



8-2014

## Nationalism, Universality, and Globalization: Notes on the Narrative of Three Guatemalan Authors

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NATIONALISM, UNIVERSALITY, AND GLOBALIZATION: NOTES ON THE  
NARRATIVE OF THREE GUATEMALAN AUTHORS

by

Marcie Noble

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Spanish  
Western Michigan University  
August 2014

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# NATIONALISM, UNIVERSALITY, AND GLOBALIZATION: NOTES ON THE NARRATIVE OF THREE GUATEMALAN AUTHORS

Marcie Noble, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2014

This dissertation examines various works of literature produced by three Guatemalan authors: Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899-1974), Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003), and Rodrigo Rey Rosa (1958) in order to trace a trajectory in the narrative written by Guatemalans from a nationally focused literature to one that is increasingly global. The first chapter provides an overview of the study and clarifies the terminology applied throughout the dissertation. In chapter two I analyze *El Señor Presidente* (1946), *Hombres de maíz* (1949), and *Mulata de Tal* (1963) as key examples of Asturias' nationally focused works, which continually represented and mythologized Guatemala. In chapter three I concentrate on the narrative of Augusto Monterroso, with whom Guatemalan literature moves beyond the boundaries of the concept of nationhood and toward a more cosmopolitan perspective. I examine short stories, fables, essays and anecdotes from *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* (1959), *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (1969), *Movimiento perpetuo* (1972), *La palabra mágica* (1983), *La letra e* (1987), and his only novel, *Lo demás es silencio: la vida y la obra de Eduardo Torres* (1982). Finally, Rey Rosa is studied in the fourth chapter as the more global author. This is shown through the analysis of his collection of short stories *Ningún lugar sagrado*

(1998), and several novels: *El cojo bueno* (1996), *La orilla africana* (1999), *Caballeriza* (2006), and *Severina* (2011). Throughout the study, I use an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates the ideas of a wide array of scholars, including Benedict Anderson, Doris Sommer, Ulrich Beck, Ulf Hannerz, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Edward Said, and Bernat Castany Prado.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee, whose patience and thoughtful reviews of my work have challenged me, encouraged me, and been an integral part of the shaping of this project. In the beginning of this process, I understood that through my research I would be learning more about this topic than one might believe possible. But I had no inkling of the journey of self-discovery upon which I was about to embark. And I wish to express, not only to my committee members, but also to the entire department, my profound gratitude for this opportunity.

I also wish to thank my family and friends who supported me throughout my journey. Your love and understanding, hot meals, cold drinks, and general companionship have been invaluable these last several years. I am in your debt.

Marcie Noble

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II: MIGUEL ANGEL ASTURIAS .....	32
CHAPTER III: AUGUSTO MONTERROSO .....	73
CHAPTER IV: RODRIGO REY ROSA .....	126
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS .....	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	200

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Central American Literature in general and, more specific to this study, Guatemalan Literature is an area that is often underrepresented in the canon of Hispanic American letters. In a study of Masters and PhD reading lists completed by Joan L. Brown and Crista Johnson, only two Central American born authors appeared on more than fifty percent of the lists. Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío was present ninety-eight percent of the time, and Guatemalan Miguel Ángel Asturias achieved seventy-seven percent.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Guatemala has suffered through decades of civil war and strings of ruthless dictatorships made literary production difficult, and the *kind* of fiction an author was producing could also be a predicament. Many authors and critics believed that politically committed literature—literature written with the goal of revealing the problems of the writer’s era and influencing change—was the only acceptable path in the region. This discourse can be observed as early as the post-independence era. For example, Jean Franco makes reference to the literary groups that were forming in Latin America in the first half of the nineteenth century, many of which “were constituted with the deliberate intention of encouraging a national literature” and “sometimes, these circles were political as well as literary.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Franco explains that Romanticism was a dominant topic of discussion for these groups, and in Latin America Romanticism was closely associated with notions of individual freedom and nationalism: “The new literature was thus identified with political and social reform in the minds of

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<sup>1</sup> Joan L. Brown and Crista Johnson, “Required Reading: The Canon in Spanish and Spanish American Literature,” *Hispania* 81, no. 1 (March 1998): 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 46. Reference to this discourse can also be seen in the first two chapters of Franco’s *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Will H. Corral’s “General Introduction” in *The Contemporary Spanish-American Novel* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

young intellectuals who held on to these ideals during dark periods of oppression, dictatorship and civil war. In such periods, literature was sometimes the only form of activity left open to them, so that the novel and even poetry came to be regarded as instruments for attacking injustices, and for creating a sense of patriotism and civic pride.”<sup>3</sup> Narrowing the focus to the region of Central America, John Beverly has also argued that “literature was not only a means of revolutionary politics but also a model for it in Central America. Why this was the case had to do not only with the content of individual texts (i.e., with something that might be revealed by a hermeneutic or deconstructive analysis) but also with the way literature itself was positioned as a social practice by the processes of combined and uneven development in Central American history.”<sup>4</sup> Werner Mackenbach has stated even more forcefully that in Central America, “la literatura se convierte en un arma en la lucha por la liberación (nacional)” and he explains:

En esta estrecha relación entre política y literatura le es conferida a la literatura una función central en la construcción de la nación, sea en los movimientos guerrilleros como arma cultural para la realización de un proyecto nacional/social contra los vendepatrias (también en sentido cultural) ante el imperialismo del "gran hermano" del Norte, sea como proyecto de gobierno, en donde la literatura se convierte en una institución nacional.<sup>5</sup>

While evidence of political commitment has been highly valued in the isthmus, expressing commitment to a resistance movement could cost a writer his or her life. Writer/revolutionaries of Guatemala’s *Generación comprometida*, which formed after the 1954 CIA-backed coup of the left-leaning government gave way to military rule in

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<sup>3</sup> Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> John Beverly, “‘Through All Things Modern’: Second Thoughts on Testimonio,” *Boundary* 18, no. 2 (1991): 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Werner Mackenbach, “Entre política, historia y ficción. Tendencias en la narrativa centroamericana a finales del siglo XX,” *Istmo* 15 (julio-diciembre 2007), <http://istmo.denison.edu/n15/articulos/mackenbach.html>.

Guatemala, considered works that were not overtly committed to the resistance movements of Central America as flawed or of less importance. One example of this attitude is Guatemalan poet Otto René Castillo's "Intelectuales apolíticos" which warns:

Se les preguntará, / sobre lo que hicieron / cuando / la patria se apagaba /  
lentamente, / como una hoguera dulce, / pequeña y sola. . . .

Intelectuales apolíticos / de mi dulce país, / no podréis responder nada. / Os  
devorará un buitre de silencio / las entrañas. / Os roerá el alma / vuestra propia  
misericordia. / Y callaréis, / avergonzados de vosotros.<sup>6</sup>

This warning to the "apolitical intellectuals" of Guatemala clearly stems from the belief of the *Generación comprometida* that it is not enough simply to have a conscience; rather, one must act on that conscience, using his or her writing as a weapon against social injustice. In the case of Castillo, among others, this expanded into arming himself as a guerilla fighter and dying for his beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Those writers who went into exile rather than take up arms often found themselves in a position to continue writing and publishing, but in a much different atmosphere than their colleagues back home. Marc Zimmerman summarized the schism in Guatemala's intellectual life this way:

For those who have remained at home, the development of overtly radical or revolutionary literature has been difficult, and at times virtually impossible. . . . Nevertheless, still others have risked themselves to write works which, from outside their country, might well seem tepid, but are hardly so in the local context. And they might well argue that it is indeed rather easier to write radical as well as highly experimental works in the relative comfort which they take to be the lot of many exiles.

Those sympathetic to this latter position argue that while the many writers who have spent years abroad (many of them in forced or well-advised exile) have been freer to write, their knowledge of the country has faded, and almost in direct

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<sup>6</sup> Otto René Castillo, *Let's Go! / Vámonos patria a caminar*, trans. Margaret Randall (New York: Cape Goliard Press, 1971), n.p.

<sup>7</sup> See Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala: Textual Modes and Cultural Politics from El Señor Presidente to Rigoberta Menchú*, vol. 1 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995), 96. "As it turned out, many writers during the [1960s and 1970s] stepped over the invisible and ever-shifting line of tolerated middle-sector dissent, so that several of the more politically committed were disappeared and killed . . . while many others suffered harassment, persecution, discrimination, and exile."

relation to their subversive nature, their dissemination and impact within Guatemala has generally been limited. They also see the exiles' concern for cosmopolitan norms and innovations as a sign of their submission to foreign fashion and their growing uprootedness from their backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>

Zimmerman goes on to mention that some exiles have also criticized the writers residing in Guatemala of “tendencies toward provincialism, as well as inadequate attention to criticism and literary innovation.”<sup>9</sup> The “cosmopolitan norms and innovations” of exiled writers are problematic for some because they are viewed as evidence of the exiled writers turning away from or letting go of the nation, their local focus. However, a closer examination of cosmopolitanism reveals that the two are not necessarily incompatible.

Cosmopolitanism dates back to the Cynics (fourth century BC) and is generally defined as being a citizen of the cosmos or world. Kwame Anthony Appiah identifies two parts to cosmopolitanism:

One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, a cosmopolitan strives to understand the world and its peoples on a broad scale, not just to understand his immediate locale. At the same time, the cosmopolitan respects difference rather than attempting to impose any kind of universal order or sameness, which would eliminate the very object of the cosmopolitans' attention. Ulf Hannerz has also stated that cosmopolitanism “in a stricter sense includes a stance toward

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<sup>8</sup> Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance*, vol. 1, 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>10</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), xv.

diversity itself, toward the coexistence of cultures in the individual experience. A more genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other.”<sup>11</sup> He also comments on the dependence of cosmopolitans on locals: “For cosmopolitans, . . . , there is value in diversity as such, but they are not likely to get it, in anything like the present form, unless other people are allowed to carve out special niches for their cultures, and keep them. Which is to say that there can be no cosmopolitans without locals.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the notion of the cosmopolitan is not only compatible with the local, it is actually reliant on it.

A major development in the late twentieth century was the genre of *testimonio*, which became the more popular trend in Central American literary studies due to its realistic portrayal of the social and political problems faced in countries like Guatemala. Werner Mackenbach, for example, states that “los textos testimoniales fueron vistos como una parte integral de la resistencia contra las dictaduras militares.”<sup>13</sup> Other forms of testimonial narrative, such as the testimonial novel, were also emerging alongside these “textos testimoniales.” Just as the *literatura comprometida* that preceded it, testimonial literature has had clear, consistent ties to resistance movements in Central America. In *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* Linda Craft explains: “Resistance texts confront official discourse critically and harshly, offering a rewriting of that discourse.”<sup>14</sup> Looking specifically at Guatemala, one can see such a “rewriting” in

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<sup>11</sup> Ulf Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (June 1990): 239.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>13</sup> Werner Mackenbach, “Después de los pos-ismos: ¿desde qué categorías pensamos las literaturas centroamericanas contemporáneas?,” *Istmo* 8 (enero-julio 2004), [http://collaborations.denison.edu/istmo/n08/articulos/pos\\_ismos.html](http://collaborations.denison.edu/istmo/n08/articulos/pos_ismos.html).

<sup>14</sup> Linda Craft, *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997), 7.

the well-known and controversial testimony of Rigoberta Menchú.<sup>15</sup> While these expressions have been an important contribution to Central American literature and culture, the present study will consider other types of narrative coming out of the region.

Along with resistance texts like *testimonio*, the kind of fiction that has been more readily accepted in Guatemala is a nationally focused literature. Since the mid-twentieth century, the preference for the national was due to the intense and sweeping violent circumstances of life in Guatemala. When a people feels threatened and exploited by an imperialist power, it is normal for them to react with protectionism and nationalist ideas, to group together in the face of the enemy. Edward Said has commented on this phenomenon in *Culture and Imperialism*. He affirms that in a multitude of regions of the world,

natives banded together in independence and nationalist groupings that were based on a sense of identity which was ethnic, religious, or communal, and was opposed to further Western encroachment. That happened from the beginning. It became a global reality in the twentieth century because it was so widespread a reaction to the Western incursion, which had also become extraordinarily widespread; with few exceptions people banded together in asserting their resistance to what they perceived was an unjust practice against them, mainly for being what they were, i.e., non-Western.<sup>16</sup>

The Guatemalan people not only suffered from northern imperialism, but the tyranny of their own government as well. When every day is a struggle just to stay alive, it is difficult to look beyond the immediate situation much less to imagine that anything could be more important to a writer or intellectual than overtly using your writing as a weapon in the fight against a corrupt and violent dictatorship. Many of those who chose the path of exile naturally focused their attention on the nation they had lost. This is an example of

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the controversy of Menchú's text, see for example David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), and Arturo Arias' *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 218.

what Edward Said refers to when he writes, “nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages.”<sup>17</sup>

Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899-1974) of the Generation of 1920 is the first author presented in this study, and while he may not have been a nationalist in the strictest sense of the word, he focused on Guatemala during his exile and began to represent and at times mythologize that nation in his writings. His attention remained fixed on the nation of Guatemala throughout his career, and his body of work is an example of national literature. Bernat Castany Prado defines national literature as that in which there is an underlying national worldview: “Podemos llamar «nacional» a aquel tipo de obras literarias que incluyen de forma implícita una cosmovisión nacionalista. Serán obras que suelen considerar que la propia nación es la única realidad de la que deben y pueden dar cuenta; que cada cultura o sociedad nacional es autosuficiente; o que la responsabilidad moral no tiene más alcance que el que marcan las fronteras de su propio país.”<sup>18</sup> Of course he also notes that national literature is not necessarily nationalist. The distinguishing factor between the two is that nationalist literature not only maintains that its own nation is the only universe of discourse, but also seeks to diffuse among its readers this particular way of conceiving the world and identity. This study does not propose that Asturias wrote nationalist works, as this would imply that he produced propaganda rather than literature. Following Castany Prado’s statement that “toda literatura es hoy día nacional y posnacional a la vez y sólo podemos realizar

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 176.

<sup>18</sup> Bernat Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2007), 168.

distinciones en función de las proporciones de elementos nacionales o posnacionales que aparezcan en cada obra,” when Asturias’ works are described here as national, it is not meant to indicate that they contain *only* national features, but rather that such characteristics are prominent.<sup>19</sup>

Asturias initially left Guatemala after having been detained a handful of times for his participation in student-led protest movements and for publishing controversial articles in various newspapers. In 1920, the dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera fell from power after more than two decades, but Guatemala did not stabilize. Another dictator, José María Orellana, was in power in late 1923 when Asturias traveled by boat to England and later moved on to Paris. Over his lifetime, Asturias would travel almost continually, spending time intermittently in Guatemala, France, and Spain, with more brief visits to countless other countries around the globe. His longest period in Guatemala after his initial departure began in 1933 during the rule of General Jorge Ubico (1931-1944). Asturias left for Mexico in 1945, after Ubico’s fall from power and the October Revolution that would mark the beginning of a decade of rule in Guatemala called the Democratic Spring (1944-1954). During this decade, Asturias held government posts—from cultural attaché to ambassador—in various different countries. He held one government position after that—Guatemalan Ambassador to France (1966-1970) under the moderate Revolutionary Party President Julio César Méndez Montenegro—a fact that greatly disillusioned younger leftist revolutionary generations. Asturias witnessed his country suffer a seemingly endless series of overthrows and dictatorships. He never was able to settle in Guatemala and upon his death he was buried in Paris in accordance with his wishes.

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<sup>19</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 167.

Asturias is the most well-known Guatemalan novelist and is important to this study for two reasons. One is that he was the first Guatemalan to achieve recognition around the world for his writing and the second is that he always focused on Guatemala and the Guatemalan people in his works. He wrote with the goal of imagining and portraying a national Guatemalan identity. In *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias* Saúl Hurtado Heras points out that in the current age globalization, the categories once commonly used to sort out things like one's culture or identity are much more nebulous now than they were in Asturias' lifetime.<sup>20</sup> His desire to define Guatemala certainly stems in part from the country's precarious political situation, which amplified the instability of the national identity. The author's exile is also an important factor in this instability. According to Said, the condition of exile denies an identity to the people who experience it.<sup>21</sup> In this context, it is not at all surprising that Asturias and his compatriots (and other Latin Americans) that were uprooted and sought refuge from the cruel regimes of their homeland were interested in establishing their identity through their art.

Benedict Anderson states that the printing press and increased accessibility to printed material was fundamental in people's ability to imagine themselves as part of a community.<sup>22</sup> It makes sense, then, that printed material continues to play a major role in the formation of national consciousness, at least for the literate population.<sup>23</sup> Anderson also points out an interesting example of the impact of the printed word on a small group

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<sup>20</sup> Saúl Hurtado Heras, *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias: Una revisión crítica* (México: UAEM, 2006), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 46.

<sup>23</sup> The potential problems that this theory brings up in a country such as Guatemala (where there is a high rate of illiteracy as well as twenty three officially recognized indigenous languages spoken in addition to Spanish) will be addressed in the second chapter.

of intellectuals. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the history of Ancient Greece was being made available in printed form.

This ‘past’ became increasingly accessible to a small number of young Greek-speaking Christian intellectuals, most of whom had studied or traveled outside the confines of the Ottoman Empire. Exalted by the philhellenism at the centres of Western European civilization, they undertook the ‘debarbarizing’ of the modern Greeks, i.e., their transformation into beings worthy of Pericles and Socrates.<sup>24</sup>

Asturias, a well-traveled Guatemalan intellectual, was doing something similar in *Hombres de maíz* (1949). Having worked with Georges Raynaud in translating the *Popol Vuh* as well as the *Anales de los Xahil* during his time in Paris, Asturias was inspired to write *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930). It was with that text that he first began to re-present the indigenous people of Guatemala. Later in *Hombres de maíz* he would once again argue for recognition of the indigenous culture by Guatemala’s *ladino* population, hoping that through acceptance they might form a better nation.

Chapter two of this study examines three novels by Asturias: *El Señor Presidente* (1946), *Hombres de maíz* (1949) and *Mulata de Tal* (1963). The analysis reveals them to be akin to foundational fictions, works written in order to provide a vehicle for the search for a national Guatemalan identity.<sup>25</sup> By focusing on the key human relationships in each narrative, readers will understand that the health of these relationships is representative of the health of the nation. The relationships also often reflect attempts to bind together disparate elements of society, providing a vision of unity for a diverse nation that does not become reality. While all of Asturias’ works have Guatemala at their core, the first two of the novels examined in this study—*El Señor Presidente* (1946) and *Hombres de maíz* (1949)—contain the suggestion of a vision of a unified Guatemalan nation. The

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 72.

<sup>25</sup> The term “foundational fictions” refers to the work of Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

third work to be addressed is *Mulata de Tal* (1963). In this novel the focus, while still being on Guatemala, maintains none of the remnants of the possibility of a united Guatemala. Asturias highlights the problems that stand in the way of the formation of a successful nation in all three of the novels, but while *El Señor Presidente* and *Hombres de maíz* both have endings that leave open the possibility of a united Guatemala, *Mulata de Tal* reveals a dark image of the author's homeland in which that possibility is consistently denied.

The third chapter shifts the attention of this study to Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003). He was part of Guatemala's Generation of 1940/Grupo Acento, a group of young Guatemalan intellectuals who founded the magazine *Acento* and were active in both the political and literary realms. They came together in protest of the Jorge Ubico dictatorship (1931-1944). Monterroso was detained in 1944 because of his involvement in these activities. After escaping custody, he sought asylum in the Mexican Embassy and quickly fled Guatemala for Mexico. During Guatemala's Democratic Spring (1944-1954), which began later that same year, Monterroso held government positions in various Latin American countries. When the 1954 CIA-supported coup ousted the Árbenz government and ended the Democratic Spring, Monterroso found himself moving from one country to another for several years, and he finally settled in Mexico in 1956 until his death in 2003.

While the focus of Asturias' works is on the local and is presented from a fairly local perspective, with Augusto Monterroso one begins to see Guatemalan literature move beyond the boundaries of the concept of nationhood and toward a more cosmopolitan perspective. One key difference between him and Asturias is that

Monterroso is not as direct with his commentary. His writings tend to have a certain ambiguity of place and time, an extraterritorial quality in contrast with Asturias' obvious setting of his works in Guatemala. Monterroso was also different from Asturias in the sense that, while the issues in his home country were important to him—and his opinions strong enough to get him arrested—he frequently spoke of the notion that his main responsibility as a writer was not to Guatemala, but rather it was to write well. Jorge von Ziegler explains just that in his prologue to Monterroso's *Viaje al centro de la fábula*:

La literatura, para Monterroso, no existe para remediar la pobreza, los vicios o la injusticia del mundo, sino para alimentar la imaginación. En la esfera práctica, la literatura es cabalmente inútil; en la de la mente y las necesidades psíquicas, una eficaz “fábrica de sueños”. El compromiso del escritor es de naturaleza artística: con las palabras y la lengua, con el valor literario, antes que con la moral o con la política. Monterroso no niega el contenido político o social de toda literatura, sino la preeminencia que ciertas tendencias quieren adjudicarle dentro de la producción literaria. Monterroso no ha estado solo en Latinoamérica; pertenece a la corriente renovadora que, ante nuestro realismo tradicional, creador de una vasta literatura de tesis y denuncia, buena y mala, buscó otras vías en la imaginación y el experimento verbal.<sup>26</sup>

This reflects Monterroso's point of view, as expressed in many interviews and essays, that an author's main concern should be his craft. It also touches on the important work that Monterroso did in terms of narrative experimentation, which will be examined in the third chapter.

Monterroso's body of work received belated recognition and has been difficult to classify. As Francisca Noguerol Jiménez points out in her exhaustive study of satire in the author's narrative, “su obra ha recibido los más diversos (y contradictorios) calificativos” and among them, she notes that the term “universal” is frequently applied

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<sup>26</sup> Jorge von Ziegler, “Presentación,” in *Viaje al centro de la fábula* (Mexico: Biblioteca Era, 1989), 11.

in attempts to catalogue Monterroso's style.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, different critics attach diverse meanings to the term, which some perceive as positive and others as negative. For example Juan Antonio Masoliver states: "Tal vez sea peligroso, ofensivo y verdad decir que Monterroso está más cerca de la literatura sudamericana (Borges, Cortázar, incluso algunas ideas de Sábato) que de la centroamericana. La coherencia de sus lecturas nace de una concepción humanista de la cultura, de su convencimiento del valor universal por encima, aunque no necesariamente al margen, de los dictados del tiempo."<sup>28</sup> It is perhaps due to this type of assessment of Monterroso's work that Masoliver also is quick to point out in the same 1984 article the "escaso conocimiento que hasta ahora se tenía de este verdadero clásico."<sup>29</sup> The fact that Monterroso was producing neither overtly political nor lengthy "boom" style works certainly played a part in the early lack of critical recognition. Francisco Albizúrez Palma asserted in 1983 that Monterroso was "el cuentista guatemalteco que más tempranamente rompió con el modelo criollista y se insertó en la preocupación universalista propia de muchos narradores centroamericanos contemporáneos,"<sup>30</sup> and Sergio Ramírez describes Monterroso's *Obras completas* as "el libro que fija en forma definitiva, el abandono de los amarres vernáculos para el cuento centroamericano y lo coloca en una perspectiva universal."<sup>31</sup> Ramírez sees Monterroso's perspective as a boon to his region's literature because it takes the bourgeois writer out of the paternalistic role of writing the lives of the marginalized *campesinos* and *indios*.

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<sup>27</sup> Francisca Noguero Jiméñez, *La trampa en la sonrisa: Sátira en la narrativa de Augusto Monterroso* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1995), 38.

<sup>28</sup> Juan Antonio Masoliver Ródenas, "Augusto Monterroso o la tradición subversiva," in *Refracción: Augusto Monterroso ante la crítica*, ed. Will H. Corral (México: Ediciones Era, 1995), 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Francisco Albizúrez Palma, *Grandes momentos de la literatura guatemalteca* (Guatemala: José de Piñeda Ibarra, 1983), 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> Sergio Ramírez, "La narrativa centroamericana," *Repertorio* 6, no. 15 (1970): 12. Other examples appear in Dante Liano's *Ensayos de literatura guatemalteca* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 1992), 56.

Mark Zimmerman has commented on Monterroso's "all-but-mediocre 'universalist' mode of writing [that] has caused many critics to misconceive or underplay the social dimension of his work."<sup>32</sup> Zimmerman's use of quotation marks around universalist in this statement reveals his uneasiness with the term, and with good reason. Universalist is not the best way to describe Monterroso's mode of writing because at the very least it implies general similarity, a resemblance across the board with no particularities, no discerning characteristics, or to borrow from Zimmerman, mediocrity. Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek address some of the problems of the concepts of the universal and the particular in their respective chapters of *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. Butler speaks of "the use of the doctrine of universality in the service of colonialism and imperialism" noting that "the fear, of course, is that what is named as universal is the parochial property of dominant culture, and the 'universalizability' is indissociable from imperial expansion."<sup>33</sup> Jesús Martín-Barbero also addresses the concept of universality in *Al sur de la modernidad*, reflecting upon "las secretas complicidades entre el sentido de lo *universal* que puso en marcha la Ilustración y la globalización civilizatoria que el etnocentrismo occidental ha hecho pasar por universal."<sup>34</sup> This negative interpretation of the term reveals the potential criticism in its application to Monterroso's body of work.

In addition, both Butler and Žižek speak of the concept of competing universalities where "each particular position, in order to articulate itself, involves the

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<sup>32</sup> Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance*, vol. 1, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Al sur de la modernidad: Comunicación, globalización y multiculturalidad* (Pittsburgh, PA: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Universidad de Pittsburgh, 2001), 117.

(implicit or explicit) assertion of *its own mode of* universality.”<sup>35</sup> There is no true universal, but rather what is perceived as universal by one group will not be understood as such by another. These views on what constitutes the universal reveal how the phrase “universal literature” can be interpreted as literature written according to the tastes of the European or North American center and excluding the Latin American periphery. Because of the instability of the term, Monterroso is better described as cosmopolitan in this study. What some critics perceive as his “universality” is in fact the hybrid nature of Monterroso’s works and his extraterritorial narrative style, both of which are indicators of his cosmopolitan vision. The term cosmopolitan is well-suited to describe Monterroso’s works as he obviously pays attention to his country (and countrymen), but is also engaged with the rest of the world in all its diversity, and his literature reflects these cosmopolitan ideals.

Monterroso’s experimentation with and mixing of different genres—the fable, the memoir/fictional narrative combination and the apocryphal “biography” of Eduardo Torres, to name a few—are testaments to his taste for the cosmopolitan. The hybridization of genres will be an important part of the discussion of Monterroso and will extend somewhat into Rey Rosa as it reveals the “contamination” of literature as a trait that is on the rise. Appiah uses the word contamination ironically to describe the mixing of different concepts and ideas, which in the end produce something positive. In one interview he stated that “great civilizations and great cultural moments are usually the result not of purity but of the contamination and combination of ideas to produce new

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<sup>35</sup> *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, 315.

things.”<sup>36</sup> The fable, for example, rooted in Greek/Latin antiquity, is an illuminating mode of narration that Monterroso employs to make indirect statements about the condition of the world in which he lives. He uses irony to point out the violent nature of human beings while he disguises them as animals. Nowhere in the fables does he state that he is referring specifically to any location or time in particular, of course, and this ambiguity is the essence of his cosmopolitan nature.

In this way, he embodies what García Canclini calls attention to in his study of Luis Cardoza y Aragón’s essay “¿Qué es ser guatemalteco?”<sup>37</sup> García Canclini writes that Cardoza y Aragón’s text “se movía entre los dos precipicios donde hoy se tambalea América Latina: habló de la ‘universalidad’ como condición para que el nacionalismo no sea una ‘idiotez’.”<sup>38</sup> Cardoza y Aragón was a contemporary of Asturias but he was the exception in his time, going against the current in which his fellow writers produced their works, and he was not recognized on the world stage in the same way that Asturias had been with the Nobel Prize for literature. As García Canclini implied, Cardoza y Aragón was already beginning to recognize what the future of Latin American literature would hold. He was more focused on essay than novel and in particular he is known for his autobiographical works which by their very nature lend themselves more to reflection on reality than to the imagination of a unified nation. Rather than be seen as representative of his era, Cardoza y Aragón must be identified as an atypical twentieth century Guatemalan author who consistently fought for peace and democracy for Guatemala,

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<sup>36</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Appiah: Cosmopolitanism,” in *Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Astra Taylor (New York: The New Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>37</sup> Luis Cardoza y Aragón, *El río: novelas de caballería* (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 1986), 785-793.

<sup>38</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002), 20-21.

while at the same time maintaining that “los nacionalismos han originado tantos crímenes, tantas limitaciones, tantos nulos anhelos.”<sup>39</sup>

Monterroso, like Cardoza y Aragón, resists the temptation to see the supposed universal and the national, or the global and the local as mutually exclusive concepts. In addition, Monterroso does not feel the need to signal his home country as the focus of his writing. The problem of violence is, after all, one which occurs on the local level all across the globe. In *La letra e* (1987), Monterroso recalls having been asked to what degree the social, cultural and political circumstances in which he had lived had influenced his writing. His answer perfectly encompasses his commitment to Guatemala as well as his cosmopolitanism. He explains that the situation in Guatemala (the Ubico dictatorship) and that of the world (the Second World War) during his adolescence...

contribuyeron sin duda a que actualmente piense como pienso y responda al momento presente en la forma en que lo hago . . . y mis reacciones como individuo siguen siendo las de una profunda preocupación por la suerte de mi pueblo y mi país. . . . *cuando escribo me considero producto de estas dos vertientes: el acontecer político, y la aguda conciencia de que soy heredero de dos mil quinientos años de literatura occidental y, atávicamente, de otros tantos de nuestras culturas autóctonas.*<sup>40</sup>

In the third chapter, various short stories from *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* (1959), fables from *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (1969), essays and anecdotes from *Movimiento perpetuo* (1972), *La palabra mágica* (1983), and *La letra e* (1987), as well as his novel *Lo demás es silencio: la vida y la obra de Eduardo Torres* (1982) are analyzed to further illustrate these tendencies. Monterroso is an example of a major step toward a

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<sup>39</sup> Cardoza y Aragón, *El río*, 785.

<sup>40</sup> Augusto Monterroso, *La letra e* (México: Biblioteca Era, 1987), 129-130 (emphasis added). It is interesting to note here that Monterroso felt compelled in this interview to defend his commitment to Guatemala. It points to the fact that he had been criticized and his dedication questioned.

global perspective, a cosmopolitan who bridges the gap between Asturias and Rey Rosa, leading the way toward the global trend to follow in Guatemalan literature.

The fourth chapter deals with the more globally minded writings of Rodrigo Rey Rosa (b. 1958). By his own account, Rey Rosa traveled considerably as a boy with his parents and at age eighteen he spent a year traveling in Europe, returned to Guatemala for about a year and then left again for New York. He explains it this way in a 2001 interview: “I came to New York, really because I didn’t want to live in Guatemala anymore. . . . As you know, it was a very bad time to be in Guatemala—it was 1979.”<sup>41</sup> He goes on to explain his various migrations between New York, Morocco, Colombia, Spain, and eventually back to Guatemala in the mid 1990s. Violence was prevalent in Guatemala throughout Rey Rosa’s childhood, and it was gaining momentum in the late seventies and early eighties. This undoubtedly was the reason for his departure, and the fact that his mother was kidnapped and held for six months in 1981 by an anonymous group, which could have been from either side of the conflict, certainly reinforced his decision of self-imposed exile.

Rey Rosa has been viewed in Guatemala as a traveling writer, as evidenced in an interview from October of 2011 posted in the Guatemalan literary blog Los Buc Buc. When asked “¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia en Guatemala como un escritor viajero?” the author replies with a laugh, “Parece que una vez que uno viaja, en Guatemala creen que sigue viajando eternamente. Todavía me preguntan hoy, después de casi 15 años de estar aquí, que si ya estoy de vuelta en Guatemala.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, Rey Rosa returned to Guatemala

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<sup>41</sup> “Placing the Placeless: a Conversation with Rodrigo Rey Rosa,” by Jeffrey Gray, *A contra corriente* 4, no. 2 (2007): 163.

<sup>42</sup> “Entrevista a Rodrigo Rey Rosa,” *Los Buc Buc* (blog), October 21, 2011, [http://losbucbuc.blogspot.com/2011/10/entrevista-rodrigo-rey-rosa\\_21.html](http://losbucbuc.blogspot.com/2011/10/entrevista-rodrigo-rey-rosa_21.html).

in the late 1990s, and in various interviews and statements he has spoken about the concept of the “Guatemalan author.” One example is found in the television documentary “Tierra caliente, la Guatemala de Rodrigo Rey Rosa” in which he participated for the RTVE series *Esta es mi tierra*. He shares that he is often asked whether he considers himself a Guatemalan autor, “Cuando me preguntan, y es una pregunta que me hacen con cierta frecuencia, bien o mal intencionadamente, si me considero escritor guatemalteco, me pregunto ¿a qué Guatemala se refieren?” and he admits, “prefiero considerarme como una especie de turista o viajero crónico, y así me siento más o menos fuera de lugar en cualquier parte sobre la superficie de la tierra.”<sup>43</sup>

It is true that Rey Rosa has written and published many of his works while traveling and/or residing outside of his birth country. He also sets many of his works outside of Guatemala, and includes characters from numerous parts of the world that are often somehow displaced or transient. *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998) and *La orilla africana* (1999) are two important examples. Many of his characters, even those present in narrative set in Guatemala, are often living outside of their home country. In the short stories of *Ningún lugar sagrado* the majority of his characters are people on the move: homeless people, foreign exchange students and immigrants all living in New York City. In *La orilla africana* the main character is a Colombian tourist in Morocco who is doing everything he can to not return home. Such examples of deterritorialization are evidence that Rey Rosa is dealing with local issues from a global perspective, and that for him the local is not only Guatemala, but can be any place.

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<sup>43</sup> At 32:40-34:03 min. of “Tierra caliente, la Guatemala de Rodrigo Rey Rosa,” *Esta es mi tierra* RTVE video series, 45:55, February 12, 2010, <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/esta-es-mi-tierra/esta-tierra-tierra-caliente-guatemala-rodrigo-rey-rosa/691887/>.

Rey Rosa's literary production is an example of what Bernat Castany Prado terms "mundialismo literario" in that it represents not so much a national (local) society as a world (global) society.<sup>44</sup> The local is not lost in the notion of globality, however, as local and global are in constant dialogue and cannot exist separately. The local is decidedly present in Rey Rosa's works, as is the concept of the nation, but is represented from a global rather than a local perspective in this type of narrative. Castany Prado also refers to the dislocated or uprooted man or woman as the most habitual character in what he calls post-national literature, and Rey Rosa's main characters certainly meet this description as well, although for this study the term global literature is preferred over Castany Prado's term "post-national" as it places emphasis on the global nature of the phenomenon rather than the erosion of the national.<sup>45</sup>

Another important contribution to the study of the recent narrative from Latin America comes from Aníbal González, in his introduction to a series of articles born out of a 2009 conference hosted by the Yale University Department of Spanish and Portuguese. In "Más allá de la nación en la literatura y la crítica latinoamericana del siglo XXI" González notes that the idea for the symposium came about through the readings of those involved in its creation: "Al leer una variedad de obras de ficción en prosa latinoamericanas de la última década, nos pareció que un rasgo común que se hacía más frecuente en todas ellas era la disminución, marginación, o incluso la desaparición de ambientes, personajes y situaciones derivados de las diversas naciones latinoamericanas y, en cambio, el privilegio que se le daba en ellas a ambientes, personajes y situaciones

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<sup>44</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 225. It is important to remember that although "mundialismo" might look like globalism, I prefer the term globality, as the other could be confused or associated with imperialism.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

provenientes de otras partes del globo.”<sup>46</sup> The phenomenon was already appearing in Rodrigo Rey Rosa’s works just before the turn of the twenty first century. They fit the description that González elaborates regarding other authors such as Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, Roberto Bolaño y Cristina Rivera Garza, in whose works “parece manifestarse no un simple afán de cosmopolitismo, ni mucho menos de escapismo, sino una voluntad de explorar e incorporar espacios y mentalidades alejados de la realidad nacional de los autores y no determinados por ella.”<sup>47</sup> González, like Castany Prado, refers to this type of narrative as post-national, since the authors refuse to be limited by their national origin, and deliberately seek points of contact with other literary and cultural traditions.

It is not necessary for the entire body of work of a particular writer to be set in foreign countries or to ignore the author’s country of origin in order for it to be considered a global or, in the words of the above scholars, “post-national” literature. In this study, the descriptor “global” stems from the fact that such authors do not restrict themselves to autochthonous themes and do not write in order to participate in nation-building activities such as the shaping of national myths or identities. On the contrary, they reflect the reality of a global society that is comprised of people from all walks of life and from all corners of the world, and who are living in increasingly close contact with one another. The representation of such interplay between groups in Rey Rosa’s works often reveals a strong critique of the national in general, and frequently of his own nation as well. The travelers, migrants, and otherwise uprooted individuals who inhabit these narrations are the keys to understanding the global perspective of his body of work.

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<sup>46</sup> Aníbal González, ‘Introducción’ in “Más allá de la nación en la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XXI,” *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 46, no.1 (2012): 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

Whereas Asturias represents the national, Monterroso demonstrates the first signs of a widening or opening up of literature by Guatemalans that in turn influences later writings by a global author such as Rey Rosa. The short stories and novels Rey Rosa has authored take place in many different parts of the world and include a host of characters of diverse nationalities, many of whom are on a journey. They may be travelers, tourists, exiles, ex-patriots, or migrants, and their presence is suggestive of the global perspective of Rey Rosa's body of work. Rey Rosa is not writing consistently about Guatemala from abroad, as Asturias did, nor does he propose a national Guatemalan identity in his writings. He handles Guatemalans and issues specific to Guatemala at times, but he also examines the rest of the citizens of this world, many of whom are living outside of their home countries for varying reasons, and all of whom are interacting with other cultures. His stories and novels are set in various parts of the world, and he is specific about where they are, not ambiguous like Monterroso. The effects of globalization shape his view of the world and therefore his literary production is more global. This study will include analysis of several of Rey Rosa's novels, *El cojo bueno* (1996), *La orilla africana* (1999), *Caballeriza* (2006), and *Severina* (2011), as well as the collection of short stories *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998). These works are representative of Rey Rosa's style and they reveal his evolution as a writer over the last two decades.

The perceived need for a local, autochthonous focus against the idea of foreign influence has been a point of polarization in the history of Latin America and its literature, and it remains a topic of interest today. While in the mid-nineteenth century Domingo Sarmiento was in favor of Argentina imitating the United States and adopting the bourgeois ideals of Europe, later in that century, Latin American countries' status as

peripheral entities led some intellectuals to focus inward and find value in the autochthonous, while simultaneously criticizing the center. José Martí's essay "Nuestra América" (1891) was written just a few years prior to the start of the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). In it, the author stresses the need for Latin Americans to unite against North American and European imperialism. Also apparent to Martí was the need to create independent Latin American nations using autochthonous ideas rather than imported ones. In *Ariel* (1900), José Enrique Rodó outlined a case for inclusion of some non-autochthonous ideas, indeed a mix of the best of different groups or cultures. At the same time, Rodó was against imitation, which he feared would lead to a de-latinization of the hemisphere. Nearly a century later, Roberto Fernández Retamar wrote *Calibán* (1971) in defense of the Cuban Revolution. In this essay, Fernández Retamar expounds on the perception of Latin American countries as mere echoes of the metropolis and he criticizes the writings of intellectuals such as Jorge Luis Borges as re-creations of European texts, which perpetuate that problem. For him, socialism was the future of Latin America because it was what distinguished it from the North.

