best axis around which to organize that part of the discussion which attempted to consider the broad historical conjuncture of the 1960s and 1970s. Most participants concurred that the 1960s represented an ontological crisis.* They discussed this crisis on two levels: (1) a crisis in Latin America of liberalism, or of the bourgeois national project which had constituted the dominant interpretative vision of intellectuals and political elites since the nineteenth century, and (2) a global crisis of capitalism.

Halperín's paper is a good point of departure for discussing the continental articulation of the problem. His oral presentation of the paper was brief and hardly touched on the issues which I feel are most useful to review here. The paper's treatment of these issues, however, offers a cogent and comprehensive background for the study of the problematic. The crisis of the 1960s, which Halperín saw expressed both in dependency theory and in narrative, corresponded to a renunciation of a certain vision of Latin American history which he characterized as dominant, although not exclusive, in the social sciences and in the literature of the period spanning roughly 1880 to 1960. (He was more specific about the temporal origin of this vision in social science than in literature.) He described this vision of history as historical (as opposed to ahistorical--cyclical, static, mythic, or apocalyptic and voluntaristic) in that it presupposed an accumulative, temporal project, an evolution through time in which

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*One voice of skepticism was that of Bolívar Lamounier, who asserted that all decades are important and cautioned against exaggerating the importance of the 1960s.

material circumstances determine what is possible at any given moment. He did not claim legitimacy for this vision, but merely attempted to describe it: "Al señalar todo esto no se trata de reivindicar visiones latinoamericanas por otra parte entre sí contradictorias, ninguna de las cuales ha revelando hasta ahora tener indiscutible valor predicativo. . . ."

Both the literary and the socio-political enunciations of this vision conceived of Latin America as "un avance . . . de una realidad sometida a fatalidades naturales ilevantables a una progresiva cancelación de esas fatalidades, que marca el ingreso de Latinoamérica en la historia." Although Halperín did not make this point, the idea of a movement from timeless nature into history sounds, at least in the aspect of "timeless nature," like Hegel's Euro-céntric dismissal of Latin America as residing in the antechamber of history. It also sounds, as Jean Franco indicated, like the ideological perspective expressed in the opposition civilización y barbarie. Halperín did not make this connection, but other workshop participants (including myself) would associate civilización y barbarie with a bourgeois national project as well as with certain Euro-centric or quasi-Euro-centric antibourgeois analyses that envisioned Latin America's destiny largely in terms of criteria elaborated in Europe and descriptive of a European bourgeoisie and capitalist development. (The fact that Halperín included Mariátegui within this vision did not strike me as contradictory; on the contrary, it reveals a sensitivity to Mariátegui's acceptance of certain Euro-centric criteria.)

If, then, it is valid to interpolate these ideological contents into Halperín's description of an historical process, we can see his paper as providing a coherent historical context for the varied but frequently overlapping interpretations advanced by the participants who described the 1960s as a crisis in ontology, in class hegemony, and/or in bourgeois organizational structures. Halperín, himself, described the crisis of the 1960s in terms of the rejection of a previously operative historical vision and its replacement by an apocalyptic or voluntaristic one. For him, the visions proposed by the novels of this period were cyclical, static, or mythical. They communicated an exuberance at the release from historical determination and a euphoria that anything was possible. Halperín claimed that dependency theory also performed a voluntaristic leap into the irrational; it traced such a fatalistic and monolithic picture of dependency that the revolutionary alternative which it posited consequently appeared more necessary than possible. Whereas the new dizzying freedom from historical determinants made novelists ebullient, it made social scientists desperate. The most illuminating nexus between the two groups was the commonly held slogan "La imaginación al poder."

Halperín, both in his paper and in his presentation, also referred to the political behavior of the boom novelists. A number of them saw themselves as a political vanguard and believed that their books constituted a type of revolutionary practice. Aguilar Mora proposed that a characteristic of this group was the

discontinuity between their acute sensitivity to the problem of political power and the resolution of this awareness in a moral rather than in a political vision within their novels, a dilemma which took the form of "la disyuntiva de una militancia política directa o de una lucha ideológica solitaria." In some cases (e.g., Fuentes), the possibility of resolving this dilemma became identified with the elucidation of the ontological enigma: what is Latin America? Thus, a political problem developed into a mythical quest--the will to convert Latin America into a transparent entity. Aguilar cited Vasconcelos's La raza cósmica as an antecedent of this ambition. Elsewhere in the discussion, Skármeta tried to define his own generation by using roughly the same dichotomous scheme. Instead of creating myths, he said, the young writers act, and some have chosen the concrete forms of political militancy. They feel uncomfortable with the disequilibrium that they find in the boom between history and literature: "Los del boom convirtieron la historia en mito."

