

The Dictator Novel: Writers and Politics in the Global South

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Chapter Three **Fathers of the Fatherlands: Writing, Politics, and Literary Form at the End of the Latin American “Boom”**

In early 1967, Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa put together plans for a volume of narratives about Latin American dictators. The collection would be titled “Los padres de las patrias” (“The Fathers of the Fatherlands”) and entries written by prominent writers of the moment, each paired with an historical dictator from their home country. “You can be sure that the resulting book will be one of the greatest successes of Latin American literary history,” Fuentes wrote to Vargas Llosa, “and the topic itself would assure its success, if not as great at least comparable, in Europe and the United States.”¹ Despite much enthusiasm, the project never materialized. A few years later, three dictator novels appeared in quick succession: Alejo Carpentier’s *El recurso del método* (*Reasons of State*, 1974), Augusto Roa Bastos’s *Yo el Supremo* (*I the Supreme*, 1974), and Gabriel García Márquez’s *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 1975). Fuentes would later declare that these originated with “Fathers of the Fatherlands.”² All three writers were involved, but it is not hard to find contradictions to Fuentes’s claim. García Márquez had long been at work on a dictator novel; he interrupted work

on what would become *Autumn of the Patriarch* to complete *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967), which made him an international sensation and consolidated the Latin American literary “boom” in the public imagination. Carpentier had outlined elements of *Reasons of State* in a short essay on Gerardo Machado published in 1933 and tackled tyranny and political cynicism in *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*, 1949) and “El derecho de asilo” (“Right of Sanctuary,” 1967). Roa Bastos’s *I the Supreme*, meanwhile, was the second in a trilogy of novels exploring Paraguayan history and identity.³ Nor was the idea of Latin American writers coming together to take on the dictator itself new, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. A generation earlier, Miguel Ángel Asturias wrote *El señor presidente* (*The President*, 1946) in conversation with Arturo Uslar Pietri and Carpentier while exiled in Paris in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁴

But if “The Fathers of the Fatherlands” did not properly originate the later dictator novels, the largely unexplored archive of correspondence it left behind does offer new means to examine these works and regenerate critical discussion of the dictator novel.⁵ I read *Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Reasons of State*, and *I the Supreme* as the literary interrogation of the problems outlined in the correspondence, which links together questions of the writer’s social function, political commitment, and literary form. These problems include: first, the challenge of making literature out of dictatorship, which pits fiction against the seemingly incredible extremes of history. Second, the difficult relationship between literature and politics subsumed in the category of “committed literature,” here informed by the cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American literary boom. And, third, the nagging awareness of the parallels between writer and dictator, only discreetly registered in earlier works. In engaging these tensions, García Márquez, Carpentier, and Roa Bastos reshape the tropes, themes, and (at

this point) *idées reçues* of the genre. Read together, they offer a set of critical keys for reading the dictator novel, both within Latin America and across the Global South.

Because of the critical furor that followed the near-simultaneous publication of these works, *Reasons of State*, *I the Supreme*, and *Autumn of the Patriarch* have been central to the demarcation of the dictator novel as an object of study in Latin American literature. Ángel Rama declared them exemplary of the critical potential of the dictator novel. Gerald Martin observes that these are amongst the few works that have “managed successfully to unite the specific instance with the more universal concerns of tyranny, power, and evil.”⁶ These terms of praise point to a paradox: the dictator novel responds to and exists in relationship with a very real political phenomenon; but if it fails to connect these specifics to more general or “universal” questions, it risks isolation in the particularity its concerns. Let me reframe the paradox as a question: if Carpentier, Roa Bastos, and García Márquez’s works are exemplary dictator novels, what is the dictator novel they exemplify? Rama would answer that, in engaging the dictator as an individual as well as the historical and social dynamics that make his regime possible, these novels move beyond the immediate goal of denunciation and demonstrate the analytical and therefore critical potential of the dictator novel. I add that these novels in fact exemplify the constitutive difficulties of the dictator novel as a genre. That is, the tensions and even contradictions that often go overlooked in the rush to celebrate these works as anti-dictator statements or, alternately, to denounce them for falling short of that goal. Although seemingly clear in its purpose (opposition to the dictator), each novel offers a tangled engagement with the idea of the dictator novel as such.

The difficulties begin in the complicated interplay of proximity and distance, which conditions production as much as interpretation. Recall Rama’s contention that the value of the

dictator novels of the 1970s was their “leap into the void” of the dictator’s consciousness, as the place from which it becomes possible to properly interrogate authoritarian power.⁷ Yet proximity carries risk, as Augusto Monterroso, who declined to participate in “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” usefully articulates. In a later pair of essays, he expressed skepticism about the political impact of literature presumed by such a project and argues that writing about dictators principally produces commercial and cultural capital for the writer. Asturias, for instance, was “rewarded” for *The President* with the 1967 Nobel Prize. Monterroso also admits a deeper aversion:

[...] the truth is that I was afraid, afraid of becoming [too] involved in the character, as would inevitably have happened, and of falling into the stupidity of looking into his childhood, his anxieties [insomnias] and his fears, and that I would end up “understanding” him and feeling pity for him.⁸

The danger lies in the intimacy the act of writing requires, which opens toward identification. I have previously discussed Rama’s position as an illumination of the critical potential of narrative mechanics. But if narrative mechanics facilitate imaginative “access” to the dictator—and from here the more thorough critique of dictatorship—these same formal experiments or distortions should also be read as attempts to navigate the risks of intimacy.

Conversely, one of the remarkable characteristics of these three novels is their orientation toward the past: *Reasons of State* offers a composite of early-twentieth century despots; *Autumn of the Patriarch* similarly combines historical models into a generalized Latin American (specifically, Caribbean) dictator; and *I the Supreme* narrates the final days of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the first president of Paraguay. The relative asynchronicity of these works unsettles the presumed relationship between the dictator novel and its historical referent. By the early 1970s, authoritarian regimes in Latin America had undergone significant transformation.

This decade saw the ascent of highly bureaucratized military dictatorships, where the junta replaced the charismatic leader. With this came a shift from the bombastic aesthetics of earlier despotisms to more austere, cloistered, and procedural forms of repression. It is with this in mind that Dain Borges writes of these novels: “their tone is nostalgic, looking backward at a type that no longer could center politics.”⁹ Martin, too, accuses Carpentier and García Márquez (but not Roa Bastos) of nostalgia.¹⁰ The term implies a sentimental imagining of the past in place of critical engagement with the present. Contra such criticism, Rama and Mario Benedetti posit that all three writers use the past to think about the present.¹¹ The question of political commitment in the dictator novel undergirds both positions. For Borges and Martin, the failure to attend to contemporary realities signals a political shortfall; for Rama and Benedetti, those same realities can only be grasped through a literary engagement with the past. This distinction is at the root of widely differing readings of these novels.¹² To further complicate matters: García Márquez, Carpentier, and Roa Bastos were all aligned with the Cuban Revolution, but their respective dictator novels sit uneasily with those public positions. As Roa Bastos would later explain, to assume a political stance in advance of writing overdetermines the composition of the text and limits its critical potential. In order to write *I the Supreme*, he had to relinquish the idea that he was the “crusader of a militant literature” (*cruzado de una literatura militante*).¹³

At the core of my argument in this book is the contention that to evaluate a dictator novel on the basis of its historical referentiality forecloses the analysis of form, aesthetics, and—to use a very literary term—the transformative function of mimesis. I position this argument in opposition to the idea, implicit in Borges, that if the dictator novel is to function as a political weapon it requires some kind of referential immediacy. More importantly, however, such debates overlook the fact that the novels themselves are centrally concerned with the

complicated relationship between writing and politics. They proffer critical meditations on the very possibility of political commitment in literature, drawing on past and present events as well as the tradition of writing about dictators and dictatorship in Latin American letters. The novels are, in this sense, self-reflexive interrogations of the assumptions that drove the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project and could only have emerged in its wake. The problems they identify are neither dismissed nor resolved, but rather encoded into the novels themselves. To read *Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Reasons of State*, and *I the Supreme*, therefore, is to learn to look beyond the immediate political question of dictatorship and attend to the deeper theoretical questions with which each dictator novel is engaged.

Writers, Dictators, and the Boom: The Story of “Fathers of the Fatherlands”

García Márquez, Carpentier, and Roa Bastos were all established writers by the time they published their dictator novels.¹⁴ The novels arrived at an interesting moment: by the early 1970s, the Latin American literary boom had begun to lose momentum. The arrest of Heberto Padilla in Cuba in 1971 and the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 (itself anticipated by the 1964 coup in Brazil) signaled a larger political shift in the region. The boom—or, the “so-called boom” (*el llamado boom*)—is an unavoidable reference point in discussions of twentieth century Latin American literature, alternately described as a movement, a critical construct, and (merely) a market phenomenon. It was all of these, to an extent. I take up the boom as a moment, a movement (in qualified terms), and as a literary-critical descriptor of limited utility nonetheless germane to the material covered here. Arguments about periodization aside, the end of the boom marks the collapse of a particular vision of the role of the writer.¹⁵ In their engagement with the political question of dictatorship, *Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Reasons of*

State, and *I the Supreme* retain the aura of the boom; their self-reflexive interrogation of the political function of literature signals its dissipation; and the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project marks the cusp between these two moments.

The postwar period in Latin America saw rapid economic growth and social change, including increasing urbanization, rising literacy, and (often short-lived) transitions to liberal democracy. The Cuban revolution made Latin America and the Caribbean protagonists in the Cold War, bringing intensified interest to the region. For writers, the exhilaration of the early years of the revolution fostered a sense of shared politics and collective Latin American identity. Per José Donoso, this feeling of unified purpose was central to the internationalization of the Latin American new novel (which had been developing since at least the prior decade) in the 1960s.¹⁶ Writers actively participated in the circulation and promotion of their work; they published essays and articles as part of what Idelber Avelar has called a “self-descriptive and self-justifying critical practice;” and created new networks for collaboration.¹⁷ The literary boom was, in this sense, the cultural correlative of the revolution.¹⁸ However, the place of writers within the revolution remained a matter of debate. As discussed in chapter one, the Cuban government made often-contradictory demands on artists, while arguments between writers unfolded the pages of magazines such as *Casa de las Américas* (Havana), *Marcha* (where Ángel Rama was an editor; Montevideo), *Primera Plana* (Buenos Aires), and *Mundo Nuevo* (edited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal, initially funded by the CIA’s Congress for Cultural Freedom and later the Ford Foundation; Paris).¹⁹ This same period saw anxiety about the region’s underdevelopment and its relation of dependency to the developed economies of the world-system. The literature of the boom, then, was a response to and engagement with theories of underdevelopment (as “belatedness”) and dependency (as “unoriginality”) that questioned, even

upended, their underlying teleological assumptions.²⁰ It fundamentally changed understanding of what Latin American literature could be, for writers and readers alike. In subsequent decades, the formal innovations of the boom-era novels—particularly those combined under the term “magical realism”—moved into international circuits of cultural consumption and continue to exert influence throughout the global North and South.

The term “boom novel,” however, is frustrating in its lack of specificity. Its cognates “new novel,” linking these works to the French *nouveau roman*, and “total novel,” which captures the grandeur of vision and monumental ambitions that characterized many of these works, sketch the outline of a typology. But the works produced in this period evince a range of narrative modes (from modernism to postmodernism, within and beyond the scope of the kind of magical realism popularized by *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) and thematic concerns that contravenes any singular literary-critical categorization.²¹ The concept of a “boom generation” is similarly complicated. The boom comprised multiple generations, bringing increased international recognition for already-established writers (Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, and Carpentier, for instance) as much as the emergence of younger talent (García Márquez, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, and so on).²² In so far as is possible to speak of a “boom writer,” these were (overwhelmingly) men, highly self-aware and mindful of their rising status, politically conscious, and increasingly international in their movements and networks.