Many Latin American countries, including Guatemala, were drawn into the Cold War and waged their own attacks on communism, forcing out the left-leaning intelligentsia and paving the way for neoliberalism. As the Cold War ended and neoliberal economic policies came into play in the region, Latin America began to experience an intense period of globalization. Jean Franco points out that in the 1990s, "the intelligentsia would find it difficult to reimagine forms of resistance for they could no longer assume a position as sharpshooter from the outside. The separation between inside and outside the state was now as obsolete as the simple binary alternatives of the

Cold War itself.”<sup>48</sup> In recent years, Latin America has seen a resurgence of leaders from the left, but this has not halted the process of globalization.<sup>49</sup>

In *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion and Change*, the authors refer to globalization as “a shorthand term for [the] big forces that act . . . above and beyond the level of the nation-state, and above and through international institutions, bypassing national borders to affect local actors.”<sup>50</sup> They go on to state that “Central America’s revolutions, regime changes, economic development strategies, evolving classes, worsening social problems, and persistent poverty in recent decades all reveal the impact of the global upon the local.”<sup>51</sup> Another excellent portrayal of the impact of globalization on Central America comes from William I. Robinson in *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change and Globalization*. For Robinson, a systematic understanding of globalization is a key to understanding the world today, and globalization has exercised underlying structural causality in Central America’s recent history.

Around the world, with few exceptions, the underlying structural dynamic of each country and region in recent decades has been the breakup of national economic, political, and social systems—reciprocal to the breakup of a pre-globalization nation-state based world order—and the emergence of new economic, political, and social structures as each nation and region becomes integrated into emergent transnational structures. . . . The transitions in Central America are best viewed from this structural perspective rather than through an analysis of the surface political dynamics of the end of the Cold War or more temporal considerations of strategies of revolution and counterrevolution. Economic globalization, and the

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<sup>48</sup> Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed analysis of the so-called “left turn” in Latin America, see Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, eds., *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). In their introduction titled “Latin America’s ‘Left Turn,’” the editors assert that as of 2010 Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Paraguay and El Salvador all had democratically elected Left governments (Table I.1, 20). It should also be noted that since that study was published, Perú elected a left leaning president, Ollanta Humala.

<sup>50</sup> John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America: global forces, rebellion and change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

transnationalization of states, classes, political processes, and civil society that it involves, signals elemental change in the referent points of each national society and in the boundaries between the national and the transnational. As the region has experienced globalization it has undergone a transition to a new transnational model of society reciprocal to changes that have taken place in the global system.<sup>52</sup>

Regarding Guatemala specifically, writer Mario Roberto Morales illustrates many of the changes occurring in his country due to globalization, but he adds that it “does not end the traditional or the local, but it does transform and refunctionalize them to the point that they may become unrecognizable.”<sup>53</sup> Morales is speaking to the changes he sees on a local level which are influenced by increased globalization, but also the hybridization that occurs when local and global cultures come into contact. This study takes a similar stance, understanding that globalization is changing culture, although not through a process of homogenization. Instead, different cultures are experiencing more contact and are mutually influencing each other in the process. Hybridization is similar to Appiah’s idea of contamination, which he uses in a positive sense to describe how, as different cultures come into contact and enter into a dialogue, each one is changed by the other.<sup>54</sup> It is also reminiscent of transculturation, which Angel Rama understood as an alternative to *regionalismo* in Latin American narrative. However, Rama’s idea of transculturation supposes a synthesis of the cultures in question as opposed to a heterogeneous mixing. For this reason, I prefer the term hybrid.

Speaking more generally on globalization, Ulrich Beck defines it as an “escape from the categories of the national state” but he also tells his readers that it is a *process*

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<sup>52</sup> William I. Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization* (London: Verso, 2003), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Mario Roberto Morales, “Autochthonous Cultures and the Global Market,” in *Latin America Writes Back: postmodernity in the periphery*, ed. Emil Volek (New York: Routledge, 2002), 141.

<sup>54</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 101-113.

and not just a phenomenon that is springing up on its own. It also means “world society *without a world state and without world government*” and “denationalization – that is, erosion of the national state, but also its possible transformation into a transnational state.”<sup>55</sup> The process of globalization has a cultural as well as an economic and political impact. Beck distinguishes globalization from globality when he points out that where globalization is a process, globality is the idea that, like it or not, we (all of us on this planet) are all connected:

From now on, nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event; all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world, and we must reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a ‘local-global’ axis. Globality, understood this way, denotes the new situation of the second modernity.<sup>56</sup>

Beck’s idea of an axis may be imagined as a coordinate system where the x and y axes represent local and global respectively. This allows for more complex analysis of the local and global qualities of an artefact. It can show a work as both local and global to varying degrees rather than limit it to an either-or scenario.

Similarly, Roland Robertson has suggested that the concept of “glocalization” be introduced into social theory in order to transcend the polarity of the idea of local versus global:

There is a widespread tendency to regard this problematic as straightforwardly involving a polarity, which assumes its most acute form in the claim that we live in a world of local assertions *against* globalizing trends, a world in which the very idea of locality is sometimes cast as a form of opposition or resistance to the hegemonically global (or one in which the assertion of ‘locality’ or *Gemeinschaft* is seen as the pitting of subaltern ‘universals’ against the ‘hegemonic universal’ of dominant cultures and/or classes.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), 1, 11, 13 and 14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>57</sup> Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 29.

For Robertson, the term glocalization reflects his view that “the concept of globalization has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or – in more abstract vein – the universal and the particular” (30). The process of globalization has affected Guatemalan literary production, making it more global, but the increase in globality does not imply an automatic decrease in the realm of the local. In other words, the local and the global do not displace one another, but can appear simultaneously in a work and each one to varying degrees.

This dissertation focuses on the increasing globality of Guatemalan literature through an analysis of the works of three Guatemalan authors. Asturias’ nationally focused works continually represent the country of Guatemala, and any reference to the world beyond those national boundaries is rare; Monterroso’s cosmopolitan vision portrays both the local and the global through extraterritorial narrations; and Rey Rosa is the contemporary global author whose works epitomize the global interconnectedness of the world’s many locales. It is the scale and intensity of the current state of globalization that takes the trajectory from a cosmopolitan perspective in Monterroso to a global one in Rey Rosa. Monterroso’s cosmopolitanism is exemplified in the ambiguity of his narration, or extraterritoriality, in that specific locations are rarely referenced, and the reader is free to imagine the setting. On the other hand, Rey Rosa is very specific about location in his works, whether it be Guatemala or a myriad other locales, in a deterritorialized way. He is always precise about the varied nationalities of the characters he has created, and who are interacting with one another on their journeys, thereby emphasizing the global perspective of his narration.

Globalization in one's personal life is referred to by Beck as "place polygamy" and he asserts that "[t]ransnational place polygamy, marriage to several places at once, belonging in different worlds: this is the gateway to globality in one's own life; it leads to the globalization of biography."<sup>58</sup> This can be seen in all three of our authors (who have all lived in exile and been transient in their lives) but their literary production is different in each case. In other words, the fact that these authors have lived in exile or spent significant stretches of time in many foreign countries, does not automatically mean increased globality or a decreased presence of the local in their works. In his essay "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said explains that exiles differ based on the era in which they are experienced, "the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration."<sup>59</sup> This age to which Said refers is the age of globalization. Although all three of the authors included here have lived considerable years of their lives outside of Guatemala and have traveled extensively, their experiences of exile have translated quite differently. Being a writer in exile in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world has an impact on each author's writing in sometimes similar and at other times dissimilar ways.

As globalization has expanded, the way exile has affected these authors has changed. Asturias, for example, spent his time in France studying his own country and its indigenous peoples from the outside. As an outsider in Paris, he was able to fully

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<sup>58</sup> Beck, *What is Globalization?*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 174.

experience his Guatemalan identity in a new way. This phenomenon is described by Edouard Glissant in terms of the migration of French Caribbean people to France:

It is very often only in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeanness; an awareness that is all the more disturbing and unliveable, since the individual so possessed by the feeling of identity cannot, however, manage to return to his origins (there he will find that the situation is intolerable, his colleagues irresponsible; they will find him too *assimilé*, too European in his ways, etc.), and he will have to *migrate again*.<sup>60</sup>

Asturias was similarly influenced by his time in Paris and in fact did not return home in any permanent sense, perhaps in part because of the repercussions of migration described by Glissant. Another possible factor is the political situation at the time in Guatemala, which would negatively impact his reception there. The exotic nature of his works, which he mined from the struggles of his homeland and the Mayan people's worldview, provided him relative success in Europe. Additionally, Asturias did accept a controversial political appointment later in life which caused him to fall out of favor with the left.

In the case of Monterroso, who spent most of his life in Mexico, it is not as clear in many of his writings that his experience of exile reinforced his Guatemalan identity. Monterroso's extraterritorial narrative style makes it possible, on the one hand, to imagine that the story could be taking place almost anywhere, that the events could be happening to practically anyone. On the other hand, this style that some mistakenly call "universality" can be perceived as a lack of political commitment to Guatemala on the author's part. In this study, this phenomenon will be identified in Monterroso as cosmopolitanism in order to better clarify the complexity of his work. Another related characteristic in Monterroso is the hybrid nature of his works. Part of his uniqueness as a writer of his era was his experimentation with hybrid genres. Monterroso placed different

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<sup>60</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 23.

literary forms, and in that sense different cultures, into conversation with one another. This is another sign of his cosmopolitanism and is a tendency that continues and flourishes in Rodrigo Rey Rosa.

The greatest examples of the influence of the current state of globalization are in the narrative of Rey Rosa, who has lived in a time where the process of globalization has greatly intensified, and therefore experienced it more fully than the previous two authors discussed here. Many of his works are not only set outside of Guatemala, but often outside of Latin America in examples of deterritorialization. Even when he published *Caballeriza* (2006), a novel that is set in Guatemala, there is a nod in the narration to the fact that it is unusual for him to do so. This tendency in Rey Rosa to go beyond the national does not mean, however, that the local—whether that is Guatemala or a host of other locales—is not present in his works. The difference is in the perspective. He reveals the local from a global angle.

The three authors included in this study (Miguel Ángel Asturias, Augusto Monterroso and Rodrigo Rey Rosa) have written, been published and been quite popular outside of their homeland, in some cases *more* popular. In addition, like many Latin American writers and intellectuals, these Guatemalan authors have lived in exile due to political reasons. Their experiences in and outside of their home country have influenced their writing and should not be ignored, but there is also a case to be made regarding the effect of globalization on the literature being produced by Guatemalans. There is a definite trajectory in the history of Guatemalan literature toward a global perspective that reaches out beyond the nation and can be traced through the works of these three authors.

The fact that some authors expand their horizons does not mean that they have turned their backs on their own nation's problems. As was stated above, the global does not erase the local, although it may transform it. Instead of reading certain writers as too "universal," readers and critics should be focusing on what their works have to offer, what they are saying about the local and the global, and from what perspective. The problems that have plagued Guatemala and other Central and Latin American countries are far from being isolated incidents and Guatemala is definitely part of this new, globalized world.<sup>61</sup> As our world becomes increasingly smaller, it is easier to see just how widespread those problems are.

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<sup>61</sup> For more on Guatemala's participation in globalization, see Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts*, 113-117.

## CHAPTER II: MIGUEL ANGEL ASTURIAS

Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899-1974) of the Generation of 1920 is the most well-known Guatemalan novelist and, as was mentioned above, is important to this study because he was the first Guatemalan to be recognized around the world for his writing and he always focused on Guatemala and the Guatemalan people in his works. As explained in the first chapter, analysis of three novels by Asturias: *El Señor Presidente* (1946), *Hombres de maíz* (1949) and *Mulata de Tal* (1963) highlights the national literature of Guatemala as perceived by this very influential author. This will also provide a point of departure for the chapters on Augusto Monterroso and Rodrigo Rey Rosa in order to trace the trajectory of Guatemalan literature from a national focus to a more global one. *El Señor Presidente* is Asturias' famous novel of a dictator, which was not published until more than ten years after he completed it for fear of repercussions against the author. It was released after Guatemalans finally ousted dictator General Jorge Ubico, who ruled from 1931-1944 and would certainly have taken the portrayal of a Guatemalan president in this light very personally. In this nationally focused work Asturias examines the Guatemalan people, especially in the urban centers, and their struggle to survive amid the intense oppression of the title character. *Hombres de maíz*, the second novel to be analyzed here, is mainly set in the countryside and Asturias' continued focus on his country of origin, his nation, is apparent although this time through the telling of the struggle of the indigenous peoples. Still searching for the best way to present and re-present his nation, Asturias turned to the millenarian culture that makes up nearly half of Guatemala's population. In the third and final novel discussed here, the setting goes from countryside to hell. *Mulata de Tal* tells the story of a humble *indio* who sells his wife to

the devil and embarks on a seemingly endless cycle of accumulation of power and defeat. There remains a persistent spotlight on Guatemala throughout the three novels, starting in the city with *El Señor Presidente*, then in *Hombres de maíz* moving to the indigenous countryside, and finally into the hell-like setting of *Mulata de Tal*.

Asturias' life was fascinating—he struggled through decades of dictatorships, mainly living outside of Guatemala. He spent much of his life in exile in Mexico, Spain, France and countless other countries, and would go years without publishing his writing for fear of the repercussions that could follow. For this very reason the first novel analyzed below, *El Señor Presidente*, was not published until more than a decade after it was finished. He began his education studying law and medicine, and his thesis was titled *El problema social del indio* (1923). In this work he maintained, much along the same lines of other thinkers of the time like José Vasconcelos in *La raza cósmica* (1925), that the indigenous population of Guatemala would benefit through miscegenation with the white population. Perceived through the lens of the twenty-first century, the ideas presented in his thesis can be described as racist. Nevertheless, they reflected a progressive thought process at a time in Latin America when positivism and eugenics were popular theories among many leaders and the extermination of indigenous peoples was a reality in many countries. Over time, Asturias' feelings about the indigenous people of his country were changing and he did withdraw the idea of miscegenation as a solution to the problems of these groups in a later edition of his thesis. The years he spent exiled in Paris, studying sociology and translating Mayan documents, were essential to his ability to appreciate the culture of the indigenous tribes.<sup>62</sup> At home, it is unlikely that

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<sup>62</sup> Asturias, according to Gerald Martin: “No conoció ninguna de las lenguas indígenas de su país, pero colaboró en la traducción al español de las dos obras más importantes de Guatemala, el *Popol Vuh* (maya-

Asturias would have been asked to translate Mayan texts, much less accepted such a task. His status as an exiled Guatemalan in Paris —an outsider—led him to establish this unusual connection with his homeland. This is similar to what Said refers to when he writes that those who suffer the condition of exile tend to seek out any tie to home in an attempt to fend off exile and avoid its negative effects.<sup>63</sup> The appreciation that Asturias gained for this aspect of his home country through this exercise eventually led to the publication of *Hombres de maíz*.

In this chapter, Asturias' works will be analyzed as if they were foundational fictions written in order to provide a vehicle for the definition of a national Guatemalan identity. Doris Sommer's aim in her book *Foundational Fictions* was to "locate an erotics of politics, to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at mid-century."<sup>64</sup> Sommer also writes in her essay "Irresistible Romance" that nineteenth-century Latin American political and military leaders promoted the romantic novel "as perhaps the most significant discursive medium for national development."<sup>65</sup> Far from being on the side of any leader's national program, Asturias generally spoke out against what had become the

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quiché) y los *Anales de los xahil* (cakchiquel). "Introducción del coordinador," in *Hombres de maíz*, critical ed., 2nd ed. (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica de México, 1996), xxii.

<sup>63</sup> Said writes that "nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages." *Reflections on Exile*, 176.

<sup>64</sup> Later she adds, "to paraphrase another foundational text, after the creation of the new nations, the domestic romance is an exhortation to be fruitful and multiply. Exhortation is all we get though, along with a contagious desire for socially productive love and for the State where love is possible, because these erotico-political affairs can be quite frustrating. And even when they end in satisfying marriage, the end of desire beyond which the narratives refuse to go, happiness reads like a wish-fulfilling projection of national consolidation and growth, a goal rendered visible." Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Sommer, "Irresistible Romance," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 84.

status quo in leadership for his country in the first part of the twentieth century and put forth his own ideas of what the nation should look like.

While the participation of writers and intellectuals in politics was nothing new in Asturias' lifetime, his experience is in contrast to the nineteenth-century phenomenon that writers in Latin America were much more active in politics and were more likely to actually hold political office. One example is Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, author of *Facundo* (1845). This was a nineteenth-century, nation-examining endeavor by an intellectual who would later become Argentina's seventh president. In the twentieth-century, however, an intellectual who spoke out was much more likely to be held prisoner, exiled or murdered, than to achieve his country's highest political office. A more contemporary example comes from Guatemalan writer and U.S. resident Arturo Arias (b. 1950). He has written about his experience of exile in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, explaining that "for the Latin American writer, the issue has been a down-to-earth pragmatic one. If you stay in your own country and open your big mouth, your life is genuinely at risk."<sup>66</sup>

The novel is the ultimate genre for nation-building exercises due to its very form. According to Timothy Brennan the amalgamated form of a novel embodies "the nation's *composite* nature."<sup>67</sup> Brennan writes, "the idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows a repeated dialectic of uniformity and

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<sup>66</sup> Arturo Arias, "The Meaning of Exile for the Contemporary Latin American Writer," in *Art on the Line: Essays by Artists about the Point Where Their Art and Activism Intersect*, ed. Jack Hirschman (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2002), 284.

<sup>67</sup> Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 51.

specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people.”<sup>68</sup> These “disparate elements” are heavily reflected in the novels analyzed here, and Asturias’ attempt to lay them out for the reader, and at times bind them together through his art, is apparent. Other scholars such as Saúl Hurtado Heras support the notion that Asturias’ novels are nation-building experiments: “El núcleo que articula las distintas novelas de Asturias es la búsqueda de la nacionalidad guatemalteca, tal como la había propalado el escritor desde su realidad social en su juventud parisiana.”<sup>69</sup> For his part, Gerald Martin notes in the introduction to his edition of *Hombres de maíz* that for Asturias, “los «mayas» fueron quienes dieron a Guatemala su especificidad, y los utiliza tácitamente, como un signo «nacionalista».”<sup>70</sup> Asturias’ use of the Maya as a nationalist symbol is actually very ironic, given the fact that although a large part of Guatemala’s population claims Mayan ancestry, the Maya do not solely reside in Guatemala. In addition, the community has existed since long before the current concept of “nation” was formed. The Mayan people are but one example of the national for Asturias, however, and the diverse elements of Guatemalan national culture are evident throughout all three of Asturias’ novels examined here.

Homi Bhabha, in his chapter of *Nation and Narration*, “DissemiNation”, explains that “the people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within

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<sup>68</sup> Brennan, “The National Longing for Form,” 62. It should be noted that Brennan places Asturias in his list of “cosmopolitan commentators on the Third World, who offer an *inside view* of formerly submerged peoples for target reading publics in Europe and North America in novels that comply with metropolitan literary tastes.” Ibid., 63. I would take issue with his inclusion of Asturias both regarding the alleged target audience and the idea of his works complying with metropolitan literary tastes.

<sup>69</sup> Hurtado Heras, *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias*, 115.

<sup>70</sup> Martin, “Introducción del coordinador,” in *Hombres de maíz*, xxiii.

the population.”<sup>71</sup> The lower to middle-class characters in the three novels analyzed here are no different and neither were the actual Guatemalans who were caught in a web of suffering, the result of the tyranny of the ruling elites. At the start of the twentieth century, Guatemala’s leaders had focused the country’s agriculture on the export first of coffee and later of bananas, and concentrated landownership in the hands of the *latifundistas*, forcing the substantial indigenous population from their land. Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who ruled from 1898-1920, was one of many who governed on behalf of these wealthy landowners and cooperated closely with foreign interests such as the United Fruit Company in order to maintain the country’s riches in the usual hands. This cooperation in turn had a major influence on Guatemalan politics as Estrada Cabrera strictly limited workers’ rights and responded to dissent with ruthless oppression. In *Voices from the Silence*, Marc Zimmerman and Raúl Rojas mention somewhat euphemistically that although “there were moments of dissent and even concerted opposition ... the apparatuses designed to deal with disruption were quite up to their tasks—at least until the end.”<sup>72</sup>

Following Estrada Cabrera’s overthrow in 1920, there was a very brief period of rule by Carlos Herrera, who “quickly disappointed U.S. business interests” and was overthrown after scarcely a year by General José María Orellano whose “war minister, Ubico, cracked down on unrest, killing and jailing numerous political opponents.”<sup>73</sup> Ubico would not succeed Orellano directly but he did eventually come to power in 1930

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<sup>71</sup> Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 297.

<sup>72</sup> Marc Zimmerman and Raúl Rojas, eds. *Voices from the Silence: Guatemalan Literature of Resistance*, trans. Marc Zimmerman (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998), 127.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

and continued to stifle conflict through a strong central government. Again, according to Zimmerman and Rojas,

he cowed congress, unions and rural opposition through a system of secret police and spies. Repression became the order of the day, especially as he worked to secure an illegal re-election, and as he tightened the reigns throughout the 1930s, arresting opponents, taking control of printing presses, and militarizing many schools.<sup>74</sup>

William I. Robinson notes that the Guatemalan economy prior to the end of the Second World War “was the strongest in the region and the oligarchy became the most powerful. Yet the popular classes mounted a major challenge to this oligarchy early in the post-WWII years.”<sup>75</sup> An unprecedented display of anti-government activity was underway toward the end of Ubico’s regime, made up largely of teachers demanding higher wages. As described in *Bitter Fruit*, “on June 29, [1944] the scattered rallies culminated in the largest protest in the country’s modern history. People from nearly every segment of urban Guatemalan life, led by middle-class idealists, converged on the capital’s central square to demand that the dictator go.”<sup>76</sup> This uprising eventually led to the election in 1944 of Juan José Arévalo and marked the beginning of what would be labeled Guatemala’s “Democratic Spring” which lasted from 1944-1954 and as was mentioned above, provided a window for the release of Asturias’ *El Señor Presidente*. From 1950-1954, Arévalo’s successor Jacobo Árbenz also sought to swing the pendulum of wealth back toward workers by enacting sweeping reforms. These actions were labeled communist by the United States and eventually led to the CIA-supported military coup which left Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas in control of the government. All of the reforms

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts*, 103.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27.

of the Árbenz administration were rolled back and wealth distribution returned to its previous state of deep inequality. What followed was the intense polarization of the Guatemalan people in a class and cultural struggle, which would lead to civil war. Such divergent cultures and ideas as have tended to exist in Guatemala are masterfully portrayed in Asturias' works, though the endings are rarely happy. The binding-together of disparate elements of society does not hold, as revealed by an analysis of *El Señor Presidente*.

The 1946 publication of *El Señor Presidente* placed Asturias in the international spotlight. The novel was actually written more than a decade earlier in Paris, mainly prior to the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico (1931-1944) and was kept under wraps until the country's Democratic Spring (1944-1954) was underway. The sensitive nature of the novel's topic explains the reason behind the delay in publishing. A dictator such as Ubico would never have allowed that a novel critical of a tyrannical "president" be published during his time in power, as it could easily have been construed as a depiction of Ubico himself. Asturias undoubtedly was protecting himself by waiting until the presidency of the more liberal Juan José Arévalo to release the novel to the public.

Asturias had already been deeply involved in journalism and had written his thesis, *El problema social del indio* (1923) as well as various works of fiction including *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930).<sup>77</sup> It was *El Señor Presidente*, however, which put him in the international spotlight and it continues to be his most talked-about work. This complex novel of a dictator employs baroque language and surrealism to bring home the image of the Guatemalan people held in literal and figurative prisons, struggling through

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<sup>77</sup> For an excellent overview of Asturias' body of work, see Saúl Hurtado Heras, *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias*, 27-32.

the negative effects of the tyranny of their president. Although no mention is made of either the name of the country or that of the president, the work is clearly based on the later years of the decades-long Manuel Estrada Cabrera dictatorship in Guatemala (1898-1920).

The key relationship in *El Señor Presidente* is that of Miguel Cara de Ángel and Camila Canales. Miguel is the protagonist and a close adviser to the president and Camila is the daughter of a general (Eusebio Canales) who has recently lost favor with the president. It is the president's desire to ruin Camila's father that leads to her first encounter with Miguel, so although they are from the same sector of society, the conflict between the president and the general creates the necessary tension for a star-crossed-lovers scenario. Cara de Ángel is a complicated character. He is initially described as “un ángel: tez de dorado mármol, cabellos rubios, boca pequeña y aire de mujer en violento contraste con la negrura de sus ojos varoniles.”<sup>78</sup> Conversely, there is a dark side to his character that is soon revealed to the reader. His first appearance in the narration is when he assists the injured beggar Pelele. He physically helps him walk to town and gives him money before they part ways. In a later chapter it is revealed that he is the president's most trusted adviser, and he is described as “bello y malo como Satán,”<sup>79</sup> a refrain that is repeated throughout much of the novel. His many contradictions are disconcerting to the reader. He is an expert liar, persistently complimenting the president in a most exaggerated way and constantly inventing stories on the spot in order to carry out the

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<sup>78</sup> Asturias, *El Señor Presidente*, 32. This description is ignored by Arias, who refers to a *change* in Cara de Ángel from masculine to feminine as part of his change from evil to good through his love for Camila. Arturo Arias, “*El Señor Presidente: amor y sentimentalidad*,” 688. As you can see, he was actually described by the narrator as having these feminine qualities very early on in the novel. That certain feminine quality he displays definitely mirrors Sommer's analyses of the male protagonists of her selection of nation-building novels.

<sup>79</sup> Asturias, *El Señor Presidente*, 44.

president's devious plans. For example, in the process of carrying out the president's order to alert General Canales that he must leave town or face prosecution for the murder of a colleague, he takes note of a witness' misinterpretation of his rush to speak with the general's daughter. He quickly invents a story about being in love with Camila and wanting to run away with her. He uses this tale in order to manipulate the owner of the nearby *fonda* El Tus-Tep and her would-be lover into unknowingly assisting in the general's escape. Ironically, Canales' daughter will eventually become his real love interest.

During the narration of the events up to this point in the novel, the reader will have encountered mostly poor citizens: the beggars who sleep in the Portal del Señor, the student and the sacristan who are political prisoners by order of the president and are accused of being revolutionaries, the woodcutter who finds the beggar Pelele in a pile of garbage. The huge imbalance of power is already apparent in the first five chapters as the aforementioned characters are contrasted with the government officials, Cara de Ángel and especially the president—the most powerful man in the country. This imbalance is an example of those “disparate elements” which must be formally bound together to create a nation, as in Timothy Brennan's explanation of the idea of nationhood and the novel, cited above.

In a strange turn of events, Miguel Cara de Ángel realizes that perhaps he is not as powerful as he thought, and in fact he is nothing more than a pawn in the president's plan to kill Canales:

Muy otro era el sentimiento que llevaba a Cara de Ángel a desaprobear en silencio, mordiéndose los labios, una tan ruin y diabólica maquinación. De buena fe se llegó a consentir protector del general y por lo mismo con cierto derecho sobre su hija, derecho que sentía sacrificado al verse, después de todo, en su papel de

siempre, de instrumento ciego, en su puesto de esbirro, en su sitio de verdugo. (83-84).

Miguel continues more cautiously with a slightly different plan, assembling a team of men to help him remove Camila from her father's house as the general makes his escape. During this operation he finds himself plagued by thoughts of having a wife and children. He is beginning to see himself and his relationship to those around him quite differently. This makes the protagonist a potential catalyst for change, as he is portrayed as being capable of analyzing his situation and choosing a different path than the one intended for him by the president.

Details of Camila's past and her family life are intermingled with scenes of the hours after her capture as she waits, terrified, in the Tus-Tep. Her upper-class status is confirmed by the descriptions of her childhood activities. She has led a sheltered life and the narrator points out, regarding her first moments in the tavern: "Jamás sospechó Camila que existiera este cuchitril hediendo a petate podrido, a dos pasos de donde feliz vivía" (98). In an extremely melodramatic style, the narrator describes Miguel's dilemma regarding Camila's state of homelessness, as none of her relatives will take her in for fear of the president's reaction. Miguel's growing obsession with the girl is troubling him and he is aware that he is acting completely out of character. The whole town is gossiping about his *amores* with Camila, and he is lying awake, thinking of excuses to spend time with her. As he drifts off to sleep, there is a surreal scene in which El Sueño (sleep personified) receives Cara de Ángel and then tells his men to take him to "la barca de... - el Sueño dudó- ...los enamorados que habiendo perdido la esperanza de amar ellos, se conforman con que les amen" and later, Camila is sent to "la barca de las enamoradas que

no serán felices” (174). This bad omen is realized when a boy wakes Miguel to inform him that Camila has fallen deathly ill.

Miguel begins to do favors for various townspeople in an attempt to bargain with God for Camila’s life. Miguel is appearing ever more angelic, especially to the people whose lives he is affecting. In a country where no one is safe from the tyranny of the president, Miguel is in a unique position (for the time being) to help, to save lives. Miguel and Camila marry on her deathbed and “el Tícher,” an English-speaking foreigner, recites a fragment of a Shakespearean sonnet, “Make thee another self, for love of me!” (254). That is exactly what Cara de Ángel has done—changed his very nature for the love of Camila. The president is not happy with this turn of events and in his Machiavellian way, he orders an article to be printed in the paper stating that he was the best man of the wedding, among other lies, thereby making a mockery of the young couple’s union.

To summarize, two upper-class young people, both of whom are connected to the president, meet for the first time in a moment of great uncertainty in their lives. Miguel is the president’s close adviser and Camila the daughter of a general who develops revolutionary inclinations early on in the novel. They are each on the cusp of a paradigm shift. Miguel is finally understanding his role in the tyranny of the president, and Camila is about to lose her father and her home. Miguel seems to be alone in the world, and while Camila has grown up among a large extended family, she is now orphaned. For the two of them—the president’s “favorite” and the daughter of the rebel leader—to marry was highly controversial to say the least. Until the moment of their union, they represented the *status quo* (Miguel as the president’s trusted advisor) and the revolution

(Camila via her father). This representation of the joining of such a mismatched pair is typical of the mainly nineteenth-century Latin American historical romances that would later be termed “foundational fictions.” Asturias was undoubtedly familiar with such works, which for Doris Sommer are “almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests and the like” and the issues that may inhibit their union come from outside the relationship so that “the lovers must imagine their ideal relationship through an alternative society.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, the successful union would provide an example or indicate a path for the readers that would strengthen the nation and on the other hand, any challenge to their relationship creates an opportunity for them to imagine a society in which they can be together. In *El Señor Presidente* the external challenge to the relationship comes in the form of the President. Sommer admits that “the novels offer a variety of options in theorizing the family as a microcosm of the state”<sup>81</sup> and after Miguel and Camila are married the question becomes whether their family, and by extension the state, will be healthy and productive or if, on the contrary, Asturias’ vision of a united Guatemala is a mere fantasy. In this case the union was real, but also fleeting, as is made clear in the final chapters.

Camila, like Miguel, feels like a different person after recovering from her illness and waking up to her life as a married woman. They are both cautiously optimistic about their new life together. Miguel is very reflective about his life in these moments, and although they both seem content to have married, it takes some time for them to grow into their relationship. This is in part because Camila is still recovering from her illness, not to mention the fact that the two hardly know each other. The binding together of this

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<sup>80</sup> Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 5, 18.

<sup>81</sup> Sommer, “Irresistible Romance,” 89.

unlikely pair appears to be working, though it is not until they leave the city and spend some time in the countryside that they begin to feel like a couple. This twentieth-century portrayal of the rural as a place of contentment is in contrast to the nineteenth-century view of the rural as a locus of barbarism. In *Doña Bárbara* (1929) the city was where the civilized resided and the protagonist's aim was in effect to civilize the countryside. The opposite is true in *El Señor Presidente* where the city is a dangerous and unpredictable environment. It is in the country, far away from the president, where Miguel and Camila feel safe. Although at first their country honeymoon is riddled with awkwardness and interruptions that leave the reader wondering if they will ever consummate their marriage, the chapter ends as Camila "vio a su marido y se desearon con la mirada, sellando el tácito acuerdo que entre ellos faltaba" (285). There is a profound sense of hope projected here that disappears once the couple has returned to the city.

The president eventually sends Miguel away on an important trip to New York City, which turns out to be part of an elaborate plot to secretly detain him. Of course, he never makes it out of the country, but rather is put in a prison where he is mentally and physically tortured, and eventually dies of dysentery. Before his death, a fake prisoner who is working for the president befriends him. This man tells him a story about a woman (Camila) whom he lusted after, but that turned out to be the president's "pefe" (334). Miguel dies having lost all hope of reuniting with his wife, and Camila never learns of Miguel's imprisonment, so there is a nagging suspicion in her mind that perhaps he simply decided to leave her. The president has orchestrated a plan that leads them each to doubt the other's love and dashes their vision of an alternate society in which they could be together. Camila gives birth to a son, Miguel, and moves to the country to raise

him and live out her days. Through his diabolical plan, the president ruins their life together (and by analogy, the hope for the nation) and leaves them with a dishonored memory of that life.

Asturias is rereading the past, specifically the years of Estrada Cabrera, but not with nostalgia. As Nina Gerassi-Navarro has commented, the rise of the historical novel in the nineteenth century was a moment in which “Spanish American writers looked back into their past seeking to unveil moments of glory and national honor that would reflect their national heritage and identity” and “the rereading of the past becomes a way of defining one’s nation, as it reveals the individuality of a people and brings to light the great moments of national honor.”<sup>82</sup> In this instance, Asturias does not consider those years as “great moments of national honor” but rather is shedding light on a shameful period. His focus is national, but he is not proud of what he sees. This attempt to shine a light on the nation is one of understanding the past so as not to repeat it. At the same time he does seem to want to bring the nation together in the example of Miguel and Camila. Miguel is a complicated character, a bad person redeemed by love. There was a glimmer of hope in their relationship even though it was thwarted by the president. The reader can imagine, though, that the fact that Camila is raising her son in the country is a sign of better times to come, or at least a further suggestion that the city is no place to raise a family/the nation.

In addition to the countless bad omens that surrounded the relationship between Camila and Miguel, marriages and families all around them are being destroyed by acts of the president. If not directly by his hand, they are at the very least being hit by the

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<sup>82</sup> Nina Gerassi-Navarro, *Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 108-109.

fallout of his malicious tactics. Genaro Rodas and his wife Fedina are a prime example. The Rodas family is poor: Genaro is unemployed and willing to do just about anything to feed his family, and Fedina recently gave birth to their first child. Genaro witnesses the killing of Pelele and then tells his wife what he knows about the plan to remove Camila from her home. The next morning, Fedina is captured while attempting to check on Camila at home. Fedina's interrogator threatens to let her baby die if she does not tell them what she knows about the general and his daughter. In the meantime, her husband receives a severe beating of 400 blows. In the end, the baby dies, the powerful Madame of the local brothel purchases Fedina for 10,000 pesos, and her husband finds himself on the secret police force. Fedina never recovers from the death of her child and the president describes her as "media loca."<sup>83</sup> Another family in crisis is that of Abel Carvajal, the other man (besides Camila's father) who is accused of murdering Colonel Parrales Sonriente. He is jailed and has no way of defending himself against the charges. The state has pressured a group of fourteen beggars to testify against him in court and finally, he is sentenced to death. His wife made many attempts to persuade the president to release him, but he refused to see her. In the end, due to the president's overwhelming control of the town, she is unable to obtain even one signature on a petition to the state to tell her where his body can be found.

Asturias' portrayal of this nation implies that although all things may be possible, the president has the power to make or break any possibility. The fact that no relationship in this entire novel appears to survive demonstrates that for Asturias, at least at the time he finished *El Señor Presidente*, there was little hope of uniting the nation. True, there is talk of revolution in parts of the novel but the overall tone, especially in the end, is one of

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<sup>83</sup> Asturias, *El Señor Presidente*, 307.

powerlessness. It is the title character, the omnipotent *Señor Presidente*, who always had been, and continued to be up to the final pages, in control. Even though there are hangers-on who seem to benefit from being close to him, everyone appears to be helpless against his power. Those who worked for him, like Miguel Cara de Ángel, prove to be pawns in the president's elaborate game. He appears god-like, a kind of master puppeteer. Anyone and everyone can be coerced into doing the president's bidding. All the people can do in the end is pray, and the final words of the novel demonstrate this: "*Kyrie eleison*" or "Lord, have mercy" (340). They are pleading, either with their creator, or perhaps with their leader, to save them from this situation because they can see no way out. Asturias is drawing attention to their powerlessness and to the dysfunction of the nation in his portrayal of the many relationships in the novel, in hopes that the awareness may help to initiate a change and break the cycle when the opportunity arises.

With *Hombres de maíz* (1949), Asturias brought indigenous people into the foreground of Guatemalan literature, placing them in the role of protagonist after so many years of virtual invisibility. This was an abrupt departure from the *criollista* and *naturalista* movements of the earlier half of the twentieth century, in part because in this novel, nature and the earth are no longer portrayed in the same terms of civilization vs. barbarism. It is true that the *criollista* novel is considered an attempt on the part of Latin American writers to create something truly autochthonous, and there is no doubt that Asturias has done that in *Hombres de maíz*, but there are key differences between those works and Asturias' novel. For instance, nature is not depicted here as a *llano* to be tamed or exploited as in Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929), nor is it a place to learn hard lessons on your way to a civilized existence as in Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo*

*Sombra* (1926). In these respects it has very little to do with the *novela de la tierra* as nature is revealed as a sacred place which Asturias deems worthy of respect. Conversely, the urban, modern, so-called civilized society is criticized. In this novel, there is a pulling away from modernity and a push toward embracing the ancient indigenous culture. In 1967 Asturias won the Nobel Prize for Literature “for his vivid literary achievement, deep-rooted in the national traits and traditions of Indian peoples of Latin America”<sup>84</sup> which is easily identifiable in *Hombres de maíz*. This novel did meet with some skepticism among the critics, however.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps because of its complex nature and heavy use of surrealism it was simply ahead of its time and difficult to comprehend. It shares a good deal of characteristics with “boom” novels, such as polyphony or multiple perspectives, magical realism and non-linear narration, and therefore should be considered a precursor to the movement. José Donoso rejects that notion in his *Historia personal del «boom»*, but this dismissal of Asturias likely results from a comment the latter made at a conference in which he offended many “boom” authors by suggesting that their success was merely a product of marketing.<sup>86</sup> For many *Hombres de maíz* was (and still is) a confusing work, but as with the novels of the Latin American “boom,” such complexity requires an active reader who is rewarded in the end with an understanding of the depth of the novel. Just as writers of the “boom” would be criticized years later for writing elitist works, Asturias is criticized for his *Hombres de maíz*. The

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<sup>84</sup> “The Nobel Prize in Literature 1967,” *Nobelprize.org*, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1967/](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1967/).

<sup>85</sup> See for example, Ciro Alegría, review of *Hombres de maíz*, by Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Asomante* 6, no. 2 (1950): 92-94; and José Antonio Galaos, “Los dos ejes en la novelística de Miguel Ángel Asturias,” *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 52 (1962): 126-139.