John Beverley included boom novelists within the New Left. During at least most of the 1960s, the boom writers expressed a strong antibourgeois sentiment. They repudiated the national bourgeoisie, disbelieved in the capacity both of the peasantry and the CP for revolutionary initiative, and considered that the illustrated middle class would assume the role of political vanguard. Beverley compared the boom novelists to Nietzsche, Flaubert, and the Social Darwinists after 1848. He said that like these nineteenth-century middle-class dissidents, the boom writers would be seen in retrospect not as having contributed to revolutionary change but as having helped to create a new morality, a new sensibility necessary for the readjustment of Latin American capitalism at a new stage. In answer to Beverley, Roberto Márquez used the case of the Antilles to argue that not necessarily all middle-class writers should be seen as allies (whether conscious or unconscious) of the bourgeoisie. He insisted that the situation is more complex, and that now many middle-class writers of the Antilles, whose interests might earlier have been identified with the economically dominant sectors, find themselves sharing situations of work and exile with people who 100 years ago were slaves. This break with past structures, which is occurring on all levels, suggests that an interpretive model (Lukács) which was designed to describe a European situation existing in the nineteenth century is perhaps inappropriate or at least insufficient for explaining contemporary Latin American fiction.*

Jean Franco organized her paper and presentation around the contemporary crisis in historical consciousness. She spoke of the simultaneous existence of three kinds of time in Latin America and the reflection of these types in three different paradigms of

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* This sentence represents my interpretation of what Roberto Márquez said. He did not state this explicitly.

the writer in the late 1950s and the 1960s. She spoke of communal memory and the oral storyteller, which, according to the aforementioned "Hegelian" perspective, would correspond to nature. She spoke of history (as defined by the metropolis) and the author, and she spoke of the repetition of mass culture (a further negation of history) and the star. In her discussion of history and the author, her assumptions and analysis paralleled Halperín's idea that the 1960s saw the abandonment of an historical perspective previously considered appropriate for Latin America. The decade witnessed disillusionment with the notion that Latin America would ever be able to reproduce the trajectory already mapped out by the European bourgeoisies for their respective countries. In her analysis of Fushía's island in La casa verde, she gave a concrete example of the kind of literary voluntarism alluded to by Halperín or the ambitious undertaking to create mythologies described by Aguilar and Skármeta. Fushía's island is an inverse parody of Robinson's island. If Robinson unites the qualities of the primitive capitalist of England, Fushía is the absence of these qualities. His story cannot even be told in linear, rationalist European time (the time of nineteenth-century bourgeois realism) because his history and his project definitively do not correspond to the European model. If Latin Americans cannot participate in European historical time, they are excluded from the discourse of power called history. Franco described Vargas Llosa's novel as a representative rebellion against this exclusion. If the Latin American bourgeoisie cannot materialize a national project, the novelist can nonetheless fantasize a project, a continent, a world, a Tlön. The novelist replaces the national bourgeoisie as founder of reality, as a father of the fatherland (padre de la patria). (This analysis was questioned by Beverley who wondered whether it really reflected an intention on the part of novelists to supplant the bourgeoisie or rather the imaginative hindsight of critics exposed to dependency theory. Márquez also asked for clarification. Subsequent to the workshop, Franco said, "I did not want to suggest in my paper that the novelist wanted to supplant the bourgeoisie but rather that the novel was in some sense a compensatory achievement which paradoxically seemed to depend on the recurrent topos of the failure of individual enterprise." Letter, Franco to rapporteur, January 27, 1980.)

Aguilar developed Franco's theory to corroborate his assertion that the mythic interpretations advanced by the boom were failures: novelist/entrepreneurs cannot appropriate that which does not belong to them. Taken at face value, this statement is of course not true, but with it, Aguilar was saying (I believe) that we cannot create a discourse of power that does not correspond to real political power: we cannot create a discourse of power to express a reality that daily reminds us of our lack of power (e.g., urban landscapes built by foreigners).

Other participants spoke of the absence of an ontology or of an accepted order in Latin America, although not necessarily in the context of what Halperín described as the abandonment in the 1960s of an order previously invested with at least a certain degree

of legitimacy. One alternative emphasis which reappeared was that the absence of a legitimate order was a legacy inherited from the past. Since the conquest, Latin American reality had never been transparent; there had never been, according to Jacques Leenhardt, a "cohérence d'une identité nationale ou continentale," "un axe auquel ordonner la realité, d'un principe d'intelligibilité permettant aussi bien aux auteurs de la vie sociale d'agir, qu'aux écrivains d'écrire." In his paper "Le problème de la structure essayistique dans le roman Latino-americain," Leenhardt used this perspective to explain the search for a coherence--for a national and continental identity--in a number of recent novels (in particular, Roa Bastos's Yo el supremo) and to link this search to the ways in which these novels incorporate aspects of the essay. Leenhardt also suggested that the characteristic delirium or the phantasmagoria of much of the literature of the 1960s and 1970s can best be understood as a function of this secular absence of an order recognized and accepted by the community.