Fuentes, the multilingual, globetrotting son of a diplomat and future diplomat himself, then married to the Mexican actress Rita Macedo, embodies the boom’s glamour as well as its limitations. He makes visible, first, the political ambivalence at the heart of the boom; and, second, the subsumption of issues of race and class under its ebullient celebration of literature, Latin Americanism (as a cohesive Latin American identity), and alluring internationalism. I use

the term “ambivalence” in its most literal sense, as writers’ positions shifted over time. By 1966, Fuentes had begun to moderate his adhesion to Cuban revolutionary orthodoxy. Both the U.S. State Department and CIA took an interest in Fuentes as a conduit to the Latin American left.²³ The inaugural issue of *Mundo Nuevo*, for instance, featured an interview with Fuentes. Yet he did not fully alienate the Cubans, as his work continued to appear in *Casa de las Américas*. Over the course of the decade, assumption of the boom writers’ adherence to the Cuban revolution produced a disjuncture between their public statements, the substance of their work, and the critical reception of that work. As Martin observes, by the end of the 1960s, many writers seemed to be “speaking left” while “writing right.”²⁴ Similarly, Roberto Fernández Retamar denounced Fuentes as a spokesman for the same class of long-entrenched élites as Jorge Luis Borges and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento; speaking specifically of Fuentes’s critical study *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (“The New Spanish American Novel,” 1969), he criticized Fuentes for “expounding right-wing concerns with left-wing language.”²⁵

The second issue Fuentes exemplifies is the boom’s monumentalization of literature over and against other forms of cultural production, in particular those engaged more directly with indigenous and popular traditions, which would become the focus of the cultural turn in Latin American studies in subsequent decades.²⁶ Literature, at least “literature” as imagined by writers such as Fuentes, was still largely the province of the lettered élite. This is not to say that boom writers were uniform in this regard. The Paraguayan Roa Bastos, whose first language was Guaraní and who used Guaraní vocabulary and grammar to make-strange the Spanish language in *I the Supreme*, is a very different case. Yet his relatively marginal status, as seen from outside the region, underscores the point. I highlight these issues to better-illuminate the difficult position of the dictator novel in the boom: when intended as public statement or attack, it comes

up against the limits of literary form, as a vehicle for the representation and analysis, as well as of literature itself as means for political statement or intervention. I explored elements of the latter in the previous chapter. The former requires consideration, because it proved to be the problem at the heart of “Fathers of the Fatherlands.”

From the start, Fuentes and his collaborators imagined “Fathers of the Fatherlands” as a means to consolidate the boom (that is: the international prominence of Latin American writers) by engaging Latin America’s history of dictatorship. As Fuentes wrote to Vargas Llosa:

I have been mulling over the idea since we spoke that afternoon, at Le Cerf Volant, about Wilson and *Patriotic Gore*, and about [doing] a collective book in that vein. I was speaking last night with Jorge Edwards and proposed to him the following: a volume that could be titled “The Patriarchs,” “The Fathers of the Fatherlands,” “The Redeemers,” “The Benefactors,” or something like that. The idea would be to write a crime report [*crónica negra*] for our America: a desecration of the desecrators in which, for example, [Jorge] Edwards would turn out a [José Manuel] Balmaceda, [Julio] Cortázar a [Juan Manuel de] Rosas, [Jorge] Amado a [Getúlio] Vargas, [Roa Bastos] a [José Gaspar Rodríguez de] Francia, García Márquez a [Juan Vicente] Gómez, Carpentier a [Fulgencio] Batista, I a [Antonio López de] Santa Ana, and you a [Augusto] Legúia... or some other Peruvian. What do you think? [...] The people from Gallimard, having returned from Tunis, are telling me of the enthusiasm with which critics from several regions of the world spoke of the Latin American group. It seems to me that emphasizing this sense of community, of a group project, will be immensely

important for the future. Without downplaying individual personalities, I think that there are indeed a series of common denominators—literary, political, linguistic, of outlook and hopes for the future—that it would be useful to emphasize and strengthen [...]²⁷

With these initial plans laid out, Fuentes and Vargas Llosa set about inviting participants and reaching out to publishers.²⁸ The topic of the Latin American dictator coupled with the growing prestige of Latin American writers was a seductive combination: invitations were for the most part eagerly accepted. Carpentier liked the idea so much he personally reached out to Gallimard about publishing the volume; Roa Bastos was “thrilled to add [his] weapons to the encampment;” and García Márquez quickly became involved in planning and coordination.²⁹

The project’s appeal had several facets: first, there was the allure of membership in the group, particularly for less well-known writers. As Carlos Martínez Moreno put it, “the company is too tempting for me to say no.”³⁰ Second, there was the draw of dictatorship as a common denominator in the region and as a tradition of writing on which writers could make their mark. Third, there was the attraction of the topic as a political question. In assembling pairs of writers and dictators, “Fathers of the Fatherlands” named a fantasy of the writer’s involvement in politics, and military metaphors abound in the correspondence. The plural “fathers” can refer to the plurality of dictators or of writer-dictator sets, each unit constituting a pair of rival potential “fathers” of the fatherland. Some limitations are immediately clear: despite the late-stage inclusion of Claribel Alegría, this was very much a contest “between men” (*cosa de hombres*), to borrow a phrase from Gabriela Polit Dueñas. Nor were the “fatherlands” properly defined: García Márquez was insistent that authors should only write about a dictator from their own country.³¹ However, he disagreed with the invitation of the Dominican writer and former

president Juan Bosch to write about Rafael Trujillo: “Bosch, for being more of an ex-president than a professional writer, does not seem to me appropriate.”³² In the interest of coverage, some invitees were asked to write about dictators not from their home country. If there was a pervading sense that participation in “Fatherlands” would constitute a form of action, then, its actual aims were vague.

These incongruities indicate the fluidity of the contours of “Fathers of the Fatherlands.” Throughout planning it remained unclear what individual contributions or the collection would look like. The repeated references to Edmund Wilson’s *Patriotic Gore* (1962), a study of the U.S. Civil War in American letters, for instance, yield little elucidation. At best, it seems, Fuentes wanted to replicate its success. In that first letter to Vargas Llosa, Fuentes offered the analogy of the crime report (*crónica negra*); there are also later comparisons to teratology (the study of physical abnormalities), a portrait gallery, and Madam Tussaud’s wax museum. Several invitees, including Miguel Otero Silva, assumed Fuentes wanted an essay or biography. Fuentes responded that he wanted a “literary recreation” (*recreación literaria*).³³ He similarly asked José Donoso for a “literary treatment” of the topic (*tratar literariamente*); to Roa Bastos he described a “literary transposition,” adding “in Latin America, only literature is capable of converting false history into true history [*historia auténtica*];” and to José Emilio Pacheco he wrote: “It will be interesting to see how each [writer] converts [*convierte*] the history into literature.”³⁴

Ineffectual as the terms “conversion,” “transposition,” and “recreation” may have proven as instruction, they productively describe a relationship between literature (the dictator novel) and history (the phenomenon of dictatorship): it is a transformation of the historical referent into a narrative that will offer a more trenchant analysis of the dictator and dictatorship than possible in other (non-fictional) genres. Fuentes also made a larger claim—seen in the previous chapter—

about the material potential of literature. As he wrote to Cortázar: “I believe that history only becomes truly historical when it is literature, and this project offers us, imaginatively, the opportunity to overwrite [*cancelar*], in the act of remembering them, the monsters of our Latin American teratology.”³⁵ The goal was not only to make literature out of history, but in so doing to remake history itself, as emphasized by my choice of the English “overwrite” for Fuentes’s *cancelar* (cancel). In making this second claim, Fuentes both inserts “Fatherlands” into the larger tradition of writing about dictators and makes explicit some of the implicit assumptions (or, hopes) of that tradition.

Yet such large-scale claims occlude the practical difficulties of the writing itself. Fuentes would later acknowledge that the Latin American dictator posed a tremendous challenge for the Latin American writer, who had to compete with historical realities that exceeded the imagination.³⁶ As Pacheco put it at the time:

[Porfirio] Díaz is unfathomable [*insondable*]. To understand him is to understand the mechanisms of power and perhaps to understand Mexico—a project too ambitious for my limitations. What’s more, in terms of the *writing*, I have no idea how to tackle it [...] The information, the context are indispensable. And here there is the risk of turning the narrative into an article for *Miroir de l’Histoire* [popular history magazine] or a cheap sociological essay.³⁷

While I have described the novel as omnivorous in its capacity to absorb other forms of discourse, this is a retrospective description and, from the writer’s perspective, does not solve the immediate problem of bending narrative form to an unwieldy subject. Pacheco’s use of the term “unfathomable” to describe Díaz is canny: the dictator is not just a person, but the product of larger forces that stretch back in time (depth) and beyond the individual nation-state (breadth).

The question is not just how to write about the dictator, but of how exactly to understand the phenomenon of dictatorship. This disrupts the driving logic of “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” which relied on that clear-cut pairing of writers and dictators.

Perhaps most telling of the contradictions inherent in the “Fatherlands” project were comments made by writers who declined to participate. Monterroso, as discussed, was weary of the risks of intimacy. Otero Silva demurred because of his personal experiences with Juan Vicente Gómez, who had imprisoned and exiled him as a young man.³⁸ Edwards departed because of disagreements about the definition of the term “dictator.” In early 1968, press reports had begun to appear about the forthcoming collection.³⁹ Citing complaints, Edwards argued that the term “dictator” was a misnomer for José Manuel Balmaceda, whom he called “the most progressive Chilean president of the nineteenth century” for the challenge he posed to entrenched class interests.⁴⁰ The issue was not simply that the definition of “dictator” is a matter of perspective, but that what comes to constitute “dictatorship” in Latin America—or the Global South—is intertwined with international economic and political interests, particularly when these coincide with those of the local élite. While on the surface an anti-dictator project could claim alignment with the values of the left, it would falter if it failed, first, to properly interrogate the larger structural factors driving dictatorship (or, so-called dictatorship), and, second, to address the complicated place of literature (including literacy and language choice) and the writer in Latin American society. Such (self-) critical considerations proved not to be within the scope of “Fathers of the Fatherlands.”

By mid-1968, discussions in the correspondence turned to the political turmoil unfolding across the globe as well as the many other projects in which writers were involved. Although deadlines and parameters were set, the trail runs cold after 1970.⁴¹ Fuentes later ascribed the

failure of “Fathers of the Fatherlands” to difficulties coordinating writers’ schedules and interests.⁴² “Interests” is the key word: what eventually dissolved the project was the fragmentation of the cohesion that characterized the group, as careers and commitments diverged. But recognition of these external factors must not distract from the actual difficulties of the project. The oppositional pairing of writer and dictator in “Fathers of the Fatherlands” left little room for effectively exploring the problem of dictatorship in Latin America. Pacheco’s remarks in particular point to the long and difficult trajectory between the thing analyzed and the formal expression of that analysis. For Pacheco, the undertaking apparently proved insurmountable. For García Márquez, Carpentier, and Roa Bastos, the answer was to turn attention to the dictator novel itself.