<sup>86</sup> This arguing is referenced in Donoso’s *Historia personal del «boom»* (Santiago de Chile: Alfaguara, 1998), 16, 31, 32, 66 and 81.

truth is that he opened a door for Latin American writers and helped change the face of the region's literature, regardless of the debate between he and certain "boom" authors.

In *Hombres de maíz* Guatemalan life is portrayed through the telling of the stories of various relationships—some fruitful, others not—each representing different sections of the country. This is a perfect display of that composite nature of both the novel and the nation referred to above.<sup>87</sup> Asturias was attempting to imagine a Guatemalan nation, which not only included the indigenous population, but actually was based on their centrality to Guatemala as he had come to see it. This is evidenced by the fact that so many of the couples—including the most fertile one—are *indios*. Other intellectuals in many parts of the Americas and in other time periods may have promoted extermination or, like Asturias in his thesis, a kind of dilution of the indigenous line by the addition of white blood, but in *Hombres de maíz* he markets acceptance and coexistence. The previous "solutions" regarding indigenous populations revolved around a lack of respect for little-understood cultures. Even as far back as 1882, Ernest Renan, in his essay "What is a nation?" states that the "noblest countries, England, France and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed."<sup>88</sup> His point is that race does not make a nation, but Renan's praise of the mixing of races is not so different from Asturias' doctoral thesis in that both can be interpreted as euphemisms for extermination of one (barbarian?) culture by the addition of other (civilized?) blood lines. The idea is that homogenous populations, in theory, should have fewer reasons for conflict. Renan goes on to talk about language as well, another important factor in a country with as many languages as Guatemala. He refers to the unique example of Switzerland, who "so well made, since she was made

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<sup>87</sup> Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 14.

with the consent of her different parts, numbers three or four languages.”<sup>89</sup> He is attempting to illustrate the idea that a nation is formed by the will of the people to unite and remain united. If there is no will to come together, there is no nation.

Asturias wrote this novel with particular attention paid to a *ladino* audience. The term *ladino* is prominent in regions where the Maya have a strong presence and it is considered by some to be a synonym of *mestizo*. Nevertheless, it is also used to describe a person—Mayan or not—who speaks primarily Spanish and has a non-indigenous way of life. According to Rolena Adorno, as far back as the Spanish colonial period, “individuals of indigenous American background who were familiar with the Spanish language and customs were commonly described as *ladino*.”<sup>90</sup> In a country where there are a multitude of indigenous languages coupled with such a high illiteracy rate—especially among the indigenous tribes—it stands to reason that Asturias’ target audience must be *ladino*. He would like this group to accept that in order to coexist, differing cultures need to respect each other, even if each one seems strange to the other or cannot read or understand the other’s language. Embracing the indigenous culture was, for Asturias, an innovative way to imagine a Guatemalan nation. He makes use of an ancient culture to construct a new Guatemala, much like the phenomenon of “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes”<sup>91</sup> which Eric Hobsbawm comments on in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*. There is a recycling and re-presentation of what Asturias sees as a fundamental part of Guatemalan culture, the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>90</sup> Rolena Adorno, “The indigenous ethnographer: The ‘*indio ladino*’ as historian and cultural mediation,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 379.

<sup>91</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6.

indigenous culture, in order to reinvent the Guatemalan nation. In writing this novel, he was attempting to sway the will of the (*ladino*) people in order to unite the country in this embrace of the indigenous Guatemalan peoples.

Asturias shows many examples of different ways of conceiving the family as a microcosm of the state in this novel. The first couple introduced to the reader is Gaspar Ilóm and La Piojosa Grande. There may be no Christian idea of marriage in this community, but the union is there, nonetheless. This indigenous union is the first sign of the fact that the *indio* is the key to Asturias' idea of Guatemala as a nation. Just as Sommer observes that the romances she studies "were part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation,"<sup>92</sup> Asturias is attempting to give authority to the indigenous culture of Guatemala with his novel.

Gaspar Ilóm is a leader in his community and he is very concerned about the *maiceros* and their methods of slashing and burning the jungle in order to make room for their cornfields. One morning he tells his Piojosa, "hay que limpiar la tierra de Ilóm de los que botan los árboles con hacha, de los que chamuscan el monte con las quemas."<sup>93</sup> On the following page the narrator alludes to the feudal system at work and remarks that "el maíz empobrece la tierra y no enriquece a ninguno. Ni al patrón ni al mediero. Sembrado para comer es sagrado sustento del hombre que fue hecho de maíz. Sembrado por negocio es hambre del hombre que fue hecho de maíz" (9). The idea that corn is sacred and should be grown only for sustenance is an overarching theme in the novel. Any character who engages in the exploitation of the land is punished for it in the end, whether it is the *maiceros* or the hotel operator in a coastal tourist town. Historically, the

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<sup>92</sup> Sommer, "Irresistible Romance," 92.

<sup>93</sup> Asturias, *Hombres de maíz*, Critical ed., 2nd ed., comp. Gerald Martin (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica de México, 1996), 8.

great majority of Guatemalan leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used the exploitation of land and indigenous peoples to benefit the ruling elites, creating huge imbalances of wealth and power. Additionally, most of the arable lands were being used to grow products for export rather than to feed the country's population. This created a strong dependency on imported food and made it increasingly difficult for the poor to survive. The novel decries these methods in favor of a more communal lifestyle.

Gaspar decides to take action against the *maiceros*. Each day he leaves his home and shoots dead the first one he encounters. The *ladinos* and *patrones* become very afraid that the *indios* will be successful in thwarting them. Colonel Chalo Godoy heads an army against the *indios* and defeats them. He also convinces a *ladina* called la Vaca Manuela (one-half of another couple analyzed below) to poison Gaspar Ilóm. His wife Piojosa runs away with the baby she had with Gaspar, protecting the indigenous family line. The poisoning of the indigenous leader by the *ladina* Manuela is an obvious allusion to the general betrayal of the native people of the "New World" by the white settlers who arrived after 1492 and who continued to exploit the indigenous populations and their lands long after the region's independence from Spain. By betraying Gaspar, la Vaca Manuela unwittingly starts a chain of events that will haunt her family for many years. This is an example of Asturias' condemnation of the treatment of the native peoples of Guatemala, whose culture he had come to see as the nation's best hope for unity.

Manuela's husband Tomás Machojón was an *indio*, but as the narrator says, "su mujer, la Vaca Manuela Machojón, lo había untado de ladino" (17). Tomás is a *patrón* and is cursed by the *Brujos de las luciérnagas* to never have children or grandchildren after his wife poisons Gaspár Ilóm. Tomás' only son Machojón dies at the hands of the

same *Brujos* soon after the poisoning, leaving a young woman named Candelaria Reinosá to mourn him before they were able to marry. This ensures the impossibility of continuing this family's line, and in a sense, the idea is that of elimination of the traitorous *ladinos*. Tomás is then fooled by the men who work for him into burning more acres than he ever had before. They make him believe that if you look carefully into the flames of the burning jungle, you can see Machojón riding his horse. By burning more of the jungle, these greedy men have a chance at a larger corn crop and therefore greater profits, but abusing the land by growing corn for profit only leads to suffering in this novel. Manuela dies in a cornfield fire started, ironically, by her own husband Tomás. These two obviously were not what Asturias had in mind for the national Guatemalan identity or a microcosm of the nation, as everything they do is in complete opposition to the idea of respecting the land.

The relationship between the land and the people is another important theme in the novel. One way this link is demonstrated is through the concept of fertility. In the novel, the fertility of the land and the fertility of the people are strictly connected. For example, the *maiceros* who abuse the land by burning large areas of forest in order to plant corn are not fertile in their family lives because they have left the land barren by the methods they employ in order to reap the greatest profit from the sale of their crop. On the other hand, the *indios* who only grow corn for sustenance do not harm the land, but rather are its stewards and therefore they have many children. This all ties in to the idea of the centrality of corn for the indigenous tribes. The novel's very title alludes to the creation story of the *Popol Vuh* in which the gods attempted many times to make a man of various different materials: clay, wood, etcetera. However, it was not until they made a

man of corn (*un hombre de maíz*) that they were successful. According to this myth, corn is not just the food of humankind; it is equivalent to the human body. People are made of corn, and so selling corn is analogous to selling human beings. An old man (who turns out to be one of the *Brujos de las luciérnagas* mentioned above) tells Nicho Aquino, “todo acabará pobre y quemado por el sol, por el aire, por las rozas, si se sigue sembrando méiz (sic) para negociar con él, como si no fuera sagrado, altamente sagrado” (180).

Goyo Yic and María Tecún are an *indio* couple. He is a jealous blind man with a reputation of keeping his wife pregnant in order to bind her to him. They have many children (i.e., a fruitful union), but she runs away with them, leaving her husband alone and giving birth to the legend of the Tecuna that permeates the countryside.<sup>94</sup> Goyo Yic, in his desperation upon discovering that his wife and children have fled, laments his loss and describes how he found an infant María amid a pile of bodies after the massacre of the Zacatón family.<sup>95</sup> In the final pages of the novel it is explained that María is neither a Zacatón nor a Tecún, but actually the spirit of María la Lluvia, also known as la Piojosa Grande.<sup>96</sup>

María lives her life away from Goyo Yic with a *ladino* named Benito Ramos. He is referred to as her “segundo marido, el postizo”<sup>97</sup> and he is everything that Goyo Yic is not. To begin with he is referred to as “el postizo” or prosthetic, something that is not permanently attached. He is also infertile and so he cannot chain her to him through

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<sup>94</sup> Every woman who leaves her husband is called *tecuna*: “. . . como se dice a toda mujer que huye, «tecuna».” *Hombres de maíz*, 144.

<sup>95</sup> María Tecún’s origins are fuzzy. If she were a Zacatón, a descendent of the pharmacist who prepared the poison that killed Gaspar Ilóm, then that would mean that not all of that family had been destroyed.

<sup>96</sup> For the explanation of this amalgamation (as told by the Curandero-Venado de las Siete-rozas) see *Hombres de maíz*, 279-280.

<sup>97</sup> *Hombres de maíz*, 281.

pregnancy and more children. Goyo Yic lived in fear that María would take advantage of his blindness and deceive him, but Ramos made a deal with the devil that he would always know when his first wife was cheating on him. Since making that deal, Ramos (unlike his blind counterpart) can see, and not just the world around him. He is able to see things before they happen, as when he predicted, to his fellow soldiers, an attack on their colonel that would occur only a few moments later. María does not stay with Ramos forever, though. She will eventually be compelled to return to her *indio* husband.

The interruption in María and Goyo's relationship, the years that they live apart and in which he goes on a long journey in search of his "tecuna," provide a point of departure in the novel that allows Asturias to insert commentary on Guatemalan life. He exposes readers to the different strata of society: the drunks, the poor, the wealthy foreigners, the witch doctor who cures Goyo Yic's blindness, as well as the working class, the *arrieros* and the tavern operators, the hotel owner in the coastal town that relies on tourism, and even the island prison where Goyo Yic is eventually reunited with his son and later his wife. This tour of the many levels of Guatemalan society is like a cubist painting of the disparate elements of the nation, which Asturias is attempting to unite through telling the long story of the reuniting of the *indio* couple of María and Goyo.

The description of the moment that Goyo recovers his sight provides an interesting perspective on his situation. He had believed that his wife left him because of his blindness, because he was useless to her, and that is true in part. He was useless, but perhaps not because he was blind. After all, once he has his vision he realizes that seeing her would mean nothing to him, as he had never seen her with his eyes, only heard her voice and smelled and touched her body. Additionally, he continues to behave in a way

that does not inspire much confidence in him as a man who can take care of himself. The best example of this is the act that gets him thrown in jail. This section of the novel is more like a fable that has been inserted in the narration.

Goyo and a friend, Domingo, decide to try to earn some money by acquiring a permit to purchase a large jug of liquor wholesale and then to sell it glass by glass at the town fair. They have to travel a long distance to buy the jug, and on the way there they go on about how they must have rules about the jug, specifically that the two of them should have to pay for each swig they take, just as a customer would. One says to the other, “[l]o malo sería que usted y yo fuéramos trago y trago de puro obsequio” (133). On the way back with the liquor, however, that is exactly what they do. Although they are convinced that they each are paying for every swallow they consume, they do no more than pass back and forth the same six pesos at every turn. They wind up arrested because they cannot produce the permit—which they lost in their stupor—that allows them to have possession of the liquor. They believe that they were robbed and, as a result, wrongly accused of illegally distributing the liquor. They never realize their error and the two of them are sent off to the island prison mentioned above. In this section of the novel, Asturias is warning against trying to make money by selling alcohol, which the reader should recall, is made from grain and very likely from corn. This enterprise of Goyo’s is no less damaging than selling corn for profit.

At the end of the novel, Goyo Yic and his wife María Tecún are reunited thanks to the coincidence of their son being sent to the same island prison as his father. Father and son finish their respective sentences and move back to their village. Goyo and María build a bigger ranch so that all of their children and grandchildren can live together with

them. “Lujo de hombres y lujo de mujeres, tener muchos hijos. Viejos, niños, hombres y mujeres, se volvían hormigas después de la cosecha, para acarrear el maíz; hormigas, hormigas, hormigas, hormigas...” (281). Gerald Martin affirms: “En estas últimas líneas de la novela se vuelve al lugar de origen o punto de partida de la narración: a la mujer perdida, a la familia extendida, al trabajo colectivo; y se vuelve, sobre todo, a los dos temas fundamentales de éste como de todo mundo, ficticio o no: la reproducción (lujo de hombres y mujeres) y la producción (acarrear el maíz).”<sup>98</sup>

This novel ends with a fruitful union. It is forward-looking at the end in that the family unit is returned to the status quo and we see the image of the people as ants working together to grow corn for sustenance, not for sale. It carries the idea of foundational fiction as described by Doris Sommer to its logical conclusion, a family that will help to populate the new nation.<sup>99</sup> The family represents the nation, whose people can also work together and do the right thing. It is also a statement that the time of the indigenous people is coming, indicated by the fact that María Tecún is identified as the spirit of María la Lluvia. Gerald Martin tells us, referring to the “resurrection” of this important woman: “Lo que fue en el pasado será otra vez en el futuro.”<sup>100</sup> Not only is María resurrected, but also the power of the indigenous people, who are the key to the national Guatemalan identity that Asturias is promoting. The irony of the fact that Asturias uses the Maya as the foundation for his concept of a national identity has already been mentioned above, but it is worthy of further comment. The concept of nation is one that comes from across the Atlantic, from the hegemonic populations of Europe.

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<sup>98</sup> *Hombres de maíz*, 402, n287.

<sup>99</sup> “To paraphrase another foundational text, after the creation of the new nations, the domestic romance is an exhortation to be fruitful and multiply.” *Foundational Fictions*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Hombres de maíz*, 401, n277.

Nevertheless, in Asturias' vision a marginalized population assumes the role historically reserved for the center.

Nicho Aquino and Isaura Terrón de Aquino is another indigenous couple in the novel, but one who has no children, perhaps because Nicho's job takes him away from home regularly. He is the postman for the village of San Miguel Acatán and takes his responsibility very seriously. Nicho is a poor man struggling to break the cycle of poverty in which he finds himself, working day in and day out, on foot, carrying his bag of envelopes from the village to the city and back again. The trust that villagers have in Nicho is strong when one considers the contents of the envelopes he carries. Many of them contain money: payments owed to a lender in the city, a gift for a relative in the village, or wages owed to workers in the village, etcetera. Being responsible for all of that money is what ties Nicho to capitalist modernity in a very tangible way in spite of his humble home. He returns home one day from delivering the mail and Isaura is nowhere to be found. Nicho's thoughts turn immediately to the legend of la Tecuna, a woman who, unhappy in her marriage, decided to run away from her husband. Any time a woman disappears—a recurrent situation in the novel—she is referred to as a “tecuna.” Women leave their husbands at such an alarming rate that even the Catholic Church opines on the possible reasons for and solutions to this problem. It seems as though this quandary is affecting the whole region's population and this fact is telling as to the general quality of the relationships in the novel.

In reality, Isaura was not a “tecuna” after all. Nicho discovers in a later conversation with a *Brujo* that she in fact died from a fall down a well. Even so, Nicho is made to realize that his link with modernity was harming his marriage and keeping him

from having children. When the *Brujo*, representative of the indigenous culture, urges him to give up his bag of mail forever by throwing it onto a fire, Nicho complies. This strong rejection of ladino culture and of modernity sets him free, though he has already lost everything else. Nicho's mistake was that he was chained to his work and had no time for a family. This infertile couple, tied to modernity, is another failed model for Asturias' vision of a Guatemalan identity, and the hopeful ending portrayed through the reconciliation of María Tecún and Goyo Yic unfortunately never translated into reality.

Although Asturias seems to have been very optimistic about the future of Guatemala upon finishing this novel, his utopian vision of the nation united in an embrace of the indigenous people and culture was not to be. His optimism is not surprising, considering that the book was published in the early years of Guatemala's Democratic Spring, which was a hopeful time for intellectuals like him, and this is the only instance of that kind of optimism that one can find in reading his works. His later novel, *Mulata de Tal*, represents a decline in Asturias' confidence in his nation and reflects the major changes that occurred in Guatemala between the publication of the two works (1949 and 1963). Where Asturias' literary production is concerned, this period between *Hombres* and *Mulata* saw the release of his *trilogía bananera* which was comprised of *Viento fuerte* (1950), *El papa verde* (1954) and *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960). According to Hurtado Heras, these novels, along with the collection of short stories titled *Weekend en Guatemala* (1956), aroused much enthusiasm among critics for their focus on the crude reality of Guatemalan life and their prolongation of the author's focus on the indigenous people.<sup>101</sup> He goes on to state: "A partir de entonces, Asturias

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<sup>101</sup> More specifically, Hurtado Heras refers to "la prolongación de la supuesta tendencia indigenista [de Asturias]" but I have rephrased this to avoid use of the term indigenist. *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel*

comenzó a ser valorado como un escritor comprometido con la realidad de su país. El provisional escepticismo que había despertado la publicación de *Hombres de maíz* quedaba salvado con estas novelas, más asequibles al común de los lectores.”<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, the tide would change in 1966 when Asturias accepted the position of Guatemala’s ambassador to France during the brutal government of Julio César Méndez Montenegro. This was an inexplicable act in the eyes of the younger revolutionary generations as well as many of Asturias’ fellow writers. That contradiction caused him to lose the respect and friendship of his compatriot Luis Cardoza y Aragón, and drew strong disapproval from critics across Latin America.

*Mulata de Tal* (1963) was published nine years after the CIA-supported military coup ended the country’s decade of democracy and the atmosphere was undeniably less hospitable to intellectuals. Asturias had not yet won the Nobel Prize for Literature and his country was in turmoil. Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas became the new “president” of Guatemala after heading up the U.S.-backed invasion of the country and forcing Árbenz to resign in 1954. He promptly undid all of the reforms that his predecessor had put into place and then in 1957 he was assassinated. The army installed another military man, General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, during whose rule more than one revolutionary group began to use guerilla war strategy not unlike Fidel Castro in Cuba. Polarization among the Guatemalan population was growing and Asturias was surely conscious of these events. To have witnessed the Democratic Spring only to come out the other side of it and face one military dictatorship after another was undoubtedly heartbreaking for many

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Asturias, 35. Asturias’ work is described by René Prieto as “neoindigenista” in “The literature of *Indigenismo*,” *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* vol. 2, eds. Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155. Prieto borrows the term from Tomás Escajadillo and uses it to describe works that go beyond “*Indigenismo* in which native Americans are viewed from the outside” (ibid., 154).

<sup>102</sup> Hurtado Heras, *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias*, 35-36.

Guatemalans. This was the environment in Guatemala when Asturias created *Mulata de Tal*.

*Mulata de Tal* is the Faustian story of a poor, rural, married couple whose lives are repeatedly upturned because of one or the other's desire for money and power. In the beginning of the novel, Celestino Yumí and Catalina (or Catarina) Zabala have almost nothing: they are childless and cannot afford shoes. They have no land of their own—probably a reflection of the real-life reversal of Árbenz' agrarian and land reforms—and instead live like serfs on a tiny plot of land. They sleep on their *petate* and survive on the small and unpredictable sums that Celestino earns by cutting and selling wood. Rural Guatemala seems less than idyllic in this work, in stark contrast to the utopian ending of *Hombres de maíz* where the indigenous family is shown to prosper and multiply in their rural paradise, growing their corn for sustenance. Asturias' renewed pessimism due to his country's downward spiral most certainly influenced his writing, and the utopian dream of the mid 1940s gave way to a 1960s study in human greed and dissatisfaction.

Celestino is the first one of this couple to allow his lack of satisfaction to lead him astray. He enters into a pact with *Tazol*, an indigenous demon or devil. The initial agreement is for Celestino to attend the Feria de San Martín Chile Verde with his fly undone so that all of the women who see him will take communion in sin. This apparently simple contract eventually evolves into Celestino agreeing to sell his wife Catalina to the devil in exchange for vast wealth. Once this relationship between Catalina and Celestino was infiltrated by the devil Tazol, it would never be the same again. Continuing the same line of analysis that was used on the other two novels by Asturias, the nation's suffering is symbolized through the distress of this married couple.

Something evil has come between them and that something is, incredibly, indigenous. After the exaltation of that culture that permeated every page of *Hombres de maíz*, it is difficult to understand Asturias' choice in this case. One might expect that the devil would be foreign, considering the history of United States' intervention in the area, but Asturias gives the impression that Guatemala's problems started in Guatemala with his choice of Tazol. Furthermore, the relinquishing of something irreplaceable, such as one's soul or in this case a spouse, in exchange for riches hints at Asturias' feelings toward wealthy Guatemalan elites who for so long turned a blind eye to the immense economic inequalities of their nation, allowing their desire for wealth and power to rule them. *Mulata de Tal* is a denunciation of the human cost of the accumulation of such wealth and power in too few hands.

The devil Tazol begins to convince Yumí to give up his wife by planting the idea in his head that she has cheated on him with his rich friend Teo Timoteo. Interestingly, Yumí would not mind that she had been with the other man if she had in fact become pregnant. It seems that what is really lacking in their life together is a child, and he is willing to accept even an illegitimate one. As in *Hombres de maíz*, a couple who reproduces is still the more desirable scenario. In this case the husband would go so far as to lie to himself about the origins of the baby his wife may be carrying in order to keep the family (and therefore the nation) intact; and not only would the family be intact, but it would also be a fruitful union rather than the barren one that previously existed. There is a sense of desperation to ensure a future for the family/nation at any price. Celestino's willingness to deceive himself in order to have the family he and his wife have longed for is short-lived, however, as Tazol eventually convinces him that he should relinquish

Catalina because the pregnancy is not certain. In exchange Tazol will make him a rich man. This is a difficult decision for Celestino, but Tazol's persuasive argument that once he is rich he will be able to have any woman he wants is enough to sway him. A plan is put into action, and in a short time Catalina disappears.

Yumí is sick with guilt, but everyone thinks that he is simply mourning the loss of his wife. He is very alone because he cannot share with anyone the reason for his desperation. Tazol does not show himself for some time and Yumí contemplates suicide, thinking that he has been tricked, but the devil will not allow him to do it. He arrives just in time and shows the poor man a kind of magic toy box full of miniatures. Yumí sees a whole world that is his for the taking, and he is happy again. Tazol convinces him that he can not become rich overnight, though, because that would be suspicious: "Y eso no conviene, no porque fueran a hacerte algo, no, el dinero es el mejor escudo: contra Dios, dinero; contra justicia, dinero; dinero para la carne; dinero para la gloria; dinero para todo, para todo, dinero."<sup>103</sup> Money, represented here as the answer to all of life's problems, is then characterized immediately afterward in a very different way:

La riqueza, Yumí, es como un nudo corredizo... [...] Para el avaro, la riqueza es el peor de los ahorcamientos y también para el dadivoso, el manirroto... Pero, lo que yo quería que supieras es que el nudo corredizo de todo lo que poseerás y ya posees en miniatura, está en mi brazo, más fuerte que la rama del tamarindo que habías escogido para colgarte y morir, y al darte la riqueza, como una cuerda, y colocarte al cuello, como la más valiosa condecoración humana, la sogá del millonario, de ti depende que te ahorques por avaro o pródigo, avaricioso o derrochador. (40)

This warning is strange coming from the devil himself, but it adds to the irony of the denouement. In the end, Tazol's proposed solution to life's problems (money) is also

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<sup>103</sup> Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Mulata de Tal*, critical ed., comp. Arturo Arias (Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2000), 39.

described as a noose, a tool used to end one's life, and ultimately the only way out of life is through death.

Celestino becomes rich, just as Tazol promised him, by taking out the things he desires one by one from the box of miniatures so they will become real. Then, exactly one year after attending the Feria de San Martín Chile Verde with his fly open, he meets the Mulata de Tal. He is extremely attracted to her and she entices the drunken Yumí to marry her by telling him that it is the only way that he may physically possess her. They are married by a judge with Teo as a witness and it is a most unnatural union. She never allows him to have sex with her face to face. This relationship is one of bigamy, given that Catalina is still alive, albeit in miniature, in the magic box that Tazol presented to Yumí nearly a year ago. She is in fact the last thing that he takes from the box, in a moment of desperation and dissatisfaction with his new wife:

No era una mujer, no era una fiera. Era un mar. Un mar de olas con uñas, en cuya vecindad dormía sobresaltado, cuando conseguía conservar el sueño entre los párpados, un poquito de sueño, sin que ella lo despertara, siempre insomne y turbulenta, para quejarse y llorar a veces, como una muñeca de café, susurrándole al oído: «¡Soy tu animalito! ¡Soy tu animalito!», o enfurecerse y atacarlo como al peor enemigo. (53)

This relationship between Yumí and his bestial partner is dangerous and unpredictable. The Mulata is not indigenous, but she is a marginal “other” of mixed race, and in most regions of Guatemala would be very exotic.<sup>104</sup> I agree that this portrayal of the destructive Mulata is, according to Diane Marting, used “to criticize a money economy (capitalist agriculture) and Western culture (Catholicism, Hispanic American social practices), both of which were (and are) being forced upon the men and women of rural

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<sup>104</sup> According to the CIA's online publication *The World Factbook*, the ethnic makeup of Guatemala is “Mestizo (mixed Amerindian-Spanish - in local Spanish called Ladino) and European 59.4%, K'iche 9.1%, Kaqchikel 8.4%, Mam 7.9%, Q'eqchi 6.3%, other Mayan 8.6%, indigenous non-Mayan 0.2%, other 0.1% (2001 census).” Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html>.

Native America.”<sup>105</sup> However, I do not agree with her claim that the title character is *mulata* and not *mestiza* or *ladina* in order to broaden the novel, making it more Latin American than Guatemalan. While it may be “more racially and ethnically inclusive than if all the characters had been Hispanic, Indian, or a mixture of the two,”<sup>106</sup> the fact that this woman is exotic is more indicative of capitalism as an *external* destructive force.

This union with the Mulata turns out to have been a poor choice for Celestino Yumí and represents the choices made by people in charge of the nation, the economic elites of Guatemala who supported dictators that consistently cooperated with foreign companies, placing a vast majority of Guatemala’s natural resources under their control. The Mulata is greedy and spends his money faster than he can make it, so he starts keeping dried corn leaves, “tazol en lugar de mazorcas” knowing that transforming them into paper money is the only way to keep up with the demands of the Mulata (53). Whereas in *Hombres de maíz* we see a people selling corn for a profit and then suffering for having done so, in *Mulata* the connection is even more direct. Celestino takes *tazol* (the corn leaf) and transforms it into paper money. Additionally, he is able to turn the *olote* into gold. Assuming that Asturias still espouses the idea that corn is sacred, these acts by Celestino are the ultimate in sacrilege. There is not even an exchange taking place in a market; it is simply the corruption of the plant through an evil kind of magic. Celestino became greedy as he was swept up in the current first of Tazol and then of the powerful Mulata and his little town of Quiavicús has a whole host of new residents because his wealth created a boom in the area. The town is growing and experiencing a process of modernization, much like Guatemala has in so many periods of its history; and

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<sup>105</sup> Diane E. Marting, *The Sexual Woman in Latin American Literature: Dangerous Desires* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 60.

<sup>106</sup> *Mulata de Tal*, 62.

the results are the same in fiction and reality. The so-called modernization that occurred during the dictatorships only benefited the elites and the foreign companies who managed the land. Quiavicus is booming but there are more poor people than ever and corruption is on the rise.

Yumí considers the possibility of bringing Catalina back home and getting rid of the Mulata, but when he finally removes Catalina from the box, she comes out as a dwarf. He is shocked, but willing to accept her as she is. Amazingly, after Yumí informs her of the situation he has created, she is also willing to contend with it. This is another potential opportunity for Catalina and Yumí to be happy together, except for two problems: first, the Mulata is standing in their way and second, Catalina is so small that their relationship could never be fruitful. Nevertheless, he takes his dwarf-wife home and the Mulata decides to keep her as one would a doll. In this part of the novel, Catalina's name becomes Juana and every subsequent shift in the lives of this couple is accompanied by a physical transformation, as well a change of name.

Juana reassures her husband that she will help him get rid of the Mulata and she does accomplish her goal temporarily, but eventually the Mulata escapes her prison and wreaks havoc on the town of Quiavicus. She comes in like an earthquake that swallows up everything in a frenzy of destruction. The city is devastated, Teo dies and the money in Yumí's pocket turns back into dried corn leaves. His decision to cooperate with Tazol, reminiscent of the long-time cooperation between various Guatemalan leaders and greedy outside interests, has led to the destruction of their wealth as the Mulata departs. A volcano rises up out of the ground where Yumí's house once stood. They are finally free of the Mulata, but they have been left even more impoverished than before Yumí's pact

with Tazol. The fact that they are back to some kind of a beginning makes the reader think that the couple is getting another chance to live their lives without the Mulata. They set out to find a way to survive, mainly as street performers who exploit Juana's dwarfism, dance and play music. In their travels they meet up with a group of creatures that are half-man, half-boar—the Salvajos. Through them, Yumí learns of a way to get Catalina back to her normal size, and it works. Finally, they are both the same size and they head back to Quiavicús. They live as they did before Tazol and forget their ambitions, believing that “la buena vida es la vida y nada más, no hay vida mala, porque la vida en sí es lo mejor que tenemos” (113).

Their contentment with remaining poor in Quiavicús does not last long. In the turn of just a couple of pages of the novel, they decide that they need power and set off to a town called Tierrapaulita where they can become “Grandes Brujos” or great sorcerers (117). This constant upheaval in the lives of the couple is suggestive of the unrelenting turmoil in Guatemala after 1954, with at least three regime changes in less than ten years, and no sign of improvement in sight. Yumí and his wife carry Tazol with them as protection on their quest for power, tied to a crucifix in order keep his evil side at bay. This couple is constantly taking risks in order to get something more, whether it is money or power, and they seem willing to do anything to get it—even continue to use the same devil that already destroyed their lives once. Asturias is making his country out to be rather imperceptive, or perhaps insane, with this invariable cycle of returning to the same problem and repeating the same errors.

The people who live in Tierrapaulita are all deformed, as are the buildings and the landscape. As time passes their first night in town, Yumí and Catalina also begin to suffer

physical changes, including missing toes and distorted faces, symptoms of their time spent in this corrupt and twisted town where no one can be trusted. Again, we are seeing the literally ugly consequences of the pursuit of power. In the middle of their quest to become sorcerers, they are struck by fear and attempt to leave Tierrapaulita, only to find that it is practically impossible. As they contemplate their options, trapped between three different groups of evil creatures, Catalina feels as though she has suddenly become very pregnant and she abruptly gives birth. The baby is the son of Tazol, who has impregnated her through her navel. Oddly enough, Yumí does not feel jealous of the fact that Catalina was impregnated by Tazol, since it happened through her navel rather than the usual way. The woman who could never have children winds up bearing the child of a devil and the baby, Tazolito, offers to save them from this situation in exchange for the freedom of his father Tazol. This transformation in their world comes with another new name for Catalina: Giroma, which means “mujer rica, poderosa, madre de todas las magias” (141).

Since Giroma is more powerful than Yumí now, he worries aloud that she might change him into a dwarf to get revenge on him, and so it happens. Yumí gets a new name, Chiltic, and he is made to dance, just as she had to when she was a dwarf. The family that once consisted of a normal sized Yumí, a dwarf-Juana and the powerful Mulata, is now a dwarf-Chiltic, a powerful Giroma and a baby/devil called Tazolito. In this circumstance, it is Giroma who is in charge and Giroma who becomes greedy. In this relationship, the two are never equals. One is always more powerful and the other is then usually a dwarf. These are not the makings of a solid, fruitful union, and so are not the makings of a solid nation. It is clear that ambition is always getting in the way of the relationship, representing Asturias’ criticism of the out of control ambition of his

countrymen, and the great disparity in size between Giroma and Chiltic represents the vast inequality present in Guatemalan society.

It has been some time since there was any mention of the Mulata at this point in the narration, or of bigamy. The moment is coming though, in which Yumí will become a bigamist once more. He is married by the priest of Tierrapaulita to a dwarf named Huasanga. The priest believes that they will be able to produce a legion of dwarfs to entertain the people. Yumí agrees to the marriage in order to get revenge on Giroma, but at the end of the wedding, she turns him into a giant so that he will not be able to consummate the marriage. Interestingly enough, Celestino, after trading his wife for riches, married the Mulata de Tal. He was a bigamist, married to a normal sized woman and a dwarf (Catalina). Later, he is the dwarf Chiltic, married to his first wife (Catalina) and a dwarf (Huasanga). “-¡Qué condena –reflexionaba Chiltic– ser siempre bígamo de enana y mujer completa! Primero, la Mulata de Tal y la Zabala, su mujer, que entonces era enanita, y ahora, su mujer, la poderosa Giroma, y esta enanísima de la Huasanga” (157). Any unevenness in the relationships of the other two novels by Asturias tends to be more along the lines of two people from different classes or with different ideologies or goals joining together in order to metaphorically unite a divided nation. The couples in *Mulata* are actually physically incompatible, but their physical attributes point toward roles of power and weakness, the rich and the poor, the hegemonic and the subaltern. In the many variations of the key relationship of this novel, the hegemonic partner is consistently out of control. Greed, envy and lust are always working within them to destroy the union, but somehow they continually fall back together only to begin the cycle again. On the level of the Guatemalan nation, these same kinds of incompatible

groups are seen juxtaposed in the deepening polarization of the people and increased disparity between the upper and lower classes as well as the insurgency and counter-insurgency groups. The cycle of corruption and violence, which continued long after the publication of *Mulata*, was already obvious to Asturias.

In a final incarnation of the relationship between Yumí and Catalina, they are both normal sized once again, but they still have the dwarf Huasanga living with them. To make things worse, the Mulata, to whom Yumí is still attracted, reemerges. The two are married (this time in the church, not by a judge) and Catalina arrives on the scene to destroy the Mulata. This act gives the impression that being married in the church equals crossing the line. Catalina sends Huasanga to remove the Mulata's sex, and in being castrated, she loses all of her magic. It is interesting that Catalina battles so furiously for Yumí after all he has done to her. They seem to be destined to fight for each other, only to let it all fall to pieces and repeat. There is never a moment of rest, never a child. The Mulata, on the other hand, only wants Yumí because she erroneously believes his skeleton is made of gold. There is no example of a fruitful, solid union in this novel and the ending is one of destruction, suggesting that Asturias was giving up on his dream of a utopian Guatemalan nation founded in the indigenous peoples. Gone are the images in *Hombres de maíz* of the indigenous family with their many children living happily ever after on their ranch. The images of reproduction in *Mulata de Tal* are ones either of fruitless sexual contact or of reproduction ordered by the Christian Devil in order for him to have more souls to carry off to Hell. Many women are castrated or barren, and the only birth is that of the demon-child Tazolito, through truly unnatural means.

Asturias continues to focus on the nation in his novels, beginning with frustration in *El Señor Presidente* and moving toward hope in *Hombres de maíz*, but his disillusion is apparent in *Mulata de Tal*. This novel is a step toward the works of the “boom” which, as Sommer tells us, “trace the historical density on a map full of mangled projects” and the characters rely on “pretty lies” in an attempt to salvage their disintegrating relationships.<sup>107</sup> At every opportunity to start a new life, Celestino Yumí and Catalina Zabala always seem to get it wrong. Their inability to have a child of their own destroys them time and again as they attempt to fill the void with wealth and power. Guatemala’s continued failure to form a single, productive nation is what is reflected in this tale. While it remains clear that Asturias desires a healthy nation, he has simply redirected his energy toward pointing out the failures rather than pointing out the path he saw as the correct one in *Hombres de maíz*.

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<sup>107</sup> Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 27.

### CHAPTER III: AUGUSTO MONTERROSO

With Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003) of the Generation of 1940/Grupo Acento, Guatemalan literature begins to move outside the boundaries of the concept of nationhood. The author's transnational biography may have had a part in the development of this perspective. Monterroso's mother was Honduran and his father Guatemalan, and he was born in Tegucigalpa. His family traveled between these two countries during Monterroso's youth and eventually settled in Guatemala in the mid-1930s. There he began to write, and in 1941 he published his first short stories in *Acento* magazine and in the newspaper *El Imparcial*. Jorge Ubico was Guatemala's dictator at that time, and Monterroso's involvement in anti-government activities led to his arrest, but he eventually escaped and sought asylum through the Mexican Embassy. He left Guatemala for Mexico in 1944, just after Ubico's fall from power. Shortly thereafter, during the Arévalo administration, he was employed at the Guatemalan Consulate in Mexico City. In 1953 he left Mexico for Bolivia, where he worked as a diplomat in La Paz until the 1954 CIA-supported coup ousted the Árbenz government and ended Guatemala's Democratic Spring. He then was obliged to abandon Bolivia for Chile and finally, from 1956 on, he resided in exile in Mexico until his death in 2003. He only returned to Guatemala a handful of times in the mid-1990s upon receiving several honors and awards there. Because of the fact that he spent the greater part of his life in Mexico, many critics perceive Monterroso's works as Mexican and it would not be unusual to read his works in a course on Mexican literature.<sup>108</sup> Seen from this perspective, his life is

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<sup>108</sup> Monterroso's work is also treated as Mexican, or at least compared with other works and authors labeled as Mexican, in more than a few journal articles and dissertations. In fact, a search of the keywords "Monterroso" and "mexic\*" in the MLA International Bibliography (16 June 2010) produced thirteen articles and dissertation abstracts in which the first descriptor is "Mexican literature." See for example

a great example of Ulrich Beck's concept of place polygamy mentioned in the Introduction. Monterroso's biography is similar to Asturias' in that both traveled a good deal and held diplomatic positions in the Guatemalan government, but Monterroso's exile after the end of the Democratic Spring took place mainly in Mexico, and he never worked with any Guatemalan government body again after the end of the Democratic Spring.

Monterroso's focus was never fixed plainly on the nation of Guatemala in any direct sense, and this aspect of his work has been interpreted by some as a lack of commitment to Guatemala, when on the contrary; Guatemalan society is at times a major theme for the author. He tended to omit details that would place his works in a particular region, country, or locale. Monterroso's transnational life, along with his extraterritorial style of writing and a belief that to change the world is not the purpose of literature, has translated into a body of work that some perceive as "universal." As was already pointed out in the first chapter, this term is inappropriate to describe Monterroso, as it implies an orientation toward Western tastes and in some cases a lack of uniqueness. Furthermore, as Butler and Žižek have noted, there are no true universals since each group will have differing views on what constitutes the universal.<sup>109</sup> I prefer to describe him as a cosmopolitan author who has produced a wide variety of socially conscious works which reference problems specific to Guatemala, as well as many works that lack any direct references to particular countries or even to historical figures, Guatemalan or otherwise. While it may have initially stemmed from a fear of repercussions, the beauty of such ambiguity is that it leaves the reader free to imagine any number of interpretations.