Sánchez seemed to be referring to a similar lack of coherence when he said in his paper "Nuestro continente es, desde luego, en buena medida, surrealista e histérico. Como lo es todo subdesarrollo." Skármeta observed that Latin Americans have always had the sense of moving in an evasive reality, a reality without a center, and writers, by definition, have to create an order. The danger is to confuse these creations with reality. The boom began to disintegrate when critics fell prey to this confusion and demanded of the writers that they account for reality.

Halperín's paper, because of its breadth and precision, seemed to me an appropriate point of departure for discussing the various observations of participants concerning the crisis of the 1960s and Latin American historical consciousness. Yet, it should be remarked that his appraisal was one of the gloomiest and most devastating presented at the workshop--a sort of obituary of the decade. He called the revolution as conceived by the writers una revolución boba, and saw the 1960s as a series of failed revolutionary aspirations. While I would say that the prevalent attitude toward the 1960s was one of sober criticism (an accounting which recognized errors and shortcomings as well as debts), there were participants who emphasized what they saw as positive. Richard Morse, while accepting the argument that the 1960s witnessed a change in sensibilities, did not see the movement away from a European rationalistic perspective as a leap into the void or even particularly as a moment of problematic disorientation. He said that the boom validated a vision which had not been stylish or allowed for a long time. This view is that Spain and Portugal opted out of the scientific and rationalist revolution and that Latin America, the colonial offspring of these two powers, consequently has an alternate tradition: it is the custodian of ancient, displaced European values that were overthrown in northern Europe long ago. He said that the boom was able to face this with lucidity and to see hidden messages in everything that had come before. Thus, the boom and the climate that produced it allowed Latin Americans to face their own history and to understand it better. Daniel Levine, in his paper "Senses of Self: Literature and Other Creative Forms in Contemporary Latin America," did not discuss

an alternate tradition, as did Morse, but rather emphasized the elaboration in the 1960s of intellectual modes more appropriate for investigating Latin American identity: "Thus, the search for new modes of self-understanding and expression has, it seems, provided more valid, authentic, and appealing forms of knowledge and creativity than were ever derived from following the externally imposed 'universals' of earlier, world-wide trends in economics, sociology, or literature."

Participants, on occasion, broadened the issue of the crisis in consciousness to discuss a global crisis. Ileana Rodríguez said that the crisis being discussed was the crisis of imperialism. Roberto Márquez dramatized this by saying that during these years the center of the world had shifted from the west: we were experiencing nothing less than a Copernican revolution. Both used these observations to explain why certain writers had been so well received in the United States and Europe while others had remained unknown. Rodríguez strongly suspected that there were ideological reasons which explained the fact that a few authors were repeatedly included in the curricula of North American universities, while others were excluded. Márquez made this point more explicitly. He said that Naipaul is the Antillian writer most published and promoted in the United States precisely because he is the one whose vision most conforms to what U.S. readers want to believe about that part of the world. At a time when the metropolitan world-view is under constant assault, a writer from the "periphery" who confirms or validates this beleaguered view is comforting. The implication, as applied to the boom, is that perhaps these writers found favor in the U.S. because their books were written in the "language" of the metropolis. Levine observed that the boom may have been popular here because the crisis of identity which was expressed and investigated in these novels responded to a similar cultural crisis in the United States, which was provoked by Vietnam. Halperín observed that dependency theory had also constituted a common language between Latin America and the United States ("entre los de dentro y los de fuera"), and that such an identity of interpretive perspectives was uncommon.

The New Narrative and the Mass Media

The simultaneity in the mid-1960s of the boom and the take-over of Latin America by the mass media was a point frequently touched on during the discussion. The boom was seen to be inseparable from the dramatic, though relative, expansion of the domestic consumer market and the middle class, the appearance of glossy news magazines, and the spread of television and other communication technologies. As to the effects of mass media on Latin American culture, participants often seemed to divide into two groups--the _apocalípticos_ vs. the _integrados_, although this division was far from universal.