García Márquez: From “The Fathers of the Fatherlands” to *The Autumn of the Patriarch*

García Márquez’s idea for a novel about the Latin American dictator dates to January 1958, when he was working in Caracas and witnessed the removal of Marcos Pérez Jiménez from power.⁴³ He produced a number of drafts over the next seventeen years, discussing progress with fellow writers. In one letter, Fuentes reported that Asturias himself had praised the project, adding: “Your idea for the tyrant-novel [*novela del tirano*] is SENSATIONAL [...] I think you have a real find on your hands.”⁴⁴ But writing proved difficult: García Márquez struggled to render historical narrative and political analysis into a literary text, even after he had chosen to invent a composite dictator. “At every step,” he wrote to Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, “I am afraid that this novel will turn into a sociological treatise.”⁴⁵ In the first iteration of the novel, García Márquez imagined a dictator on trial, inspired by the public trial of Jesús Sosa Blanco, a general under Fulgencio Batista (Cuba).⁴⁶ The second version built on the first: the novel would be

structured as the monologue of an old and decrepit dictator attempting to justify the abuses of his 92 years in power before a tribunal; García Márquez planned to write in the first person, using the dictator's own words to give full view of his logical errors, ignorance, and simple mindedness.⁴⁷ By 1966, he was convinced fiction would never supersede reality.⁴⁸ In 1967 he wrote to Vargas Llosa: “the novel of the Patriarch is rotting away inside of me [*se me está pudriendo dentro*].”⁴⁹

While corresponding with Fuentes and Vargas Llosa about “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” however, García Márquez began to rethink the novel in earnest, sketching out its final version in a letter to Mendoza:

With much sorrow, I discarded the structure of the long monologue because it was deceptive (I want to tell the story with my words, not those of the character), and I have also resolved (with the recklessness of an adventurer) to eliminate all historical, political, and social context, and to focus on the terrible solitude of the dictator, well over a century old, in the last years of his reign, half mad and half forgotten, when he no longer even rules, or sees, or hears, or understands, but nevertheless continues to command without knowing it. I have to start with the final chapter, when the people enter the palace, following the buzzards that are climbing in through the windows, and find the dictator lying in the throne room, dead, and already half eaten away, to the point that no one is sure that it is him. I have to tell everything backwards, in a huge tome that will reconstruct several years of his life and leave the impression that no one will be sure that he is dead. My idea, in all modesty, is that the empty palace will continue to govern.⁵⁰

The General, the novel's titular patriarch, is indeed a solitary figure, having withdrawn from the world to safeguard his power. The narrative opens with the discovery of the dictator's corpse by a collective "we." As the first-person plural narrator begins to reach for memories of the dictator, voices, including the General's, surface. The dictator's life is told in retrospect, as a combination of narrated memories and prolepses, framed within the narrative present in which the body is discovered, such that the novel's structure forms a spiral. The General's isolation stands in counterpoint to those many voices that crowd the narrative. García Márquez described this as a "multiple monologue" (*monólogo múltiple*).⁵¹ The resulting polyphony suggests a broader social portrait, but absent the guiding hand of a narrator (the "we" is one voice amongst many, as is the General's) or clear chronological order, polyphony can quickly slide into cacophony. The effect is disorienting, and in so doing García Márquez effectively defamiliarizes Latin America's long history of dictatorship as well as its literary representation.

The General evinces recognizable tropes of the Latin American dictator, but the novel distorts these through repetition and exaggeration. A military man put in power by the U.S. Marines during an occupation, the General has ruled for what seems like centuries and is almost farcical in his ignorance and brutality. When he discovers one of his most trusted men (General Rodrigo de Aguilar) has been quietly undermining his regime, for instance, the General has Aguilar killed and served as dinner to the high command of the presidential guard. The narrative also gives remarkable attention to the dictator's sexual appetites. It lingers on the General's sexual organs (he has a herniated testicle, which is one of the few distinguishable features of his decomposed corpse) and acts, often narrating these from the perspective of the women on whom the General forces himself. While the conquests are many, the General's performance is "fast and poorly" and he has a tendency to weep on completion. Critics often cite the novel's reliance

on such vulgarity, ostensibly intended to elicit disgust or mocking laughter, as a weakness.⁵² Here I return to Achille Mbembe's analysis the aesthetics of vulgarity in the African postcolony. Obscenity, vulgarity, and the grotesque, Mbembe makes clear, are the modalities of authoritarian power; the body of the despot is central to this symbolic economy.⁵³ The General makes no attempt to hide his excesses, because they are the very expression of his power. To point to these, even in the spirit of mockery, does not suffice as an act of sabotage. This is a system of signs produced *between* ruler and ruled (this is what Mbembe terms the "conviviality" of power). The dictator's subjects themselves participate in and help to sustain that system. In this perspective, the repeated scenes of rape (to give one example) risk contributing to—or, sustaining through repetition—the patriarchal violence at the heart of dictatorship.⁵⁴

I treat the repeated references to the General's herniated and enlarged testicle with the same skepticism. As the first-person plural narrator recognizes, mocking jokes are often cover for comfort or intimacy with the dictator: "Not only had we ended up really believing that he had been conceived to survive the third moment but that conviction had issued us with a security and a restful feeling that we tried to hide with all manner of jokes about old age."⁵⁵ The recurring attentions to the dictator's bodily and sexual excesses function as a similarly self-conscious "joke." The General's testicle is the material expression of the difficulties described by Pacheco (above) and García Márquez himself in the years spent struggling to write the novel. The emphasis on vulgarity, then, is a symptom of the representative challenge posed by the dictator: the sign of the aporia, rather than its resolution. If neither the description of the excesses of power nor jokes suffice, a new course is necessary. García Márquez, to be clear, does not properly break with either of these approaches. However, through its use of the multiple monologue, *Autumn of the Patriarch* broadens the narrative scope beyond that dictator, shifting

focus from the question of evil or “barbarism”—the savage and monstrous figure of the dictator explored in the previous chapter—to the larger forces that drive dictatorship in the region.

The empty palace to which García Márquez referred in the letter to Mendoza constitutes the core of the analysis and therefore political intervention of this dictator novel. The proposition is that the dictator himself is ancillary to dictatorship, because he is in the end merely the servant of the larger interests of capital and imperialism, here represented by the United States. Eventually, the Americans come to make claims on the General, demanding the Caribbean Sea as payment on the interest of the country’s accumulated debts. This is at once a dismissal of the dictator’s claims to omnipotence and a commentary on the nature of dictatorship in the Caribbean, Latin America, and, by extension, the Global South. Debt, like the novel itself, unfolds as a spiral: the country’s debts date to the wars of independence, after which it took out new loans to pay off old debts, and then further loans to pay the interest on the back interest, and so on, all against the background of boom-and-bust economic cycles. García Márquez here points back to the collapse of commodity prices at the end of Latin America’s “Export Age,” the period in which the preset of the novel is set, as well as forward to the hyper-commoditized logic of neoliberalism and the ravages of structural adjustment.⁵⁶ In both directions, debt is the key device of capitalist imperialism. With this in mind, *Autumn of the Patriarch* is far from “nostalgic,” and instead uses its composite dictator to tell a larger story about the political and economic fortunes of Latin America and the Caribbean.

This “conversion” of history into literature in *Autumn of the Patriarch* produces a strange and difficult text, such that the eruption of form itself forms part of the analysis of power. Take, for instance, the passage in which the U.S. Ambassador speaks to the General about taking the Caribbean:

[...] either the marines land or we take the sea, there's no other way, your excellency, there was no other way, mother, so they took away the Caribbean in April, Ambassador Ewing's nautical engineers carried it off in numbered pieces to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of Arizona, they took it away with everything it had inside general sir, with the reflection of our cities, our timid drowned people, our demented dragons, in spite of the fact that he had appealed to the most audacious registers of his age old cunning trying to promote a national convulsion of protest against the despoilment, but nobody paid any attention general sir, they refused to take to the streets either by persuasion or by force because we thought it was a new maneuver on his part like so many others [...]⁵⁷

Focalization here shifts without warning from the ambassador, to the dictator (“there was no other way, mother”), to one of the dictator’s assistants (the phrase “general sir”), to the plural speaker (“we”). The juxtaposition of voices makes it difficult to distinguish who is speaking at any given moment. The time of narration, too, moves back and forth, with the General addressing his long-dead mother in the present tense. Both on the level of grammatical tense and in the seemingly-interminable arc of the dictator’s rule, historical periods collapse into each other. This has its formal correlative in the recursive plotting of the novel as well as in its structural and syntactical complexity. There are no paragraph breaks; the sentences are complex and increase in length as the novel unfolds; the final chapter comprises of a single sentence. Confusion is a generalized condition expressed grammatically, structurally, and thematically.

As García Márquez explained in a 1975 interview for the *Revista de la Universidad de México*, he intended to “de-mythologize” the Latin American dictator in *Autumn of the*

Patriarch. Only in directly engaging these wider dynamics—here exaggerated to the limits of intelligibility—would it be possible to move toward a true analysis of power.⁵⁸ This is a very different critical task than that envisioned by the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project. Confronting Latin America’s history of dictatorship therefore required the elaboration a new “literary language” distinct from that of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, whose shadow García Márquez sought to escape. As he confessed to Vargas Llosa in 1968:

It seems to me that my next novel will be the victim of the success of the previous one. I am making it deliberately hermetic, dense, complex, so that only those who have previously taken the work to learn literature will be able to stand it; that is to say: us, and a few friends.⁵⁹

The phrase “deliberately hermetic” implies a limited readership for this dictator novel, which complicates the assumption of its intended function as a public act of denunciation. *Autumn of the Patriarch* does not imagine a future beyond the dictator or dictatorship. It closes with the death of the dictator, where it also began, and the jubilation of the crowd; this is an optimistic but ultimately unqualified gesture. However, the novel does offer two moments in which the conceit of the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project and the task of the dictator novel are staged and interrogated within the text. These self-reflexive meditations do not rise to the level of self-critique, but they do effectively foreground a critical consideration of the task of writing about the dictator and, more broadly, on the Latin American writer’s relationship to the dictator.

The most immediate example is the dictator’s body double, Patricio Aragonés. Physically identical to the General, Aragonés impersonates the dictator at public events, allowing the General to maintain his popular persona without personal risk. Over time, the two men grow close and begin to resemble each other in sexual habits as well as appearance: both invariably

father children who are born premature (a return of the family metaphor discussed in the previous chapter). Eventually, Aragonés is poisoned. During his final night, freed by impending death, the dictator's double becomes his sharpest critic.⁶⁰ This is a hatred born of intimacy, expressed by a man who has seen the dictator at his weakest and who understands the tenuous nature of dictatorial power. To recall Monterroso's trepidation of writing about the dictator, the story of Patricio Aragonés suggests that proximity, intimacy, and even some kind of complicity with the dictator are the condition of possibility for critique. This is a game of mirrors: the dictator's double is the writer's double in the text. At the same time, the comparison helps to establish a distinction: Aragonés is not (quite) the General, just as García Márquez is not (quite) Aragonés, who never managed to imitate the General's voice.

In both personal correspondence and public statements, García Márquez enjoyed drawing parallels between himself and the General, often referring to this novel as his most autobiographical work. As he claimed in that 1975 interview: "*The Autumn of the Patriarch* is practically [*casi*] a personal confession, it is a totally autobiographical book, it is almost a memoir [*libro de memorias*]. But the thing is, of course, that they are encoded memories."⁶¹ In his biography of García Márquez, Gerald Martin reads these comments as both provocation and confession, linking the General's isolation to García Márquez's own conflicted feelings in the years following the success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.⁶² I am interested in what such claims reveal about the dictator novel. Specifically: the nagging awareness of the parallels between writer and dictator, which stretches back to the previous century. While the "Fathers of the Fatherlands" project depended on a diametric opposition between writer and dictator, García Márquez in *Autumn of the Patriarch* brings the question of their similarity to the fore. This tension is not resolved, but Patricio Aragonés, the double for both dictator and writer, lingers as a

kind of warning. Indeed, when the General finds a photograph of his former double years after his death, he mistakes Aragonés for himself.

The second instance of a self-reflexive *mis-en-scène* gets to the heart of the matter. This is the General's own "gallery" of Latin American dictators: the rest home he builds for the "dethroned fathers of other countries [*patrias*] to whom he had granted asylum over the course of many years and who were now growing old in the shadow of his mercy." They are a source of comfort for the General, who visits "to look at himself in the instructive mirror [*espejo de escarmiento*] of their misery while he wallowed in the great slough of felicity."⁶³ Within the narrative, these ex-dictators signal the wider network of dictatorship in the region together with the General's own remarkable luck, as his tactics for staying in power are not significantly different from theirs. Indeed, the home reappears much later, once the Americans have taken the sea, as the General wanders the now-lunar landscape of the sea floor: "on the top of the reefs he saw the solitary light from the rest home for refugee dictators who sleep like sitting oxen while I suffer, evil-born bastards."⁶⁴ If the rest home was an "instructive mirror," at the end of the novel the emphasis falls on mirror, as an anticipatory figure, rather than on the instructive value of the negative example.