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Teresa Sadurní's "Rulfo, Arreola y Monterroso: tradición y modernidad en el cuento mexicano," *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 31, no. 61 (2005): 91-109; or Lauro Zavala's anthology *Relatos mexicanos posmodernos: Antología de prosa ultracorta, híbrida y lúdica* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, 315.

Monterroso's vision allows for representation of the human being in general rather than a specific group or nationality, and thereby opens up his works to a much broader audience.

In *Literatura posnacional*, Bernat Castany Prado speaks of how he arrived at the selection of the term "posnacional" to describe the type of literature he studies in his text. He had considered both "transnacionalismo" and "cosmopolitismo" in the process, and he explains that

«transnacionalismo» expresa perfectamente el carácter de *Aufhebung*, esto es, «superar conservando», que el «posnacionalismo» parece pretender en su relación dialéctica con el nacionalismo. Este término, sin embargo, parece sugerir más un nacionalismo ampliado, regional o continental, que en el fondo conserve la esencia del nacionalismo, que una verdadera superación del mismo. Sin olvidar que este término tiene demasiadas connotaciones económicas al haberse utilizado como sinónimo de empresa multinacional.<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, he discarded "cosmopolitismo" mainly because it is a millenary intellectual tradition, while the phenomenon he studies is more recent. However, he also admits that cosmopolitanism has evolved over the centuries, and that there is a connection between the cosmopolitan and the postnational. In the end, he preferred to reserve the term cosmopolitanism to refer to the philosophical tradition from which postnationalism admittedly drinks.<sup>111</sup>

I agree with Castany Prado that the term "transnational" is inadequate to describe the type of literature he studies. For the purposes of this study, while it may be used to describe Monterroso's biography, it is not appropriate to describe his body of work. Cosmopolitan is a viable option for this study of Monterroso's writing although Castany Prado's definition is not preferred. For him, the philosophy of cosmopolitanism is "aquel que considera el pertenecer a la humanidad en su conjunto como más importante que el

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<sup>110</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 74.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

pertenecer a cualquier otro grupo menor en virtud del convencimiento de que todos los seres humanos participan de un elemento común que los une: elemento que ha cambiado según las épocas históricas.”<sup>112</sup> This explanation is lacking the focus on diversity as a central theme of cosmopolitanism found in the descriptions elaborated by Ulf Hannerz and Kwame Anthony Appiah that were cited in the first chapter of this study. For Hannerz, cosmopolitanism implies “a willingness to engage with the Other” and its existence relies heavily on the presence of other cultures, or in other words, “there can be no cosmopolitans without locals.”<sup>113</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah takes a similar stance, explaining that a cosmopolitan has “obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship” and at the same time, “because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life.”<sup>114</sup> The cosmopolitan recognizes and respects difference rather than attempting to impose any kind of universal order or sameness, which would eliminate the very object of the cosmopolitans’ attention.

Exile is also an important part of the discussion of Monterroso’s life and work due to the fact that he spent more than half of his life exiled in Mexico. Edward Said famously described the state of exile as “strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience” and called it “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a

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<sup>112</sup> *Literatura posnacional*, 137. Castany Prado also divides his idea of postnationalism into a variety of types, the first of which is the cosmopolitan type, “uno propiamente cosmopolita, que recuperaría el discurso estoico-ilustrado de corte individualista y propondría la formación de un gobierno y una ciudadanía mundial” (78). For Castany Prado, cosmopolitan postnationalism connects back directly to the cynics and stoics in its Western incarnation (though cosmopolitanism is not only of the West) and in Latin American literature, Jorge Luis Borges is his prime example.

<sup>113</sup> Ulf Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (June 1990): 239, 250.

<sup>114</sup> Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xv.

native place.”<sup>115</sup> Monterroso expressed similar feelings when he spoke of the condition of being an exiled Latin American writer in his essay “Llorar orillas del río Mapocho.”

There he stated that “para un latinoamericano que un día será escritor las tres cosas más importantes del mundo son: las nubes, escribir y, mientras puede, esconder lo que escribe.” The idea that one must hide their work is, of course, due to the dangerous nature of writing anything that could be considered contrary to authority in a land ruled by a dictator. Monterroso goes on to say that

el destino de quienquiera que nazca en Honduras, Guatemala, Uruguay o Paraguay y por cualquier circunstancia, familiar o ambiental, se le ocurra dedicar una parte de su tiempo a leer y de ahí a pensar y de ahí a escribir, está en cualquiera de las tres famosas posibilidades: destierro, encierro o entierro. Así que más tarde o más temprano, si logra evitar el último, llegará el día en que se encuentre con la maleta en la mano y en la maleta un suéter, una camisa de repuesto y un tomo de Montaigne, al otro lado de cualquier frontera y en una ciudad desconocida, oyendo otras voces y viendo otras caras, como quien despierta de un mal sueño para encontrarse con una pesadilla.<sup>116</sup>

This is an extremely skillful description of exile and the condition of the immigrant or the political refugee. Regardless of the fact that the exiled writer is surviving or even thriving as a direct result of his flight, to have to make this type of a choice is still a troubling situation. As Said explained:

exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism. On the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as “good for us.”<sup>117</sup>

Even in the supposed safety of exile, Monterroso avoids writing very directly about historical figures like dictators, for example. One reason for this decision is the

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<sup>115</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 173.

<sup>116</sup> Monterroso, *La palabra mágica* (México: Ediciones Era, 1983), 16.

<sup>117</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 174.

aforementioned danger of directly criticizing a dictator or totalitarian government.

Another reason relates to his feelings about the role of literature. He stated on more than one occasion that the purpose of literature is not to change people or to fix the world.<sup>118</sup>

He preferred allusions to politics and historical events and figures over actually naming them, and ambiguity is favored over obvious political commitment in the majority of his writing. As Will H. Corral put it, “no es ninguna coincidencia que cuando los escritores centroamericanos y sudamericanos de las dos últimas décadas asumen de manera frontal una responsabilidad testimonial (y personalmente peligrosa) ante la historia, Monterroso y su obra son un punto de partida obligatorio para encontrar las bases de ese compromiso.”<sup>119</sup>

The selection of the term “cosmopolitan” for this study of Monterroso takes into account the controversial nature of the author’s life in exile and his attention to all human beings rather than just one nation. Bruce Robbins explains how the left has criticized cosmopolitanism for such behaviors:

The most general form of the case against cosmopolitanism on the left is the assumption that to pass outside the borders of one’s nation, whether by physical travel or merely by thoughts and feelings entertained while one stays at home, is to wallow in a privileged and irresponsible detachment. What is assumed is in fact a chain of successive detachments: from true feeling, hence from the responsibility that engages a whole person, not a sometime spectator; from responsibility, hence from the constituency to which one would be responsible; from constituency, hence from significant political action.<sup>120</sup>

This explanation details many of the feelings held by those who remained in their home countries to fight an oppressive regime, while their comrades fled to safer lands as

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<sup>118</sup> “Novelas sobre dictadores 2” in *La palabra mágica* (México: Ediciones Era, 1983), 51 is one example. Also see “Inutilidad de la sátira” in *Viaje al centro de la fábula*, 37-40 (México: Ediciones Era, 1989).

<sup>119</sup> Corral, “Prólogo,” in Corral, *Refracción*, 12.

<sup>120</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Introduction Part I,” *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 4.

Monterroso did. Another example of criticism of cosmopolitanism is outlined by Appiah in his essay “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” which discusses the fear of cultural homogenization as the root of the idea that cosmopolitanism is “parasitic.” Appiah dispels such fears and points out that while some homogenization is certainly always occurring, “as forms of culture disappear, new forms are created, and they are created locally.”<sup>121</sup> The arguments against cosmopolitanism are echoed in views expressed by critics of those who chose exile rather than to stay and fight for social justice in their homeland.

Monterroso’s lack of focus on specifically Guatemalan themes in much of his body of work is not a sign of detachment from the problems facing that country. Furthermore, in borrowing from western philosophical and literary traditions and denying any relationship between politics and literature, Monterroso was not in the business of producing culturally homogenized and escapist works, but rather creating and nurturing his own literary style. Monterroso spent a good deal of time defending this style in many of his writings and interviews. The following examples come from the interviews collected in *Viaje al centro de la fábula*.<sup>122</sup> As part of his response to whether or not he believes that literature has a social and/or political end, he states: “No sé por qué [la literatura] tiene tanto prestigio, ni por qué a veces a los escritores se les pide y en muchos casos se les exige que hagan novelas como editoriales o poemas para derrumbar al tirano. Otra cosa es que el novelista, el poeta o el ensayista quieran hacerlo” (37). Later in the same interview he replies negatively to the question, “¿Pueden separarse la postura política del escritor y su creación literaria?” and goes on to say:

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<sup>121</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in Cheah and Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 92.

<sup>122</sup> All pages cited are from Augusto Monterroso, *Viaje al centro de la fábula* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1989).

Sabemos ya que cualquier actitud es una actitud política. Claro, estas actitudes alcanzan una gama muy extensa. En cuanto a la literatura, es decir, a la actitud política del escritor y la relación de ésta con su creación literaria, no siempre aparece en forma tan evidente. El juicio sobre la obra de cualquier escritor está siempre teñido por los prejuicios dominantes en su tiempo o en su circunstancia, o por la exigencia o la prisa con que determinadas personas bien o mal intencionadas quieren que las cosas cambien. (38)

When asked in another interview what type of writer or literary attitude he least supports or what kind of literature interests him the least, he responds: “Los novelistas o los poetas –buenos o malos, eso no lo sé porque nunca los leo– que adquieren notoriedad atacando o defendiendo al Estado en que viven, cualquiera que sea ese Estado, socialista o capitalista” (43). It would seem clear that Monterroso did not wish to become well known for his level of political commitment, but rather for his abilities as a writer. Another interviewer comments that many critics speak of the social responsibility of the writer, to which he replies:

La responsabilidad social es de todos. Quizá en países analfabetos, en que al escritor se le exige algo que él no se había propuesto, toda vez que no es político, ni sociológico, ni dirigente de masas, en esos países pienso que se está exagerando esto. El escritor es un artista, no un reformador. Los *Versos sencillos* de Martí son la obra de un *escritor*. Cuando Martí quiso actuar como político agarró un fusil, atravesó el Caribe, se montó en un caballo y murió bellamente en el primer combate. Siempre supo qué cosa estaba haciendo. (64)

The author recognizes that there is a certain futility in attempting to influence outcomes through written works in countries that, like Guatemala, have a high rate of illiteracy. In his own writing, he only deals with politics inasmuch as it is something commonplace, “en cuanto el tema político resulta tan cotidiano como cualquier otro. En nuestros países, y esto es quizá lo que haga que ciertos críticos quieran más política en lo que uno escribe, la política absorbe prácticamente todo” (64). He reveals his pet peaves as “los escritores que se valen de las revoluciones latinoamericanas para adquirir notoriedad; la canción

protesta y la música popular en estaciones de radio culturales” (72). When asked what he thinks about *compromiso*: “Aparte de sus compromisos políticos, familiares, laborales, sociales, deportivos o culinarios, el único compromiso del escritor es el de no publicar cosas mal hechas” (74). Finally, speaking in 1982 of young writers in Guatemala he laments, “Hoy los escritores jóvenes se van a la montaña en calidad de guerrilleros y muchos mueren allí y se convierten en símbolos de algo nuevo y esperanzado; o trabajan clandestinamente en las ciudades y sacrifican cualquier posibilidad de fama y por eso no los conocemos. Y por eso en Guatemala hay como un gran silencio literario” (104).

These interviews reveal that Monterroso was questioned a great deal about his political commitment, even though it was at times indirect. His responses to the line of questioning introduced by many different interviewers consistently communicate his attitude toward the relationship between politics and literature; that it is somewhat of a non-topic for him. For Monterroso a writer can be patriotic or rooted in their home country or region, and can be highly conscious of social injustice, even committed to political change without necessarily revealing this through his or her work. Likewise one can write about his homeland, or not, without it becoming necessary for the public to question the commitment of the writer. As a cosmopolitan writer, Monterroso obviously felt a deep connection to Guatemala, but the idea that he or any other writer should feel somehow compelled to tackle social problems in their narrative is anathema to him.

Whether or not the cosmopolitan writer chooses to reveal his patriotism or social commitment through his works, cosmopolitanism is in fact very compatible with patriotism. There are various perspectives on this question, one being that of Timothy Brennan, who describes cosmopolitanism as the opposite of patriotism, and states that it

“is *local* while denying its local character.”<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, Kwame Anthony Appiah, as the title of his work “Cosmopolitan Patriots” suggests, focuses more on the ways in which patriotism and cosmopolitanism are similar and even work together, rather than being mutually exclusive concepts. He describes this type of cosmopolitan patriotism as “rooted cosmopolitanism” in which anyone can be “attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people.”<sup>124</sup> This is the view of cosmopolitanism most compatible with the present analysis of Monterroso’s works.

Literature itself is a common theme in Monterroso’s writing, and his biggest preoccupation was to write well. He was concerned that any attempt to change the world through literature was a fool’s errand that would accomplish little more than to lower the caliber of his writing and/or transform it into mere propaganda. That does not mean, however, that a reader of his works will or should automatically draw the conclusion that Monterroso is unconcerned with the situation in Guatemala, the wider regions of Central or Latin America or even the world as a whole. In fact, Guatemalan society is a major theme of Monterroso’s work, although as Zimmerman states, it is rarely portrayed through “clear and direct social comment.”<sup>125</sup> Monterroso focused on his craft rather than on transforming the world through literature, so it is not surprising that historical details, like the location and time period in which the action takes place, are not clearly stated in most of his narrative. His works can be interpreted as speaking about Guatemala (the local) and the broader world (the global) from a cosmopolitan perspective. According to J. Ann Duncan, “Monterroso escribe para divertirse (y divertirnos) y no por algún motivo

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<sup>123</sup> Timothy Brennan, “Cosmo-Theory,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 660.

<sup>124</sup> Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in Cheah and Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 91.

<sup>125</sup> Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala*, vol. 1, 141.

más ambicioso; y esta actitud en verdad modesta y relajada es, tal vez, lúdica en mayor medida que los textos incómodamente abiertos que frente a nosotros mueven escritores cuyo propósito real es orientar nuestra lectura sólo en ciertas direcciones.”<sup>126</sup>

Monterroso’s cosmopolitanism is evidenced in his narrative through the mixing of genres, cultural tastes, and modes of literary production as well as the content. His works should be viewed as hybrid rather than homogenized creations. They reflect his cosmopolitanism and represent the surmounting of universal discourses, revealing Monterroso’s style as more subversive than universal. The use of a hybrid style such as this (which he has stated is the result of the situation of Guatemala as well as that of the “western” world during his youth) is an act of aggression on standard forms of narrative. This hybrid form does not venerate either western culture or the autochthonous; on the contrary, it transforms both as they intermingle.

Monterroso is known for his short fiction and published several books of short stories and fables as well as one novel, *Lo demás es silencio: la vida y la obra de Eduardo Torres* (1982), and various non-fiction works including the compilations of essays and short fiction titled *La palabra mágica* (1983), *La letra e (Fragmentos de un diario)* (1987) and the memoir *Los buscadores de oro* (1993). He called his first book of short stories *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* (1959), and in that adeptly chosen title we can see the humor of the author at work.<sup>127</sup> He has been awarded many literary prizes

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<sup>126</sup> J. Ann Duncan, “Completar las obras más que completas de Augusto Monterroso,” in Corral, *Refracción*, 64-65.

<sup>127</sup> For more on Monterroso’s sense of humor see Dante Liano, “El fin de la utopía genera monstruos” in *Literaturas centroamericanas hoy: Desde la dolorosa cintura de América* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005); Francisca Noguero Jiméñez, *La trampa en la sonrisa: Sátira en la narrativa de Augusto Monterroso* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1995); or Rony Garrido Prado’s *El humor como principio organizador de las obras de Augusto Monterroso* (Guatemala: Editorial Cultura, 2006).

including the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia (1975), the Premio Juan Rulfo (1996) and the Premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Letras (2000).<sup>128</sup>

Monterroso composed several well-known short stories that more overtly show his political commitment to Guatemala through biting social commentary. “Míster Taylor,” “El eclipse” and “Primera Dama” are the most commonly referenced, and have been studied much more extensively than the rest of his body of work. All three appear in his first collection, *Obras completas*. “Míster Taylor” tells the story of a “gringo pobre” and his encounter with the indigenous people of an unnamed, tropical region. His purchase and resale of a shrunken head eventually brings about such an insatiable demand for shrunken heads abroad that the country’s population is decimated and the very same Míster Taylor becomes part of the inventory. “El eclipse” also deals with an encounter between a white man and the indigenous population. In this story, however, the man is a Spanish priest who underestimates the Indians’ knowledge of astronomy and is unable to change his destiny of being the victim of a Mayan sacrifice. Finally, in “Primera dama” we are introduced to the egotistical wife of a president and her desire to recite poetry to a group that has been assembled to raise money to combat childhood hunger. In truth, she is more focused on the opportunity to recite than on the task of helping the schoolchildren. This First Lady is believed to be based on actress Berta

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<sup>128</sup> The Premio Xavier Villaurrutia was started in 1955 in order to support and diffuse Mexican literature as well as the literature of exiled authors living and/or publishing in Mexico. The first author to receive it was Juan Rulfo for his novel, *Pedro Páramo*. The Premio Juan Rulfo is now called the Premio de Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe and is awarded every year (since 1991) at the Feria del Libro in Guadalajara, Mexico. It is considered to be one of the most prestigious literary awards in all of Latin America. The Premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Letras is, since 1981, awarded to a person or group whose work represents an important contribution to the heritage of all Spanish-speaking peoples.

Singerman, the wife of one-time general and president of Guatemala, Carlos Castillo Armas.<sup>129</sup>

The author chose to omit details about the specific location of the action in two of these political stories, but one could easily perceive that the narrator is commenting on the situation of Guatemala in either of them. However, it is also possible to imagine the action occurring in any number of countries of the so-called Third World. In fact, all three of these obviously political works represent the author's commitment to Guatemala at the same time that they warn against too much focus on one's own social group. The lack of knowledge of other classes or cultures turns out to be the downfall of the protagonists in each story. This display of the perils of such non-cosmopolitan behaviors, such as the ignorance of the supposedly educated and civilized, is comical, but at the same time it evokes a cringing reaction in the reader. These stories are very popular, but Monterroso is cautious not to let that type of writing overwhelm his body of work. In his own words, he explains:

Mis cuentos más conocidos y antologados, "Mr. Taylor" y "Primera Dama", son políticos de principio a fin. Lo que ocurre es que estoy convencido de que si uno pone demasiada política en lo que escribe corre el riesgo de volverse popular durante un tiempo entre los jóvenes, lo que implica el riesgo adicional de creer que ése es el único camino de la literatura.<sup>130</sup>

Because they are more well-known and are the works that have received the most critical attention, this study will go no further in the analysis of these more obviously political stories.

That Monterroso focused his creative energy on short stories and essays more than any other genre is interesting, especially considering the popular literary movements

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<sup>129</sup> Noguero Jiméñez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 90-91.

<sup>130</sup> Monterroso, *Viaje al centro de la fábula*, 89.

of his time. The Latin American “boom” was in full swing when he published his collection of fables, *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (1969). As Dante Liano put it, Guatemalan literature was moving towards brevity while the rest of Hispanic America was “construyendo catedrales de palabras.”<sup>131</sup> Moreover, brevity was taken to the extreme with Monterroso in his *micro-cuentos*. He is credited with having written perhaps the shortest story ever, “El dinosaurio” which consists of the following statement: “Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí.”<sup>132</sup> His cultivation of this genre has allowed him to achieve worldwide status as a short story author of the highest regard and his works have been translated into more than a dozen languages.

This chapter will deal with short stories from *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)*, fables from *La oveja negra y demás fábulas*, and finally Monterroso’s ventures in even more innovative, hybrid genres, which include selections from *Movimiento perpetuo*, *La palabra mágica*, *La letra e*, and the novel *Lo demás es silencio*. As was explained in the above, the term “universal” is unstable. It can be suggestive of general similarity or a lack of discerning characteristics, and in that sense is inappropriate to describe Monterroso’s body of work. Another problem with the term is the fact that it has commonly been used to describe whatever the dominant culture of a time and place might be. There is no one true universal, as Judith Butler has pointed out, but rather multiple, competing universalities. The analysis will show that Monterroso’s cosmopolitan style, use of hybrid genres which combine classic modes with modern themes, and willingness to go against the grain and write short fiction rather than follow the trends of the time, reveal him as an innovator in his field.

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<sup>131</sup> Liano, “El fin de la utopía...,” in Kohut and Mackenbach, *Literaturas Centroamericanas hoy*, 127.

<sup>132</sup> Monterroso, *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1998), 77.

The intricate short story “Diógenes también” appears in *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)* alongside the more celebrated “Mister Taylor,” “Primera dama” and “El eclipse.” It is a complex work in which the ambiguity common to Monterroso’s writing once again leaves the story open to various interpretations. Many critics have chosen to focus on the psychological or surrealist aspects of the work, if not ignore it altogether, but the story is a wonderful example of a work that is committed and artful as well as open to interpretation. It is not surprising that “Diógenes también” has received so little attention. As with much of Monterroso’s writing, the reader must familiarize him or herself with centuries of philosophy and literature in order to begin to understand the countless references the author utilizes. That is not to say that one must be the ideal reader in order to enjoy the work, but rather that the analysis can be enhanced if the reader is willing and able to participate actively. In this story, Monterroso has woven an intricate web of seemingly insane narratives in order to portray a social problem, not just a complex, psychological representation.

The story begins with a third person narrator who soon converts to first person. In this moment it is uncertain whether or not the same character is narrating, or someone completely different. Later on, and many times, the narrative voice obviously alternates between the son (called simply “P.”), the father, and in the end, the mother of the family. Francisca Noguerol Jiménez has focused on the psychology of Monterroso’s works which deal with the problems of the family unit. She explains:

Los diferentes personajes de “Diógenes también” —el hijo, el padre, y la madre— narran la muerte del perro de la familia a través de testimonios contradictorios. La anécdota que da pie al relato, abierta a varias interpretaciones, desvela la profunda angustia e incomunicación de los tres narradores, quienes al final del texto se revelan como diferentes caras de una única personalidad esquizofrénica.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Noguerol Jiménez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 111.

Rather than having a single schizophrenic personality, I see this work as a dialogue occurring between various marginalized characters. One of the characters is Diógenes, the family dog whose name appears in the title. Although he is technically silent, this important character's voice comes through to the extent that he is the embodiment of Diogenes the Cynic. This mix of classical and contemporary themes portrays an early example of Monterroso's cosmopolitan vision.

Diogenes of Sinope (also known as the Cynic) was a Greek philosopher who appeared in the *Dialogues of the Dead* of Lucian of Samosata, a second-century author who lived in what is now Turkey. Lucian used the Cynic to illustrate indifference toward death, which was a characteristic of Diogenes. Through the centuries, future generations of authors would make use of this figure time and again. One of these was William Blake, the author of the epigraph which appears at the beginning of "Diógenes también" ("sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires").<sup>134</sup> Another was Augusto Monterroso in "Diógenes también." The intertextuality of this story, which involves the Englishman William Blake, Diogenes the Cynic and the setting of Guatemala, is an excellent example of the cosmopolitan hybridity of Monterroso's narrative style.

According to David Mazella, William Blake used Diogenes to exploit "the potential for the broadest possible critique of his own historical moment."<sup>135</sup> Diogenes represents different things for the various English authors of the eighteenth century whom Mazella studies. He explains that Diogenes' "discontinuous quality actually makes him

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<sup>134</sup> Monterroso, *Obras completas*, 59. The quotation Monterroso employs is one of the Proverbs of Hell from Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

<sup>135</sup> David Mazella, "Diogenes the Cynic in the Dialogues of the Dead of Thomas Brown, Lord Lyttelton, and William Blake," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48, no. 2 (2006): 103.

an excellent vehicle for writers reflecting upon their own present.”<sup>136</sup> Historically, it is understood that Diogenes of Sinope had a reputation for being a rude person who lived off the kindness of others or even robbed what he needed to survive. He earned the nickname “Cynic” or “Dog” by way of his lifestyle and, of course, lived in the street like a stray dog.<sup>137</sup> Mazella comments that Diogenes considered himself a cosmopolite “because he lived in a condition of voluntary exile and poverty, without a home, family, or city-state to call his own.”<sup>138</sup> He was a philosopher who considered marginality a necessary and even optimum state of being.

Just like the English authors of the eighteenth century in their *Dialogues of the Dead*, Monterroso arms himself with the “viejo cínico” in “Diógenes también.” Ironically, his employment of Diogenes simultaneously conceals and strengthens Monterroso’s critique of the Guatemalan society. If a reader fails to investigate the epigraph, he or she may not fully understand the meaning of the use of Diogenes. As Noguero Jiménez explains in her study of Monterroso, “[su narrativa] genera palimpsestos literarios de múltiples significaciones, que el lector puede interpretar equivocadamente debido a la enorme gama de referencias culturales utilizadas en ellos.”<sup>139</sup> “Diógenes también” is no exception; it requires a reader eager to participate in order to achieve the most complete reading.

At various points in the narration, there is confusion about exactly who is speaking and even whether the son and the father are one and the same as Noguero Jiménez has suggested. The parallel created between the two male characters lends itself

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<sup>136</sup> Mazella, “Diógenes the Cynic,” 119.

<sup>137</sup> See Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives, opinions, and remarkable sayings of the most famous ancient philosophers*.

<sup>138</sup> Mazella, “Diógenes the Cynic,” 104.

<sup>139</sup> Noguero Jiménez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 14-15.

to the idea that violence begets violence. If they are not one and the same, P. is definitely his father's son. At one point, one of the narrators says, "ningún otro niño (excepto mi hijo) ha tenido un padre como el mío."<sup>140</sup> This comment reinforces the idea that a child raised around violence will tend toward that behavior himself. The chain of violence is adeptly illustrated and the difficulty of distinguishing between the narrations and the conflated identities of father and son is a mechanism used to reveal that pattern.

The narrator-son begins to fill in more details, which leave the reader with the image of a poor, unhappy, dysfunctional family. The father is obsessed with catching the mother cheating on him; the mother is fixated on needlepoint. The mother also makes great efforts to disguise the fact that the family situation is less than ideal—that the violent, alcoholic father of P. has abandoned them. When at last the father's version of events is revealed, the reader is presented with a confused and unreal environment. In one moment the father is attempting to remove his coat, which in the next instant has become a straitjacket. The identities of his wife and his mother are conflated, and once again there is a mingling of the father and son characters to throw light on the chain of violence.

The narrator-father begins to talk about the family dog and to explain the source of his hatred toward that species. He insists on not mentioning the name of their pet and hints that the dog's name had something to do with its death. Nevertheless, there is an asterisk, which leads the reader to a footnote that reveals the name of the dog to be Diógenes. The importance of the dog's name is undeniable. Not only does it appear in the title of the story, the father then refuses to utter it and it appears, ironically, as a footnote. Additionally, the incident of the dog's death is the densest part of the story and it seems as though everything apart from that scene occurs in an instant. The narrator-son provides

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<sup>140</sup> Monterroso, *Obras completas*, 62.

a detailed description of the moments leading up to Diógenes' death. He speaks of how shocked he and his mother were by the event—the father having shown such apparent tenderness toward their pet right before he slammed an iron down on his head. As P. sadly recalls just prior to narrating the violence: “ese día tuve una vaga idea de lo que era la felicidad” (72). He even blames the victim somewhat, just as the father does at the end of the story.

In the last few lines of the tale, the various perspectives of the father, mother and son are presented in juxtaposition. This is not a dialogue in the conventional sense of a conversation that occurs between the narration's characters in real time. It is the juxtaposition of the contrasting perspectives of the different narrators, and it is used as a philosophical or didactic device as much as a narrative one. In this text, each of the characters provides their testimony regarding the death of Diógenes. They are contradictory statements that still reflect and anticipate each other even though they are not portrayed as a conversation. Each character attempts to blame another, or even the dog himself. Neither of the two parents have anything good to say about the son—they accuse him of lying about his childhood, the dog, and more. It is a dialogue, but one of chaos where there is no real communication among the characters. In this way, Monterroso has altered the conventional understanding of dialogue as conversation in order to draw attention to the problems of the family and society.

The criticism offered through this text is of a society that cannot unite. The family is the most basic unit of a society and if it is in crisis, one can interpret the society as being in crisis. Diógenes gives himself over to death, perhaps not indifferently like the philosopher, but no doubt innocently. He is unaware of the consequences of trusting his

master. The dog is generally symbolic of certain characteristics, such as loyalty and unconditional love. The death of Diógenes is representative of the end of any hope of those positive attributes surviving in this family. He is not the same Diogenes as Blake's, but he does call attention to the indifference toward violence and death. Blake employed the figure of Diogenes to demonstrate indifference toward death as something positive. Monterroso does the opposite. He calls attention to the chain of violence and the problem of indifference toward such a vicious cycle.

As was previously referenced in the Introduction to this study, Monterroso explained in *La letra e* that the situation in Guatemala (the Ubico dictatorship) and that of the world (the Second World War) during his adolescence were both contributing factors in his development as a thinker and a writer. He admits a profound preoccupation with Guatemala and recognizes that he has been influenced by not only Guatemalan politics, culture and literature, but also more than two millennia of Western literature and culture.<sup>141</sup> It is obvious that in writing "Diógenes también," Monterroso had not ceased to consider these two factors in his intellectual and literary formation, and they are in fact very much present, forming a hybrid narration revealed through the reference to the Cynic of the Western tradition combined with the dysfunctional family representing the effects of the social and political situation in Monterroso's homeland. In fact, there is even a mention of "los aguaceros del verano, que en mi país se llama invierno."<sup>142</sup> This leads the reader to place the action in Guatemala, where the rainy months of summer are indeed called winter.

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<sup>141</sup> Monterroso, *La letra e*, 129-130.

<sup>142</sup> Monterroso, *Obras completas*, 61.

Monterroso's rooted cosmopolitanism, his commitment to both literature and social justice, remains intact according to what is revealed by a detailed analysis of this work. The many levels of interpretation are at times dizzying, but one must appreciate the genius of an author capable of managing so many layers of sub-text. The figure of Diógenes is used to draw attention to society's indifference toward violence and death. He converts Diógenes into a symbol of innocence and in killing him off in such a sudden and brutal way, he calls the reader's attention to the consequences of violence. As was previously noted, Monterroso's work can lead the careful reader to view him as committed to Guatemala, but it is also vague enough in its references to allow for broader interpretations. The hybridity of the story reveals the subversive nature of Monterroso's narration. He is creating something completely different by combining these classic and modern elements, confronting the problem of violence in a unique and cosmopolitan way.

The next collection of works that Monterroso published is *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (1969).<sup>143</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first definition of fable is "a fictitious narrative or statement; a story not founded on fact" and the second adds, "a short story devised to convey some useful lesson; *esp.* one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors; an apologue. Now the most prominent sense."<sup>144</sup> Structurally speaking, Monterroso's fables make use of the classic formulas and phrases one would expect to find. There are few characters, and they are often animals or inanimate objects. Most of the fables begin with phrases like "había una vez" or "hace mucho tiempo." Angel Rama wrote that Monterroso's choice of such a conventional genre as the fable was an unusual one, since so few writers dared to approach it.

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<sup>143</sup> Augusto Monterroso, *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. "fable."

Pocos escritores se atrevieron con las fábulas. Justamente porque ellas olían a literatura en un tiempo que decidió que lo que escribía no era literatura. Escribir fábulas significó fingir reconocer explícitamente la construcción de un artificio literario: en el flagrante manejo de una irrealdad nada inquietante y toda ella convencional . . . se diseña el riguroso campo textual de una mera operación de la escritura.<sup>145</sup>

Monterroso's borrowing of the form of the classic fable to write his collection mirrors the relationship of the *Dialogues of the Dead* to "Diógenes también." Both are examples of how Monterroso borrowed a classic genre from the Western world and made it relevant to his time and experience, thereby revealing himself as a rooted cosmopolitan. Beyond their structure, these fables are quite different from the traditional ones attributed to Aesop, and can be seen as anti-fables. Jorge von Ziegler goes so far as to say that Monterroso's fables are in fact a negation of the genre:

A pesar de esos modos mecánicos que nos devuelven la cultura del género, las frágiles composiciones de Monterroso son una verdadera crítica de la tradición. . . . Apela al mito y a la leyenda familiares. Pero sólo para traicionar después la lengua tradicional del fabulista. . . . A diferencia de los grandes fabulistas, a quienes no se prohibía saquear los asuntos de sus predecesores, Monterroso casi no recrea la tradición. Al contrario, sus fábulas son críticas y proponen una lectura distinta de la leyenda común.<sup>146</sup>

Part of this distinction comes from the fact that the characters are not so much emblems of behavior that should be corrected; they are examples of humankind portrayed as is, through animals and sometimes objects, as a diverse and imperfect group that is not expected or counseled to change. In addition, one cannot assume that the animals in these tales will behave in the ways proscribed in classic fables. The old archetypes are destroyed and any outcome is possible in Monterroso's variations. This critique of the categorization of people into certain groups—represented in the ancient fables by animals

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<sup>145</sup> Angel Rama, "Un fabulista para nuestro tiempo," in Corral, *Refracción*, 27-28.

<sup>146</sup> Jorge von Ziegler, "La literatura para Augusto Monterroso," in Corral, *Refracción*, 51.

such as the hardworking ant, the lazy grasshopper or hare, the diligent tortoise, or the greedy lion—further highlights Monterroso’s cosmopolitanism.

He expressed in a later essay from *La palabra mágica* titled “Cómo acercarse a las fábulas” that the best way to do this is:

Con precaución, como a cualquier cosa pequeña. Pero sin miedo.

Finalmente se descubrirá que ninguna fábula es dañina, excepto cuando alcanza a verse en ella alguna enseñanza. Esto es malo.

Si no fuera malo, el mundo se regiría por las fábulas de Esopo; pero en tal caso desaparecería todo lo que hace interesante el mundo, como los ricos, los prejuicios raciales, el color de la ropa interior y la guerra; y el mundo sería entonces muy aburrido, porque no habría heridos para las sillas de ruedas, ni pobres a quienes ayudar, ni negros para trabajar en los muelles, ni gente bonita para la revista *Vogue*.

Así, lo mejor es acercarse a las fábulas buscando de qué reír.

-Eso es. He ahí un libro de fábulas. Corre a comprarlo. No; mejor te lo regalo: verás, yo nunca me había reído tanto.<sup>147</sup>

Monterroso’s suggestion on reading fables flies in the face of the didactic nature of the classic genre and the author was well aware of the fact. His playful proposal that the reader look for the comical goes hand in hand with his refusal to believe that literature should seek to change the world.

The epigraph to the collection reads, “los animales se parecen tanto al hombre que a veces es imposible distinguirlos de éste – K’nyo Mobutu.”<sup>148</sup> This comparison of humans to animals takes on even deeper meaning when at the end of the collection in the “Índice onomástico y geográfico” the reader discovers that Mobutu is described as a cannibal (“antropófago”).<sup>149</sup> This wink to the reader is at once humorous and disturbing because the epigraph does not just endorse the usefulness of the genre of the fable; it calls attention to an extreme example of humans committing violent acts on other humans. The

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<sup>147</sup> Monterroso, *La palabra mágica*, 69.

<sup>148</sup> Monterroso, *La oveja negra*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

ugly side of humanity is evidenced, but the reader is driven to laughter rather than tears due to the unique presentation of the information.

Monterroso's fables are speckled with references to violent acts that expose the world as an unpredictable and dangerous place. One example is "La Jirafa que de pronto comprendió que todo es relativo" (43-45). In it the giraffe, an innocent bystander, nearly becomes a casualty of a battle in which neither of the two sides is willing to compromise. Because of their tenacity, nearly all of the troops on each side are mortally wounded. The narrator ironically portrays them all as heroes who will be honored by their respective historians. Meanwhile the giraffe contemplates the idea that everything is relative, as she realizes that had she just been a bit taller, or had the cannon that nearly took her head off been positioned just a bit lower, she would certainly be dead.

The tone of this fable is ironic, as revealed through the nonchalant description of the giraffe's thought process and the jab at the biased historians on each side recording the so-called facts of the event. The reader of classic fables would anticipate a moral message against such violence at the end of the story, but there is no pat, one-line moral to this or any of Monterroso's fables. There is only the image with which the reader is left, of the eagerly self-destructive soldiers and the somewhat dense giraffe who does not perceive the role of the soldiers in her near death experience, but rather the "relativity" of the situation. Like the giraffe, the imperfect protagonists of the other fables in the collection are not examples to directly suggest that anyone change their habits. They are merely examples of the kinds of behaviors and personalities that one encounters in the world, and each reader can make their own conclusions about them. As Gloria Estela

González Zenteno puts it, “su valor semiótico no es representativo, sino heurístico.”<sup>150</sup>

Monterroso’s cosmopolitan twist on the fable is not necessarily didactic, but a lesson can be drawn from it if the reader so chooses.

“La honda de David” is another fable which takes violence into consideration. This time a boy and his slingshot are the perpetrators. The use of the name David and the choice of weapon are both clear references to the intertextuality between this fable and the Old Testament parable of David and Goliath. However, in this case David’s arc is quite different. He starts out using his sharp-shooting skills to knock down inanimate targets rather than a larger-than-life foe. He then moves on to killing birds of many kinds until his parents discover his secret hobby and put a stop to it once and for all. Unfortunately, he continues shooting, but his new favorite target is other children. Eventually he grows up to become a respected general who is “condecorado con las cruces más altas por matar él solo a treinta y seis hombres.”<sup>151</sup> Rather than meet one giant foe in a religious battle, David is defeated in a final ironic twist in the last line of the fable where it is revealed that he was executed for allowing an enemy carrier pigeon to escape. His parents’ lesson about shooting birds made an enormous impression; unfortunately, David did not value human life as much as that of a bird.

The ironic, intertextual play of the parable of David and Goliath with Monterroso’s anti-fable is another example of the hybrid nature of these works, as well as Monterroso’s rooted cosmopolitanism. As in “Diógenes también,” violence is learned in childhood and violence toward animals is where it begins. That David would rather shoot a man than a pigeon illustrates the arbitrary nature of violence, and that some will

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<sup>150</sup> Gloria Estela González Zenteno, “Augusto Monterroso: el animal y la recreación paródica de una tradición literaria,” *Chasqui* 28, vol. 1 (May 1999): 19.

<sup>151</sup> Monterroso, *La oveja negra*, 83-84.

devalue human life wherever it is present. Aside from the presence of violence, the reader can also find irony, humor and a sense of resignation, that whatever is happening in the context of the particular fable is simply the way it must occur. There is no character attempting to intervene, to change the course of events for the betterment of society or even of a single person. In fact, intervention can even have strangely negative results, as seen in the attempt of David's parents to change his violent behavior. The biblical hero becomes a killing machine in the fable, except when it comes to birds.