One pessimistic observation concerned the way in which the absorption of literary production into the market compels writers to accept the form of mediation between producer and public characteristic of this market--promotion or advertising through the mass mdedia. In this process, writers are confronted by a discourse

radically different from their own. If the media tend to dilute all specific messages from an eternally distracted audience, writers find that the seriousness and possible influence of their messages are undermined, and they, themselves, are divested of their moral authority by the media's all-pervasive air of spectacle.

The loss of moral authority, described in Rama's paper, contrasts dramatically with the ethical imperative of the Latin American novelist discussed by Leenhardt. Leenhardt argued that precisely because a community of values does not exist, the Latin American novelist assumes certain of the moralistic responsibilities of the essayist. In this context, the issues of seriousness and influence are crucial. If the novelist attempts to constitute a public which is also a community, the media--if we apply Rama's argument--work against this project. Of course, the writer's real influence takes place at the level of the book in the hands of a reader, and the media's counterattack occurs in a different sphere. However, since the reader is also situated in this other sphere, the subversiveness of the media is likely to affect the way in which the book is read.

Another pessimistic vision emerged from the juxtaposition of papers and comments. Franco described "what is taking place in corporate society" with the aid of the mass media as "the release of people from the determinations of their past in order to organize desires and energies more effectively around consumption." If we compare this to the crisis in historical consciousness of the 1960s--due either to the abandonment of an interpretive model or to the secular failure of Latin American society to generate one--we see that an aggressively ahistorical mode takes hold at a time of considerable weakness for historical perspectives, thus possibly reinforcing the voluntarism evident in political and intellectual practice.

Skármeta represented a much more sanguine position with regard to the mass media. He suggested that the alarm provoked by the mass media is elitist and said that the writers of his generation apparently feel more comfortable with the realities of consumer society than do their predecessors. James Irby also insisted that the mass media (movies, for example) do not have to be an impoverishment, and quoted Guattari: "Film is the psychoanalysis of the poor."

Exclusions and Silences

During the workshop, the boom was criticized repeatedly for being exclusive and aristocratic. In spite of an intentionally more democratic perspective that sought to be "programáticamente anticultural" (Skármeta), the novísimos were also called to account on the issue of exclusions. Márquez observed that when he read their novels, which he enjoyed, he was always aware of what was missing from them and especially of the potential public that they failed to address. He was referring to the problem of a dominant discourse and suggesting that there were still ways in which the novísimos were

caught within a language of power and discrimination. The fundamental problem, he claimed, was who defined this relation of power: who defined what was legitimate, interesting, or important, and what was not. "What was not" inevitably passed into the limbo of the excluded.

The discourse of power was, whether explicitly or implicitly, a recurrent theme during the workshop. It manifested itself in multiple ways and was invested with multiple contents. At its most graspable, it was defined as political power imposing limits on expression. This perspective informed a number of papers and presentations (Viñas, Piñón, Skármeta, Desnoes). At the conclusion of his paper, Skármeta referred to the silences--ranging from partial to absolute--imposed by extremist antidemocratic governments that close the preexisting spaces for expression and thereby force many writers into clandestine existence, exile, or quiescence. Edmundo Desnoes insisted that all political powers limit expression: "La cultura como instrumento político continúa y no debemos pecar de ingenuos. En esto que dicen se llama capitalismo es una válvula de escape, en sistemas de unidad cerrada es un instrumento en la formación ideológica de niños, jóvenes y ancianos. . . . Todos somos manipulados, lo importante es saber usar y saber dejarse usar sin desequilibrios mortales." Desnoes included the capitalist market under the rubric of political power (one possible interpretation of his statement, "Donde ustedes hablan del mercado y la narrativa latinoamericana, yo tendría que hablar de la política y la narrativa latinoamericana"), thus pointing back to the preceding discussions of the boom as a commercial phenomenon and the market as wielding the power of arbitrary discrimination.

Of greater subtlety was the matter of internalized discourses of power, in which systems of power and powerlessness remain, at some level, unquestioned, as though they were natural rather than historical. Márquez, in his words of caution to the novísimos, was talking about these insidious operations of internalized power. Privilege can become so habitual that it impairs the capacity of the included to speak objectively about the excluded or even to listen to them once they raise their voice. Ileana Rodríguez made this point about literary criticism. Both Jean Franco and Rosario Ferré had remarked on the exclusion of the problematic of women writers from the debate of the workshop;* Ferré stated that she hoped this silence was not symptomatic. (Her remark was met by silence.) Rodríguez, returning to this issue, said that the failure of critics to deal with the situation of women had a linguistic component: how were individuals to gauge their language in order to be listened to and taken seriously when talking about something not legitimated by the dominant discourse; how were they to find a

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*In another context, Franco had denounced the failure of critics, including herself, to expose and analyze the sexism of boom novels.

convincing vocabulary when this vocabulary only existed in a state of discredited marginality? She then extended the problem of exclusion and silence to include political and geographical areas which have been baptized as "marginal" by the linguistic and ideological "center." Central America constitutes a silence within Latin American discourse, and this was demonstrated by the scant attention given during the workshop to the historical drama currently unfolding in this area as opposed, for example, to the interest shown in the experiences of Argentina, Chile, and Cuba.