At the metanarrative level, the rest home for former dictators serves as a warning to would-be authors of dictator novels. Like the General, writers run the risk of mistaking collection and display for instructive or substantive analysis. The former is a suitable description of "Fathers of the Fatherlands," and the reference is clear in the Spanish phrase "padres destronados de otras patrias" (dethroned fathers of other fatherlands). In placing this image near the start of the novel, García Márquez signals his intent (or, desire) to resist the temptation to substitute display for analysis via an allusion largely only legible to fellow participants in "Fathers of the

Fatherlands.” These, I argue, are the “few friends” he had in mind. Display, as the enumeration of the dictator’s crimes or the “revelation” of his vulgarity, does not suffice. Nor, drawing on García Márquez’s descriptions of the successive versions of the novel in its development, is occupation of the dictator’s perspective enough to provide a cogent analysis of power (contra Rama). A larger and more intricate social portrait is necessary. Hence García Márquez’s turn to the multiple monologue; which, even if it cannot escape the temptation to wallow in the dictator’s vulgarity, signals a possible (if experimental) way out of this impasse. To extrapolate from this: the critical force of the dictator novel should be directed away from the dictator and toward (first) the underlying causes of dictatorship and (second) toward writers themselves, lest one slip into self-congratulation. These are principles unevenly enforced within *Autumn of the Patriarch*. But, when this novel is read in the light of the “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” we glimpse the myriad ways in which García Márquez aimed to push the dictator novel beyond its existing limitations.

Carpentier: Art and Politics in *Reasons of State*

Although he was an early and enthusiastic participant in “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” there is little archival trace of Carpentier’s conversations with Fuentes or Vargas Llosa. Having long lived in exile, Carpentier returned to Cuba after the revolution to serve as head of the Editorial Nacional and later as ambassador to France. It was in Paris that Fuentes met with Carpentier and proposed the “Fatherlands” project. Four decades since he had met weekly with Asturias as he worked on *The President*, Carpentier set about writing his own dictator novel—now informed by the cultural politics of the Cuban revolution as well as by his much longer history with politically engaged artistic vanguards in both Latin America and Europe. As a

young man, Carpentier was imprisoned by Gerardo Machado (1925-1933) and fled Cuba. These experiences were the basis for an early essay on Machado, “Portrait of a Dictator” (1933). I read *Reasons of State* in dialogue with this essay and the short story “Right of Sanctuary” (1967), which preceded the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project.⁶⁵ These intertexts illuminate the evolution of Carpentier’s approach to the representation of the dictator and consideration of the possible modes of opposition to dictatorship. *Reasons of State* functions as a vehicle for expressing necessary skepticism of utopian political projects as well as of the deployment (or, too easy appropriation) of art in service of those projects.

In “Portrait of a Dictator” Carpentier describes Machado as a near-illiterate, overindulgent hypocrite who secured power through collaboration with U.S. financiers.⁶⁶ The story of the Head of State (*Primer Magistrado*) in *Reasons of State* echoes the arc of Machado’s career: the lascivious and self-indulgent dictator of an unnamed Latin American country faces rebellion at home while struggling to shore up support (from both the United States and the United Fruit Company) for his regime in the political climate of the First World War, the ensuing economic boom, and the chaos that followed its bust. Amidst growing opposition, the Head of State is forced from power and retreats to Paris, where he dies (Machado died in Miami). But these parallels are simply an initial outline for the elaboration of the dictator as a character in the later novel. The Head of State is an aesthete: his residence in Paris is filled with fine paintings, sculptures, and furnishings. Hoping to recreate these pleasures at home, he brings the opera to his capital city, Nueva Córdoba, and builds a new capitol modeled on the one in Washington, D.C. Inspired by his friend Manuel José Estrada Cabrera’s Temple of Minerva in Guatemala City, the Head of State orders an enormous allegorical statue from an Italian sculptor. When it finally arrives—hailed in pieces abroad a train from the coast—the statue of the Republic is so tall her

face is obscured by the dome of the capitol and visible only to the workmen who clean it. As such scenes suggest, the Head of State's interest in the arts is about status and the creation of a veneer of "civilization" to cover over "barbarism" enacted by other means.⁶⁷ In this, the Head of State represents the moldering end of the Enlightenment principles that inspired the founding of the Latin American republics. The Spanish title of the novel, *El recurso del método* ("The Recourse of Method"), is a play on René Descartes's *Le Discours de la méthode* (*Discourse on Method*, 1637), citations from which appear as sardonic epigraphs throughout.

The superficiality of the Head of State's pretensions to culture is clearest in his distaste for modern art. This is an attitude assumed from the Distinguished Academician, whom the Head of State supports in exchange for access to Parisian circles, and who reacts with horror to modern sculpture, jazz, and Futurism. Toward the end of the novel, once the Head of State has become the *ex-Head of State*, he returns to Paris to find his daughter has discarded his collections. Panicked, he hurries from room to room, finding everywhere "the same disasters: crazy, absurd, esoteric pictures, without any historical or legendary significance, without subject or message, dishes of fruit that weren't dishes of fruit, houses looking like polyhedrons, faces with a set square for a nose, women with their tits out of place [...]"⁶⁸ The foregrounding of this shift in art-historical periods suggests an historical teleology in which the dictator's moment—or, at least the era of this particular kind of dictator—will pass. Just as the Beaux Arts gave way to the Belle Époque and then to modernism, so too will the Head of State become obsolete. Indeed, the Head of State is eventually betrayed by his secretary, Peralta, and that break is anticipated by Peralta's early preference for modern art. In a larger frame, this alignment suggests a diametric opposition between the Head of State and Carpentier, whose own participation in modernist vanguards laid the groundwork for the emergence of magical realism (via his theorization of the Latin American

“marvelous real” in the preface to *The Kingdom of this World*) and influenced the new novel of the Latin American boom. In this reading, the Head of State is the corrupt remnant of the previous century, and will be buried by the writer of the twentieth.

However, *Reasons of State* is hardly a triumphant. The dictator’s replacement, the Provisional President and former professor of philosophy Luis Leoncio Martínez, does not prove an effective leader. The Student, an idealized figure who stands for radical youth in the novel, anticipates this outcome in an extended confrontation with the Head of State. Throughout his debate with the dictator, the Student eschews all easy alternatives, pointing out that a coup would likely lead to a military junta seizing power. He instead calls for a truly popular uprising, which does not arrive in the novel.⁶⁹ Near the end of the narrative, however, the now-exiled Student reappears in Paris, on his way to the First World Conference Against Colonial and Imperialist Politics in Brussels.⁷⁰ On the train, the Student sits with the activist Julio Antonio Mella, a Cuban student leader assassinated in Mexico in 1929, and Jawaharlal Nehru, then the delegate for the National Hindu Congress, future first Prime Minister of India, and eventually a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement. This moment, which bridges history and fiction, shifts emphasis from opposition to dictatorship at home to the international struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism are here continuous with opposition to dictatorship, as individual dictators operate in the service of foreign interests that seek to establish or retain economic and political control. Near its conclusion, then, *Reasons of State* turns to political struggles that exceed the national frame, anticipating other movements of cross-regional and transnational solidarity, including Bandung (1955), the Tricontinental (1966), the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement, and even the Global South.

But the scene aboard the train is less a utopian moment of international solidarity than one of confusion and miscomprehension. While Mella and the Student have an animated conversation, Nehru sits quietly in a corner. As the train passes coalmines at the border with Belgium, Nehru speaks:

“Cool, cool,” said Nehru, leaving the others uncertain whether he meant to say “cool” or “coal”—but it was indeed cold in this second-class carriage, excessively cold for these men from hot climates. And the Indian went on sleeping with his eyes open until the train got to Brussels.⁷¹

These terms appear in English in the Spanish, highlighting the problem of language difference: “*Cool, cool,*” dijo Nehru, sin que los otros acertaran a saber si se refería al carbón o al frío—por una explicable confusión entre *coal* y *cool*.” In turning the reader’s attention to the larger political horizon, Carpentier also illuminates the challenges to transnational solidarity, where language stands for actual linguistic difference as well as possible historical and ideological divergences. These problems are not resolved; instead, they signal a refusal to idealize utopian alternatives. The point is not to imagine a condition or system beyond dictatorship, but rather to examine the situation at hand and to learn from the mistakes that came before.

The same is true of Carpentier’s use of art in *Reasons of State*. While the teleology sketched above (from Beaux Arts to modernism; from dictatorship to freedom) is appealing, artistic preferences do not actually index politics. The Head of State’s secretary, Peralta, as well as his fashionable daughter, Ofelia, both prefer modern art but neither represents a positive political force. Here, “Right of Sanctuary,” which centers on the secretary to the President (dictator) of an un-named country, provides illumination. Like Peralta in *Reasons of State*, the Secretary is a lover of modern art, preferring Paul Klee to the President’s (insipid) taste for the

Beaux Arts. But he is also an opportunistic schemer who, when a coup breaks out, takes refuge in the embassy of a neighboring country and eventually replaces the Ambassador. “Right of Sanctuary” is centrally concerned with the cyclicity of violence and the recurrence of political chaos in the region, and identifies the Secretary as one of the key causes of the problem. Taking into account Carpentier’s own participation in the artistic vanguards of the first part of the twentieth century, there is in Peralta (*Reasons of State*) and the Secretary (“Right of Sanctuary”) an important lesson: art, both in general and in the form of specific movements or modes, is not *a priori* opposed to the dictator.

Nor can it be assumed that if a text expresses opposition to the dictator the message will be effectively conveyed. Early on in the novel, on his way home from Paris to put down another rebellion, the Head of State purchases a copy of Sarmiento’s *Facundo*. Reading it, “gave rise to some bitter thoughts about the dramatic fate of Latin American peoples, always engaged in a Manichean struggle between civilization and barbarism, between progress and dictatorship [*caudillismo*].”⁷² The Head of State, in short, identifies with Sarmiento. The satire cuts in two ways: first, the Head of State is a poor reader who cannot recognize himself as the dictator (that is: a descendant of Rosas); second, it mocks Sarmiento, whose Europhile model of civilization has given rise of individuals like the Head of State. In this very brief scene, Carpentier ruminates not just on the tradition of writing about dictatorship—the allusion allows Carpentier to position his own work within the longer arc of the Latin American dictator novel—but on the material effects of anti-dictator writing: the work of art is always vulnerable to misinterpretation.

For much of *Reasons of State*, Carpentier installs himself (and the reader) in the dictator’s consciousness. The reader is privy to the dictator’s moments of confusion, misinterpretations, and recurrent contemplations of sex. Narrative intimacy with the dictator, both in the first- and

the third-person, drives the satire in the novel. Yet Carpentier is after more than critical laughter. Focalization through the dictator facilitates an analysis of the workings of power, from the Head of State's ruthlessness and paranoia to his moments of fatigue, as when he struggles to find the words for the requisite victory speech after having put down yet another rebellion. The reader is also given Peralta's quietly critical view on the Head of State as well as the perspective of a collective "we" that describes the increasing infiltration of U.S. culture and institutions into daily life in the country. As in *Autumn of the Patriarch*, such expansions of the field of vision de-center the dictator, diminishing his importance within the politics of the present. But the shifts in focalization are also a protective measure against the dangers of intimacy described by Monterosso. In giving these other perspectives, *Reasons of State* insists that while its focus may be the dictator, the Head of State is by no means the hero of the novel.

This impulse to delineate between the dictator and other possible points of view is most explicitly on display in the scene in which the Head of State confronts the Student. The conversation is preceded by a long passage in which their respective interior monologues are intercalated as the two men take stock of each other:

[...] *a vicious, obscene man: it's all in his appearance / the face of a boy who hasn't screwed many women: intellectual lightweight / not even a monster: a petty tyrant giving himself airs / those weak ones are the worst / all this is pure theatre: this way of receiving me, the light on my face, that book on the table / capable of anything: he's got nothing to lose / don't look at me like that, I won't lower my eyes / although he may be brave, he wouldn't resist torture / I wonder if I could stand torture: some people can't / I believe he's afraid / torture ...*⁷³

Graphically, the use of the slash intends a clear separation between the two streams of thought. However, the contrapuntal play establishes a troubling, if flickering, equivalence; their thoughts echo each other, such that the two monologues come to resemble a dialogue. The Student also becomes the object of critique, as at the end of the scene when a bomb goes off and the Student, looking for damage, begins by checking his face “because women were important to him.”⁷⁴ I stated earlier that the Student in *Reasons of State* is an idealized figure who stands, broadly, for opposition to dictatorship and authoritarianism. But he is not immune from criticism. The Student, too, is an archetype within the system, the whole of which Carpentier submits to analysis.