“El Mono que quiso ser escritor satírico” is an example of Monterroso's many works that are a reflection on the problems of the writer. In this fable, the monkey decides to become a satirical writer and so he begins to study the society of the jungle. Each group or species of animal is initially a possible target for satire, but as he gets to know them and becomes their friend, he decides that he could not possibly satirize any of them. In the end, he is unable to criticize any of the groups for fear that his new friends may see themselves reflected in his writing. This is another example of how Monterroso problematizes the archetypes of the ancient fables. The protagonist developed a rooted cosmopolitan perspective in the sense that, while he wanted to satirize his companions, he could not avoid feeling connected to them. This led him to change his course and write in the tradition of love and mysticism, a choice that left him friendless, as everyone believed that he had lost his mind. The obvious reference to the problem of being a writer and opening yourself up to criticism as you publish your work is coupled with the idea that those around you, your friends and acquaintances, may never understand your work, regardless of what path you take. The difficulties that a writer encounters are highlighted

here, especially regarding any attempt to characterize perceived societal problems in an attempt to sway opinions or change society.

It is difficult not to imagine Monterroso, the writer, behind this monkey. The problems faced by Monterroso with regard to his writing at times certainly left him feeling that no one understood him. Both the monkey and the author behind him are self-conscious about how their works will be perceived. A later piece published in *Movimiento perpetuo*, “A lo mejor sí,” also reflects these sentiments:

Pero lo poco que pudiera haber tenido de escritor lo he venido perdiendo a medida que mi situación económica se ha vuelto demasiado buena y que mis relaciones sociales aumentan en tal forma que no puedo escribir nada sin ofender a alguno de mis conocidos, o adular sin quererlo a mis protectores y mecenas, que son los más.<sup>152</sup>

For Monterroso this vulnerability is perhaps a source of his innovation. The fable as a genre provides an author with a vehicle to disguise the true subjects of his work as animals. This subversion of reality provides a safer space for the writer to exercise his art and the ambiguity affords him a way out of any potential rejection or reprisal. The crux of this arrangement is found in the epigraph of the collection, the K'nyo Mobutu quote referenced above, which equates animals and humans.

The fable that gives this collection its title, “La Oveja negra,” follows:

En un lejano país existió hace muchos años una Oveja negra.  
Fue fusilada.

Un siglo después, el rebaño arrepentido le levantó una estatua ecuestre que quedó muy bien en el parque.

Así, en lo sucesivo, cada vez que aparecían ovejas negras eran rápidamente pasadas por las armas para que las futuras generaciones de ovejas comunes y corrientes pudieran ejercitarse también en la escultura.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Augusto Monterroso, *Movimiento perpetuo* (Mexico: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1975), 121.

<sup>153</sup> Monterroso, *La oveja negra*, 25.

In practically the same breath that the narrator mentions—with a striking lack of details—that there was a black sheep and that she was put to death, the reader is suddenly confronted with the ridiculous image of a statue of that sheep on horseback. As Garrido Prado has pointed out, this fable has been judged by critics in widely different ways, from being considered just average to the best of the collection.<sup>154</sup> It is the ambiguity of this fable that makes possible such divergent critiques. One could interpret it as a call to question the reasons behind humanity's urge to enshrine historical figures or a denouncement of institutionalized violence against that which is different (the black sheep, the Other). One can even imagine a criticism of capitalism behind the point that all future black sheep were also killed so that future generations of "regular" sheep could be employed as sculptors or an elevation of the arts in society at the expense of the black sheep. Perhaps all three are correct interpretations of the fabulist's intended message, and that is the beauty of this fable and Monterroso's cosmopolitan body of work.

The author's cosmopolitan vision is illustrated through the hybrid nature of his fables, which stems in part from the intertextual play evident in so many. It is also portrayed through the obvious mention of archetypal characters or specific texts, and through a subversion of the way in which these have traditionally been understood. According to González Zenteno, "los narradores monterrosinos, bien leídos como la inteligencia que los inventa—aunque no necesariamente buenos lectores—, no hacen necesariamente referencia directa a un texto determinado del pasado, sino a la manera en que cierta comunidad de lectores los han entendido." Zenteno's analysis of other fables, such as "La tela de Penélope, o quién engaña a quién," portrays the tergiversation of such classic stories. In this example, the figure of Penelope is revealed to be the opposite of

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<sup>154</sup> Garrido Prado, *El humor*, 58.

what Homer intended. Her weaving is what leads Ulysses to travel, rather than the way she passes the time waiting for him. Indeed, she actually spends the long years flirting with various suitors.

This intertextuality adds depth and layers of interpretation to the reading. The interpretations go far beyond those of classic fables, which simply portray an animal as an archetype representing a particular human flaw that must be corrected. Morality is present in Monterroso's fables if the reader chooses to focus on that type of reading, but an overt attempt to correct what is morally wrong is not apparent. The absurd logic of the characters and societies portrayed in these fables can be seen as alarming, but it is also humorous, and that humor is what captivates the reader. He uses the fable ironically, as a cliché, to point out the futility of any attempt to influence human behavior. In his versions of the genre, Monterroso is once again using hybridity, in the form of intertextuality, in a subversive way. He thereby turns this Western genre on its head, and in the process he continues to demonstrate his cosmopolitan vision.

*Movimiento perpetuo* (1972), *La palabra mágica* (1983) and *La letra e* (1987) are three collections that mix short story, essay, anecdotes and observations, and at times it is difficult to categorize an individual piece of a collection in any one genre. Essentially most of the works that Monterroso published after *La oveja negra* (1969) are compilations of reflections, short stories, essays, literary criticism and other genres. Even the novel/apocryphal biography of Eduardo Torres contains varied materials in different sections. The epigraph which opens *Movimiento perpetuo* reads, "La vida no es un ensayo, aunque tratemos muchas cosas; no es un cuento, aunque inventemos muchas cosas; no es un poema aunque soñemos muchas cosas. El ensayo del cuento del poema de

la vida es un movimiento perpetuo; eso es, un movimiento perpetuo.” This is followed by a quote from Lope de Vega, creator of the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (1609), “Quiero mudar de estilo y de razones.” These are cues to the reader to be prepared for Monterroso’s innovative use of intertextuality and the twisting and mixing of genres that reveal his cosmopolitan nature.

Another important aspect of this collection, which also provides a clue to the question of genre, is the intercalation of quotes by different thinkers and authors. These quotes come from an abundance of cultures and backgrounds and all of them regard flies, whose seemingly perpetual motion and their ubiquity are representative of the cosmopolitan vision of the author. Every culture recognizes the fly, and its perpetual movement is suggestive of the author’s hybrid style outlined in the opening epigraph. The quotes about flies reveal not only a significant part of the intertextuality of the work on the structural level, but also its hybridity, as their content comes from authors of such varied backgrounds and cultures. Monterroso explains his fascination with flies in the first piece of the collection, “Las moscas,” where he reveals that there are only three subjects, “el amor, la muerte y las moscas.” He indicates that flies represent the quotidian and the ubiquitous, and that they are pursuers and observers: “Ellas vigilan. Son las vicarias de alguien innombrable, buenísimo o maligno. Te exigen. Te siguen. Te observan.” In addition, Monterroso suggests that the reader should observe as they do in his closing statement: “Tú mira la mosca. Observa. Piensa.”<sup>155</sup> Observation of the mundane and the ubiquitous is vital to this collection, as evidenced in Monterroso’s focus on these themes in many of the writings.

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<sup>155</sup> Monterroso, *Movimiento perpetuo*, 11, 14.

One of the essays from *Movimiento perpetuo* that provides the reader with a clear representation of Monterroso's rooted cosmopolitanism is "La exportación de los cerebros." In it, Monterroso speaks of the phenomenon commonly referred to as "brain drain" as one that has always existed, but that has recently begun to be perceived as a problem in Latin America: "Sin embargo, es un hecho bastante común, y suficientemente establecido por la experiencia universal, que todo cerebro que de veras vale la pena o se va por su cuenta, o se lo llevan, o alguien lo expulsa" (39). He then goes on to cite some examples of how exporting a mind, in this case that of Asturias, in reality tends to have a positive effect on a country: "Es evidente que la exportación del cerebro de Miguel Ángel Asturias le ha dejado a Guatemala beneficios más notables, un premio Nobel incluido. Por otra parte, muchos otros cerebros han salido de ese país sin que, por lo menos que se sepa, la estructura de éste se haya resquebrajado en lo mínimo" (41). He is suggesting a new, more cosmopolitan attitude toward this perceived problem, which he sums up in three points at the end of the essay: 1) The minds that leave are mostly doing so on their own; 2) The exportation of a mind is generally beneficial to the country of origin; and 3) When a dictator forcibly expels a good mind, he is actually doing the country a favor:

A veces se equivocan de buena fe y expulsan a muchos que no lo merecen; pero cuando aciertan y destierran a un buen cerebro están haciendo más por su país que los Benefactores de la Cultura, que convierten a los talentos de la localidad en monumentos nacionales incapaces de decir una frase o dos que no se parezcan peligrosamente al lugar común o, en el mejor de los casos, al rebuzno, que, viéndolo bien, no ofende nunca a nadie y a veces puede incluso embellecer la caída de la tarde. (43)

According to Monterroso, those expelled minds are not only introduced to the world outside their country, they do not run such a risk of being turned into a "national monument" as do their fellow citizens who remain.

There is certainly an ironic tone to this work, especially in the way he undermines the negative perspective on exile, portraying it as a boon to both the exiled and to his or her country. In this way, Monterroso shows that the theme weighs heavily on him. On the other hand, his treatment of it also reveals the importance of that subject to others who are critical of the exiled intellectual in general. He defends the exiled intellectual's right to continue to participate in a meaningful way, and he shows that exile is not a one-dimensional state, but rather a complex situation with both positive and negative consequences. In this essay, Monterroso draws attention to this inside-outside debate by strongly challenging the idea that an exiled Guatemalan has less impact on or connection to his nation than a resident. The way in which he mocks the state of the resident is controversial, but his cosmopolitanism allows him to explore the basis of this type of thinking and affirm that living in exile does not automatically release anyone from rootedness in their homeland. Of course not all of those living outside their home country are exiled intellectuals like the author, and Monterroso acknowledges this in an interview published in *El país*: "Cuando se trata de escritores, no hay ningún lado dramático. Los exilios duros son los de los obreros o campesinos. Los escritores siempre encuentran la manera de arreglárselas. Lo mejor que han hecho nuestras dictaduras en favor de la literatura ha sido exiliar gente. Muchas veces exilian a gentes que no lo merecen."<sup>156</sup> The majority of those in the diaspora take enormous risks in the pursuit of better economic opportunities and freedom from political oppression. In "La exportación de cerebros" Monterroso speaks of a situation that he has personally experienced, and does not attempt to represent the experience of others. This is in keeping with Monterroso's role as an

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<sup>156</sup> "Augusto Monterroso: 'El exilio es uno de los grandes bienes que puede recibir un escritor,'" interview by Juan Cruz, *El país*, July 30, 1980, [http://elpais.com/diario/1980/07/30/cultura/333756003\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1980/07/30/cultura/333756003_850215.html).

author who in the middle of the twentieth century had helped Central American literature take a step toward abandoning the paternalistic role of the educated, upper-class outsider who appropriates the stories of the *campesinos* and *indios* in an effort to portray the nation. As Sergio Ramírez explained:

Esta limitación sectorial de la realidad, conduce pronto a una degeneración y apagamiento del proceso creativo, pues comienza a identificarse a la nación con el folklore y no se concibe otro tipo de narración que no sea la campesina; se establece entonces las diferencias entre lo culto y lo bárbaro; la camisa y la cotona; el guaro y el champaña. A medida que tal estilo se vuelve hábito, ya el autor de gabinete ni siquiera se molesta en aprehender directamente un habla y un paisaje; sino que las crea o las toma de los libros; y así se fabrica al campesino de cuerda y se le rodea de un vocabulario que se hace aparecer a la postre como el “alma nacional.”<sup>157</sup>

For Ramírez, the dangers of representing a world to which the author has no real connection are clear. In his essay, Monterroso is speaking very specifically to his experience as an intellectual in exile, and he does not presume to have the right or the knowledge to incorporate into this satire the very real struggle of the millions of less fortunate refugees.

“El informe *Endymion*” is another work that exemplifies the author’s mixing of genres and his cosmopolitan vision. To begin with, the title references the style of a report, but the text is more like a short story. It is a nearly stream-of-consciousness retelling of the adventures of a group of writers. The third person narrator introduces five poets from five different countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Ecuador). Four of the five live in exile; all of them are fans of Dylan Thomas. They meet by chance one evening in a bar in Panama, and decide to travel to New York City in time for the inauguration of the World’s Fair of 1964. They miraculously attain visas and make the journey to New York from Panama by car over the span of several months. Monterroso

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<sup>157</sup> Ramírez, “La narrativa centroamericana,” 5.

makes use of their need to pass through Central America and Mexico in order to satirize the political and social situations of those countries. On their trip, they are detained and interrogated by the authorities in nearly every Central American country. The various armed officers who attend them all claim to be “amigos de Platón y de la poesía,” especially when it comes to the most famous poets of the region (Neruda, Darío, Barba Jacob, etc.). In this way, they are allowed to pass, albeit slowly, through the Central American nations and eventually arrive to the United States. Upon their arrival, they go directly to Dylan Thomas’ favorite bar in Greenwich Village, and toast to their beloved poet who drank himself to death in that city. They take their leave of New York without setting foot in the World’s Fair, “negándose expresamente a poner un pie en nada que ni de manera lejana pudiera parecerse a cualquier feria mundial de ninguna parte del mundo, pero en particular de Nueva York, ciudad siempre digna de mejor suerte.”<sup>158</sup> These five travelers, who are more interested in their beloved poet, reject the highly commercial idea of a World’s Fair for a more classic literary cosmopolitanism.

The presence of many themes associated with cosmopolitanism is clear, for example the men are from five different countries, they are traveling, some of them are in exile, and they appreciate the works of a Welsh poet who wrote in English, and whose popularity led him to travel and recite his works in the United States. Structurally, the intertextualities abound in the work as well. The borrowing of *Endymion* for the title of the literary journal in which an article about the five poets’ journey is published may be interpreted as a reference to the poem by John Keats, as Noguero Jiméñez has suggested.<sup>159</sup> As she points out, all of the people that the poets encounter on their journey

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<sup>158</sup> Monterroso, *Movimiento perpetuo*, 49.

<sup>159</sup> Noguero Jiméñez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 136-137.

declare themselves to be “amigos de Platón y de la poesía” but only the editors of *Endymion* are “amigos tanto de Platón y de la poesía como de la verdad.”<sup>160</sup> Another layer of interpretation exists in the mythological character of Endymion who, in his eternal sleep, represents dreaming or even death. The use of his name in both the title of the fictional literary magazine and the title of the story alludes to the unreality, indeed impossibility of the five poets’ trip. It is a pessimistic view of the possibilities of a writer in Latin America and strengthens the criticism of the region’s treatment of artists. More importantly, the presence of Endymion (regardless of one’s interpretation) points to Monterroso’s hybrid style. He has once again borrowed from Western culture, whether from the Greek myths or from the English poet Keats, in order to enrich and provide multiple layers to his narrative. In this way, the presence of Dylan Thomas is also significant. In making Thomas the object of the five Latin American poets’ homage, Monterroso authorizes his fellow Latin Americans to enjoy a poet from outside their region without fear of scandal, reprisal, or the supposed threat of cultural homogenization.

Intertextuality in Monterroso does not just mean mixing or bending genres, or making use of mythological or historical characters to provide layers to his works. Many times the intertextuality remains within his own writings. Several works from *Movimiento perpetuo* include quotes by Eduardo Torres, the “intellectual” protagonist of Monterroso’s biography/novel *Lo demás es silencio*, which at the time had not yet been published. In the essay “Cómo me deshice de quinientos libros” the epigraphic Torres quote reads, “Poeta: no regales tu libro; destrúyelo tú mismo” (87). The essay is written in the first person and deals with the reasons people collect books and the difficulties of

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<sup>160</sup> Monterroso, *Movimiento perpetuo*, 49.

purging them when one has too many. It is a humorous piece that satirizes those who—to paraphrase the author—confuse the act of buying books with that of reading them. This type of ridicule of a certain type of intellectual is common in Monterroso, especially when one considers the character of Eduardo Torres. He is a lover of the arts, the director of the Sunday Supplement to his city’s newspaper, and encompasses a sharp parody of the provincial intellectual environment.

Another mention of him in *Movimiento perpetuo* is found in “Ganar la calle,” in which the writer relates the outrageous idea of an anonymous “admirador de la poesía, residente en San Blas” (Torres’ fictional home).<sup>161</sup> In short, his interlocutor proposes that each time a poet publishes a worthy book of verse, his name automatically be assigned to a city street. As each additional book of poetry is published, their quality will be judged and a certain number of blocks may be added or taken away accordingly. This literal take on the expression “ganar la calle” is a humorous way to poke fun at the way poets and their works are judged and praised. Rather than “manifestarse” or “amotinarse,” “ganar la calle” is a literal winning of the street as a reward for their work—quite the opposite of one having to protest or take to the streets in order to have his or her voice heard. In that twisting of the meaning of the phrase, Monterroso reveals his preoccupation with injustice, but in a way that pokes fun at those intellectuals, like the fictional Torres, whose provincial misinterpretation of cosmopolitanism points to the lack of understanding of what a politically committed writer endures in his or her career.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 109. While there are probably many small towns in Latin America called San Blas, there is no San Blas, S.B., nor any San Blas that has all of the monuments and features described in *Lo demás es silencio*. Jorge Ruffinelli indicated in his edition of *Lo demás es silencio: La vida y la obra de Eduardo Torres* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1986), that San Blas is likely a representation of Mexico City, 70 n23.

“Estatura y poesía” is another humorous essay from *Movimiento perpetuo* where Torres is quoted in the epigraph: “Los enanos tienen una especie de sexto sentido que les permite reconocerse a primera vista.”<sup>162</sup> Monterroso, himself a rather short man, relates many of the jokes he has had to endure about his height. He goes on to write about the connections between being malnourished, short, and a writer: “La desnutrición, que lleva a la escasez de estatura, conduce a través de ésta, nadie sabe por qué, a la afición de escribir versos. Cuando en la calle o en alguna reunión encuentro a alguien menor de un metro sesenta, recuerdo a Torres, a Pope, o a Alfonso Reyes, y presiento o casi estoy seguro de que me he topado con un poeta” (126-127). After this explanation, and in taking a second look at the epigraph, one could substitute the word “poeta” for “enano.” Of course, that would not cause the same impression in the reader. This comingling of the categories of poets and persons of shorter stature through the Eduardo Torres quote is another way in which Monterroso gently lampoons himself and his fellow writers.

The many examples of intertextuality in these works are the structural clues to Monterroso’s rooted cosmopolitanism, and the content of the work also demonstrates a widening of the national view expressed in Asturias’ novels analyzed in the previous chapter. The intertextuality and innovative experiments with genre present in these works, together with the philosophical statements that demonstrate his rooted cosmopolitanism, continue to reveal the gradual shift away from national narratives and toward the regional, providing a bridge to the globality found in the works of Rodrigo Rey Rosa in the chapter that follows. This trend continues in the final work analyzed in this chapter.

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<sup>162</sup> Monterroso, *Movimiento perpetuo*, 145.

*Lo demás es silencio: la vida y la obra de Eduardo Torres* (1978) is a mock biography/novel in which the line separating the provincial and the cosmopolitan is constantly blurred. Eduardo Torres seems to defy categorization under one label or the other, causing the reader to question his true nature. The work is a collage of various modes and is divided into the following five sections: “Testimonios,” “Selectas de Eduardo Torres,” “Aforismos, dichos, etc.,” “Colaboraciones espontáneas,” and finally an “Addendum.” There is also an epigraph and an epitaph that precede these formal sections. The main title of the text is revealed as an epigraph: “Lo demás es silencio,” which is erroneously attributed to Shakespeare’s *Tempest* when in reality it is taken from Hamlet’s dying words in the play of the same name. This is just the first of many tests or winks to the reader, who can be either naïve to the author’s intentional deception, or pass the test and consider him or herself an accomplice or one who is “in on the joke.” In this way Monterroso prepares the careful, knowledgeable reader for a much richer experience with his text.

A transcription of the living Eduardo Torres’ epitaph follows the titular epigraph:

AQUÍ YACE EDUARDO TORRES  
QUIEN A LO LARGO DE SU VIDA  
LLEGÓ, VIO Y FUE SIEMPRE VENCIDO  
TANTO POR LOS ELEMENTOS  
COMO POR LAS NAVES ENEMIGAS

This piece and its play on the famous Julius Caesar quote are further illuminated by the first of many footnotes in this text, apparently placed by the compiler, Monterroso. The note informs the reader of several details:

El padre Benito Cereno, cura párroco de San Blas tiene depositado, en la urna funeraria correspondiente, el epitafio de Eduardo Torres. Compuesto por el propio Torres, será grabado algún día en su lápida. Contra su deseo, casi todo lo suyo empieza a conocerse antes de su muerte, que esperamos aún lejana. Otros eruditos

samblasenses consultados quisieron ver en este epitafio, aparte de las acostumbradas alusiones clásicas tan caras al maestro, una nota más bien amarga, cierto pesimismo, ineludible ante la inutilidad de cualquier esfuerzo humano.<sup>163</sup>

Torres' use of the third person in his self-penned epitaph reflects an often ridiculed affectation. Additionally, there is apparent irony in the wishes of the other "eruditos" of San Blas when one takes a second look at the epitaph. The pessimistic tone of "fue siempre vencido" which replaces the original "vici" of Caesar's message is clear, and this type of contradiction is the norm throughout the novel. Furthermore, the reader is already presented with a variety of textual modes (epigraph, epitaph and footnote) in just the first few pages of the novel.

In the first formal section of the text appear the barely coherent, contradictory testimonies of friends and relatives of Torres. The choice of the term *testimonio* is interesting considering that by the time this work was published in 1978, testimonial narrative was already considered a genre, as evidenced by its inclusion (beginning in 1970) as a category in Casa de las Américas' annual literary contest. However, Monterroso's testimonies certainly do not meet the criteria for testimonial narrative as explained by John Beverly and Marc Zimmerman more than a decade later:

The general form of the *testimonio* is a novel or novella-length narrative, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. The unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life episode (e.g., the experience of being a prisoner). Since in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer or intellectual, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 57-58.

<sup>164</sup> John Beverly and Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 173.

While some of the structural similarities are present, for example the fact that in *Lo demás es silencio* the testimonies are narrated in the first person by witnesses (characters) who are not professional writers, the most obvious difference is in the content. The experiences narrated by the family and friends of Eduardo Torres in this fictional text are much more melodramatic than traumatic in that they are the mostly self-centered, confused ramblings of Torres' friends and family. Moreover, they do not have the truth effect of the testimonial genre, but on the contrary are designed to instill doubt in the mind of the reader. The section of testimonies and the novel in its entirety play with the idea of authorial control, displacement and intention. This also brings to mind the debate surrounding authorship in the testimonial genre. In *Against Literature*, John Beverley states that "testimonio involves an erasure of the function and thus also of the textual presence of the 'author,' which by contrast is so powerfully present in all major forms of bourgeois writing since the Renaissance, so much so that our very notions of literature and the literary are bound up with notions of the author, or of an authorial 'intention.'"<sup>165</sup> In this sense, however, Monterroso's use of this type of "testimonio" in his novel ironically calls attention to his own presence in the text as author or compiler instead of erasing him, and he adeptly confronts the problems of creative control and authority, who can be an author, and who has the ultimate control over a text or even the identity of a character.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>166</sup> As Beverley suggests, "testimonio tended to destabilize disciplinary boundaries: Was testimonio in fact literature? . . . Who was the author of a text like *I, Rigoberta Menchú*: the compiler or the narrator?" *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiii.

The general, non-literary definition of testimony is “a formal written or spoken statement, especially one given in a court of law: *the testimony of an eyewitness*.”<sup>167</sup> Seen in this light, Monterroso was using the mode and the drama of a courtroom testimony as a piece of his collage of the fictional Torres. There is a sense of doubt created in the retelling of these stories by the interlocutor, interviewer, or editor who appears from time to time through a footnote or parenthetical interjection. The reader is led to question the truthfulness and authenticity of the testimonies in *Lo demás es silencio* for various reasons. In some it is due to their melodramatic, contradictory or absurd styles. In others, the footnotes by the editor or the insertion of comments made by the apparent interlocutor or interviewer of the family member or friend are the red flags. The testimonies of the friends and family of Eduardo Torres cause the reader to wonder about both the fictional Torres’ and the compiler Monterroso’s roles in the edition of the documents as well as to continue to question just who Eduardo Torres is. As his valet will testify in this section:

Baste decir que aunque de acuerdo con la opinión más general nunca se logrará saber con certeza si el doctor fue en su tiempo un espíritu chocarrero, un humorista, un sabio o un tonto, lo más probable es que cada oportunidad en que se presentara como cualquiera de estas cuatro cosas haya tenido, por lo menos en ese momento, algo de las otras tres.<sup>168</sup>

This uncertainty surrounding Torres abounds throughout the novel and lends itself to the discussion of the provincial versus the cosmopolitan in that the reader encounters many different perspectives on Torres, and all of them provide contradictory information regarding which of the terms might best describe him.

The first of the testimonies, “Un breve instante en la vida de Eduardo Torres,” was anonymously authored by “Un amigo,” but a footnote immediately reveals that it

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<sup>167</sup> *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, s.v. “testimony,” accessed December 20, 2011, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/testimony>.

<sup>168</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 78.

was written by Juan Islas Mercado, former personal secretary to Eduardo Torres. This ironic note states the identity of the author of the testimony while directly referring to the fact that he preferred to remain anonymous. The hand of an editor (the compiler, Monterroso or perhaps Torres himself) has obviously passed over the text. Based on the style in which it is narrated as well as the content, the first testimony reads as if it were produced by a person who would like to consider himself a writer or intellectual. The narrator's use of many contradictory adjectives and clichés in his descriptions of Torres and his surroundings gives the reader the sense that he is attempting to sound erudite. The doubts created at the start with the footnote continue to gnaw at the reader, who wonders to what extent the text has been altered.

This testimony, however earnestly written by its fictional author, is a humorous parody of the provincial intellectual who considers himself more of a cosmopolitan. This is a theme which continues throughout the work. Just as the narrator is undermined by Monterroso, he also contributes in parodying Torres as he describes the "breve instante" in Torres' life. In his testimony, he walks a fine line between worship and ridicule with his over the top descriptions. These contradictions, as well as a connection to the essay analyzed above, "Cómo me deshice de quinientos libros," are observed in the following selection. The narrator takes note of the many volumes that his employer possesses, and adds that it is common knowledge that Torres has read them all at least two times:

De cuando en cuando su fría mirada, difícil de resistir como muy pocas entre muchas, deja su acero y se evade del volumen que en ese momento lee, para después de breve instante ir a posarse ya sea vaga, o bien meditativamente en un amarillento busto de Cicerón, que a su turno y a través de los siglos domina ahora con los ojos en blanco aquel amplio recinto de paredes cubiertas con libros delicadamente encuadernados en piel, la totalidad de los cuales, *según es fama en*

*los mentideros intelectuales de San Blas, ese hombre divagado ha leído por lo menos dos veces.*<sup>169</sup>

The juxtaposition of the term “mentideros” with the adjective “intelectuales” is just one of the many examples of contradiction in the paragraph, and the fact that this information is hearsay leads the reader to question the truthfulness of this narrator’s assertions.

Following these images of his employer Mercado describes the visit Torres receives from a group of important men of San Blas to implore him to accept the candidacy for governor. For unexplainable reasons, in that moment the narrator describes himself as Torres’ defender, hiding behind a curtain with his pistol drawn, ready to confront any aggression. This unusual insertion of melodrama appears to be connected to the apparent desire of the narrator to create a certain atmosphere in his testimony, also noticeable in his awkward descriptions of Torres. Robert A. Parsons attributes this mood to another layer of parody in the text, that of the melodramatic, gothic literature of the nineteenth century.<sup>170</sup> Such a reference is another example of hybridity, where the author has called upon a more classic mode and weaved it into his own text.

The parody of the intellectual continues as Torres declines the invitation to be a candidate for governor, stating that he will not leave his work as a professor and journalist. He responds, “no debo convertirme temerario en el objeto de mi propia censura que, *mutatis mutandis, castigat ridendo mores.*”<sup>171</sup> Noguerol Jiménez has similarly analyzed this section of the text as a parody of the “intellectual” who uses elevated language in an attempt to display his wisdom, but the result is “un lenguaje grandilocuente y vacío, donde las fórmulas estereotipadas enmascaran la carencia de

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<sup>169</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 62 (emphasis added).

<sup>170</sup> Robert A. Parsons, “Parodia y autoparodia en *Lo demás es silencio* de Augusto Monterroso,” in Corral, *Refracción*, 109-122.

<sup>171</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 65.

argumentos.”<sup>172</sup> The long silence that follows Torres’ absurd speech is attributable to the confusion experienced by his audience, who seem to consider him a wise man, and so must assume that their inability to understand his speech is due to their own ignorance of his references. Torres demonstrates the worst qualities of a provincial intellectual. He believes himself to be quite cultured, as do his visitors, when in truth he is a caricature of the unsophisticated, armchair academic that imagines himself more of a cosmopolitan. This satirical portrayal of a provincial intellectual echoes Zimmerman’s point that some exiles have criticized the writers residing in Guatemala of “tendencies toward provincialism, as well as inadequate attention to criticism and literary innovation.”<sup>173</sup> While Torres is never described as Guatemalan, and the precise location of San Blas is not provided, this portrayal of Torres shows that provinciality can be found anywhere. Monterroso’s continued attention to this problem is another sign of the evolution of narrative by Guatemalans from a national to a more cosmopolitan viewpoint. The use of the Latin phrase *castigat ridendo mores* is an allusion to the function of comedy and parody in the work, further uncovering Monterroso’s vision of his alter ego, Torres—a caricature of the man he could have been, or feared becoming. In mocking an intent by his protagonist to appear erudite, Monterroso also responds with humor to those who might consider him elitist.

The next testimony is that of Luis Jerónimo Torres, Eduardo’s frustrated journalist brother, and is ironically or perhaps mockingly titled “E. Torres, un caso singular.” The brother immediately explains: “Contra lo que podría parecer por el extraño título de estos recuerdos, E. Torres no es un caso singular en el viejo terruño.” Luis

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<sup>172</sup> Noguero Jiménez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 175.

<sup>173</sup> Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance*, vol. 1, 98.

informs the reader that, contrary to the statement of the title, Eduardo is just like most other editors of periodicals such as the Sunday Supplement to the San Blas Herald “al ofrecernos la lectura de obras y polémicas ajenas en cualquier caso a temas políticos que en el fondo corrompen, como quería Sócrates, a la juventud.”<sup>174</sup> While Eduardo Torres may consider himself to be erudite, worldly, and even quite cosmopolitan, his brother contradicts this with his testimony. Luis explains how the birth of the supplement has changed journalism:

Nuestro periodismo dio un gran vuelco al recoger en sus columnas, sin distinción de sexo, moral alguna o ideología, ya no sólo lo que nuestro Estado produce, sino los aportes de las nuevas generaciones de los alrededores, sin contar con la producción del samblasense de fuera y hasta del español o hispanoamericano de dentro, pues no todo ha de ser rencor con el pasado, rencillas mal entendidas y desestabilizadoras llamadas a saturarnos o a crear un caos artificial ahí donde ese caos existe ya en forma por demás natural y amena. (68-69)

This could be misinterpreted as a benign description of Eduardo Torres, but the tenor of this whole testimony is informed by the envy Luis feels toward his brother. His admission that he has always lived in Eduardo’s shadow, that it has been difficult for him to publish his work, and that he likes to drink, work together to undermine the verisimilitude of his testimony. In his thinly veiled criticism, Luis accuses his brother of a lack of criteria and of flooding the readers of the supplement with a chaos of selections. He criticizes not only the themes that Eduardo chooses to highlight, but also the authors. The jealous brother resents his more successful sibling’s apparently cosmopolitan (but more likely random) choice of artists featured in the Sunday supplement, believing that he should be more selective, perhaps even more local. This may indicate that Luis’ work was never in the supplement; after all, nothing could be more local than publishing a

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<sup>174</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 68.

work by or about your own family member. This is a parody of the struggle between the autochthonous representations of culture versus the so-called universal. Nevertheless, the problem with Eduardo Torres' selections for the supplement is quite possibly a result of his lack of true intellectual ability more than any perceived cosmopolitanism, as is suggested throughout the text by the friends and family who offer their testimonies, as well as in some of the examples of Eduardo's own works that are inserted in the later chapters. In one of Luis' criticisms of his brother he reveals: "Y mi hermano ha sido siempre fiel a su fidelidad a sí mismo, convencido como estoy de que jamás se ha traicionado sosteniendo la misma idea o concepto por más de una hora o veinticuatro, a lo sumo" (72-73). This is one of the many examples presented in the text that suggest that Eduardo Torres lacks intellectual rigor, but the seed of doubt is simultaneously planted in the form of an unreliable narrator, making it difficult to know exactly what kind of person Torres truly is.

The next testimony is "Recuerdos de mi vida con un gran hombre" by Luciano Zamora, valet to Eduardo Torres. Noguero Jiméñez has noted that several points of the biography of the author of this testimony point to Monterroso. One example is the footnote that dedicates this testimony to Bárbara Jacobs, the Mexican author whom Monterroso married in 1976. In addition, Zamora was encouraged by his employer to educate himself and was an avid reader of fiction as a young man, much like Monterroso.<sup>175</sup> His testimony sums up very well the overall feeling one has about Torres while reading *Lo demás es silencio*, and his statement about how it is difficult to know if Torres is "un espíritu chocarrero, un humorista, un sabio o un tonto" is the most representative of this. Although the former is not the most flattering of statements,

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<sup>175</sup> Noguero Jiméñez, *La trampa en la sonrisa*, 181.

Zamora also insists that he considers Torres to be a hero based on his encyclopedic knowledge as well as his generosity and good treatment toward the young valet.

An important example of the characterization of Torres as a caricature of a provincial intellectual aspiring to cosmopolitanism occurs when Zamora finally returns to the topic of his employer. He gives a hilariously absurd description of the first time he went to see Torres, first explaining that when one meets a great man, it should cause the person to realize that in reality he is also a human being with flaws and problems. He then reveals that when they met, Torres was “*practicando simplemente un poco de esgrima, en mangas de camisa, como cualquier otro señor en su casa y a esa hora.*”<sup>176</sup> As Torres continues to practice his fencing maneuvers, he explains to Zamora that he would like him to highlight anything “cultural” in the newspaper. At first, Zamora finds it to be a big job, as he is uncertain what culture really is. He soon realizes, however, that “*lo cultural era en realidad muy poco y . . . por lo común se hallaba metido entre los cumpleaños, los crímenes y las bodas, y lo señalaba con el lápiz sin ningún trabajo*” (85). This question of what in fact is culture couched in such a literal scenario is another example of the caricature of the intellectual as a distortion of the cosmopolitan. That Torres hired someone with no academic background to filter out the things in the newspaper that he should read is indicative of his own lack of intellectual rigor.

The final testimony, “*Hablar de un esposo siempre es difícil,*” is that of Carmen de Torres, wife of Eduardo. This testimony is a transcription of a recording rather than a composed piece. She speaks of the responsibilities that come with being the wife of a “gran hombre” like Eduardo and, as in the other testimonies, her comments are not very flattering. In her interview she continues to reveal her husband as a provincial intellectual

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<sup>176</sup> Monterroso, *Lo demás es silencio*, 84.

who aspires to cosmopolitanism. She paints herself as a mostly tolerant wife who does what she can to help her husband in his work, but she does not seem to hold him up on any kind of pedestal. In her comments about San Blas, she reveals a city that is in truth still a “pueblón” and whose residents are gossips and “farsantes, casi empezando por mi marido que habla y habla todo el tiempo de cosas elevadas (ay sí) pero que en su tiempo apenas se ocupaba de sus hijos y me dejaba a mí toda la carga” (108). The “ay sí” placed amid her statement reveals the interviewer, most likely also the compiler and editor of the work, Monterroso. She talks about Torres’ library as well, and again, it echoes the one described in “Cómo me deshice de quinientos libros.” The quantity of books creates a series of problems: what to do with the duplicates that arrive, the difficulty of parting with those that you never use and even the duplicates, etcetera. Later on, she explains a typical day for Eduardo. In her detailed description she reveals that he really does not do anything but read, walk, visit his friends and rest. Nevertheless, he is fatigued by all of the activity in his day and never skips the *siesta*.

In general this testimony fits in well with the others in that overall, the reader is presented with a collage of somewhat negative perspectives on the life of this “intellectual.” These characters’ portrayal of the subject of their testimonies in contradictory terms makes it difficult to decide if Torres is, as his valet suggested, “un espíritu chocarrero, un humorista, un sabio o un tonto” (78). What continues to stand out is the characterization of Eduardo Torres as a man who sees himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual, but is unwittingly perceived as a caricature of the provincial intellectual. The contradictory information presented in the testimonies successfully challenges the reader to question exactly who is Torres; in other words, whether or not any of the witnesses has

produced a reliable testimony. This also reflects the notion that as one becomes a public figure his image may be altered by the perceptions of others. Torres represents many qualities of the provincial intellectual, and yet the lines are constantly blurring and then coming into focus only to blur again. Torres can be seen as the object of Monterroso's critique and as his alter ego, the caricature of the provincial intellectual striving for cosmopolitanism.

The second section of the text, "Selectas de Eduardo Torres," easily leads the reader to conclude that Torres has no merit as a scholar, but also makes the reader question why Torres himself would allow the compiler to place such unflattering examples of and responses to his work in his biography. The first selection includes a review of a new edition of the *Quijote*, written by Torres and supposedly published in the *Revista de la Universidad de México*. The review is very poorly written, as if by a person who believes himself to know much more than he really does, and who does not take the trouble to check his work for factual errors. It contains comical inaccuracies that highlight his ignorance of the history of everything from the Spanish language to the *Armada Invencible*. A letter to the editor of the magazine follows this, complaining about and explaining the problems with the article. While the letter may have more academic validity than the review, both texts are written in a language designed by their authors to impress the reader with their genius and so neither Torres nor the author of the response is safe from parody.

The blunders continue in the essay "Traductores y traidores." Torres mulls over the benefits of two methods of translation (spiritual and literal) and in the end displays both styles of translation of a poem that is representative of Torres' desire to be

cosmopolitan. Christian Morgenstern's "Fisches Nachtgesang" only contains actual words in its title, and the poem itself is a series of straight and curved lines arranged in a form reminiscent of a fish. Nevertheless, Torres' translations are obviously different, the literal one being a literal translation of the title with a fairly exact copy of the many lines of the poem. The spiritual translation, however, uses a very much non-literal translation of the title and the series of straight and curved lines are sloppily drawn. In "El pájaro y la cítara (una octava olvidada de Góngora)" Torres misuses various terms and then ironically points out that most people never stop to truly study a text and see the errors (132). These types of mistakes are puzzling to the reader, who continues to wonder if Torres is conscious of them—even mocking the reader with them—careless or simply uneducated. This masterful portrayal of Torres by Monterroso causes much doubt in the mind of even the most careful reader.