Another exclusion--which the workshop did consciously attempt to redress--was Brazil in relation to Spanish-speaking Latin America. (In this context, the other non-Spanish-speaking Latin, Proto-American, and Caribbean cultural areas were clearly treated as silences, although Márquez and Aguilar Mora presented their case.) By virtue of the composition and focus of the workshop, Latin American literature in the Spanish language determined the prevailing discourse of power. That such a discourse existed was made clear in the discussion following presentation of the two papers on Brazilian literature. Much of the exchange involved requests for information and clarification, and the airing of impressions which revealed that for many of the participants (myself included) Brazilian literature was the "newest" of all narratives being dealt with.

Nélida Piñón began her presentation, entitled "A trajetória cultural de um pais," by underscoring Brazil's isolation within the continent; it is, she said, an unknown and exotic territory for the rest of Latin America. At another point, she said that Brazil had been completely marginalized from the phenomenon of the boom. These two observations--and what they represent--established Brazil within the discourse of <u>la otredad</u> (Viñas). Aside from the overviews of Brazilian literature presented in the papers of Piñón and Antonio Cândido, most of the discussion about Brazil had to do with this <u>otredad</u> or the perceived differences between Brazil and Spanish-speaking Latin America. Irby wanted to know why Brazilian literature had been richer than Hispanic American literature during the colonial period and even afterwards. Rama observed that Hispanics perceive a much bolder and earlier development of the novel in Brazil than in their own areas. He suggested that perhaps Brazil had developed a national discourse before Hispanic America, which had suffered in this respect from its fragmentation. Sara Castro-Klarén asked why there had been no international circulation of Brazilian books in the 1960s comparable to that of Spanish American books. Halperín said that Brazil is a huge country with networks for internal consumption, while Hispanic America, as of the 1960s, came to depend in good part on Spain for the distribution of its literature. Piñón implied that Portugal could not fulfill the same role for Brazil as Spain in the 1960s had for Hispanic America because Portugal did not esteem Brazil's culture and therefore could not be looked to for support. Contrary to the experience of Hispanic Americans, Brazilian intellectuals never established ties with Europe. According to Schwartz, the Brazilian writer traditionally does not choose exile; he or she does not try to appear in translation and feels that

domestic recognition is sufficient. Jorge Amado is the only Brazilian writer with an international reputation. Brazil is a country turned in upon itself.

Martínez Moreno suggested that there are also political reasons why Brazilian writers do not seek exile: the quality of repression in Brazil is different from that in Uruguay and Argentina, for example. Schwartz responded by saying that this version was optimistic; rather, if there is a difference, it is because the class struggle in Brazil has not reached the stage of conflict that it has in these two countries. Rama said that there is a sense among Spanish Americans that the notion of an intellectual elite is more developed in Brazil, and consequently authorities there treat intellectuals with more tolerance. Aguilar Mora said it was necessary to clarify to what extent writers are the object of repression in Brazil; the argument about class struggle is insufficient.

A falta de otras palabras: la última

Finally, there is the issue of the silences or the subtext of the workshop itself. A few evaluators of the first draft of this report faulted its author for giving either too much or too little attention to certain silences that marked the dynamics of the workshop--notably, the absence of the female voice and the paucity of verbalized response to Edmundo Desnoes's presentation.* It would be presumptuous to attempt to account for the silences of some 30 people of heterogeneous opinion, whose individual motives for not responding to particular presentations or comments could range from unqualified solidarity to the judicious adoption of José Martí's practice: "Callar es mi modo de censurar." Let me merely suggest, as a personal observation, that the silences which punctuated the conclusions of Rosario Ferré's remarks on the neglect of women's literature and of Edmundo Desnoes's presentation of his paper were eloquent testimony to the strength of feelings that are aroused by the two issues of Cuba and of women.

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*Unlike the other workshop participants who presented papers, Desnoes did not synthesize his text during the time allotted him for this purpose. Rather, he read it. Thus, the context of his presentation can be found in toto in his paper, which, I trust, will be published.

"The Rise of the New Latin American Narrative, 1950-1975"
Workshop, October 1979

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