As a figure of opposition to the dictator who will soon be exiled to Paris—recalling, in part, Carpentier himself as a young man—the Student is also a double for Carpentier. I arrive here at the self-reflexive dimensions of *Reasons of State*, which Benedetti and Roberto González Echevarría have called “auto-critique” (*autocrítica*) and “self-parody,” respectively⁷⁵ Martin, with González Echevarría’s reading in mind, draws a strong distinction between the “self-critical” and the merely “self-referential;” the latter is a gesture while the former requires sustained critique.⁷⁶ However, if González Echevarría idealizes the novel, Martin too quickly dismisses its self-reflexivity. While these moments might not rise to the level of critique, they signal a self-conscious hesitation on the part of the writer, which correlates to the novel’s demurral from triumphant, transnational political utopianism. Further, the Student is not the only vector through which self-referentiality is achieved. For instance, in the brief moments in which the narrative focalizes through Peralta, Carpentier’s critical perspective on the Head of State and that of the dictator’s secretary align. While the Student may make an idealized double for the author, Peralta is a much more troubling figure. This discomfort is precisely the point.

As in the case with art itself, there is a consistent rejection of categorical certainties in *Reasons of State*. In so doing, Carpentier calls for a self-conscious reflection on the relationship between aesthetics and politics. These are particularly complex questions in the context of the Cuban revolution. Despite Carpentier's work for the revolutionarily government, it would be a mistake to say that his thinking—or, that of *Reasons of State*—necessarily followed official orthodoxy. In both interviews and essays from this period, Carpentier expressed skepticism of the novel's (in general) ability to effect social change. Literature can reveal or denounce a particular ill, he argued, but it is not a form of concrete action; in this sense, it should be distinguished from non-fiction genres such as the essay.⁷⁷ Literature, instead, is one possible starting point for the study of social problems. As Carpentier remarked to Elena Poniatowska, Marx and Engels were the first to rely on novelists as the basis for critical study and observation of society.⁷⁸ Commitment, then, is expressed through literature's representation and analysis of social problems, rather than any explicit or public political stance on the part of the writer.

Following from this, *Reasons of States* offers an extended analysis of a particular form of dictatorship, primarily associated with the turn of the twentieth century, but with continuities in the present. It locates dictatorship within the larger context of a political culture and global distribution of power—specifically, colonialism and capitalist imperialism—of which the dictator is only a part. Similar to *Autumn of the Patriarch*, in *Reasons of State* the dictator serves as the core around which the larger critique is organized. The enlarged frame of the novel, however, must not obscure its smaller, self-reflexive moments, which distinguish *Reasons of State* from the celebratory and triumphant tone of “Portrait of a Dictator” or, for that matter, the oppositional (even opportunist) thinking that drove the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project. This interest in self-reflexivity, in turn, finds its fullest expression in Roa Bastos's *I the Supreme*.

Roa Bastos: Imitation and Complicity in *I the Supreme*

Roa Bastos locates his dictator novel at the very founding of the Latin American republics: he chose José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the first president-dictator of Paraguay (1814-1840), on the conviction that this was the figure best suited to the “monstrous genealogy” (*genealogía teratológica*) Fuentes and Vargas Llosa had in mind for “Fathers of the Fatherlands.”⁷⁹ The historical Francia was the key actor in Paraguay’s separation from the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata. He oversaw nearly every aspect of government, dissolving all bodies capable of challenging his rule, including the military and the Church, in order to more freely model the nation on Enlightenment principles inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1672). A figure of fascination—particularly for contemporaries like Sarmiento, who mentions Francia several times in *Facundo*, and Thomas Carlyle, whose essay on Francia Roa Bastos cites in *I the Supreme*—Francia was the archetype of the enlightened despot later parodied and evacuated of intellectual substance in *Reasons of State*.⁸⁰ In taking Francia as his subject, then, Roa Bastos not only confronts the long history of post-independence dictatorship in Latin America, but also the history of its literary representation. Like *Autumn of the Patriarch* and *Reasons of State*, *I the Supreme* is as much about writing the dictator as it is about Francia himself; but unlike García Márquez and Carpentier, Roa Bastos directly confronts the dictator’s complicated relationship to writing, placing this at the core of his dictator novel.

Narrated almost entirely from Francia’s perspective (or, consciousness), *I the Supreme* is the most steadfast realization of Rama’s “leap into the void.” The novel begins with the discovery of an apocryphal official decree (pasquinade) calling for the decapitation of the dictator after his death and the burning of his remains, along with those of his servants. The

forgery infuriates Francia, because it demonstrates how easily an anonymous writer can displace the dictator. The simulation of the dictator's language in the pasquinade also operates as metanarrative: Roa Bastos too will infiltrate Francia's stronghold by means of his language and, in the end, bury him in words. Accordingly, the narrative arc follows the dictator's decline; early on, Francia suffers a fall that eventually proves fatal. Before his death, Francia sets fire to his records. The novel itself is a palimpsest of archival documents, both real and invented. These include Francia's dictations to his secretary, Policarpo Patiño; a "Perpetual Circular" written for his functionaries, which becomes a freewheeling narration of Paraguay's independence; Francia's private notebooks; texts by European travelers; excerpts from twentieth century historiography; and marginal notes of unknown provenance. Much of this material is stranger than the phrase "archival documents" suggests—as in Francia's recollections of hunting a manticore or the meteorite that he has "captured" and keeps chained to his chair. These fantastical interpolations shift the fevered imagination of the dictator's consciousness from the re-creation of an individual mind into a meditation on the nature of knowledge itself. The materials are organized by an unnamed "Compiler" (*Compilador*), who describes the provenance of archival sources, gives background, and provides translations where necessary. The world of *I the Supreme* is pointedly multilingual, with frequent recourse to Guaraní vocabulary, cosmology, and grammar, as well as to Portuguese and Portuñol. This attention to the cultural specificity of Paraguay, particularly to the intersections of indigenous and European cultures as well as of European empires (Spain and Portugal), locates the problem of dictatorship within Latin America's history of (external) colonization and internal colonialism obscured by the abstract categories of "barbarism" and "civilization." Not only is the cultural and political world of

Paraguay too complex for this binary, the binary itself has foreclosed effective analysis of dictatorship in the region.

I the Supreme turns on Francia's fraught relationship to writing. He is at once absolutely dependent on it for administration of the state and fundamentally suspicious of text as a means for conveying information. Patiño bears the brunt of this mistrust. As the dictator's amanuensis, the secretary embodies the problem of textual mediation, which threatens error as much as purposeful adulteration. In search of a solution, Francia praises the parrot as the ideal recording machine, because it repeats language without comprehension. Later, he makes use of a magical pen, the "souvenir pen" (*pluma-recuerdo* or *pluma-memoria*) capable of a kind of image-writing akin to cinematic projection. This fantastical machine allows Francia to break out of language. But these projections are visible only to Francia, and therefore not a viable means of communication. Francia instead becomes obsessed with divining Patiño's mind, pouring all manner of potions into the basin where the secretary soaks his feet in hopes of discovering his innermost thoughts.⁸¹ Finally, Francia accuses Patiño of plotting against him and sentences the secretary to death, forcing Patiño to copy out his own death sentence.

Francia's critique of writing is initially posited as a distinction between writing and action; as he declares, "I don't write history. I make it." But the opposition does not hold. In this same scene, Francia goes on to note that the writer has the unique power to rearrange events. He continually rails against historians, calling them "rodents" and "rivals of moths and rats" whose imprecise fiddling may be secondary to the work of men of action but is also, crucially, always a threat. As he remarks early on to Patiño: "Later on there will come those who pen more voluminous libels. They will call them History Books, novels, accounts of imaginary facts seasoned to suit the taste of the moment or their interests."⁸² Within the narrative, Francia's

accusation is meant to weaken any completing claim to historical truth. But by putting such claims in the dictator's mouth, Roa Bastos moves through the self-reflexivity of metafiction to a self-critique of the dictator novel.

Roa Bastos's novel is in explicit dialogue with the long history of writing about dictators and dictatorship in Latin America, and Sarmiento is a key point of reference. In the narrative, Francia repeatedly endeavors to erase his familial ties; "I was born of myself," he insists.⁸³ These claims of auto-genesis culminate in a patricidal fantasy that is also a reworking of a key scene from *Facundo*. There, the caudillo Facundo Quiroga is first introduced to the reader via an anecdote in which he is stalked by a jaguar ("tiger") on the plain (pampas), taking refuge in a tree. Once rescued, Quiroga takes brutal revenge on the animal. But he also identifies with its ferocity, earning the nickname the "tiger of the plains" (*el Tigre de los Llanos*).⁸⁴ Francia describes a similar incident, in which a jaguar attacks a trading boat captained by his father. The young Francia leaps from the boat just before the attack and watches in fascination as the jaguar wreaks havoc. The father's gun is thrown from the boat, landing in the young Francia's hands, and only once it mauls his father does Francia kill the jaguar. As he reports: "I closed my eyes and felt I was being born."⁸⁵ For Francia, the triangulation of the father (a representative of colonial authority), the jaguar (a figure for American nature), and his younger self (the new American man) invites a reading of this story as an allegory of independence in the Americas. Within the novel, what matters is that the story is apocryphal, as the Compiler makes clear. In a larger frame, however, this scene is not just a self-conscious insertion of Roa Bastos's work into the tradition of the dictator novel, as Carpentier does when the Head of State purchases a copy of *Facundo*, Roa Bastos revises the signs of his predecessors. The archive of the dictator novel is full of dictators with missing, absent, or unidentified fathers. In *I the Supreme*, however, the

fatherless dictator is no longer a trope (something the writer can say about the dictator) but the dictator's own fantasy, and a central component of his understanding of authoritarian power. In breaching the dictator's consciousness, Roa Bastos brings with him the repertoire of tropes for writing about the dictator. Replicated in the dictator's voice, they take on new meanings, collapsing the oppositional logic that previously structured the genre. No longer does the writer speak of (or against) the dictator; the dictator speaks for himself and even to the writer.

The central self-critical maneuver of *I the Supreme* is Francia's self-conscious engagement with the literary representation of dictators. He names and comments upon the central mechanisms of the dictator novel-to-come, as in a scene in which Francia rails against Patiño:

Don't you think that I could be made into a fabulous story? Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Excellency! The most fabulous, the truest, the most worthy of the majestic exaltedness of your Person. No, Patiño, no. It's not possible to make stories of Absolute Power. If it were, The Supreme would be *de trop* [*estaría de más*]: in literature or in reality. Who would write such books? Ignorant people like you. Professional scribes. Pharisaical farceurs [*Embusteros fariseos*]. Idiomatic compilers of writing no less idiotic. The words of power, of authority, words above words, will be transformed into clever words, lying words. Words below words. If one wishes at all costs to speak of someone, one must not only put oneself in that someone's place: one must *be* that someone. Only like can write about like. Only the dead can write about the dead. But the dead are very feeble. Do you think you could relate my life before your death, you ragtag amanuensis?

You would need at the very least the craft and the strength of two Fates. Eh, isn't it so, compiler of fictions [*embustes*] and falsifications?⁸⁶

Like the rest home for ex-dictators in *Autumn of the Patriarch*, Francia's comments loom over *I the Supreme*, which itself has a compiler (the Compiler). Francia's central claim is that absolute power exceeds the capacities of textual representation, that the only person willing to attempt the task would necessarily be a self-righteous charlatan and also a hypocrite, as one who claims to reveal truths that cannot be properly conveyed by "lying" words. Finally, preempting Monterosso, Roa Bastos's Francia observes that to write from the perspective of the dictator entails not just a measure of sympathetic identification, but identity: "Only like can write about like." This series of anticipatory accusations is intended to subvert the critical potential of the dictator novel, but only if we take Francia's characterization of the dictator novel at his word. That is to say: if we continue to assume the dictator novel is only about the dictator. Instead, by folding the dictator novel on itself (having the dictator talk about writing about dictators), Roa Bastos fully activates the self-referential dimensions of the genre, making it as much about the writer as the dictator.

The mysterious Compiler stands in contrast to the exaggerated impersonation of Francia's voice in the pasquinade discovered at the start of the novel. He is first introduced by way of a parenthetical attribution at the end of a footnote explaining the nature and provenance of Francia's private notebook; it reads simply "(Compiler's Note)." Biographical details accumulate in subsequent notes, where the reader learns that the Compiler conducted extensive research, including ethnographic fieldwork, and has a personal connection to Francia. He is in possession of Francia's "souvenir pen," given to him by a childhood friend, the great-great-great grandson of Patiño, just before the Compiler went into exile in 1947 (like Roa Bastos himself).