"Decálogo del escritor" is an amusing list of twelve, not ten, rules for writers to live by. They all encompass the same awkward, contradictory tone present throughout *Lo demás es silencio*. For example, the first states: "Cuando tengas algo que decir, dílo; cuando no, también. Escribe siempre." And the tenth: "Trata de decir las cosas de manera que el lector sienta siempre que en el fondo es más inteligente que tú. De vez en cuando procura que efectivamente lo sea; pero para lograr eso tendrás que ser más inteligente que él" (137). These rules sum up quite nicely the way that Monterroso plays with the readers of this "biography." Torres seems to write (and publish) whether or not he has anything interesting to say, and without the help of the internet, the footnotes of a well-commented edition of the book or encyclopedic knowledge of history, philosophy, literature and music, the average reader may very well miss the many hints Monterroso inserts into the

text. This is how he fosters the appropriate ambiguity necessary to keep the reader guessing and, in fact, to test him or her. The attention to various modes and genres continues in the rest of this section, which is a mixed media collage of drawings of animals, the presentation made by Torres in a literary conference, and a somewhat disparaging review of Monterroso's *La oveja negra y demás fábulas*. The blurred lines between Torres' actual provinciality and his intended cosmopolitanism continue to be revealed to the reader as each piece is tainted with the absurdity of Torres' attempts at erudition, his obvious factual errors and strange contradictions. However, there are fleeting signs of cleverness and also a nagging doubt as to whether this is all an elaborate hoax being played on the reader, by both Torres and Monterroso.

The final section of the book is the "Addendum," which contains the "Punto final" signed by Torres. In it, he mentions the many parts that make up his biography and reveals that he was given the opportunity to look over the text before its publication. He shows humility as he downplays the importance of his writings and states that the analysis of Góngora's work has been treated by much wiser critics than he. He also spends a good deal of these lines talking about Monterroso's shortcomings, citing his "carencia de método" and "cierta fama de burlón que (y perdónenme) no acaba de gustarme" (197). His comments are uncomplimentary and remind the reader of his criticisms of *La oveja negra* in the previous section. These remarks, given their metafictional quality, could be seen as another round of self-criticism on the part of Monterroso. The author uses his narrator to criticize his own work, style, sense of humor, and the long periods of silence between his publications. However, they also mirror the criticisms that the reader has been led to make of Torres' works. The fact that Torres is

not reliable converts the criticism into an acknowledgement of Monterroso's prowess as a writer. His portrayal of Torres as a caricature of the provincial intellectual has helped to define for the reader what a true cosmopolitan intellectual looks like.

In the penultimate paragraph, Torres doubts his own existence. He has a difficult time believing that he is the author of those works attributed to him: "Al releerme, en ocasiones me detengo, miro a un lado y a otro, e imagino si yo habré escrito lo aquí escogido, o pensando en realidad lo que algún día dije o se dice que dije" (198). In looking around him, he is searching for Monterroso, his creator.

In this study of Monterroso's works it is apparent how growing up in Guatemala informed his writing to an extent, especially as evidenced in his early works "Primera Dama," "El eclipse" and "Míster Taylor." The end of the Guatemala's Democratic Spring certainly brought out the more obvious social commitment in those short stories, but Monterroso always pushed the boundaries of literature by distorting and expanding on the standard forms of narrative. Monterroso's rootedness is not always as obvious in his narrative as his cosmopolitanism, and his focus on his craft rather than on his political commitment at times opened him up to criticism, but without Monterroso's innovation, Guatemalan literature today would be lacking a valuable dimension.

Monterroso wrote about topics and themes about which he felt comfortable speaking. He did not restrict himself to the political and in this way he took himself out of the paternalistic role of writing the lives of the marginalized. The content of his work went beyond revealing the social injustice of his birth nation. It involved defining or in fact also blurring the limits of the provincial versus the cosmopolitan in *Lo demás es silencio* and many essays from *Movimiento perpetuo* and *La letra e*. He also surprised his

readers by exploding classical archetypes of behavior in *La oveja negra*. Aside from the cosmopolitan content of his works, the structure is also an important aspect of their cosmopolitan nature. The combination of classic modes with more modern situations in “Diógenes también” or the fables of *La oveja negra*, and the tergiversation of and intertextuality between the fable, the biography, the testimony, the book review, etcetera, are all examples of Monterroso’s cosmopolitan vision. The broadening of his perspective beyond Asturias’ national focus is apparent in all of his works and reveals the path of literature written by Guatemalans to be heading toward a more global perspective. This trajectory will be further examined in the next chapter, which focuses on the global narrations of Rodrigo Rey Rosa.

## CHAPTER IV: RODRIGO REY ROSA

The works of Rodrigo Rey Rosa (1958) best reveal the increasing globality of Guatemalan literature in recent decades. According to Ulrich Beck globality is the idea that due to the process of globalization, “nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event . . . and we must reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a ‘local-global’ axis.”<sup>177</sup> This reorientation is represented in the narrative of Rey Rosa, which reveals the local (whether that is Guatemala, Tangier, New York, or any other locale he may choose) from a global perspective. As Aníbal González has pointed out in reference to the recent narrative of Latin America, the phenomenon of such a perspective is not “un simple afán de cosmopolitismo, ni mucho menos de escapismo, sino una voluntad de explorar e incorporar espacios y mentalidades alejados de la realidad nacional de los autores y no determinados por ella.”<sup>178</sup> Rey Rosa’s narrative reflects the reality of a global society that is comprised of characters from diverse backgrounds and regions of the world. The interaction between different cultures and those individuals who inhabit them reveal the globality of his body of work.

Rodrigo Rey Rosa was born in Guatemala in 1958 and the process of globalization has intensified significantly in his lifetime. The fact that his experience of the globalized world has been much more concentrated than the other two authors studied here is reflected in his writing. His narrative is far from the nationally focused literature of Miguel Angel Asturias, whose works concentrated on Guatemala from a fairly local point of view even as he was writing about his home country from across the Atlantic.

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<sup>177</sup> Beck, *What is Globalization?*, 11-12.

<sup>178</sup> González, “Más allá de la nación,” 51.

Rey Rosa also differs from Augusto Monterroso's cosmopolitan perspective in that, unlike Monterroso, he is very specific about location, nationalities, and other local particularities. Furthermore, his perspective is global no matter what particular locality is highlighted in the narration.

Travel has been a significant factor in Rey Rosa's life and writing, and certainly has contributed to his global perspective. For most of his adult life he has been traveling in and out of his home country. At around the age of twenty he relocated to New York City, where he enrolled in a film program at the School of Visual Arts. He did not complete that degree, but it was through this program that he was able to register for a writing workshop in Morocco with the U.S.-born author and composer Paul Bowles.<sup>179</sup> This led him to spend about a year in Morocco in 1983-84, and eventually he decided to make his home there. In the early nineties Rey Rosa returned to Guatemala, and although he has been splitting his time between the Petén region and Guatemala City for more than a decade now, he still considers himself a tourist or chronic traveler who feels "más o menos fuera de lugar en cualquier parte del mundo."<sup>180</sup> Travel has been influential in his writing, and the author has also mentioned in two separate interviews from 2008 and 2011 that he first began to write while traveling. He shared with his interviewers that "un viaje largo representa un largo silencio, muchas horas de soledad. Tal vez antes de tener inquietudes literarias tenía inquietudes de viajero" and that most of his works "mucho le

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<sup>179</sup> Bowles is best known for his 1949 novel *The Sheltering Sky*, and he was also an accomplished translator. He was one of the first to translate Jorge Luis Borges' "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan." See "The Circular Ruins" in *View*, Vol. 5, no. 6 (Jan. 1946). He recognized Rey Rosa's talent and translated some of his first works into English in the early 1990s. See for example: *The Path Doubles Back*, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: Red Ozier Press, 1982); and *The Beggar's Knife*, trans. Paul Bowles (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1985).

<sup>180</sup> Rey Rosa, "Tierra caliente, la Guatemala de Rodrigo Rey Rosa," 33:50.

deben al viaje, incluso dentro de Guatemala.”<sup>181</sup> He has often set his narrative in countries other than Guatemala, and includes multicultural casts of characters, going beyond the national and beyond nationalism by examining various different locales from a global perspective.

In 2004 Rey Rosa received national recognition when he was awarded Guatemala’s National Literary Prize, but his response to winning the prize revealed his desire to broaden the national conversation about literature. The Premio Nacional de Literatura “Miguel Ángel Asturias” includes a cash prize of 50,000 Quetzales or about 6,400 U.S. dollars, and is presented annually by the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes through a council composed of various Guatemalan authors who review the nominations received from national publishers, groups of writers, and the Humanities departments of universities from around the country.<sup>182</sup> The award has been controversial because of the nature of the ideas proposed in Asturias’ thesis, detailed in the second chapter of this study. In fact, in 2003 (the year prior to Rey Rosa’s nomination and subsequent win) the Maya K’iché poet Humberto Ak’abal refused the award, citing Asturias’ provocative thesis as the reason.<sup>183</sup> When he was announced as the 2004 winner, Rey Rosa decided that his National Literary Prize money would be put to better use to establish the Premio de Literaturas Indígenas B’atz’. This prize is awarded to the author of an original,

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<sup>181</sup> Gregory Zambrano, “Rodrigo Rey Rosa: Somos una especie esencialmente violenta,” in *Quimera* 295, June 2008, p. 21. The other mention is found in Raúl Rodríguez Freire’s interview, “Escritura en movimiento: Entrevista con Rodrigo Rey Rosa,” *Revista Iberoamericana* 77, julio-diciembre 2011, p. 1075.

<sup>182</sup> It is difficult to find any clear set of criteria for this prize. There are mentions of the criteria in newspaper articles announcing the annual winners, but no official description appears on the government’s website. Some discussion of the need to reform the process is found in an article on the blog El Diario del Gallo, <http://diariodelgallo.wordpress.com/2008/09/07/el-premio-nacional-de-literatura-guatemalteca-2008/>.

<sup>183</sup> See an interview with Ak’abal from 24 January 2004 on the BBC Mundo website: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin\\_america/newsid\\_3425000/3425421.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_3425000/3425421.stm).

unedited work from any literary genre, and written in any of the languages of the Maya spoken in Guatemala, or in Garífuna or Xinka. The first and second place winners receive a cash prize, plus the opportunity to publish their winning work through a Guatemalan publishing house.<sup>184</sup> This symbolic and financial support of the underrepresented literatures of Guatemala is a clear critique of the national in that it repurposes or redirects the Guatemalan government's investment in what it considers to be national literature.

Rey Rosa's body of work also reaches beyond the boundaries of national literature, and causes readers and critics to question their own perceptions of such a term. He can be considered a global author because even while many of his works do represent Guatemala and Guatemalans, his perspective is decidedly global. The action in his narrative may take place in any number of different countries, and includes characters of many different nationalities. Even when he writes about Guatemala specifically, questions of local color can take a back seat to the representation of the characters, their relationships, internal and external conflicts, and most of all, their journeys. In some cases, the local is mainly viewed through the lens of an outsider who may be a tourist or a person who is in some way venturing outside of their comfort zone and into an unfamiliar world or situation. In all of his works there is a sense of globality, even in those clearly set in Guatemala and which specifically portray the country's or region's problems. This is due in part to the fact that the author is aware that the concept of home is no longer necessarily linked to locality. In contrast to Asturias' tendency to focus his writings on the development of a national Guatemalan identity, Rey Rosa examines not only Guatemalans and issues specific to Guatemala, but also the rest of the citizens of this

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<sup>184</sup> See the call for submissions and an article about the first winners in *Istmo*: <http://istmo.denison.edu/n14/noticias/premio.html> and <http://istmo.denison.edu/n15/noticias/premio1.html>.

world. Nation building is not a theme in Rey Rosa's body of work, and the concept of national identity is notable in his works insofar as it pertains to the complexity and diversity of the world in general. Many of his characters are living outside of their home countries for varying reasons, like the protagonists of both *El cojo Bueno* (1996), and *La orilla africana* (1999). Rey Rosa has stories and novels set in many different parts of the world—for example, New York is the setting of the entire collection *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998), while *La orilla africana* and most of *El cojo bueno* take place in Morocco. Comparing him to Monterroso, one can see that Rey Rosa is specific about the varied settings of his works. Monterroso preferred ambiguity and never stated the location of the action in terms of nations. This represents an extraterritorial narrative style, where no specific land is referenced. When he did provide details of a city, it was to speak of the fictional San Blas, home of Eduardo Torres. Rey Rosa's narrative is more deterritorialized in that it is specific about location, but also highly conscious of the migrations that lead to increased interaction among different groups and cultures. These points of differentiation between Rey Rosa and the previous two authors studied here are a reflection of the period in which he has lived, one that is marked by intense globalization and disenchantment with the Guatemalan nation.

In the earlier part of his career, his body of work appeared to be better known outside of Central America than within, perhaps in part because of his association with Paul Bowles, who produced English translations of his earliest works. These translations were subsequently published in the United States. This external recognition is also due to his relationships with the Spanish publishing houses Seix Barral, Alfaguara and

Anagrama.<sup>185</sup> These Spanish publishers are larger and have more resources than those based in Guatemala or the larger region of Central America, such as Editorial Piedra Santa, Ediciones del Pensativo, or F&G Editores. Rey Rosa himself has noted that in Latin America it is difficult to read any writers that have not passed through “la máquina española” and that he usually finds the authors he reads through this Spanish market.<sup>186</sup> Those who work with the larger Spanish publishers certainly receive more exposure in Europe than in Latin America, and affiliation with a Spanish publisher can mean that a book has little chance of reaching the average Guatemalan citizen. According to a 2011 report published by Spain’s *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, nearly twenty two percent of books published in Spain are exported to France. Twelve percent go to Mexico, eleven percent to the United Kingdom, seven percent to Portugal and scarcely six percent to Argentina.<sup>187</sup> It is worth noting once again the relative difficulty involved in publishing and selling books in Guatemala, a country where more than forty percent of the population speaks an indigenous language and the adult literacy rate is estimated by UNESCO to be approximately seventy five percent, having risen ten points since 1994.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, in the last few years there have been some changes occurring, and several new editions of Rey Rosa’s earlier collections and novels have been re-released by the

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<sup>185</sup> Works published by Seix Barral include: *El cuchillo del mendigo*; *El agua quieta* (1992), *Cárcel de árboles*; *Salvador de buques* (1992), *Lo que soñó Sebastián* (novela y relatos 1994), *Que me maten si* (1997), *Ningún lugar sagrado* (cuentos 1998), *La orilla africana* (1999), *Caballeriza* (2006), y *Otro zoo* (cuentos 2005). *El cojo bueno* (1996), *Severina* (2011) and *Los sordos* (2012) were published by Alfaguara, and *El material humano* (2009) by Anagrama.

<sup>186</sup> “Rodrigo Rey Rosa: Somos una especie esencialmente violenta,” by Gregory Zambrano, *Quimera* 295 (June 2008): 24.

<sup>187</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística, “Sobre libros y lecturas” *Cifras INE: Boletín informativo del Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (April 2011), accessed January 12, 2013, [http://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?c=INECifrasINE\\_C&p=1254735116567&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout&cid=1259932520217&L=0](http://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?c=INECifrasINE_C&p=1254735116567&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout&cid=1259932520217&L=0).

<sup>188</sup> Regarding languages, see the “Guatemala” page of *The World Factbook*, specifically the section “People and Society,” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html>. For the literacy rates in Guatemala and many other countries, see UNESCO’s UIS data on literacy rates “Adult literacy rate, population 15+ years, both sexes (%)” <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

Guatemalan publishers cited above, providing Guatemalans and Latin Americans in general somewhat greater access to his body of work.

Rey Rosa has published much of his work through the larger, more well-known, Spanish publishing houses Seix Barral, Alfaguara and Anagrama, and according to literary critic Ignacio Echevarría, Spanish publishers in the 1990s were searching for fresh authors to meet the demands of their new business model. These publishing houses turned to Latin America, which they saw as a possible fountain of cheap, young talent. At the same time, the region seemed to be improving both economically and politically, allowing for a more global literary market.<sup>189</sup> Latin America has been viewed as a burgeoning market by Spanish publishers looking for both more potential customers and fresh voices to fill their catalogues, but Spain continues to produce many more titles per capita compared to Latin America as a whole. In 2010 Latin America and Spain produced a similar number of titles, even though the total combined population of the countries of Latin America is about ten times that of Spain.<sup>190</sup> Understanding the power of the Spanish publishing houses, and considering the current state of Spanish language publishing across Europe and Latin America, it would appear that it benefits authors like Rey Rosa to write less “local” works in order to appeal to the greatest number of readers internationally.

Pablo Dittborn, the editor-in-chief of Random House Chile, admitted in a 2011 interview that there is definitely a circulation problem between the many Spanish speaking countries.

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<sup>189</sup> Ignacio Echevarría, *Desvíos: un recorrido crítico por la reciente narrativa latinoamericana* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2007), 19-20.

<sup>190</sup> Julietta Lionetti, “Assymetry in the Spanish Book World: Spain vs. Latin America,” *Publishingperspectives.com*, March 8, 2012, <http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/03/asymmetry-in-the-spanish-book-world-spain-vs-latin-america/>.

As editors, we are continually receiving complaints from various authors who ask ‘Why is it that with a publishing house like Random House or Planeta or Alfaguara—transnational publishing houses—that my books aren’t in the other countries where you also have franchises?’ In general, the response has been: ‘Look, what you write about is of local interest.’ Or sometimes, ‘It does not work the other way around either.’ If I am accused of not publishing one of my authors in, for example, Ecuador—on the other hand, I have to point out there is no Ecuadorian literature in Chile either.<sup>191</sup>

The question of distribution and the idea of “local interest” reflect a recent criticism of some Latin American authors regarding the language that they are using in their works. According to Ignacio Echevarría:

El concepto de narrativa latinoamericana alude a una supuesta comunidad a la vez geográfica y lingüística, tanto o más que cultural. La lengua castellana actuaría aquí como un elemento aglutinador. Ahora bien: ocurre que el castellano empleado por la que se reconoce mayormente como narrativa latinoamericana es una lengua literaria que no sólo se diferencia, en cuanto tal, de la lengua hablada, sino que se constituye, además, como una especie de *interlingua*, de latín, de lengua franca que a su vez viene distanciándose cada vez más de la lengua que, sin propósitos literarios, se escribe en los diferentes países de los que emerge.<sup>192</sup>

He expresses concern that only these books, written in the *interlingua*, are being marketed and consumed outside of their national borders. This leads to a situation where works that are written in local, spoken registers are more frequently turned down for publication. Echevarría sees this as setting up a situation in which writers must employ an international Spanish, one with no discernible localisms or autochthonous quirks, in order to reach a wider audience. Rey Rosa has admitted:

Si uno quiere ser entendido por un mayor número de lectores, sin pensar en España sino simplemente pensar en alguien que va a estar trabajando con la lengua española, probablemente no va a usar un montón de localismos que no están en ningún diccionario; si haces ejercicios de localismo tal vez estás como condenando a tu obra a que no se pueda entender fuera, o unos años más tarde.

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<sup>191</sup> Andres Hax, “The Challenges of Transcontinental Latin American Publishing,” *Publishingperspectives.com*, November 9, 2011, <http://publishingperspectives.com/2011/11/the-challenges-of-transcontinental-latin-american-publishing/>.

<sup>192</sup> Echevarría, *Desvíos*, 24.

Entonces eso también puede ser un problema de la supervivencia del libro. En cualquier caso, creo que lo importante es que no se note demasiada afectación.<sup>193</sup>

Rey Rosa is unapologetic about his decision to avoid the use of too many localisms. For this author, linguistic clarity is what is important, and one does not experience much Guatemalan slang when reading his works. The main local linguistic indicator that he employs in many of them is the *voseo*, but it is unlikely that his readers would be confused by this form. In the realm of literary production, authors such as Rey Rosa are creating a product, and naturally are hoping to market and sell that product to the largest number of people possible. Rey Rosa's globality is not, however, simply a result of a writer cleverly marketing his works for sale, creating culturally homogenized products that appeal to a larger number of consumers, and in the process losing local cultural specificity. More accurately stated, his works are hybridized or multicultural and represent the mixed gaze of the current era of globalization.

The process of globalization has cultural, economic and political effects on all regions of the world, and these effects have helped to shape Rey Rosa's worldview. Jesús Martín-Barbero has addressed globalization in terms of Latin America in *Al sur de la modernidad: Comunicación, globalización y multiculturalidad*. According to the author, "la globalización redefine las relaciones centro/periferia: lo que la globalización nombra ya no son los movimientos de *invasión* sino transformaciones que se producen desde y en lo nacional y aun en lo local."<sup>194</sup> Globalization differs from imperialism in this way. It is not simply about invasion, but rather about transformations that are produced from and within the national as well as the local. Culture—as well as economy—is globalized from *within* each country. Martín-Barbero affirms that globalization in Latin America is

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<sup>193</sup> "Escritura en movimiento: Entrevista con Rodrigo Rey Rosa," by Raúl Rodríguez Freire, 1079.

<sup>194</sup> Martín-Barbero, *Al sur de la modernidad*, 103.

generally perceived in one of two ways: as either an opening-up of the nation due to the imposition of neoliberalism or as regional integration characterized by those countries' own efforts to enter the world market. Regarding the scenario of Latin American integration, the perception is that as entities attempt to expand the market reach of their cultural product(s) they (like the authors that employ an *interlingua* as Echevarría has noted) are erasing any signs of local or regional identity in those products. On the contrary, Martín-Barbero believes cultural globalization must not be confused with the standardization of culture. In his example, "el éxito de *McDonald's* o de *Pizza Hut* [en América Latina] habla menos de la imposición de la comida norteamericana que de los profundos cambios en la vida cotidiana de la gente."<sup>195</sup> While economic globalization diminishes the importance of territorial boundaries, local and regional cultures simultaneously find ways to recreate themselves. Stated another way, Mike Featherstone also asserts: "One of the problems in attempting to formulate a theory of globalization is of adopting a totalizing logic and assuming some master process of global integration is under way which is making the world more unified and homogenous."<sup>196</sup> It is important to remember this when reading Rey Rosa in order to be able to fully appreciate the hybridity of his works and to not assume that his style is an attempt to homogenize in order to expand his market reach.

Another important aspect of globalization is its deterritorializing nature. García Canclini defines the process of deterritorialization as the "loss of the 'natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories" that occurs in tandem with

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 107. Just as the industrial revolution changed the way families operate in the United States, similar changes in the traditional roles of men and women in other parts of the world create a demand for convenience products.

<sup>196</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 102.

reterritorialization, which he describes as the “partial territorial relocalizations of old and new symbolic productions.”<sup>197</sup> As communication technologies have advanced, a person’s ability to participate in a group (whether the purpose of that group is social, political, cultural, etcetera) has come to have much less to do with their geographical location. As a result, the world in general appears to be more interconnected. As Arjun Appadurai explains it:

The story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history. But when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities. . . . Together, [electronic mediation and mass migration] create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces.<sup>198</sup>

Appadurai’s theory of the five dimensions of global cultural flows offers a method of examining the influence of globalization. These dimensions are ethnoscapas, technoscapas, ideoscapas, mediascapas and financescapas. Appadurai uses the suffix “scape” to reflect the “fluid, irregular shapes” of these five dimensions that he identifies in *Modernity at Large* and he additionally refers to them as, “the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*.” The two scapes that will be referenced in the analysis of Rey Rosa’s work are the ethnoscape and the technoscape. The ethnoscape is “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals.” The technoscape is “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and

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<sup>197</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Silvia L. López, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 229.

<sup>198</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4. Appadurai’s explanation of -scapes first appeared in an article, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1990).

informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries.”<sup>199</sup>

In the Latin American context, voluntary and forced migration has also been a key part of history, and Latin American writers—Guatemalans included—have long been traveling the globe as diplomats and exiles. Rey Rosa has lived on several different continents and, like Asturias and Monterroso, he has had the experience of examining Guatemala from abroad. He has also portrayed Guatemala to a global audience in works such as *El cojo bueno* (1996), *Caballeriza* (2006), *El material humano* (2009), *Severina* (2011) and *Los sordos* (2012). His characters—Guatemalan or otherwise—have a restless, nomadic quality. His works, in contrast to those of his precursors, signal a new context for Guatemalan literary production that is difficult to confine to local, national or regional spaces.

These narrative qualities can be observed in other regions of Latin America as well. For example, in *Entre lo local y lo global: La narrativa latinoamericana en el cambio de siglo (1990-2006)*, the editors suggest that after the postboom, Latin American literature is being created in a new environment in which

el neoliberalismo y globalización, desplazamientos masivos de mano de obra, megalópolis urbanas interconectadas, penetración global de los media, televisión e internet, transforman vertiginosamente la experiencia de realidad de los individuos... [La producción novelística hispanoamericana] ahora asume que no hay modo de representación ajeno a las condiciones antes descritas, y busca escribir, desde el fragmento, desde las esquirlas de los proyectos utópicos de los años setenta, esas historias otras, locales, que dialogan con el contexto global e interrogan a una Latinoamérica siempre cambiante.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33-34.

<sup>200</sup> Jesús Montoya Juárez y Ángel Esteban, *Entre lo local y lo global: La narrativa latinoamericana en el cambio de siglo (1990-2006)* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2008), 7-8.

Guatemala is no exception to this description. In the early 1990s, the years in which Rey Rosa would have been writing *El cojo bueno*, *Ningún lugar sagrado*, and *La orilla africana*, the political climate in Guatemala was one of transition. It gained momentum with the 1994 victory of the National Advancement Party (PAN), which William I. Robinson describes as a group “whose leadership came primarily from professionals, administrators, and technocrats schooled in neo-liberal economics and a modernizing outlook.”<sup>201</sup> During this time, the Guatemalan revolutionary movement was still waging an insurgency that was disrupting the nation and making it difficult for the government to gain enough stability to ensure the flow of transnational capital. At the end of December 1996, however, peace accords were signed which “established the basis for the hegemony of the transnational elite project for Guatemala.”<sup>202</sup> These events represent the end of the utopian dreams of the left wing, and the beginning of the era of disenchantment evidenced in the writings of the post-war period. This was in great contrast to the environment in which Asturias and Monterroso were producing some of the works included in the previous chapters of this study. For decades after the coup of 1954, there was a backlash against the reformist policies of the Arévalo and Árbenz presidencies in an attempt to protect the interests of the elites. Susanne Jonas reports that from just mid-1981 to 1983 the “scorched-earth” genocidal war launched by the military regime eradicated 440 villages; produced up to 150,000 civilian casualties, either killed or disappeared; and there were over one million displaced both within Guatemala as well as externally.<sup>203</sup> According to Robinson, “state terrorism became the instrument of capitalist

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<sup>201</sup> Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts*, 102

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>203</sup> Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's peace process* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 24.

globalization in Guatemala, conforming ‘national’ structures to emerging global structures.”<sup>204</sup> In the end, while the peace accords were not a panacea for Guatemala’s problems, they did represent an important step toward acknowledging human rights violations and validating the need for indigenous rights. Robinson adds that “they also helped to legitimate the emergent neo-liberal order” that would launch Guatemala into a transnational and global dialogue (114). In turn, the increased flow of information and people across borders has helped to set the stage for the emergence of a global literature in the post-war period, with Rey Rosa as Guatemala’s most original contributor.

The first work covered in this chapter is the novel *El cojo bueno* (1996), which takes place both in Guatemala City and Tangier. While it does tackle the problems of kidnapping and violence in post-war Guatemala, it also has evidence of Rey Rosa’s tendency toward a more global literature. This is apparent in the constant migrations of the protagonist and the interactions between characters of different cultures, which together reveal a consciousness of the era of globalization. It is not surprising to also find a critique of the nation in this novel, especially when one considers the history of Guatemala. The presence of such criticism is another example of the trajectory toward the global in that the author is observing his homeland and expressing an opinion without being concerned with nation building. This is particularly apparent in the final lines of the novel, which disclose that the protagonist is determined to not have offspring, a key component of nation building as described by Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions*.<sup>205</sup>

Following *El cojo bueno* are two works that reflect a turning away from Guatemala. The first is a collection of short stories titled *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998), in

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<sup>204</sup> Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts*, 107.

<sup>205</sup> See Chapter 2 for more on how Sommer’s text is applied in the analysis of Asturias’ works in this study.

which all of the action takes place in the metropolis of New York. The characters, all of whom are experiencing the harsh realities of the big city, come from many different places and backgrounds. They include vagabonds, immigrants, criminals, and all are living in constant states of flux, physically and/or emotionally. Many are struggling to understand their identities amid such change. They epitomize the deterritorialized subjects of the era of globalization, and the setting of New York City aids in representing the global perspective of the narration. The other work that reflects this turning away is *La orilla africana* (1999) in which Guatemala does not figure at all. The action occurs almost entirely in Tangier and the only Latin American character, the protagonist, is a Colombian tourist in Morocco who is in the midst of an identity crisis and is doing everything he can to not return home. He is a perfect example of the dislocated character emblematic of global literature.

The last three works analyzed find Rey Rosa's narrative set in his home country once again. *Caballeriza* (2006) is a novel that marks a literary return to Guatemala for Rey Rosa, while at the same time accentuating his global perspective through the observations of the narrator/protagonist. This character shares his name with the author, and he is portrayed as somewhat of an outsider in the world he is observing. The narration is dark and suspenseful, with a style reminiscent of a piece of detective fiction where nothing is certain. It simultaneously criticizes the national (in terms of Guatemalan society) and highlights the global perspective of the author through the treatment of the interplay between a variety of different cultures and classes. Though it will not be analyzed at length in this chapter, another example of suspenseful autofiction is found in *El material humano* (2009), which continues in the same vein as *Caballeriza*. Guatemala

continues to be the backdrop for most of the novel, but the travels of the narrator/protagonist are also highlighted, as well as the fine line between fiction and reality. This is achieved through the themes of the novel as well as the structure, which is a series of notes kept by the narrator/protagonist. Finally, *Severina* (2011) follows a beautiful and mysterious book thief and a bookstore owner in Guatemala City, the nameless narrator/protagonist who falls in love with her. The mystery of this novel is built around the texts that the woman steals, which the narrator sees as clues to discovering who she is and eventually to become romantically involved with her. This time it is not the narrator/protagonist who is the more dislocated individual, but rather his love interest and the title character Severina.

These works will be analyzed in terms of their global perspective, the evidence of deterritorialization in the narration, and the restless, dislocated characters contained therein. In terms of style, the most basic characteristics of a global perspective or “mundialismo literario” as explained by Castany Prado are:

las enumeraciones cuyo universo de discurso es de ámbito mundial; las enumeraciones que buscan generar la sensación de que existe una cierta continuidad o cohesión entre todas las cosas que forman este mundo; el uso de palabras pertenecientes a campos léxicos con un elevado grado de difusión geográfica; la evocación de la variedad y mezcla lingüística provocada por el aumento de los desplazamientos y medios de comunicaciones en el mundo actual; y el uso de recursos formales afines al escepticismo literario.<sup>206</sup>

Many of these characteristics are exemplified in Rey Rosa’s narrative, and they will be observed in the analysis of his works. Rey Rosa’s characters tend to have shifting, unstable identities, and they are continually in contact with persons of many different backgrounds and nationalities, which can challenge or cause them to reflect upon their own particular worldviews. In some works, a critique of the national is evident, but it is

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<sup>206</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 225.

presented without any concern for nation-building. In others, the local is envisioned through the eyes of an immigrant, a tourist, or some other outsider. The sense of mystery and suspense in many of the works, and the fact that the author uses his own name for the protagonist in some of them, point toward the occurrence of what Castany Prado calls literary skepticism. These approaches work together to produce a global narrative style.

*El cojo bueno* (1996) is set in Guatemala and in Tangier. All of the action surrounds a life-altering event in the biography of Juan Luis Luna, who as a young man was kidnapped and held for ransom by a group comprised in part by acquaintances from his adolescence. This group went so far as to amputate Juan Luis' toe, and later his foot, in order to convince his wealthy, emotionally distant father to pay for his son's release. At the start of the novel, in part one of four, the omniscient third person narrator depicts the outcomes of the crime on the survivors in the years after the abduction. The section begins just after Juan Luis has met with one of the perpetrators of the crime—a childhood acquaintance nicknamed La Coneja. After their encounter, La Coneja worries that his victim has finally decided to take revenge for his missing foot, so he and another surviving member of the group decide to leave town as a precaution. In the second part, the narrator takes the reader back in time to describe the kidnapping and the twist that left most of the group without their share of the ransom, and some of them dead. The third section thrusts the reader forward in time to a more recent past which highlights Juan Luis' life as a traveller since his ordeal ended. Finally the fourth section concludes the novel with a description of how it was that Juan Luis discovered La Coneja, followed by his perspective of the meeting with La Coneja mentioned in the first part. The fact that Juan Luis chooses to not take revenge on La Coneja demonstrates that he prefers to break

the chain of violence so embedded in the collective consciousness of Guatemala. His intention is to move on with his life without further violence, but also without procreation, as revealed in the childless future that Juan Luis imagines during an intimate moment with his wife in the final pages of the novel. This image of the future is interesting considering the previous examination of the family as an indicator of the health of the nation in the work of Miguel Angel Asturias. While the end of violence—at least in this particular instance—points toward the possibility of a new era for Guatemala, the end of the family line reveals hedging on the part of the protagonist with regard to the country's future. As was previously stated, the lack of desire for both vengeance and offspring on the part of the protagonist reveal Rey Rosa as unconcerned with nation building.

Beatriz Cortez analyzes this detail of Juan Luis Luna's persona in a chapter of her text *Estética del cinismo* titled "El fin de la estirpe." She details the relationship between the patriarchal concepts of the family and the state in order to show that the decision to end the family line is one that allows the protagonist of *El cojo bueno* to escape "la reproducción de una interminable cadena de sujetos dispuestos a imponer normatividad social, símbolo fundamental de un sistema de violencia y autoritarismo que invade el espacio personal y que se fija simbólicamente en la figura del padre."<sup>207</sup> In choosing to not have children, Juan Luis avoids entering into the role of patriarch and as such, breaks the cycle of oppression of those under the rule of the male figure. This in turn represents a chipping away at the cycle of violence at the level of the state. In other words, rather

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<sup>207</sup> Beatriz Cortez, *Estética del cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra* (Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2009), 262.

than supporting a sense of national identity, Rey Rosa is symbolically breaking down a negatively viewed identity through his character's decision.

Of Juan Luis' young kidnappers, those who stand out most in the narration are two of the three surviving members of the group, La Coneja and El Sefardí. While the former was a high school acquaintance of Juan Luis, the latter was a stranger to him before the kidnapping, so the fact that they all used nicknames made it difficult for Juan Luis to know his real identity. The narrator does provide enough details of their lives for the reader to know that El Sefardí has worked as a mercenary soldier on various continents and was a leader in the Kaibiles, a special force created by Guatemala's military government in the mid 1970s in order to wage a counterinsurgency. The Kaibiles were integral to the aforementioned scorched earth genocidal war and they are known to have massacred entire villages alleged to contain guerilla sympathizers.<sup>208</sup> In identifying El Sefardí as a leader in this group, the narrator is foreshadowing the plot twist, which leaves this character holding all of the ransom money in the end. The nicknames do codify the identities of El Sefardí and Carlomagno, who have never met Juan Luis prior to the kidnapping, but those of the other characters point to the childhood connection they have to their hostage since their nicknames originated in their adolescence. It is rare in the novel that any member of the group is referred to by their given name, and when the given name is used it may cause the reader to question who exactly is being referenced. The only major character who does not have a nickname in the narration is Juan Luis, and he also has the most stable identity. His adult identity was in large part formed by the loss

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<sup>208</sup> For more information on the Kaibiles, see especially the CEH - Commission for Historical Clarification. "Caso Ilustrativo No. 31: Masacre de Las Dos Erres," *Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio* (Guatemala: CEH, February 1999), Anexo 1, Volumen 1, available at: <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/anexo1/vol1/no31.html> [accessed 18 December 2009].

of his foot during this kidnapping, however, and so the title of the novel reveals what his nickname could have been—the good cripple.

The instability and uncertainty with which Guatemalans have lived both during the decades of civil war and even following the peace treaty of 1996 is apparent in this early work of Rey Rosa. Juan Luis' abduction is a violent act in itself, and that violence is accentuated by the dismemberment. At the time, the kidnappers seem unaffected by the violence they are committing, an obvious consequence of how commonplace such acts have become in the country. It can also be reasoned that the general increase in violent images in the media and in popular culture that has been occurring on a global scale influences the characters nonchalant attitudes toward violence. The kidnappers are actually quite content as they imagine how different their lives will be once they receive the ransom. The fact that El Sefardí was a mercenary in an infamous Guatemalan anti-guerrilla organization sets him apart and sets the stage for his betrayal of the rest of the group, which ends in the deaths of two of the kidnappers and, paradoxically, ensures the survival of Juan Luis. During the chance encounter between Juan Luis and El Sefardí, halfway across the globe and many years later in the Montecarlo restaurant in Tangier, El Sefardí refers to Guatemala as a beautiful country, “[p]ero demasiado violento” and Juan Luis responds, ironically, “¿Por qué lo dice?”<sup>209</sup> At another point in the novel, he dreams of killing his kidnapper, feeling no remorse, but rather a sense of justification: “Varias veces lo asesinó a traición, sin sentir ninguna culpa; o lo asesinaba sin darle ninguna oportunidad de defenderse, y sin sentir tampoco que era injusto” (85).

The fact that violence is a constant in their lives is also explained by the narrator as Juan Luis looks up at the Guatemalan sky:

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<sup>209</sup> Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *El cojo bueno* (Madrid: Santillana, 1996), 88.

Se quedó mirando las columnas de nubes con varios tonos de rojo sobre los volcanes plumizos en el cielo del atardecer. Éste era un paisaje que hacía pensar en la muerte violenta, que podía provenir de los hombres armados que iban en el auto que se detenía a su lado, o de una grieta que podía abrirse súbitamente con un temblor de tierra bajo sus pies. (101)

The physical landscape of Guatemala as well as the government and society are referenced here as Rey Rosa illustrates his national consciousness, although not in order to promote a vision of a unified nation. The author's view on violence is not limited to his home country. The numerous examples of violence and the way that it is perceived by many characters as something ordinary are a key to how the author identifies and draws attention to his country's and to the world's desensitization to violence. The violent acts of this novel were committed in Guatemala, but the threat of violence is not limited to that country, and in an interview by Gregory Zambrano, Rey Rosa downplayed the influence of Guatemala's violent history on his works, alluding to a much longer history of violence in world literature: "A mí la violencia me viene desde mis comienzos como escritor, porque tuve sueños de violencia; esa violencia era la clase de situación que podría escribir con facilidad y luego se volvió casi un reflejo. Toda la literatura occidental está llena de violencia, desde Homero; es un elemento de la cultura de la humanidad, no es el único, pero se presta mucho a la representación literaria, somos una especie eminentemente violenta...."<sup>210</sup> Safety is a concern in all parts of the world, and in the more deterritorialized works that Rey Rosa composed after *El cojo bueno*, violence proves to be just as common in the various other locations he chooses as the settings for his narrative.