The pen links the Compiler to the dictator through his ill-fated secretary. This detail is a decoy. The Compiler does not take up his project in order to vindicate Patiño, nor does he take possession of Francia's pen to turn it against the dictator. The "souvenir pen" no longer works, and actually erases text as it writes.⁸⁷

The Compiler's conscious self-marginalization in fact underscores his centrality. After all, it is he who selects and orders the historical texts; he even marks gaps and discontinuities in the archive, supplementing these with unbound fragments. The Compiler is, in this sense, another one of the historians whose meddling Francia anticipates and abhors. The "Final Compiler's Note" that closes the novel acknowledges this. Written in the mode of a conclusion to an historical study, it is here that the Compiler details the exhaustive nature of his research, emphasizing that every word was already said or composed by others. In the final paragraph, however, the Compiler takes a different tack:

Hence, imitating the Dictator once again (dictators fulfill precisely this function: replacing writers, historians, artists, thinkers, etc.), the re-scriptor [*a-copiadador*] declares, in the words of a contemporary author, that the history contained in these *Notes* is reduced to the fact that the story that should have been told in them has not been told. As a consequence, the characters and facts that figure in them have earned, through the fatality of the written language, the right to a fictitious and autonomous existence in the service of the no less fictitious and autonomous reader.⁸⁸

The relationship between objects and acts in this passage is scrambled: the Compiler begins by declaring that he will imitate Francia, but then explains that dictators themselves replace writers, historians, artists, and thinkers. The writer, therefore, imitates the dictator in his efforts to

substitute the writer. Yet the Compiler also insists that the work of the writer or historian is necessarily secondary to the actions which produce the texts that will be “rescripted,” or, following the Spanish “*acopiar*,” gathered together and arranged. While the dictator replaces writers and historians, writers and historians are also already following the dictator’s lead.

Even this rather cyclical rendering is undermined. Again, the Spanish is helpful: the separation of the “a” via the insertion of the hyphen re-opens the term *acopiar*, transforming the first letter into the prefix of negation. The “*a-copiator*” is he who “un-copies” or un-gathers. In this reading, writers and historians may well come after the dictator, but theirs is a work of un-making the previously established narrative. This is an exercise in writerly authority that aims to displace the dictator, but which also reproduces the dictator’s actions. The circularity is dizzying: if dictator, writer, and historian are truly indistinct, there is no possible place from which to articulate opposition. This is why, at the very close of *I the Supreme*, the Compiler surrenders his only-ostensibly historical work of fiction to the imaginative capacities of the reader. This closing paragraph presents the effective collapse of the anti-dictator project of the dictator novel and simultaneous re-configuration of the genre as the space for play with the figure of the dictator. The “void” of Rama’s “leap into the void,” then, is not just the dictator’s consciousness or even the chasm that separates ruler from ruled, but the more uncertain realm of fiction itself.

Behind this overarching declaration about the nature of the dictator novel in *I the Supreme* is another set of reflections on the writer’s relationship to the dictator, one which extends to and incorporates the reader. Here I return to the question of the writer’s intimacy with the dictator laid out by Monterosso. Beyond sympathy and identification, Monterosso suggests a fear of complicity. By “complicity” I do not mean the kinds of direct collaboration—the writer as accomplice, assistant, or secretary—exemplified by Pedro de Angelis’s work for Juan Manuel de

Rosas in the previous chapter. Rather, I mean “complicity” as that state of being mutually involved or implicated in an intricate structure or larger whole, drawing on the Latin root *complico* or *conplicō* (to fold together). That is: complicity as “folded-togetherness,” the recognition of which is the necessary condition for political action.⁸⁹ The question of complicity, in the narrow or negative sense of the term, haunts the dictator novel. In many cases, this anxiety motivates the relative absence of the dictator from the narrative. When the dictator is present, there is often an emphatic insistence on the dictator’s barbarity, frequently coded as vulgarity, as in *Autumn of the Patriarch*. Alternately, recalling *Reasons of State* as well as the treatment of Rosas in *Facundo*, the dictator might be presented as a “bad writer” whose project is fundamentally different from that of the author. The same is true of the preponderance of secretaries, scribes, and other writerly attendants to the dictator in dictator novels; those complicit (in the narrow sense) writers who are effectively assertions of the writer’s opposition to and therefore distinction from the dictator. Beyond the practical reasons for its failure, “Fathers of the Fatherlands” floundered precisely because it presumed opposition, failing to acknowledge the complex history of interconnection between Latin American dictators and writers. In *I the Supreme*, acknowledgement of complicity (in the expanded sense) is the starting point for its critical consideration of the dictator and dictatorship. The place at which the writer “folds” onto the dictator is, precisely, in writing—both as the act of textual representation (the making literary of historical referents) as well as in the writer and the dictator’s shared reliance on text as medium.

But while *I the Supreme* acknowledges the writer and dictator’s “folded-together-ness” in the larger and more abstract sense, it maintains a measure of ambivalence about the actual fact of writing about the dictator. This ambivalence is figured through the worms and other insects that

always working away in (eating) the papers that fill Francia's rooms, and whose activity is the background noise of the novel. They are also the cause of "gaps" in the archive, as the Compiler must often suture together worm-eaten pages. Text, as a material object, is always subject to decay and destruction. The same is true of bodies. Francia himself connects the worms' consumption of bodies to the consumption of text and to reading. Reflecting on the burial of Simón Bolívar in exile he remarks: "They consigned to the worms, those neutral and neuter readers of upright men and downright scoundrels, the old, torn book of his ugly person."⁹⁰

Worms might be neutral readers, but this "reading" is not a neutral activity: it destroys the original, hence Francia's comparisons of historians and writers of fiction to worms and moths. Further, if reading is eating, then reading is also a kind of incorporation, and the worm becomes the text it eats—to paraphrase Daniel Balderston's analysis of worms in *I the Supreme*.⁹¹ Balderston echoes a comment made by Francia himself: "From an early age, when I read a book, I made my way inside it, so that when I closed it I went on reading it (like cockroaches and bookworms, eh?). It then seemed to me that those thoughts had always been mine."⁹² Even for the insensate reader (the worm), reading as the consumption of text is transformative. To put pressure on this chain of association: if the writer, as reader-writer, is like the worm, which consumes bodies as well as texts, and if eating is a process of bodily incorporation, in reading-writing about the dictator, the writer incorporates the dictator. To write about the dictator, then, is a process of becoming-like, which recalls Francia's claim that "Only like can write about like." By extension, the same can be said for the reader. This is a very literal rendering of the folded-together-ness of complicity, and Roa Bastos does not stop here.

The figural economy of worms in the novel should be counterposed to the Compiler's final interruption in the text, which comes at the end of the novel's appendix. This appendix

concerns the fate of the historical Francia's remains, which were taken to Buenos Aires after his death. Efforts were made to repatriate these to Asunción in 1961, but the task was stymied by debates about which of two skulls attributed to Francia was in fact the dictator's. Francia kept a skull as a totem or fetish; when his remains were stolen, the skulls were confused, and this is the subject of much epistolary debate. The Compiler interrupts the final letter in the appendix to report a conversation with a former slave who worked in the house of Carlos Loizanga, an opponent of Francia who raided his grave and kept one of the two skulls. The woman—old but still lucid, the Compiler assures—tells a story about the ashes of Loizanga's maternal grandmother, which were kept in the pantry. She once mistakenly used these to prepare the day's soup. Through the interpolation of this story, the profanation of Francia's remains is compared quietly to an act of unwitting cannibalism. The exhortation is uncharacteristic of the Compiler, who himself has gathered and works with "remains." The implied comparison here is between Loizanga and the Compiler as well as readers and writers more generally: all of us "consume" the dictator.

But Roa Bastos is making a more considered point about the ideological and ethical implications of writing about the dictator. Not all forms of consumption are the same. As one of the historians quoted in the appendix remarks, the authenticity of the remains is suspect because Loizanga's stealing of Francia's skull "was inspired not by a spirit of serious and impartial historical investigation but by political passion."⁹³ The Compiler's attack on Loizanga, then, is obliquely a criticism of programmatically over-determined politically committed writing: a version of the dictator novel that privileges the political goal of denouncing the dictator over and above analysis. This is the type of dictator novel against which Roa Bastos, as well as García Márquez and Carpentier, position their respective works. However, while both Carpentier and

García Márquez turn away from this obsessive focus on the dictator to attend to the larger structures that sustain dictatorship, Roa Bastos in *I the Supreme* writes *into* the problem, keeping a singular focus on the ways in which the writer and dictator are mutually involved. As with the question of complicity, part of what Roa Bastos works through in *I the Supreme* is the question of commitment itself. As he explained in the interview cited at the start of this chapter: “What I wanted then was to work the text from within [*desde adentro*]. I had freed myself of that consciousness [*conciencia*] that seemed to be dictating to me the misfortunes of the collective and I was able to allow those misfortunes to be illuminated [*irradiados*] by the life of the text itself.”⁹⁴

In the end, Roa Bastos avoids unconsciously imitating the dictator (that is: reproducing the structures of power to which his project is opposed) by endeavoring to consciously imitate the dictator (understanding that one is necessarily complicit in these structures). This includes the forceful occupation of the dictator’s consciousness and an appropriation of his language, as well as explicit acknowledgement of the fundamental resemblance between the work of the writer and the work of the dictator. If earlier dictator novels only briefly noted the ways in which the dictator resembled the writer, by beginning with the premise of the writer’s resemblance to and imitation of the dictator, Roa Bastos unfurls the oppositional logic that drove the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project. He expands the dictator novel outward from its origins as an anti-dictator project, to encompass not just the writer but a critical meditation on writing itself.

Coda: The Latin American Dictator Novel after 1975

My reading of *I the Supreme* positions Roa Bastos’s novel not only as a self-conscious critique of the dictator novel but as an end. That is: as the culmination of a set of problems that

developed within the tradition of writing about dictators in Latin America; these returned to the fore with the emergence of the Latin American new novel (the “boom”) at mid-century and were distilled in the “Fathers of the Fatherlands” project. Yet this does not mean that the dictator novel ceases to exist; new dictator novels continue to be written, published, and circulate within and beyond Latin America. Many of these return to and rehearse the now-established contours of the genre.

But two dictator novels linked to those discussed in this chapter bear mention: Arturo Uslar Pietri was in Paris with Asturias and Carpentier in the 1920s and 1930s; he published his own dictator novel, *Oficio de difuntos* (“Funeral Mass”) in 1976. More than thirty years after “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” Vargas Llosa, too, published a dictator novel: *La fiesta del Chivo* (*Feast of the Goat*, 2000). *Oficio de difuntos* is an exploration of the complicit writer (the writer who serves the dictator) who, at the end of the dictator’s life, is reduced to cowering “in the small corner of an attic in that enormous and ramshackle house of power [*caserón de autoridad*].”⁹⁵ It centers on a priest, Alberto Solana, called upon to deliver the funeral oration for the recently deceased dictator, to whom he was a longtime aid. Solana knows that in delivering the oration he will become the scapegoat for the old regime as chaos unfolds. During a long and anxious night, he reflects on the dictator’s rise to power and how he came to be involved in the regime. In style as well as structure, *Oficio de difuntos* gestures back to Asturias’s *The President*; it does not, in Rama’s sense, “leap” into the void of the dictator’s consciousness. Vargas Llosa’s *Feast of the Goat*, meanwhile, explores events leading up to and immediately following the assassination of Rafael Trujillo (1961), reviving the oppositional logic of “Fathers of the Fatherlands” and borrowing its tactics from the dictator novels that came after that project dissolved. The narrative moves between three plot lines: Trujillo’s experiences in the days

leading up to his death; those of the men plotting to kill him; and the story of Urania Cabral, the daughter of one of Trujillo's senators, raped by the dictator shortly before his death and who returns to Santo Domingo many years later. As the perspective shifts between these characters, the novel lingers on several moments of extreme violence, often narrated from the perspective of the victims. This includes the torture of one of the conspirators, General José René Román, by Ramafis Trujillo (Trujillo's son) and the rape of Urania, which concludes the novel (digital, because Trujillo proves impotent).⁹⁶ This multifaceted approach allows Vargas Llosa to explore the perspective of the dictator as well as the effects of dictatorship on society at large. But the instrumentalization of suffering is also an unsettling recapitulation of the trope of the dictator's vulgarity. Even as the novel endeavors a critique of dictatorship, it falls back on an easy division between perpetrators and victims facilitated by its fealty to the chosen historical referent. Several decades after "Fathers of the Fatherlands," Vargas Llosa does not offer anything new for the dictator novel.