Another very important dimension in regard to the global perspective in Rey Rosa's works analyzed in this study is the idea of travel—whether it is migration, escape,

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<sup>210</sup> "Rodrigo Rey Rosa: Somos una especie esencialmente violenta," by Gregory Zambrano, 22.

exile, or tourism. As Castany Prado has indicated, “En la literatura posnacional nos hallamos no tanto con viajes de regreso como de huida, de fuga.”<sup>211</sup> This type of travel is highly visible in Rey Rosa’s body of work. In James Clifford’s *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, he discusses the task of “finding a frame for negative and positive visions of travel: travel, negatively viewed as transience, superficiality, tourism, exile and rootlessness . . . ; travel positively conceived as exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter.”<sup>212</sup> These positive and negative perceptions are connected to the reasons behind and feelings about the occasion of travel. In this novel, although the characters are all traveling for negative reasons they generally experience positive emotions about their voyages. From the vague feeling of contentment that La Coneja experiences when he leaves town after his encounter with Juan Luis, to the stronger, more complex emotions experienced by El Sefardí as he prepares to leave the country after betraying his co-conspirators, travel gives the characters of this novel a sense of freedom and relative safety. The very thought of it provides them with a moment or a window through which they are able to imagine a different life for themselves. In the case of La Coneja: “Le había sentado bien alejarse de la familia, aunque fuera sólo unos días.”<sup>213</sup> Juan Luis marries his girlfriend Ana Lucía upon being released by his captors and the restless couple immediately departs from Guatemala in a self-imposed exile. They spend time in New York, then Madrid and eventually Tangier, where Juan Luis is inspired to write a short story that is published through a Spanish magazine. Later Ana Lucía tires of Morocco and tells her husband, “sé cuándo un lugar me sienta mal. He

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<sup>211</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 234.

<sup>212</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>213</sup> Rey Rosa, *El cojo bueno*, 18-19.

pasado aquí unos de los años más felices de mi vida, pero hay algo que me dice, que ha estado diciéndome hace días, que es hora de partir.”<sup>214</sup> Their life in Tangier is becoming stagnant and both are feeling that a change of scenery is the answer. They both seem to be happier when they are traveling or starting over, and their situation is reminiscent of a circular migration in which every few years they decide that life may be better in the other country. These types of migrations are increasingly common as the process of globalization continues.

Certainly Juan Luis and Ana Lucía experience travel quite differently from other characters in the novel. They are much more fortunate in that they have the financial stability to make their migrations rather comfortably. Money is generally what makes the difference between a positive and a negative vision of travel, what can change a perception of travel as rootlessness into something more like a transforming encounter. Clifford highlights the fact that the “project of comparison [of visions of travel] would have to grapple with the evident fact that travelers move about under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed.”<sup>215</sup> These types of financial difference are present among the characters of *El cojo bueno*, but all of them manage to carry out their journeys whatever their status. For example, La Coneja is not a rich man, and his trip and his lodgings are modest. For him, getting away only involves a few hours on a bus and the purpose of the trip is to escape, to avoid the possible negative outcome that might occur if Juan Luis is looking for vengeance. In contrast, Juan Luis and Ana Lucía are able to fund their travels with his father’s wealth and although they eventually choose Morocco over New York or Madrid

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<sup>214</sup> *El cojo bueno*, 78.

<sup>215</sup> *Routes*, 35.

because it is so much less expensive, they are living comfortably and even have a maid. Later, when they decide to return to Guatemala and later still to Morocco once again, there is not even a hint of conversation about the financial implications of relocating. In the case of El Sefardí, as he explains to Carlomagno that he is taking most of the money and leaving, the song *Muévelo* starts to play on the radio. He packs a bag and examines a symbol of his identity, a Guatemalan passport expedited in New York, which has current visas to the U.S., France and Spain. It also shows stamps from El Salvador, Belize, Morocco and Senegal:

Era un objeto cargado de recuerdos, que bastaba para causarle un ligero revoloteo en el estómago, relacionado con la palabra «viaje». Y a este sentimiento ayudaba, como ayuda una especia al sabor de una comida, el no saber nada más que el punto de partida de su próximo viaje, pues su destino inmediato dependía sólo del horario de vuelos de aquel día.<sup>216</sup>

This particular character has created a situation for himself, as a result of his crime, in which he not only can afford to travel; he must leave the country or run the risk of capture. In each of the cases, the character in motion experiences a sense of freedom associated with travel—whatever the negative circumstance of their journey may be. The idea of travel in general can be viewed both positively and negatively, as transience and dislocation on the one hand and as exploration and research on the other. All of these characters are getting away from something (the mundane, a bad memory, a fear of capture, etc.) but they are also able to imagine, to varying degrees, a life that is worth living. They all recognize that a *cambio de aires* holds promise.

In this novel, Juan Luis and Ana Lucía as well as El Sefardí form part of what Arjun Appadurai calls the ethnoscape. The couple is on the move and self-exiled in a circular migration, and while they have a basic network of family and friends, they are

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<sup>216</sup> *El cojo bueno*, 68.

like Appadurai's example of people who increasingly "deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move" (34). El Sefardí also clearly fantasized about moving, a fantasy which led to his actions during the kidnapping of Juan Luis. Back in Guatemala, amid the kidnapping, El Sefardí saw a 747 pass overhead while he waited to pull from the trashcan the bag of money Juan Luis' father had deposited there as ransom. It was in that moment that he was inspired to abscond with the money and live out his fantasy of moving to Tangier. In perceiving that jet airliner, a flagship of global travel, El Sefardí took another step toward the ethnoscape.

Due to the global digital divide that has affected developing countries—like Tangier and Guatemala where *El cojo bueno* is set—the characters of the novel have a troubled relationship with the technoscape. They do not have access to the Internet or email, and the most advanced communication technologies available to them are telephone/fax and mail. While living outside of Guatemala, Juan Luis and Ana Lucía are connected to home mainly through mail and fax. When he encounters El Sefardí in the Montecarlo restaurant, Juan Luis recognizes that the violent past he has attempted to escape is not really behind him, but that a piece of it actually lives with him in Morocco. The next day he sends a fax to his father from "la *fax-teleboutique* El Faro," a business whose name harkens back to a much older way of sending out a message. He wants his father to tell him the names of his kidnappers but he lies: "*No es que me tema encontrarme con uno de ellos, pero es una posibilidad, sobre todo ahora que el mundo parece que se ha hecho tan pequeño*" (83-84, italics in the original). The reference to the shrinking world reminds the reader that globalization was certainly reaching these developing countries in the late twentieth century, even if the resulting changes were less

intense or obvious than they may have been in more developed regions of the world. This is an example of what Castany Prado calls “perspectivas vértigo,” or the violent changes in spatial or temporal focus of a narration that oblige us to consider reality from more general perspectives in which it makes no sense to distinguish between nations or ethnicities.<sup>217</sup> Juan Luis instructs his father to reply to his fax by mail, due to questions of privacy at El Faro, but because the mail workers in Guatemala happened to be on strike that month, the letter must be rerouted through the United States via private carrier. The contrast between first and third world technoscapes reveals the challenges of the underdeveloped technoscape of less industrialized countries, but the fact that it is possible to communicate that fluidly across such distances marks the experience of the inhabitants of the ethnoscape.

In addition to the globality that can be easily perceived in this work, Guatemala and its problems of violence, civil war and poverty, are also subjects of this novel. However, they are not presented in terms of a national perspective. In comparing the works of Asturias analyzed in the second chapter of this study to this transitional work of Rey Rosa, the vast difference in the amount of focus on nation building is obvious. Where Asturias tended to keep the nation at the center of his works—even rooted his works in the idea of nation—the author of *El cojo bueno* has used the nation as a point of departure rather than a focal point. The story of Rey Rosa’s protagonist, his personal development through his struggle to come to terms with his deformity and the violent acts that led to it, is more important than the nation of Guatemala. Juan Luis’ decision to not seek revenge upon La Coneja, even though he had already fantasized extensively about killing El Sefardí, is how he is able to free himself from a potential downward spiral of

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<sup>217</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 231.

violence. In Rey Rosa's own interpretation, "es un momento de libertad para el personaje, cuando yo veo que puede no vengarse me parece más interesante que la venganza previsible, pues hubiera sido fácil ejecutarla."<sup>218</sup> The decision to not have children can also be viewed as a kind of freedom—from the responsibility and the bond that having a child creates. Juan Luis is the first of many characters in Rey Rosa's body of work who represents some of the traits of the "man without bonds" described by Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Love*.<sup>219</sup> This is the type of person that inhabits and represents the global society of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Bauman's *Liquid Love* is an extension of the theories he elaborated in the earlier title *Liquid Modernity* in which he undertakes the task of describing the current age of globalization. He examines how we are moving from a solid, heavy kind of modernity characterized by territorial conquest and the building of heavy machines in huge factories owned by men like Rockefeller, to a lighter, liquid modernity in which controlling time has become more important than controlling space. Such a fluid environment has profoundly transformed the human condition, and this change is reflected in the literature of the era. As Bernat Castany Prado has noted, "el desubicado o desarraigado es el personaje más habitual de la literatura posnacional."<sup>220</sup> In other works, such as *Ningún lugar sagrado* (analyzed below), there are more examples of this type of dislocated or uprooted character, combined with a continued global perspective that places less emphasis on Guatemala

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<sup>218</sup> "Escritura en movimiento: Entrevista con Rodrigo Rey Rosa," by Rodríguez Freire, 1080.

<sup>219</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), vii.

<sup>220</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 218. In his definition of postnational literature, Castany Prado points out that postnationalism is more than a political theory in that it not only believes that the nation-state has become obsolete but also that it considers that the reach of culture can and should be global: "De este modo, la literatura posnacional tiende a dar cuenta no tanto de una sociedad nacional como de una sociedad mundial. Sus estrategias narrativas y estilísticas así como sus temas y símbolos ya no contarán la historia íntima de las naciones, sino la del mundo" (ibid., 171).

and more importance on the points of contact between many countries, cultures and communities.

The stories comprising *Ningún lugar sagrado* (1998) take place in New York City, a city full of immigrants from all over the world. Speaking of this in an interview with Claudia Posadas, which appears on the final pages of the Piedra Santa edition (2005) of the book, Rey Rosa explains: “Era un experimento el situar mis textos en esa ciudad y no en Guatemala. Nueva York es una ciudad llena de estímulos visuales, difícil de ‘narrar’... Yo quería que [el paisaje urbano] se manifestara de manera indirecta en los cuentos, sin que el texto fuera simplemente descriptivo.”<sup>221</sup> Not only is this a narrative experiment, but also a moment in which the author intuits globalization, he lives it and writes it. The protagonists as well as the minor characters of these short stories are vagabonds, foreign exchange students and immigrants. They are restless travelers, and like Bauman’s man with no bonds or Castany Prado’s “desarraigados,” they reflect the liquid modern state of the globalized era in which they were created.

In Néstor García Canclini’s *Imaginarios urbanos*, he comments that the multicultural nature of megalopolises such as New York, Mexico City, or Paris, is the result of large migrations of people from distinct ethnic backgrounds. He refers to Buenos Aires in particular as one of the first multicultural cities, but that fact has not been widely studied, “salvo por parte de algunos historiadores, porque la tendencia era más bien a construir una unidad nacional y a encontrarnos satisfechos con las maneras en que, sobre todo los grandes flujos migratorios, español e italiano, se iban disolviendo en una

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<sup>221</sup> “Una escritura sin precipitaciones,” by Claudia Posadas, in *Ningún lugar sagrado* (Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa, 2005), 165.

estructura que era representativa de una unidad nacional, de ese «crisol de razas».”<sup>222</sup>

García Canclini adds that in the late 1990s it was becoming more common to recognize the effect of migration on large cities, for example the acknowledgement that Los Angeles is the fourth largest Mexican city.<sup>223</sup> In the current era of globalization, these cities of immigrants are global cities that are difficult to define as “American” or “Mexican” based merely on their geographic locations. New York is a global city and the short stories that Rey Rosa has set there reveal the multiculturalism, the realities of neoliberalism and economic globalization, and the shift in focus from a national to a global literature.<sup>224</sup>

The idea for the story titled “Poco-loco” came from a newspaper article about a homicide that occurred near the author’s New York apartment.<sup>225</sup> The author does an excellent job creating suspense as he presents a gruesome slice of the cosmopolitan city of New York. The characters are from many different parts of the world and the struggles of migration are the backdrop for this dark tale. The protagonist is Alicia Beerle, a young Swiss student who has come to New York to study. Before her arrival she had fantasized about living there, imagining herself in a new life without the mundane problems that every human being must face, but her dream of a better life quickly evolves into a nightmare.

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<sup>222</sup> *Imaginarios urbanos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1997), 78.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 78. According to the 2010 United States Census, of the total population of Los Angeles, CA (3,792,621), 1,838,822 or nearly half self identify as Hispanic or Latino <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=0644000> [Accessed 12 February 2013].

<sup>224</sup> For census data regarding the demographics of New York City, see <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=3651000>. For more detailed data on Hispanic populations of major U.S. cities compiled by the Pew Hispanic Center, see <http://www.pewhispanic.org/hispanic-population-in-select-u-s-metropolitan-areas/#top-60-hispanic-metropolitan-areas> [all sites accessed 10 February 2013].

<sup>225</sup> See the prologue to Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Ningún lugar sagrado* (Guatemala: Piedra Santa, 2005).

She realizes shortly after her arrival that her life in New York City is not going to be as carefree as she had imagined it from the security of home. Her only contact in New York is a young Spanish woman (another immigrant) who has very little space for Alicia, so she must hasten to find a suitable place to live. In her rush to move she responds to an advertisement posted by Daniel Harkowitz, a young transient from Arkansas. Daniel lives in an apartment that he had been sharing with a girl named Mary, who disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The narrator introduces Daniel to the reader with the following charged statements:

Quizá Daniel Harkowitz habría sido otra persona si no hubiera conocido el concepto de un dios todopoderoso y personal, pero desde temprana edad la idea del Dios cristiano se había convertido para él en obsesión. «Demencia religiosa», dijeron los psiquiatras forenses que lo examinaron cuando tenía diez años, porque había intentado matar a un niño de su edad durante una ceremonia bautismal a orillas del Mississippi. (21)

At this point the reader would already have suspicions about Mary's disappearance, and the narrator gives signs that Alicia's experience with Daniel could be similar:

Por curiosidad, Alicia había entrado dos o tres veces en el cuarto de Daniel, y había ojeado algunos de sus libros: *Una vida de Antón S. Lavey* por él mismo; *Real Magic*, de Isaac Bonewitz; *The Ultimate Evil*, de Maury Ferry; *Paracelsus*, de Robert Browning. (26)

These are texts which point toward mysticism, mysteries, bloody crime scenes, and the satanic. Alicia eventually becomes suspicious and fearful of Daniel, but when she starts to look for a new apartment he discovers her intentions and murders her.

Violence—and some characters' indifference toward it—is still a theme for Rey Rosa in this example. Nowhere in this story do we see any specific reference to Guatemala or Latin America, however, which indicates that violence can occur anywhere. The person who commits murder in this case is a mad drifter who has in effect

“settled down” into a slightly more stable living condition. As a young boy he was rooted in his convictions to the point that he attempted murder. On the other hand Alicia is still figuring out who she is, and she is hoping to move out of her apartment and away from the situation with Daniel. The “native” or citizen is brutally punishing the immigrant. This juxtaposition of fixed versus fluctuating lifestyles and identities in the characters combined with Alicia’s victimization by her evil roommate Daniel points to Rey Rosa’s condemnation of stagnancy, which he equates here with madness. In *El cojo bueno* Juan Luis and Ana Lucía represented the benefits of being in flux, but here the image of stagnancy is emphasized in order to draw a contrast between the two ways of being and to make a statement about which is preferable in the eyes of the narrator.

Another story in this collection, “Negocio para el milenio,” consists of a series of letters written by an anonymous, Spanish-speaking prisoner to a certain Peter Beyle, also identified as “Presidente de la Asociación Americana de Cárceles Lucrativas” (35). Beyle’s title alludes to the fact that in the recent decades, imprisoning people has developed into a way to gain profits. The writer of the letters identifies himself as a “guest” of one of those lucrative prisons and his aim is to propose a business deal to Mr. Beyle. This is a one sided narration, as the reader is privy only to the prisoner’s perspective, and that fact calls into question the reliability of the narrator. This uncertainty contributes to the overall sense of doubt in the work, or literary skepticism, which is one of Castany Prado’s basic characteristics of “mundialismo literario.” Throughout the one-way correspondence, the letter writer frequently displays his vast knowledge of Mr. Beyle’s personal and business life in a threatening manner, alerting the addressee to the fact that even though he is a prisoner, he can still reach Beyle. Even

while floating veiled threats, the inmate is attempting to entice the businessman into a dialogue, providing him with only minimal information of his idea for fear that Beyle could appropriate it and make millions. The proposal is eventually revealed in the penultimate letter, once the prisoner has apparently become so desperate that he is willing to risk Beyle stealing the idea.

An interesting detail of the narration is that Beyle's offices are located in the World Trade Center, an iconic symbol of globalization since its first incarnation at the 1939 Worlds Fair in Flushing, New York. There the International Chamber of Commerce created an exhibit called the World Trade Center, dedicated to "world peace through trade" and the idea to build a permanent structure in Manhattan was championed decades later by David Rockefeller. Through the construction of the Twin Towers, Rockefeller and his colleagues intended to establish Manhattan as the "home of world commerce."<sup>226</sup> The location was a nucleus of global trade until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Rey Rosa composed this work in response to "un artículo publicado por aquellas Navidades [1997-1998] en *The Nation* acerca del asombroso éxito financiero de una infame empresa de cárceles privadas que opera en Estados Unidos desde hace más de diez años."<sup>227</sup> The article highlights the Corrections Corporation of America or CCA, a company which, according to its website,

specializes in the design, construction, expansion and management of prisons, jails and detention facilities, as well as inmate transportation services through its subsidiary company TransCor America. The company is the fifth-largest

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<sup>226</sup> James Glanz and Eric Lipton, *City in the Sky: The Rise and Fall of the World Trade Center* (New York: Times Books, 2003), 28; "WTC Origins," from the official website of the World Trade Center, <http://www.wtc.com/about/wtc-origins>.

<sup>227</sup> Rey Rosa, *Ningún lugar sagrado*, 11. The article mentioned is by Eric Bates, "Private Prisons," *The Nation*, 5 January 1998, 11-18.

corrections system in the nation, behind only the federal government and three states. . . . houses more than 80,000 inmates in more than 60 facilities, 44 of which are company-owned, with a total bed capacity of more than 90,000.<sup>228</sup>

Private prisons such as those run by CCA have continued to reap enormous financial benefits from the increasing detention of undocumented immigrants in the years since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>229</sup> Some experts also believe that these private prisons not only profit from the immigration crackdown, but they have also lobbied federal and state lawmakers to ensure a steady flow of detainees.<sup>230</sup>

The role of the lucrative private prison industry and the fact that the prisoner who is writing these letters is a Latin American immigrant both point to the process of globalization and offer a critique of neoliberalism. At the turn of the twenty first century, just after *Ningún lugar sagrado* was published, over eleven percent of the population of the United States was foreign born. Of those 31.1 million people, 12.5 million were citizens, 18.6 million were non-citizens, and the unauthorized immigrant population of the United States that same year was estimated at 8.4 million.<sup>231</sup> Many immigrants (documented or not) were caught up in the United States' justice system. The Bureau of

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<sup>228</sup> <http://www.cca.com/about/>

<sup>229</sup> While these events did occur after Rey Rosa's publication of this story, it is interesting to note that Office of Homeland Security (precursor to the department) was created just eleven days after the attacks on the World Trade Center.

<sup>230</sup> Chris Kirkham, "Private Prisons Profit From Immigration Crackdown, Federal And Local Law Enforcement Partnerships," *Huffington Post*, June 7, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/07/private-prisons-immigration-federal-law-enforcement\\_n\\_1569219.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/07/private-prisons-immigration-federal-law-enforcement_n_1569219.html).

<sup>231</sup> According to two reports published by the PewResearch Hispanic Center: Seth Motel and Eileen Patten, "Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 2011," Table 1, January 29, 2013, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/01/29/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-2011/>; and Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Unauthorized Immigrants: 11.1 Million in 2011," December 6, 2012, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/12/06/unauthorized-immigrants-11-1-million-in-2011/>.

Justice Statistics reported in the *Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities* of 2000, that the number of noncitizen inmates nearly doubled from 1995 to 2000.<sup>232</sup>

Immigrants are visible throughout “Negocio para el milenio,” and one example is through the suggestion of who might be the letter-writer’s spies in Beyle’s corporation. The suspects are Latin American immigrants who work in security, housekeeping and as window-washers at the high-rise location of Beyle’s offices. In several of his letters, the prisoner reveals that he is aware of waves of firings at the World Trade Center buildings. These, he assumes, have occurred because of Beyle’s increasing concerns about security since the prisoner first made contact with him. Each time he hears of another mass firing, he writes to Beyle to inform him that none of those fired were the messengers that are helping him deliver the letters: “Se ha equivocado usted una vez más. Supongo que el hecho de que más del noventa por ciento de los limpiacristales de rascacielos de Nueva York son latinoamericanos le haría sospechar que uno de mis mensajeros podía encontrarse entre ellos.”<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, the exploitation of and discrimination against immigrants and other marginalized groups is observed in the post script of one letter where the prisoner refers to

la institución de una fuerza de trabajo paralela dentro de las prisiones, donde está prohibido sindicarse y la hora laboral se paga a unos veinte céntimos de dólar, con lo cual han creado ganancias enormes para su compañía y han permitido que los mismos productos que hace apenas un lustro llevaban etiquetas como «Hecho en Corea», o «Hecho en Guatemala», hoy lleven de nuevo el orgulloso aviso de *Made in USA*. (42)

A critique of the national is evident in this depiction of the ironic way that items receive the desirable label. The prison workers are in many cases immigrants who may be

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<sup>232</sup> James J. Stephan and Jennifer C. Karberg, *Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 2000*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 24, 2003. The information can be found on page 8 of the pdf version, which is accessible through <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=533>.

<sup>233</sup> *Ningún lugar sagrado*, 46.

earning less per day than what they might make in a factory based in their respective home countries.

In his final letters, the prisoner at last reveals his plan to Beyle. He proposes that if the businessman were to pay those imprisoned for life to “check-out” of their cells early by committing suicide, he could make much more money in the long term due to the higher turnover at each prison. He has studied the business of prisons and carefully presents his idea to the man in charge, pointing out that if Mr. Beyle is willing to accept this proposal that he would save nearly a quarter of a million dollars for each prisoner who agreed to kill himself rather than serve out a life sentence. He even expands the idea to include the many Latin American countries where Beyle could be constructing more prisons in which to employ the same types of policies, “como Brasil, Colombia, El Salvador y Guatemala, donde los costes en general son mucho más bajos que los de aquí, pero donde la criminalidad es muy superior, así como son mucho más intensos el *thanatos* y la desesperación. ¡Minas de oro!”<sup>234</sup> This potential for the expanded implementation of the prisoner’s idea points to the global perspective of the narration. The prisoner suggests that he will serve as the first example for a sum of \$100,000, although upon receiving no reply, he eventually begs Mr. Beyle to deposit \$50,000 into his mother’s account in his native country in exchange for his promise to end his life, thereby making room for a new “guest.”

Rey Rosa has created a protagonist that is in some ways, like Alicia in “Poco-loco,” ripped from the headlines in order to shine a light on contemporary events like the exploitation and discrimination of the immigrant population, or the phenomenon of

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<sup>234</sup> *Ningún lugar sagrado*, 51. This could also be a vague allusion to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which would have taken the concepts of the North American Free trade Agreement (NAFTA) and expanded them across the Americas.

private prisons. These events are not solely connected to the author's home country, and they may not even reference Guatemala specifically. They are events that have worldwide impact, and they are presented from a global perspective. The protagonist of "Negocio para el milenio" and the other noncitizens present in the narration presumably went to New York to improve their living conditions, and they all experience the struggles associated with migration and marginalization. That the immigrant prisoner is a doubly marginalized figure is clear, even without any further details on the man or his crime. His suggestion that most inmates serving life sentences would rather commit suicide than to die in prison draws attention to the desperation that such extreme marginalization foments. Moreover, the period of movement, of migration in the life of this protagonist ended when he was incarcerated. Through this character, Rey Rosa has again portrayed stagnation as a state of insanity where an immigrant dies, but this time by his own hand.

The title story of this collection, "Ningún lugar sagrado," contains one voice in a style similar to the epistolary narrative of "Negocio para el milenio," but this time it is a type of dramatic monologue rather than a series of letters. The reader is privy to one half of a dialogue between the protagonist and his therapist, rather than the unanswered written communications from a prisoner to a businessman. In receiving just the protagonist's side of the conversation, the reader must imagine what is being said to him based on his responses to the questions and comments directed at him. Once again, this type of narration leaves both the reliability of the narrator/protagonist and the motivations of his interlocutor widely open to interpretation. For example, many of the protagonist's revelations in therapy appear to be led to a great extent by the therapist, whose final

actions in the story (going to bed with her client) are unprofessional by any standard. In addition, paranoia and other potential character flaws of the protagonist are notable throughout the narration.

As in the previous two stories, the main character of “Ningún lugar sagrado” is an immigrant, a person searching for his place in the world. He is a Guatemalan scriptwriter living in New York, which is one of many allusions to the author, or at least an implied author. He recently has been suffering from writer’s block, so he seeks the help of a psychiatrist, a woman called Dr. Rivers. Since the entire story is the protagonist’s side of the conversation during his appointments and other interactions with her, the reader is apprised of many intimate details of his life. For example, he lets it be known that he dislikes being mistaken for a homosexual simply because of the years he spent living in Morocco, and he admits to feeling impotent and hypocritical when he contemplates current events in his home country in contrast with his relatively simple life in New York.<sup>235</sup>

In this story there is a direct connection to Guatemala and the violence that comes from there, but because the narrator lives on the outside now—and in a constantly changing, globalized world—the perspective the reader receives is much broader. The immediate situation of Guatemala is presented in how it connects to the characters’ lives in a global context. The protagonist is expecting his sister, Antonia, who is coming from Guatemala to visit him. He speaks of her activism and how different her life is from his own. He feels as though he has turned his back on his homeland when he compares

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<sup>235</sup> Rey Rosa may be commenting here on the fact that Marc Zimmerman referred to him as a homosexual: “Meanwhile, turning to work written outside Guatemala, first, there is the collection of Kafkaesque short stories by Rodrigo Rey Rosa, a talented young homosexual writer...” Zimmerman, *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala*, vol. 1, 189.

himself to Antonia, who is coming to the United States because threats have been made on her life since she published something very controversial in Guatemala.<sup>236</sup> It turns out that she was right to be afraid because as soon as she arrives to New York she is pursued by thugs and must flee to Chicago. Her local problem becomes a global one as she realizes that even after crossing various borders, she is not truly safe. Furthermore, the men pursuing Antonia are not only following her, but also her brother, who is guilty by association. She attempts to convince him to go with her to Chicago, but he refuses, later saying to Dr. Rivers, “Pero qué podría hacer yo en Chicago. Ya se lo dije, no me interesa la política, y detesto las agrupaciones. No, mi vida está aquí, doctora. Ya me fui de Guatemala. Sí, una especie de huida. No voy a huir de Nueva York.”<sup>237</sup> The protagonist agrees that his self-imposed exile was an escape, but he does not wish to continue to live a completely transient life. No one leaves their home without a reason; there is always something motivating the migrant, be it fear, money, the dream of a better life, etcetera. No matter the cause for the migration or the form of exile, people do continue to look for some kind of stability in their lives. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, travel can be seen as a positive or negative event. While the protagonist has already fled once, from Guatemala to New York, he is not interested in doing so again to Chicago. He sees this kind of travel as negative and it is not appealing to him to continue to consider himself a hypocrite or coward, the emotions at the heart of his identity crisis. In looking for physical stability in his life he may be hoping to stabilize his identity as well.

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<sup>236</sup> According to the report produced by the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), while the early to mid 1980s saw the greatest number of human rights violations in Guatemala, the period between 1990 and 1996 echoed the tendency of the previous decade, especially regarding the assassinations of members and leaders of social organizations and political parties. See *Guatemala: Memoria del silencio*, <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/>, chapter II, volumen 2, paragraphs 155-159.

<sup>237</sup> *Ningún lugar sagrado*, 102.

After arriving to an appointment at Dr. Rivers' office and reporting to her that a man has followed him to the building, the protagonist asks if he can sit in her waiting room until the man gives up and leaves. She offers him the keys to her apartment, which is on a different floor of the building. After she finishes with her clients, she goes home to find that he has been writing: "Es un monólogo" he explains (106). She seems to be quite satisfied with this breakthrough and continues to shift their relationship from a professional to a more casual one. They end up in bed together and in the last few lines of the story, the protagonist says to Dr. Rivers, "Sí, por donde quieras. No, ningún lugar sagrado" (109). In the context of the bedroom, this line obviously refers to sex, but there is another interpretation. Neither the narrator/protagonist nor his sister has been safe in any given moment since she came to stay. It seems as though the people who threaten them are capable of finding them in any city, any country. There is no safe (or sacred) place for them. The reality is that they are living in a world which feels increasingly smaller, forcing them to face the problems that globalization can bring.

Rey Rosa perceives these problems and observes the people who live in the unstable, in-between spaces of global migrations. These are the interstices that Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, suggests might replace the trope of the prefix "post" and allow those who study culture to shift focus away from the "beyond" and toward the "moments and processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences."<sup>238</sup> These interstices are, for Bhabha, places where the possibility of cultural hybridity opens up. They are also the places where a person experiences unhomeliness. The protagonist of "Ningún lugar sagrado" and his sister, as well as many other characters in the collection as a whole, are experiencing their role as "other" in an extreme sense. They do

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<sup>238</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

not feel safe, nor do they ever feel completely at home. The characters' presence in this unhomely world is a result of their need to migrate, and as Rina Benmayor points out in the introduction to *Migration and Identity*, "migration—especially for subordinated, racialized groups—is a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context. . . . The experience and effects of migration are long-term and critical in shaping and reshaping both collective and individual identities."<sup>239</sup> The protagonist is experiencing the uncertainty of being in a new place and hearing from his family back home in Guatemala of all the problems that exist there. He is conflicted because he is happy to be far from such trouble (most of the time) but feels guilty about his relative security. This is apparently part of what has been causing his writer's block, and the solution to his problem occurs when his feeling of security is diminished.

In the end of "Ningún lugar sagrado" the reader witnesses the sexual union between the protagonist and Dr. Rivers, which could lead one to believe that the author is proposing some sort of inter-cultural unification. However, this union is not a fruitful union like the foundational fictions of the past. It is much more evocative of Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love* in which he argues that along with modernity, relationships are becoming more liquid, less solid. This means that in lieu of experiencing the more permanent relationships of the past, people are now more focused on connecting:

Connections are 'virtual relations'. Unlike old-fashioned relationships (not to mention 'committed' relationships, let alone long-term commitments), they seem to be made to the measure of a liquid modern life setting where 'romantic possibilities' (and not only 'romantic' ones) are supposed and hoped to come and

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<sup>239</sup> Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes, "Some Reflections on Migration and Identity," in *Migration and Identity*, eds. Paul Thompson, Rina Benmayor, and Andor Skotnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8.

go with ever greater speed and in never thinning crowds, . . . Unlike ‘real relationships’, ‘virtual relationships’ are easy to enter and to exit.<sup>240</sup>

The encounter between Dr. Rivers and her patient is more of a mis-encounter involving casual sex—a “virtual relationship” between two individuals living in the age of non-committal “connections”—and where those involved undoubtedly are not looking to procreate. Rey Rosa is creating these works and his characters in an era in which the impermanence of relationships is accentuated by the increasing acceleration and intensity of the process of globalization.

The protagonist’s statement that there is no sacred place, which refers back to the title of the story and the collection, reflects Bauman’s idea that in the current age of globalization, space has been conquered. The spaces that the characters inhabit—be it the city of New York, the protagonist’s apartment, or the building where he meets his therapist—are open to the presence of those people who threaten them. While the protagonist may feel somewhat safe in the therapist’s office, the idea that violence could reach him there still accompanies him. This is perhaps the reason he does not leave New York with his sister. After all, if they are able to find him in New York, they will find him in Chicago. Assuming the threat is real, the best he can do is to wait and hope that they lose interest in him. Time will undoubtedly bring change to his situation, and from that perspective time is more significant than space. Considering the comparative ease with which global travel is accomplished in the modern era, the distance between people of means may be perceived as less significant than ever before.

The next work in the chronology of Rey Rosa’s publications also concerns global travel. *La orilla africana* (1999) is a short novel in which the narrator describes a few

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<sup>240</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), xii.

weeks in the life of the protagonist: a nameless Colombian tourist in Morocco who has lost his passport—the maximum symbol of his national identity—and has found an owl. This is the first character we encounter in Rey Rosa's works who is traveling for pleasure. Still, his trip is an opportunity to flee something unpleasant. It is an escape from the mundane, and he uproots himself by turning his vacation with friends into a point of departure from his life in Colombia. As a result of his dislocation from his life back home, the protagonist's identity becomes blurred. At one point he sits in his room in a hostel in one of the worst neighborhoods of Tangier:

Envuelto en una nube de humo de kif, sentado en posición de loto en su cama de la pensión, la espalda apoyada en la pared húmeda y fría, se inventaba un destino marroquí. No volvería a casa en mucho tiempo. Aprendería el árabe. Quizá hasta se haría musulmán. Compraría una esposa bereber. Había estado solo mucho tiempo. ¿Pero hacía cuántas semanas que estaba en Tánger?<sup>241</sup>

The physical and temporal distance he has put between himself and home is opening up a world of possibilities for him. As in the situation of Juan Luis and Ana Lucía in *El cojo bueno* this character also has enough money to have travelled to Morocco in an attempt to get away from something, and he is feeling hopeful in Morocco just as the Guatemalan couple did for a while. A major difference in their situations is that while Juan Luis and Ana Lucía were escaping the memory of the kidnapping, this character appears to be fleeing his most important relationships as a means of reinventing himself. There is no violent act that leads him to uproot himself and very little to even suggest that he has reason to be unhappy with his life back home.

At one point the omniscient narrator explains the protagonist's thoughts on lying about his marital status to a potential lover:

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<sup>241</sup> Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *La orilla africana* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1999), 84.

No le gustaba mentir pero a veces la verdad acerca de sí mismo le parecía inaceptable y entonces se lo permitía, siempre con la intención de cambiar las cosas para que sus ficciones llegaran a coincidir con la realidad. Podía no estar casado, como lo estaba de hecho, ni ser un simple turista con el pasaporte extraviado.<sup>242</sup>

In his foreword to *Liquid Love*, Bauman states that the hero of his book is the man without bonds, the inhabitant of our liquid modern society.<sup>243</sup> This is an apt description of the protagonist of *La orilla africana* as well, and not unlike Castany Prado's image of the rootless character omnipresent in global literature. This protagonist has unbound or detached himself from the relationships that held him in his home country to an even greater degree than the characters in Rey Rosa's previous fictions. He has exited Colombia indefinitely, walking away from his marriage as well as his professional and personal relationships with his uncle. He makes half-hearted attempts to stay connected to that world through the faxes he sends home to his wife, but the fact that he chooses that particular technology over a telephone call indicates his desire to remain detached. It is obvious that what currently interest him are casual connections, rather than serious relationships. The difference, according to Bauman, is that relationships are bonds which are more difficult to sever, while connections can be made and unmade quickly and easily. You could compare it to a social networking site or a list of contacts on a mobile phone where one can simply press delete if a certain contact no longer holds any attraction.

Interestingly enough, the protagonist's surname, which is revealed toward the end of the novel, is Tejedor, or Weaver. This is an obvious symbol of his capacity to imagine or weave himself a new identity, and his uncanny ability to make new acquaintances—to

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<sup>242</sup> Rey Rosa, *La orilla africana*, 100.

<sup>243</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love*, vii.

connect. In fact, when he meets Madame Choiseul, a rich French woman who owns a second home in Tangier, and her friend Julie at the veterinarian where he has the owl's injured wing examined, they almost immediately offer him a lift back to Tangier and later that day they invite him to stay in the guest house while he awaits his replacement passport. Another example, as mentioned above, is how Tejedor meets his *kif* contact Rashid and seems to have an immediate connection with him. A third encounter involves the Colombian consul in Tangier, who is not a Colombian at all. He is described as a North American who has never set foot in Colombia, and does not intend to do so. This consul makes it clear that he is romantically interested in Tejedor, who takes advantage of this connection in order to briefly store his belongings when he is forced to move from his first hotel.

The hotel rooms or dingy hostels where Tejedor resides while in Tangier are reminiscent of Marc Augé's "non-places" or, "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity."<sup>244</sup> Zygmunt Bauman elaborates on this definition, describing them as places (like a hotel, airport, or public means of transportation) which "make null and void the idiosyncratic subjectivities of their 'passengers'."<sup>245</sup> In other words, a person temporarily residing in one of these non-places would experience a minimizing of their individual characteristics, their identity, due to the lack of history, symbols, and relationships there. It would stand to reason that the many provisional, non-places that a person encounters while traveling are ideal locations for researching and exploring a potential alteration of, or change in, identity.

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<sup>244</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 77-78.

<sup>245</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 102.

The less than solid identity of the main character is evidenced in various other ways in the narration as well. The most common is the constant questioning of his national/religious identity by others. Rashid, a Moroccan who has assisted him in finding a place to stay as well as some *kif* says on their first encounter, “¿nos conocemos?”<sup>246</sup> thereby implying that he could be something other than a Colombian tourist. Later Madame Choiseul tells him that he has the face of a Moroccan, and his reply is that he thinks he would not like being one. On the other hand, he does not like being a Colombian, either, and the woman agrees, “habría sido mejor nacer europeo” (93). At another point a taxi driver hints that he could pass for any number of nationalities, and then suggests to him that he should learn Arabic and maybe later become a Muslim. All of these incidents shake the foundations of his already unstable identity.

Another way to analyze the character’s break with his former life is by returning to Appadurai’s “scapes” mentioned above. The protagonist initially enters the ethnoscape as a tourist when he decides to vacation on another continent with a group of male friends. As he puts more distance between himself and his home, his detachment expands and then reaches its pinnacle when he loses his passport. He is no longer a tourist, but more like a transient at this point of his stay in Tangier. He starts out at a rather upscale hotel but has to move when he obtains the owl, and upon receiving his replacement passport he travels to Spain rather than return home to Colombia. He does not advise his wife of his ever-changing arrangements, and she finds out for herself by calling the first hotel and being told that he has checked out. He had told her that it was not possible to call the hotel directly, thereby cutting off any verbal communication in an attempt to limit the reach of the technoscape, or “the global configuration . . . of technology and the fact

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<sup>246</sup> Rey Rosa, *La orilla africana*, 52.

that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious borders.”<sup>247</sup> The protagonist and his wife therefore communicate via fax instead of the telephone. This attempt to avoid direct contact with his wife is an example of the protagonist’s intent to remain detached. He intentionally shuns the more modern methods of communication in order to insulate himself from the pressures of his relationship. In this state of isolation, and considering the symbolic loss of his national identity through the missing passport, the protagonist’s identity is more open to change. Another one of Appadurai’s landscapes, the mediascape, or “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality”<sup>248</sup> is apparent in reference to the fluidity of identity. It comes in the form of an advertisement on the street—as the protagonist is walking through the city he sees a Lacoste advertisement that invites passersby to “find themselves” through the purchasing of a Lacoste brand item: “Conviértete en lo que eres.”<sup>249</sup>

Another important character in the novel is an adolescent Moroccan sheepherder named Hamsa, who is connected to the protagonist initially by their mutual desire to possess the owl that was purchased by the protagonist just after he lost his passport. Throughout the novel, a juxtaposition of the lives of Ángel Tejedor and Hamsa can be observed. The main thing that links them is of course the owl, but there are many interesting comparisons that enrich the analysis. For example, Hamsa is introduced right at the start of the narration, and his name is revealed immediately. If a name is a link to identity, then his identity is more solid than that of the nameless protagonist. In fact, he seems to live in a world removed from or at least at the margin of Bauman’s liquid

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<sup>247</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 34.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>249</sup> Rey Rosa, *La orilla africana*, 61.

modernity. His home is a sort of shed with a curtain for a door, located in the pasture where he can awaken and go right to work caring for the sheep in his charge. Although he is an adolescent or young teenager at most, he is working every day and does not attend school. His method of communication is always face to face, sometimes through a younger boy who helps him with the sheep and carries verbal messages between Hamsa and his grandparents, who are Madame Choiseul's servants. There is no phone, no fax, no computer and no ATM in Hamsa's world. In this sense, Hamsa and Tejedor are complete opposites.