The fact of its publication is nevertheless of interest. Writing of *Feast of the Goat* and Sergio Ramírez's *Margarita, está linda la mar* (*Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea*, 1998), Polit Dueñas makes the following proposition: "When the literary production of the region undergoes notable expansion [measured in terms of recognition and circulation] the caudillo reappears as a consecrated [*figura consagrada*] and consecrating figure [*figura que consagra*]."⁹⁷ She is referring to a renewal in the global prominence of Latin American literature in the 1990s, which, like the early years boom, was propelled by international prizes and the Spanish publishing industry. When Latin American literature once again becomes the object of international attention, the argument goes, the near-mythical figure of the dictator reappears to anoint its return. This holds for the 1990s and much as the 1970s; or, late 1960s, to incorporate "Fathers of

the Fatherlands.” Polit Dueñas’s observation shifts the interpretation of the dictator novel away from its historical referents and toward its world literary circulations. While the dictator and dictatorship may be the starting point, the dictator novel exists in relation to the larger tradition of writing about dictatorship and its circulations, over and above its historical referents.

Propelled in no small part by the aura of the Latin American literary boom and fulfilling Fuentes’s prediction for “Fathers of the Fatherlands,” the Latin American dictator novel as exemplified by *Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Reasons of State*, and *I the Supreme* has circulated well beyond its continent of origin. It has become, in David Damrosch’s sense of the term, a world literary genre. Perhaps the best proof of this is the appearance of the Latin American dictator novel in Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. Here, it is one branch in the “tree” of free indirect style in modern narrative (1800-2000), which ranges from Goethe and Jane Austen to Roa Bastos, García Márquez, Carpentier, and Vargas Llosa. The Latin American dictator novels of the 1970s, Moretti writes, confined free indirect style to a limited role; Vargas Llosa moves the technique into the foreground realizing “its full political potential: by presenting the mind of the dictator ‘unmediated by any judging point of view.’”⁹⁸ This last comment is at best debatable, particularly given the long history of the Latin American dictator novel into which Vargas Llosa writes *Feast of the Goat*. Moretti’s is only a very general and necessarily limited overview of the Latin American dictator novel.

What Moretti does provide, however, is one instance of what happens to the dictator novel when it goes into circulation and is seen from without. In this case, it is reduced to a few isolated and “representative” examples, chosen for their accordance with the formal features whose evolution Moretti is tracking. If we instead choose to follow the dictator novel—as a genre or set of textual features organized around the literary representation of the dictator and

dictatorship—new comparative itineraries open up. The dictator novel is not an exclusively Latin American formation. It surfaces elsewhere in the literatures of the Global South, similarly in response to the political phenomenon of dictatorship but also in dialogue with other literary and cultural traditions. Only in following the dictator novel in this broader sense is it possible to gain a full picture of the genre.

¹ Carlos Fuentes to Mario Vargas Llosa, 11 May 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

² Carlos Fuentes, “A Despot, Now and Forever,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1986, and “Augusto Roa Bastos: El poder de la imaginación,” in *Geografía de la novela* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1993), 91-102. Fuentes locates this meeting in autumn of 1967; his correspondence with Vargas Llosa, however, shows that the initial conversations took place prior to May 1967.

³ See Darío Villanueva, “El ‘monoteísmo’ del poder: La trilogía paraguaya de Augusto Roa Bastos,” in *Yo el Supremo* (Madrid: Real Academia Española/Alfaguara, 2017), xv-xxxviii.

⁴ See Arturo Uslar Pietri, “Introducción,” in Miguel Ángel Asturias, *El Señor Presidente*, ed. Giuseppe Bellini (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), ix-xix, and Asturias, “*El Señor Presidente* como mito” (1967), in *El Señor Presidente: edición crítica*, ed. Gerald Martin (Madrid: ALLCA XXX, 2000), 468-478.

⁵ Fragmented versions of the “Fatherlands” story have long circulated in the criticism; see Carlos Pacheco, *Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria* (Caracas: Fundación Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos, 1987); Adriana Sandoval, *Los dictadores y la dictadura en la novela hispanoamericana (1851-1978)* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989); Gerald Martin, *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1989); Gabriela Polit Dueñas, *Cosas de hombres: Escritores y caudillos en la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2008); Ángel Esteban and Ana Gallego, *De Gabo a Mario: La estirpe del boom* (Madrid: Editorial Espasa, 2009), which includes some archival work; Moira Fradinger, *Binding Violence: Literary Visions of Political Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Jennifer Harford Vargas, *Forms of Dictatorship: Power, Narrative, Authoritarianism in the Latina/o Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ Martin, *Journeys*, 266.

⁷ Rama, *Los dictadores*, 15-16.

⁸ Augusto Monterroso, “Novelas sobre dictadores 1 y 2” (1983), in *Tríptico* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), 168-170 and 173.

⁹ Dain Borges, “Machiavellian, Rabelaisian, Bureaucratic?” *Public Culture* 5, no. 1 (1992): 112. This essay was part of a dossier responding to Achille Mbembe’s “The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony” (1992; 5, no. 1).

¹⁰ Martin, *Journeys*, 274.

¹¹ Rama, *Los dictadores latinoamericanos* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976), 15; Mario Benedetti, “El recurso del supremo patriarca,” in *El recurso del supremo patriarca* (Mexico: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979), 13.

¹² Benedetti, for example, argues that *Reasons of State* offers the most “revolutionary” critique and lauds its use of humor (1979, 30). Rama prefers *Autumn of the Patriarch* for its incorporation of the plural first person narrative perspective (1976, 63). Martin is suspicious of the humor in Carpentier (“the familiar phenomenon of laughter camouflages despair”) and writes of García Márquez: “It is difficult to see how so great a writer could have been so mistaken” (1989, 276-277).

¹³ Tomás Eloy Martínez, “Todo Roa Bastos,” *Papel Literario de El Nacional* (Caracas), 21 May 1978; quoted in Augusto Roa Bastos, *Yo el Supremo*, ed. Carlos Pacheco (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), 395-396.

¹⁴ By the early 1970s, García Márquez was an international star; *Autumn* was the first novel published after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Established a generation earlier, Carpentier had long been a prominent voice in Latin American letters. Although less well-known outside of Latin America, Roa Bastos had received much attention for his journalism, short stories, and the novel *Hijo de Hombre* (*Son of Man*, 1960).

¹⁵ By 1972, critics were declaring the end of the boom; see Rama, “El ‘boom en perspectiva,” in *Más allá del boom: literatura y mercado*, ed. David Viñas et al. (Mexico: Marcha Editores, 1981), 51-110. The dates of the boom itself remain a matter of debate; propositions range from a period beginning in the late 1950s through the mid-1970s to a few short years in the mid-1960s. The early 1960s saw the publication of key works—including Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1962), Fuentes’s *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 1962), and Vargas Llosa’s *La ciudad y los perros* (*The Time of the Hero*, 1963)—which established momentum for the decade. The publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967, which coincided with the award of the Nobel Prize to Miguel Ángel Asturias and the death of Che Guevara, marks the apex of this momentum. The political upheavals of 1968 signaled a turn in the political and intellectual life of the region, and the 1973 coup in Chile (itself preceded by the 1964 coup in Brazil) marks the end of a period of political optimism. Writing with these three dictator novels in mind—as well as Fuentes’s *Terra Nostra* (1975), which he calls a “titanic failure”—Martin uses 1975 to mark the “end of an era” (1989, 237).

Much of what I condense in this paragraph is expanded upon by the essays in the volume *Teaching the Latin American Boom*, ed. Lucille Kerr and Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2015).

¹⁶ José Donoso, *Historia personal del ‘boom’* (1972), 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1984), 46-47.

¹⁷ Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 24.

¹⁸ Deborah Cohn, *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism During the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press), 5.

¹⁹ See the chapter “Toward a Transnational Republic of Letters” in Diana Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 139; Antonio Candido, “Literature and Underdevelopment” (1970), in *On Literature and Society*, trans. by Howard S. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 119-141; for a contemporary description, see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, “The New Latin American Novel,” *Books Abroad* 44, no. 1 (1970), 45-50.

²¹ In the essay “The ‘Boom’ Novel and the Cold War” (1992), Neil Larson gives an excellent overview of differing (and conflicting) approaches to the idea of the boom novel; see *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture, and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 64-78.

²² For more on the shortcomings of the term “generation,” see David Viñas, “Pareceres y digresiones en torno a la nueva narrativa latinoamericana,” in *Más allá del Boom*, 13-50.

²³ Russell Cobb, “Promoting Literature in the Most Dangerous Area in the World: The Cold War, the Boom, and *Mundo Nuevo*,” in *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda, and the Cold War*, ed. Greg Barnhisel and Catherine Turner (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 245. Cobb cites as evidence a report written by Darwin (Bud) Flakoll, of the U.S. State

Department (25 October 1965). Flakoll later makes an appearance in the archive of Fuentes's correspondence on the "Fathers of the Fatherlands" project: he was married to Claribel Alegría, whom Fuentes invited to contribute. For further discussion of Fuentes' politics, see Maarten van Delden and Yon Grenier, *Gunshots at the Fiesta: Literature and Politics in Latin America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).

²⁴ Martin, *Journeys*, 272-273.

²⁵ Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America" (1971), in *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. by Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 35.

²⁶ Frustration with the hegemonic function of literature instigated a counter-canonical shift toward cultural studies and more popular genres such as *testimonio*; see George Yúdice, "Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism in Latin America," in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, ed. Jean Franco, George Yúdice, and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 1-28; John Beverly, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Eduardo Mendieta, "Remaking Latin American Studies: Postcolonialism, Subaltern Studies, Post-Occidentalism, and Globalization Theory," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 286-306; and Sophia A. McClennen, "What's Left for Latin American Cultural Studies?" *Minnesota Review* 76 (2011), 127-140.

²⁷ Carlos Fuentes to Mario Vargas Llosa, 11 May 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790). The original reads: "He andado rumiando desde que hablamos aquella tarde, en Le Cerf Volant, sobre Wilson y 'Patriotic Gore.' Y sobre un libro colectivo en esa vena. Hablaba anoche con Jorge Edwards y le proponía lo siguiente: un tomo que podría titularse 'Los Patriarcas', 'Los Padres de las Patrias,' 'Los Redentores,' 'Los Benefactores' o algo así. La idea sería escribir una crónica negra de nuestra América: una profanación de los profanadores, en la que, v.g., Edwards haría un Balmaceda, Cortázar un Rosas, Amado un Vargas, Roa Bastos un Francia, García Márquez un Gómez, Carpentier un Batista, yo un Santa Anna y tú un Leguía... u otro hombre peruano. ¿Qué te parece? [...] Los de Gallimard, a su regreso de Túnez, me hablan del entusiasmo con el que los críticos de varias zonas idiomáticas hablaron del grupo latinoamericano. Subrayar ese sentido de comunidad, de tarea de grupo, me parece sumamente importante para lo futuro. Sin menoscabo de las personalidades, creo que en efecto hay una serie de denominadores comunes, literarios, políticos, lingüísticos, de esperanza y de futuridad también—que conviene subrayar y reforzar [...]."

²⁸ Planned and proposed participants included Fuentes (Antonio López de Santa Ana, Mexico), Vargas Llosa (Luis Miguel Sánchez Cerro, Peru), Edwards (José Manuel Balmaceda, Chile), Carpentier (Gerardo Machado, Cuba), Miguel Otero Silva (Juan Vicente Gómez, Venezuela), José Emilio Pacheco (José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz, Mexico), Cortázar (Eva Perón, Argentina), García Márquez (Joaquín Mosquera, Colombia), Roa Bastos (José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, Paraguay), Carlos Martínez Moreno (Juan Manuel de Rosas, Argentina), José Donoso (Mariano Malgrejo, Bolivia), Claribel Alegría (Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, El Salvador), Monterosso (Anastasio Somoza García, Sr., Nicaragua), Adriano González León (Juan Vicente Gómez, Venezuela). Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, and García Márquez also discussed soliciting contributions from Miguel Ángel Asturias (Manuel Estrada Cabrera, Guatemala), Juan Bosch (Rafael Trujillo, Dominican Republic), the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo (on Francisco Franco's

Valley of the Fallen), and the American writer William Styron. Fuentes proposed that Styron could write on Trujillo, referring to Roosevelt's remark that "Trujillo may be a son of a bitch, but he is OUR son of a bitch;" Fuentes to Gabriel García Márquez, 5 July 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790). The phrase in reference to Trujillo is properly attributed to Roosevelt's secretary of state, Cordell Hull, although Roosevelt is credited with saying the same of Anastasio Somoza. In subsequent decades, it has become a motif in discussions of U.S. policy toward dictators throughout the Global South. Amongst the publishers interested in the project were Gallimard (France), Joaquín Mortiz (Mexico), Sudamérica (Buenos Aires), Seix Barral (Spain), Feltrinelli (Italy), Jonathan Cape (U.K.) and Farrar & Strauss (U.S.).

²⁹ Fuentes to Vargas Llosa, 5 July 1967, and Augusto Roa Bastos to Fuentes, 20 June 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³⁰ Carlos Martínez Moreno to Fuentes, 3 February 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³¹ García Márquez to Fuentes, 5 June 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³² García Márquez to Fuentes, 12 July 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³³ Fuentes to Otero Silva, 5 May 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³⁴ Fuentes to Donoso, 29 February 1968, José Donoso Papers (C0099), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Fuentes to Roa Bastos, 16 June 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790); Fuentes to Pacheco, 15 May 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³⁵ Fuentes to Cortázar, 26 May 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³⁶ Carlos Fuentes, "A Despot, Now and Forever," n.p.

³⁷ José Emilio Pacheco to Fuentes, 8 April 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790). The original reads: "Díaz es insondable. Entenderlo es entender los mecanismos del poder y quizá entender a México. Un proyecto demasiado ambicioso para mis limitaciones. Por otra parte, ya en cuanto *escritura*, no sé cómo abordarlo [...] La información, el contexto es indispensable. De allí el riesgo de convertir una pieza narrativa en un artículo de *Miroir de l'Histoire* o un ensayo de sociología barata."

³⁸ Otero Silva to Fuentes, 8 April 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

³⁹ The article to which Edwards refers presumably appeared in a Chilean newspaper, although Otero Silva earlier mentioned to Fuentes that he had shared information about the project with a Venezuelan journalist; see Otero Silva to Fuentes, 24 February 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790). The following year, Flakoll sent Fuentes a clipping from the San Salvador newspaper *El diario de hoy* that described the project (with significant factual errors) and took issues with some of the writer-dictator pairings as well as the choice of dictators included; Darwin (Bud) Flakoll to Fuentes, 13 January 1969, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

⁴⁰ Edwards to Vargas Llosa, 15 May 1968, Mario Vargas Llosa Papers (C0641), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. For similar expressions of concern, see Roa Bastos to Fuentes, 20 June 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790), and García Márquez to Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, 1 July 1963 or 1964 (Container 1.1), Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza Collection of Gabriel García Márquez Correspondence, 1961-1971, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

⁴¹ As far as I can find, Claribel Alegría was the only participant to submit a text, the short story "Audiencia Matutina" ("Morning Audience"). Narrated largely from the dictator's perspective, it repeats many of the tropes for the representation of the dictator discussed here, but adds little in terms of its approach to form. Claribel Alegría Papers (C1363), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁴² Fuentes, “A Despot Now and Forever,” n.p.

⁴³ García Márquez and Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, “El otoño del patriarca,” in *El olor de la guayaba: Conversaciones con Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza* (Barcelona: Editorial Bruguera, 1982), 115-128.

⁴⁴ Fuentes to García Márquez, 19 November 1965, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

⁴⁵ García Márquez to Mendoza, 1 July 1963 or 1964 (Container 1.1), Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza Collection of Gabriel García Márquez Correspondence, 1961-1971. See also Mendoza, *Gabo: Cartas y recuerdos* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2013), 64. The letter omits the year; Mendoza estimates it is from 1963, but given the references to a series of novels published in 1962 and 1963 (“the year before”) I date this letter to 1964.

⁴⁶ García Márquez, “El otoño del patriarca,” 120-121.

⁴⁷ García Márquez to Fuentes, 30 October 1965, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).

⁴⁸ García Márquez to Mendoza, 22 May 1966 (Container 1.1) Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza Collection of Gabriel García Márquez Correspondence, 1961-1971.

⁴⁹ García Márquez to Vargas Llosa, 2 December 1967, Mario Vargas Llosa Papers (C0641).

⁵⁰ García Márquez to Mendoza, 9 March 1968 (Container 1.2), Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza Collection of Gabriel García Márquez Correspondence, 1961-1971. The original reads: “Con el dolor de mi alma deseché la estructura del largo monólogo, porque en esta eso era falsa (quiero contarle con mis palabras y no con las del personaje), y además ha resuelto, con una irresponsabilidad de aventurero, eliminar todo contexto histórico, político y social, y centrarme en la terrible soledad del dictador, ya más que centenario, durante sus últimos años de gobernante medio olvidado y medio loco, cuando ya ni siquiera gobierna, ni ve, ni oye, ni entiende, y sin embargo sigue mandando sin saberlo. Tengo que empezar por el capítulo final, cuando la gente entra al palacio siguiendo a los gallinazos que se meten por las ventanas, y encuentran al dictador tirado en el salón del trono, muerto y ya medio carcomido, hasta el punto de que nadie está muy seguro de que es él. Tengo que contar todo al revés, en un mamotreto que reconstruya muchos años de su vida, y dejar la impresión de que nadie estará nunca seguro de su muerte. A lo que tiro, modestamente, es a que siga gobernando el palacio vacío.”

⁵¹ García Márquez, “El otoño del patriarca,” 122-123.

⁵² See Benedetti, “El recurso” 16-17, and Martin, *Journeys*, 276.

⁵³ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, trans. by A.M. Berrett, Janet Roitman, Murray Last, and Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 108-109.

⁵⁴ Gabriela Polit Dueñas, *Cosas de hombres: Escritores y caudillos en la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2008), 16-17.

⁵⁵ García Márquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (1976) (New York: Harper, 2006), 119-120.

⁵⁶ As Ericka Beckman observes, García Márquez’s novel proved extraordinarily canny of the “rationalized irrationality of modern capitalism itself;” see *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America’s Export Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), vii-ix.

⁵⁷ García Márquez, *Autumn*, 232-233; for the original see *El otoño del patriarca* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Random House, 2014), 265-266.

⁵⁸ Guillermo Sheridan and Armando Pereira, “García Márquez en México (entrevista),” *Revista de la Universidad de México* 30.6 (February 1976), 2-3; García Márquez, “El otoño del patriarca,” 124-125.

⁵⁹ García Márquez to Vargas Llosa, 12 November 1968, Mario Vargas Llosa Papers (C0641). The original reads: “Me parece que mi próxima novela será víctima del éxito de la anterior. La

estoy hacienda deliberadamente hermética, densa, compleja, para que solamente la soporten quienes se hayan tomado el trabajado previo de aprender literatura: es decir, nosotros mismos, y unos pocos amigos.”

García Márquez made a similar claim in a 1975 interview: “I write for whoever wants to read me. But there is an aspect to *The Autumn of the Patriarch* that, in large part, will never be deciphered by critics, because it consists of private jokes between my friends and I” (Sheridan and Pereira 1976, 5).

⁶⁰ García Márquez, *Autumn*, 22-25.

⁶¹ Sheridan and Pereira, “García Márquez en México,” 2.

⁶² Gerald Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 355.

⁶³ García Márquez, *Autumn*, 15-17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

⁶⁵ The story first appeared in the French edition of *Guerre du temps et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967); then in English in *War of Time* (trans. by Frances Partridge; New York: Knopf, 1970); and in Spanish as *El derecho de asilo* (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1972).

⁶⁶ Alejo Carpentier, “Retrato de un dictador,” *Octubre* (August-September 1933), 5-10; in *Octubre: escritores y artistas revolucionarios* (Liechtenstein: Topos Verlag AG, 1977), 61-66.

⁶⁷ Carpentier offered a useful typology of Latin American dictators in an interview with the Cuban newspaper *Granma* (18 May 1974): the “barbarian caudillo” (*el caudillo bárbaro*); the “out-and-out dictator” (*el dictador a secas*), practically illiterate but endowed with cultural capital by sycophants; and the “Enlightened despot” (*tirano ilustrado*): “[he] is somewhat cultured; he reads famous books; he has a house in Paris; he travels, he returns; he has opinions, etc.; and he gives the impression that he is protecting the arts, letters, etc.; but ultimately, through other means, using his henchmen, he commits the same abuses as the general with a gun or the out-and-out dictator, who doesn’t even know why he is in power.” Carpentier, *Entrevistas*, ed. Virgilio López Lemis (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), 211.

⁶⁸ Carpentier, *Reasons of State*, trans. by Frances Partridge (1976) (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013), 322.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 252-259.

⁷⁰ The First World Conference Against Colonial and Imperialist Politics took place in Brussels in February 1927; organized by the COMINTERN, it led to the founding of the League Against Imperialism, with Nehru as president.

⁷¹ Carpentier, *Reasons*, 353; for the original see *El recurso del método*, ed. Salvador Arias (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 411.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 250; for the original see, *El recurso del método*, 318-319.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁷⁵ Benedetti, “El recurso,” 21; Roberto González Echevarría, *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 73.

⁷⁶ Martin, *Journeys*, 272.

⁷⁷ See Carpentier’s response to a questionnaire on the “revolutionary literature” (*literatura revolucionaria*) (*La Bohemia*, Havana; 22 July 1966) in *Entrevistas*, 140-142. While in a later interview with the *Sol de México* (28 November 1975) he acknowledged the power of novels such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to affect public opinion, he added: “The novel is not the best vehicle [*modo*] for denunciation, nor the best vehicle for social action” (*Entrevistas*, 306).

- ⁷⁸ Elena Poniatowska, “Sociólogo e historiador además de gran escritor: Alejo Carpentier, el hijo pródigo” (1959), in *Palabras Cruzadas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2013), 221-246.
- ⁷⁹ Roa Bastos to Fuentes, 20 June 1967, Carlos Fuentes Papers (C0790).
- ⁸⁰ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), trans. by Kathleen Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 10-11; Thomas Carlyle, “Dr. Francia” (1843) in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, volume 4 (Chicago: American Bookmart, 1869), 205-263.
- ⁸¹ Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, trans. by Helen Lane (New York: Vintage, 1986), 65, 192-202, and 412-413.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 194 and 32.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 133 and 271-272.
- ⁸⁴ Sarmiento, *Facundo*, 91-93.
- ⁸⁵ Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, 284-285.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29; for the original see, *Yo el Supremo* (Madrid: Real Academia Española/Alfaguara, 2017), 39.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 197-201.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 435; for the original, see *Yo el Supremo*, 620.
- ⁸⁹ The etymology of the English “complex” draws on the Latin *complexus*, literally “plaited together”: *com*-together; *plexus*-plaited (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The Latin *complex*, in turn is the root of the English “complice” or “accomplice.” For more on complicity as folded-together-ness, see the introductions to Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and Debarati Sanyal’s *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).
- ⁹⁰ Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, 265.
- ⁹¹ Daniel Balderston, “Eater-Reception and De-Composition: Worms in *Yo el Supremo*,” *MLN* 101, no. 2 (1986), 418-423.
- ⁹² Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, 415.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 427.
- ⁹⁴ Tomás Eloy Martínez, “Todo Roa Bastos,” 396.
- ⁹⁵ Arturo Uslar Pietri, *Oficio de difuntos* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976), 344.
- ⁹⁶ Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat*, trans. by Edith Grossman (New York Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 328-331 and 385-404.
- ⁹⁷ Polit Dueñas, *Cosas de hombres*, 166.
- ⁹⁸ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005) (New York: Verso, 2007), 84 and 89.