One parallel between Hamsa and Tejedor is that both work for their uncles. Tejedor's position in his uncle's vineyard is revealed in the narration only because he loses the job while in Morocco. He does not enjoy or desire to continue in that job and so he does nothing to maintain his position. Hamsa's situation is quite different, though. He is eagerly awaiting a message from his uncle, a drug trafficker who wants to use him to watch the coast the night that he attempts to return to Africa from Spain. Hamsa would need to alert his uncle by signaling with a light if it was not safe to land the boat because of soldiers patrolling the area. The boy is enthusiastic about the riches that he is promised (and all of the things that the money could provide to him, giving him a taste of modernity) and so he agrees to help even though he is afraid that staying awake an entire night will be difficult. For this very reason Hamsa steals the protagonist's owl from Madame Choiseul's guest house. He believes that either wearing an amulet made of an owl's eye or simply eating the eye will keep him from falling asleep on that important night. The owl is a sort of insurance policy for Hamsa's potential leap toward modernity. The reason behind Tejedor's desire to possess the owl is not automatically clear, but

since he buys it right after losing his passport, the owl can be seen as a symbol of his new life, free of bonds. Ironically, he keeps the bird in a cage and later its wing is injured, impeding its flight. This happens during one of the many moments when different people attempt to steal or purchase the owl from him. His owl, and therefore his identity, is not secure. Like the protagonists of Rey Rosa's works analyzed above, Tejedor represents an identity in flux, while Hamsa's identity is more stable. This idea is reinforced after Hamsa steals the owl and Tejedor allows him to keep her, thereby giving up the symbol of his new identity. The owl is eventually healed but is still not set free. It remains tied to a perch until the very last pages of the novel where Julie returns to Morocco and convinces Hamsa to release it. The final lines of the narration describe the flying owl's perspective as the narrator describes a bird's eye view of the African shore. Finally free of her bonds, the owl must start over and find a new place to nest. While possessed by either of the two characters, the owl is an anchor in time and space for whomever possesses her. That person must feed and care for her, and just as the sheep anchor Hamsa, the owl anchors Tejedor. Once he lets go of her, the spell is broken and he is able to begin to move more fluidly through his journey.

When Tejedor finally receives his new passport he decides to extend his trip even longer with a detour to Spain. Rashid, his dealer, has asked him to take a winning lottery ticket there and cash it in for him in exchange for a commission. When he senses that he is being followed, the protagonist becomes suspicious that perhaps the favor Rashid has asked of him is actually a trap, and that once he cashes in the ticket he will be robbed. In the end, he encounters the man who has been following him in a dark alley. Once they are face to face he realizes that it is his double, who then demands his passport. As the

two men battle for the identity of Ángel Tejedor, the protagonist delivers a blow that leaves his double lying unconscious and bleeding. Forced to fight for it, his identity becomes something he desires instead of the thing he constantly flees. In the end, Tejedor realizes that without his passport, he is trapped much like the owl had been while in his possession. His reissued passport may still carry the same name, but Tejedor has imagined a new identity and a new life for himself during his time in the non-spaces of Tangier. In his reinvented life, Tejedor is free of bonds. Therefore his new identity is worth defending in a way that his previous incarnation was not.

In the end, the contrasts between Hamsa and Tejedor become clearer. Hamsa's life and knowledge represent a local perspective, whereas the protagonist's experiences are more global. While Hamsa is tied down to his sheep, Tejedor is traveling across the globe on an exotic/erotic vacation. The owl is held by each of them at different points in the narration and for each of them she represents a new life, but eventually they each must let go of the symbol and face reality. In Tejedor's case, he fights for his identity in a violent confrontation with his other (perhaps past?) self whom he leaves lying wounded and maybe even dead in a dark Spanish alley. For Hamsa the reality is that his uncle has been jailed in Spain and so his hypothetical gateway to riches is closed. This novel represents a global perspective as evidenced by the many nationalities present in the characters and in landmarks, the global transience of individuals, and the idea of travel and non-places as tools for the exploration of new identities. These work in conjunction with the fluid nature of the identity of Ángel Tejedor and his capacity to weave himself a new future in the liquid modern society.

*Caballeriza* (2006) is a more recent novel which, as was mentioned above, marked a return to Guatemala for Rodrigo Rey Rosa after having set several of his works in other countries in the mid to late nineties. The first person narrator and protagonist of *Caballeriza* is a Guatemalan writer whose name is none other than Rodrigo Rey Rosa. While attending a party and horse exposition at which a prized stallion is killed in a fire, the writer is approached by a lawyer named Hidalgo who suggests that Rey Rosa should write about the situation unfolding at the ranch. The protagonist is skeptical of Hidalgo's motives, but at the same time he is intrigued and they agree to begin to investigate, only to find themselves in the middle of a family feud that ends in the death of a young man at the hands of his father. As the protagonist was a spectator to this filicide, he is held prisoner but escapes and in the end must decide whether or not to write about what he has witnessed.

At their first meeting, Hidalgo promises to inform Rey Rosa of the events that occurred at the ranch after his departure, but not without advising him that what he is about to say should not be repeated verbatim, “Tendrá que convertirlo, usted sabrá cómo, en ficción.”<sup>250</sup> Further on in the narration, Hidalgo himself recounts the aforementioned events, feeding information to Rey Rosa, and then begins to imagine possible connections—to fictionalize—once he runs out of facts. Hidalgo's tale is not the only fictionalization referenced in this novel.

While there have been numerous hints of biographical similarities between the author and his protagonists in previous works such as *El cojo bueno* and “Ningún lugar sagrado,” this novel is the first of Rey Rosa's narrations in which the author explicitly uses his own name for the first-person narrator, who is also the protagonist. This type of

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<sup>250</sup> Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2006), 31.

narrative is examined by Gerard Genette, who uses Jorge Luis Borges' "El Aleph" as an example. According to Genette, when the author, first-person narrator and protagonist in a work of fiction like "El Aleph" all share the same name, readers are faced with a contradiction. Typically when an author, first-person narrator and protagonist of a work all share the same name, one is dealing with an example of autobiography. However, unless Borges truly saw the Aleph, his story must be fiction. The only plausible explanation according to Genette is that "the Borges who signs his name to 'El Aleph,' is not functionally identical with the Borges who is the narrator and hero of 'El Aleph,' even if they share many (not all) biographical features."<sup>251</sup> In other words, the narrator and the protagonist may be the same person, but the author is not equivalent to the narrator. This formula indicates a fictionalization of the self, or autofiction, and it is an exciting way for an author to blur the line between fiction and fact, creating a sense of doubt or skepticism in the reader and causing her or him to question what (if any) parts of the narration might be true.

Castany Prado cites the use of literary devices related to skepticism as one of the basic characteristics of *mundialismo literario*:

Entre los recursos formales del escepticismo literario, son habituales la vacilación lingüística que provoca en el lector la sensación de inasibilidad o de inseguridad identitaria; el uso de toda una serie de expresiones de distanciamiento o atenuación de afirmaciones—quizás, acaso, tal vez, es verosímil, ignoro, es dudoso—, que contribuyen a generar una atmósfera de irresolución y vaguedad; la enumeración caótica, . . . que sugiere la irreductible pluralidad del mundo; el doble discurso o antilogía, . . . ; o la paradoja y el oxímoron, que sirven como instancias o contraejemplos contra una determinada teoría general identitaria o para producir «un efecto de dificultad, misterio, profundidad y densidad estilística».<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Gerard Genette, *Fiction & Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 75-76.

<sup>252</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 229.

All of these examples point to the idea of doubt, and while autofiction does not specifically appear on his list of devices, the inherent contradiction of the autofiction is a perfect example of such a device.

Another reflection on the identity of the narrator-protagonist occurs just prior to the filicide mentioned above. The soon to be victim, Claudio, escapes his underground prison and shocks his family by bursting in with a gun as they are about to sit down to lunch with Hidalgo and Rey Rosa. The young man does not recognize Rey Rosa, and begins to inquire about him. This is an opportunity for Rey Rosa the author to comment on his work through his fictionalized version of himself. Rey Rosa, the narrator-protagonist humbly replies to Claudio's questions, downplaying the importance of his work. Claudio asks him what he writes, and Rey Rosa replies, "Cuentos, novelas. Los que puedo."<sup>253</sup> Moments later he asks if Rey Rosa has written many books, and the response is "Libritos, más bien. Tal vez una docena" (90). Claudio is also interested in whether Hidalgo has read any of them, and what he thinks about the author's work. Hidalgo contradicts an earlier statement that he has read all of Rey Rosa's work when he says, "Varios, no todos" and then he judges the works on how accessible they are, rather than their literariness: "Bien, bastante bien. . . . Se leen con facilidad" (90).

Another interesting aspect of this particular autofiction is found in the criticism of the nation. As was stated in the previous chapters, works that are obviously socially committed not only run the risk of being judged solely on their degree of commitment (rather than their aesthetic value); they can also compromise the author's safety. In this novel, Rey Rosa the author references this discourse by placing a fictionalized version of himself in the narration as a kind of amateur detective. It is he, but it is not he, who

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<sup>253</sup> Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza*, 87.

witnesses and tells the story, critiques the nation, and fears for his life. The reader uncovers the story behind the dead horse alongside this fictionalized version of Rey Rosa, who must decide if he will write and publish a book about the events he has witnessed. The novel that is proposed to Rey Rosa (protagonist) by the lawyer Hidalgo is a reference to the one in the reader's hands.

The works by Rey Rosa analyzed above seemingly turned away from Guatemala in an instance of deterritorialization. In *Caballeriza*, however, there is an obvious critique of the national which is evidenced in different aspects of the narration. One is in the representation of the heterogeneous population of Guatemala and the close contact in which people of different cultures live. This heterogeneity is an example of “*descentramiento de lo nacional*,” which Jesús Martín Barbero defines as a phenomenon that accompanies the massive migrations of Latin Americans from the countryside to the cities: “Se trata de una multiculturalidad que desafía nuestras nociones de cultura, de nación y de ciudad, los marcos de referencia y comprensión forjados sobre la base de identidades nítidas, de arraigos fuertes y deslindes claros.”<sup>254</sup> The increasing multicultural nature of populations is a constant reminder of globalization and of globality, even on the local level.

This novel takes place entirely in Guatemala, between the capital and the large ranch where the one hundred thousand dollar horse was mysteriously killed in the midst of an exposition. There are many examples of the close contact between cultures in the descriptions of the event. For example, in a discourse on the hierarchy of the class

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<sup>254</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero, “Las transformaciones del mapa: Identidades, industrias y culturas,” in *América Latina: Un espacio cultural en el mundo globalizado*, comp. Manuel Antonio Garretón (Bogotá: Convenio de Andrés Bello, 1999), 299.

structure evidenced among the workers at the ranch, the author describes the cultural hybridity resulting from such contact:

Los caballerizos estaban uniformados con trajes festivos, imitaciones bastardas de la indumentaria campera andaluza —con sombrero cordobés, botines jerezanos y demás— rematados con algún adorno local. Como fajas típicas o borlas de Todos Santos. Los pequeños andaluces de imitación, con el físico de los campesinos de ascendencia maya, se veían aún más pequeños al lado de aquellos altos y fogosos caballos. . . . «He aquí —pensé— la parte más amplia de la pirámide.»

En la segunda capa de la pirámide estaban los hombres de seguridad. Muchos de ellos también hubieran podido vestir indumentaria quiché o tzutuhil sin llamar la atención, pero iban en traje de calle, tocados con el sombrero texano todavía en boga en las fincas de la región.<sup>255</sup>

The indigenous or mestizo stablemen's uniforms tackily reflect the Spanish colonial roots of the country's equestrianism while also revealing the local through their belts and tassles as well as the individuals wearing them. The security guards have indigenous traits, but are wearing business casual attire topped with cowboy hats. In addition, a pasodoble plays over the loudspeakers after the horses finish their numbers, and the woman in charge of the horses is a German who represents something uncanny about many people who speak another language fluently: "Bárbara Braun tenía una voz ronca y agradable, y hablaba con acento muy ligero y controlado en un español correcto salpicado de localismos que tenían un efecto quizá voluntariamente cómico."<sup>256</sup> Later on the lawyer Hidalgo will reveal to Rey Rosa how he perceives this German immigrant when he speculates that Braun was romantically involved with both La Vieja, the adult son of the patriarch of the Carrión family; and Mincho, a teenaged stableboy who worked on the ranch. Since La Vieja was once married to a German woman, Hidalgo suspects that he has a preference for her type. Braun is also stereotypically portrayed in Hidalgo's

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<sup>255</sup> Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza*, 11.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 60. Castany Prado notes that in postnational literature, "es habitual hacer referencia a personajes que tengan un acento extraño o no identificable." *Literatura posnacional*, 228.

scenario as an emotional redhead, as emphasized by his parenthetical remark, “usted sabe cómo son las alemanas.”<sup>257</sup> Moreover, it is later revealed that Hidalgo actually knows Braun quite well and that he has German roots and speaks German as a second language. This series of comments and revelations remind the informed reader that Germans have a long standing presence in Guatemala and the greater region of Central America, and point to another aspect of the multicultural nature of the text.<sup>258</sup>

The examples of the multicultural nature of the atmosphere and the people working and attending the party also form part of a broad critique of the upper strata of Guatemalan society that is highlighted a few moments later. The narrator and his father are seated in an area congested with those waiting in line to greet the patriarch of the family:

Parecía inevitable que en una reunión como aquélla nos encontráramos con gente que no queríamos ver, y menos saludar: algún crítico detestable, un abogado que te engañó, el eminente médico que, por no faltar a una partida de golf, se negó a operar a un amigo. Para mi sorpresa, durante las paradas frente al cumpleaños, era como si una amnesia momentánea nos asistiera; dábamos la mano y los buenos días a gente que temíamos o despreciábamos –o ambas cosas a la vez. Las edecanes, mientras tanto, distribuían bebidas, y los invitados intercambiaban bromas más o menos maliciosas y estúpidas.<sup>259</sup>

The list of unseemly characters emphasizes a lack of morals or scruples, and concludes with the narrator’s observation that the jokes that they like to share are in poor taste. The criticism of this segment of Guatemalan society is a clear rejection of the nation of Guatemala, and the focus on the strange mix of cultural symbols represented among the workers portrays the absurdity of the idea of homogeneity as it hints at the violent conquest that had to occur in order for such hybridity to eventually exist.

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<sup>257</sup> Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza*, 41.

<sup>258</sup> For more on German’s history in Guatemala, see Regina Wagner, “Actividades empresariales de los alemanes en Guatemala, 1850-1920,” *Mesoamérica* 13 (June 1987): 87-123.

<sup>259</sup> Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza*, 14.

The descriptions of the people come from the perspective of a person with some knowledge of the society, but who considers himself an outsider rather than a part of that group. Similarly, the descriptions of the landscape of the region and the atmosphere of the party seem as though they were written by a tourist or outsider—or at least written for an audience that is expected to perceive them as exotic.

A lo lejos, hacia el noroeste, se veía el cono irregular del volcán de Pacaya. Montañas de nubes replandecientes y algodonosas cambiaban de forma en un cielo tímidamente azul. El terreno ondulante plantado de cafetales y sus árboles de sombra, con filones color limón de las siembras de bambú, se extendía hasta donde alcanzaba la vista. El paisaje era plácido, pero la desgarrada música de corridos y rancheras que había comenzado a sonar a todo volumen, combinada con el whisky que fluía en abundancia y la presencia de tantas armas, me hizo concebirlo como escenario idóneo para un crimen pasional. (16)

The narrator certainly could feel like a tourist at this ranch full of cowboys, armed guards, and some of his least favorite members of high society. This position is reminiscent of the author's statement—referenced earlier in the chapter—that he feels like a tourist, and also the idea that for him, travel and writing have always been connected. Perceiving himself as a tourist or as a person out of place in any given situation provides Rey Rosa with a detachment that allows him to assume a global perspective in his narrative. The narrator-protagonist is also out of place in this world, and his dislocation is a continued sign of globality in Rey Rosa's body of work.

The global perspective of this work is also notable in the first chapter, as the narrator-protagonist watches the barn fire that has taken the life of that extremely valuable horse. Hidalgo approaches him and suggests, "Podría usted escribir un libro acerca de esto" (23). Later, the narrator relates the following conversation between himself and Hidalgo: "—He leído, creo, todos sus libros —dijo, mientras yo guardaba [su] tarjeta—. Me gusta cómo escribe. Pero yo diría que nunca se ha metido de lleno en

nuestra realidad. Podría hacerlo ahora, me parece.” Then Hidalgo repeats, “Insisto, de aquí podría sacar material para un buen libro. Algo muy nuestro” (24). This thinly veiled criticism of the global perspective and subject matter in Rey Rosa’s narrative reveals the discourse of the perceived need for a more autochthonous focus. The statement “nunca se ha metido de lleno en nuestra realidad” is a challenge that the real author places in the mouth of this character, who in turn brings it to the attention of the fictionalized version of the author.

Another rejection of the national is the filicide mentioned above. Midway through the novel, a dysfunctional father-son relationship takes center stage. After it is suggested to them that La Vieja’s son, Claudio might have been involved in the barn fire the night of the exposition, Rey Rosa and Hidalgo visit the ranch under false pretenses in an attempt to investigate the case further. When he is left unobserved for a few minutes, Rey Rosa discovers a tunnel just big enough for a man to crawl through. What is revealed in the following chapters is that Claudio, the troubled grandson of the ranch owner, was being held prisoner in a hidden underground room by his father, La Vieja. The young man excavated the tunnel over the course of his many imprisonments there, and while Rey Rosa and Hidalgo are having lunch with the family, Claudio uses it to escape that room and holds them hostage.

Claudio is eventually surprised and overpowered by his eighty eight year old grandfather and then intentionally shot by his own father amid the struggle. This climax is what makes the novel, according to Beatriz Cortez, “tal vez la más profunda expresión de resistencia a reproducir la subjetividad violenta y autoritaria del padre en la obra de

Rodrigo Rey Rosa.”<sup>260</sup> Claudio was a troubled young man and the sole heir to his family’s wealth. He was obsessed with money, stole regularly from his family and indulged in socially unacceptable sexual behaviors. His father kept him isolated for long periods in an underground cell in an attempt to control him. Considering that the father-son relationship is a microcosm of the patriarchal nation, this denouement is evidence of the rejection of the national. The son refuses to be controlled by the father and is killed by him, thereby ending the family line and symbolically terminating the future of the nation as a patriarchal cycle of violence.

After witnessing Claudio’s murder, Rey Rosa is knocked out and held captive in the same room that had been Claudio’s prison, while the family presumably discusses what they will do with him. As he contemplates his future from the underground cell, Rey Rosa imagines that he is doomed since it is unlikely that the Carrión family would trust him to keep a secret as horrible as filicide. As in most of the history of Guatemala and other Central and South American countries, the writer is in a position to tell a story, but doing so could bring trouble. By using his own name for the protagonist of *Caballeriza*, Rey Rosa takes hold of the power to recreate his life via the fictional Rey Rosa, narrator and protagonist of the novel. Rather than allowing the fictionalized version of himself to become a victim of his own curiosity about the strange situation at the Carrión ranch, the author writes a way out of the danger, in this case an escape through the tunnel he had stumbled upon earlier in the day. Even after he returns to Guatemala City he continues to have doubts about his safety. This is evident in the open ended conclusion to the work. Rey Rosa is having coffee with Hidalgo and they are tying up the loose ends of the events at the ranch. Just as they mention the fact that the stableboy

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<sup>260</sup> Cortez, *Estética del cinismo*, 269.

Mincho was probably disappeared by the Carrión family, and that it is likely that no investigation will take place, Rey Rosa thinks he sees one of the guards from the ranch standing nearby with his back to them. Hidalgo's words close the narration: "Suele ocurrir, como usted sabe. . . ¿Otro café? ¿Un digestivo?"<sup>261</sup> Similar to the protagonists of *El cojo bueno*, "Ningún lugar sagrado" and *El material humano*, a person in this position cannot be sure when someone might decide to threaten or even kill him, so he lives with a constant feeling of insecurity and paranoia. These sensations experienced by the protagonist emphasize the fact that *Caballeriza* represents a clear rejection of the nation via the strong critique of Guatemalan society.

The global perspective of this novel is evidenced in various aspects of the narration, both structurally and in the content. The technique of autofiction produces skepticism in the mind of the reader while also providing a space to highlight the discourse of nationally focused versus global literatures. Furthermore, the narrator-protagonist continues to be portrayed as a tourist or an outsider who critiques or rejects the nation. Globality is also demonstrated in the emphasis on the cultural hybridity of the population and the fact that even the most "autochthonous" characters of the novel are perceived as multicultural. Finally, the strongest symbolic rejection of the nation is that the troubled relationship between La Vieja and his son Claudio culminates in filicide. All of these examples reveal the global perspective of the work, and consequently of the author.

The final work analyzed in this study is the novel *Severina* (2011). As with *Caballeriza* and *El material humano*, Rey Rosa does set this work in Guatemala, although in this instance it is not so obviously stated. The setting of Guatemala is

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<sup>261</sup> Rey Rosa, *Caballeriza*, 141.

suggested through the descriptions of the neighborhoods and the surrounding landscape, the flora and fauna, and certain localisms, but its importance is downplayed rather than highlighted throughout the novel. For example, when the narrator describes at the start of the narration what led him and a group of friends to decide to open a bookstore, he explains:

No teníamos nada mejor que hacer y estábamos cansados de pagar precios demasiado altos por libros escogidos por y para otros, como le ocurre a la llamada gente rara en las ciudades provincianas. (Cosas mucho peores pasan aquí, pero no es de eso de lo que quiero hablar ahora.) En fin, para acabar con este malestar, abrimos nuestra propia tienda.<sup>262</sup>

After the critical observation about the lack of variety and availability of books in Guatemala, the narrator admits in his parenthetical remark that there are far more serious topics that could be addressed, but this particular text is not the place he wants to do that. This narrator does bear some minor biographical resemblance to the author, but he is in fact nameless so this is not another example of autofiction. He is part owner of a bookstore and a frustrated writer who falls in love with a beautiful and mysterious book thief named Ana or Severina. He becomes obsessed with her after she visits his store and steals the first of many books from him, and he secretly follows her at every opportunity. Eventually he learns from another bookstore owner in neighboring Antigua that she and the man with whom she travels have left the country and will not return for nine months. The narrator waits out these months in suspense, compulsively reviewing the list of books stolen by her in hopes of uncovering a clue. The pair is eventually united after Severina's companion, Otto Blanco, suffers a stroke and falls into a coma leaving her completely alone.

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<sup>262</sup> Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Severina* (México: Alfaguara, 2011), 13. It is as if the author must place this explanation in the mouth of his narrator/protagonist in order to address the discourse of the value of local versus global perspectives.

The global perspective of this work is evidenced in a variety of ways. One is the presence of a list of occurrences that the narrator puts in the context of things that happened in the world while he waited for Ana to return to his bookstore:

Muchas cosas pasaron, o, para ser más preciso, oí que pasaron muchas cosas por aquellos días (proliferaron los linchamientos en los pueblos del interior, hubo un golpe de Estado en un país vecino, la coca ganó ventaja en la carrera global de las sustancias controladas, encontraron agua estancada en Marte, y Plutón perdió para siempre el *status* de planeta) . . . (19-20)

As Castany Prado has pointed out, the listing of international news items, “hacen que el lector sienta que la realidad que se está representando no es sólo local sino global.”<sup>263</sup>

The list begins in a local angle but gradually expands to a global one, and even moves beyond with the references to Mars and Pluto, providing the reader with a dizzying array of events.

There is an air of mystery throughout this novel, and as with *Caballeriza*, doubt and uncertainties also contribute to reveal the global perspective of the work. One way this is represented is in the unstable identities of various characters. The first person narrator-protagonist has no name throughout the majority of this novel, indicating that, like Ángel Tejedor in *La orilla africana*, his identity is vulnerable to change. In addition, the object of his affection is alternately called Ana or Severina, but at no time can the reader be certain that she is who she claims to be. Besides the names of the characters, there are other indications of identity issues through the rejection of national identities. For example, Severina is one of the most dislocated characters in this or any of Rey Rosa's works. Her origins are murky: her accent is difficult to place and she does not share much personal information with her admirer until very late in the narration, when she reveals that she and Blanco have multiple passports and none of them are real.

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<sup>263</sup> Castany Prado, *Literatura posnacional*, 226.

—Vos sabés que no tenemos papeles, él y yo. ¿Qué va a pasar ahora?  
 —¿Papeles?  
 —Identidad.  
 —¿No tienen pasaportes?  
 Se sonrió.  
 —Sí. Tenemos varios. Todos son falsos.<sup>264</sup>

The narrator worries that Ana simply might be a common thief or a woman with a mental illness, but he fantasizes that she could be something else: “Yo suponía que la explicación debía ser otra, una que para mí estaba asociada con un modelo extremo de existencia, con la absoluta libertad, una forma radical de realizar un ideal que yo mismo me había propuesto un día: vivir por y para los libros” (50). He imagines her as a woman whose identity is not wrapped up in nationalities or societal or cultural expectations, and whose only true concern is literature.

The protagonist initially finds out what he can about this woman by following her, determining where she stays, and then surreptitiously reading the guest book at her hostel. There he sees what could be her full name (Ana Severina Bruguera), nationality (Honduran) and occupation (unemployed). However, the information that she has provided to the clerk may not necessarily be accurate. The reader is already aware that she is not trustworthy, and the narrator-protagonist is not entirely convinced of the accuracy of the evidence he has uncovered. Her companion (who may be her husband, father, grandfather, or mentor depending on which character is to be believed) is identified in the guest book as Otto Blanco, a Spanish traveler. Prior to meeting Otto Blanco, the protagonist had imagined what the man, whom Ana has identified as her father, might be like:

Hacia algún tiempo que la idea del padre me asediaba, y suponía que iba a encontrármelo. Imaginaba al principio a un hombre frágil y enfermo—tal vez para

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<sup>264</sup> Rey Rosa, *Severina*, 84-85.

dar explicación al hecho de que su hija viviera con él en un cuarto alquilado? Es un inválido, pensaba. Una figura triste. Un don nadie. Luego también pensé que podía ser un personaje siniestro, alguien que necesitaba ocultarse por precaución o por vergüenza, ¿Un político acabado? ¿Un sacerdote degradado? ¿Un narco en fuga? ¿Un artista? (30)

These ponderings encompass a wide variety of possible identities, but no certain one. A few months later, when the protagonist sees Blanco on the street, he describes him as “muy alto y desgarrado” (53). Aside from their unstable official identities, another detail calls attention to the mysterious nature of this pair: like Barbara Braun in *Caballeriza*, both Ana and Otto have accents that point to their otherness. Unlike the identifying (German) accent of Braun, in the case of this pair there is more emphasis placed on the ambiguity of their identities. The third time Ana appears in the bookstore, the narrator has an opportunity to converse briefly with her and he remarks to himself, “tenía un acento imposible de identificar” (15). In a later interaction, when he confronts her about the stolen books, he thinks: “Ahora percibí un débil acento argentino o uruguayo que hasta ese momento había disimulado muy bien” (18). When he finally meets the enigmatic Otto Blanco and shows him the list of stolen books, he realizes that this man also has a strange accent: “¿No va tecirme cuánto le tebemos? –de pronto su acento me pareció extrañísimo. Asiático, o tal vez centroeuropeo, pensé. Era como si durante un momento el soporte nervioso de su español se hubiera relajado” (55). Neither Ana nor Otto has a stable identity, national or otherwise, due to the doubt that is cast on every piece of information surrounding them.<sup>265</sup>

Another clue to globality in this novel is the presence of many dislocated and/or disconnected characters. In terms of the protagonist, the reader understands early on that he is recently single, and therefore perhaps vulnerable: “Acababa de terminar con una de

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<sup>265</sup> It is notable that their names are also palindromes, which symbolize infinity or perpetual movement.

las mujeres que yo creía que sería la mujer de mi vida. Una colombiana. Una historia fácil e imposible a la vez, una pérdida de tiempo o una hermosa aventura, según quien lo vea” (13). It is interesting to note that the narrator speaks of his Colombian ex-girlfriend as *one of the women* he thought would be the love of his life, indicating that it was not the first time he had felt that way and that he is romantically impulsive. Later in the narration he admits to impulsivity, but specifies that this was the first time that he was embarking on a purely sentimental adventure (32). The question “¿Qué te trae por aquí? ¿Persiguiendo turistas todavía?” (46) that an acquaintance in Antigua poses to him later in the text puts forth the idea that the narrator may have a history of romancing women on vacation in the area. These examples highlight the idea of connections versus bonds as illustrated in Bauman’s *Liquid Love*. The narrator-protagonist of this text is—like the hero of Bauman’s text, “the denizen of our liquid modern society”—unbound and must connect in an attempt to fill the gap left by his lack of human attachment.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, once he meets Ana, the protagonist is willing to cut off all remaining connections to his previous life in order to be with her. He is even willing to commit a crime to ensure that they may be together. They do not marry, but the act of euthanizing Blanco and illegally burying his body is a secret they will always share. They are bound together as accomplices in this crime.

The protagonist’s friends and acquaintances represent a multicultural community of uprooted people. His friend Jean Latouche is a French poet who appears in various parts of the work, and Ahmed al Fahsi is a Maghrebi bookstore owner living in Antigua who is half Muslim, half Jewish, and an atheist. When the narrator and Ahmed meet to discuss Ana, they initially make small talk. Ahmed gives the protagonist a copy of Jorge

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<sup>266</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love*, vii.

Riechmann's *Conversaciones entre alquimistas* and says, "No está mal . . . para ser de un español" and the protagonist thinks to himself, "Con ese nombre, no tanto."<sup>267</sup> This consciousness of the details that make up a person's identity reveal the global perspective of the narration in that they are presented in such a matter-of-fact way through the protagonist. There is no judgement around his thoughts about a certain person's nationality, or religious or ethnic background. Instead there is a distinct awareness of the complexity of a given person's identity. This conversation with Ahmed also reveals to the reader that, like the author, this narrator is well traveled and is familiar with northern Africa in particular.

Otto and Ana, in addition to having ambiguous identities, are also examples of spatial dislocation. In their first meeting, when Blanco reveals to the protagonist that Ana is actually his granddaughter, not his wife, he describes the migratory life that they lead. According to him, books are their livelihood, and in connection to this he and Ana have been accused of being con artists, spies, and pornographers, among other things. He also speaks of wars between different types or genres:

En éstas [las guerras], no siempre ganaban los mejores; pero, para nosotros, al final ninguno pierde, aunque todos se extinguen. Estos ires y venires de los libros los usamos como podría usar un marino las corrientes oceánicas. Los aprovechamos como podemos, más allá, por decirlo de algún modo, del bien y del mal libresco. Nosotros, y ahora quiero decir ella y yo, navegamos aun hoy en día en las mareas, las corrientes de los libros. (57-58)

It is never specifically stated just how Otto Blanco and Ana make their living, but the reader gleans from this speech a sense that they, like most writers, are at the mercy of an ever-changing literary market. They are in perpetual motion in reaction to these currents. They have no true home, but pass their time moving from city to city and experiencing

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<sup>267</sup> Rey Rosa, *Severina*, 46.

the anonymous spaces of such constant migration. The pair is regularly depicted in what Augé refers to as “non-places,” on the street, in a café, their hostel, the airport, and in the protagonist’s bookstore, but never in what one could consider a home or a space with even a remote sense of personal meaning.

A major shift in the plot occurs after the above referenced conversation between Blanco and the protagonist. When the latter arrives at the hostel one evening, he finds it in a chaotic state, and at this point in the narration everything changes for him. Otto Blanco has suffered a stroke, and when Ana sees her suitor in the lobby she clings to him for support from that moment on. The narrator signs all of the paperwork once they arrive at the hospital, taking responsibility for any and all costs accrued there. After signing, he experiences a series of emotions starting with regret and ending with the certainty of being in love:

Por primera vez en mi vida, estaba dispuesto a poner todo de mi parte para hacer que una historia sentimental siguiera su curso. Había firmado esos papeles en el estado mental de quien firma un acta matrimonial. Y por un instante me sentí liberado, emancipado de la mera apariencia y de una antigua y extraña vanidad—la oscura vanidad del hombre solo. (68)

This is the first of many moments where it is clear that the protagonist is beginning to connect himself to Ana, and the narrator’s role in her life and his identity begin to shift.

Their morbid love story evolves as Ana’s grandfather lays unconscious in the hospital; being cared for at her lover’s expense. Ana spends most of her time in the narrator’s apartment, telling him stories of her travels, and together they read the books that she continues to shoplift. The narrator is experiencing a dream come true as the enigmatic Otto Blanco lies in a coma. However, the lovers eventually decide they must move Blanco from the hospital to the narrator’s apartment due to the mounting hospital

bills and the fact that he shows no sign of improving. This decision causes a moment of panic for the narrator, who realizes that someone—Ana—will have to take care of the man, and this will distract from their romance. He recalls that “ana” means “I” in Arabic, and abruptly asks her whether she prefers to be called Ana or Severina. Her reply: “Él me llamaba Severina a secas” leads him to the decision to call her that from now on (71). As the narrator slowly takes over the role once held by Otto Blanco in Ana Severina’s life, and his connection to her deepens into something resembling a bond, he experiences some reservations. The fact that he equates the word *ana* with “I” reveals his intense identification with her and shows that he is concerned that he may wind up bearing the brunt of taking care of the comatose man. Nevertheless, he sidesteps this worry by effectively changing her identity from Ana to Severina. In doing so, he also takes another step toward his new identity as her companion and protector. Throughout the rest of the novel, his unstable identity continues to shift away from that of a nameless, single, bookstore owner and frustrated writer and toward something much more complicated, but also lighter or less rooted to his former life.

Blanco does not show signs of either waking or dying, and the narrator weighs the possible outcomes of any change in this situation: Blanco could regain consciousness and he and Severina could leave again, or Blanco could die and Severina could leave the narrator, ending their relationship. His main fear is that she might leave, and this reveals once again the fragility of their relationship. In a more sinister scenario the narrator even considers ending Blanco’s life himself. He decides to do nothing, but it is the inability to know how Severina would react (and not the ethical dilemma of the situation) that keeps him from acting on this impulse. As if they can read each other’s thoughts, later that day

Severina mentions that she is considering letting her grandfather die, and they seem to form a silent pact. He begins to take steps to disconnect from his life prior to Ana/Severina's arrival, approaching his partners at the bookstore and telling them that he is thinking of selling his share. Not long after, he arrives home one evening to find that Severina has suffocated Blanco. The narrator seems to have no problem with this, and as the image of his lover holding a bag over her grandfather's head flashes before his eyes, he silently concedes that suffocation was the more humane choice over allowing him to starve to death.

The next step in the formation of the narrator's new identity and the strengthening of his connection to Severina occurs in the process of disposing of Blanco's body. It is in these hours after his death that she informs her lover that neither she nor Blanco have legal passports, although they are in possession of many false ones. After a brief silence she says, "Hay algo que todavía no te he dicho" (85). The night of his stroke, Blanco was confronted by Ahmed, the bookstore owner in Antigua with whom the narrator had spoken when he was first investigating Severina. Ahmed had suggested that Blanco give Severina to him, to be his wife, in exchange for a debt that they owed him. This sets the scene for a rivalry between the two men, and sets up the narrator to rescue Severina once again.

Severina admits to having attempted to leave the country after they had buried Blanco, but when she arrived to the airport she discovered that she had "un arraigo" (95). This cleverly chosen word indicates both a restriction (in this case on her ability to travel out of the country) and more figuratively, roots (which she has begun to put down in this relationship). The couple agrees to remain together, and they set about solving the

problem of her travel restriction, which is due to Ahmed's attempt to collect his debt via a more legal route. After tricking Ahmed into forgiving the debt in exchange for a Koran that he believed to be annotated by Borges, the couple liquidates the narrator's share of the bookstore and is free to begin their new life together. Severina does not wish to start over in another place, but she does suggest that he join her in the nomadic life that she had previously led with Blanco. She even alters a passport for him to complete his transition into a new identity, and that is how he assumes the surname of her deceased grandfather. This is the first and only time the protagonist is given a name, and it is one that Severina provides to him in an act of forgery on the final page of the novel. Neither his identity nor his life is stabilized in this act, however. It is merely a final sign that the protagonist is committed to this itinerant existence with Severina. It is evident that the couple will be continuing the nomadic ritual that Otto Blanco and Severina had been practicing prior to Blanco's death as they set off for Mexico City, their first stop on their adventure. They are in flight—both literally and figuratively—and they, like so many of Rey Rosa's characters, reflect the conditions of the current era of globalization. Aboard the airplane, Severina indicates her preference for travel and her pleasure in this routine as she says: “Ya viste. Todo ha cambiado de sabor” (104).

Like Ana Lucía and Juan Luis of *El cojo bueno*, this couple is drawn to a cyclical, itinerant lifestyle, and their aversion to rootedness is reminiscent of the condition of many characters present in other of Rey Rosa's works. They may be bound together in their relationship, but the idea of putting down roots or being bound in one place is unappealing to them. They represent the inhabitants of an extremely globalized world. The many examples of the characteristics of global literature analyzed above continue to

reveal global perspective in this novel, such as the way that the local is described in terms of its relationship to the global, the avoidance of the excessive use of localisms in the narration, the references to constant global migrations as well as the variety and mixture of languages and cultures that results from these, and the persistent sense of doubt that pervades the work.

Rey Rosa's body of work may at times portray national themes, as in *El cojo bueno* or *Caballeriza*, but it is always from a global perspective. That globality is evidenced in his body of work through the variety of countries in which the action can take place, sometimes revealing deterritorialization (*Ningún lugar sagrado* and *La orilla africana*) and other times not (*Caballeriza* and *Severina*). The global perspective is also evident through the variety of nationalities and cultures, which are represented in such a way as to cause the reader to view these clues to the national in terms of their relationship to the world as a whole. In many cases, the local is perceived through the eyes of an outsider, and it is never portrayed as an attempt at nation building. More commonly, the nation of Guatemala is critiqued and torn down through the symbolic end of the family line. In *El cojo bueno* and "Ningún lugar sagrado" this is demonstrated through a refusal to procreate, and through an instance of filicide in *Caballeriza*. The migrations that lead to increased interaction among different groups and cultures are apparent in nearly every piece, and they represent the period of intense globalization in which the author has lived and composed these works. Alongside such constant movement, the increased virtual interconnectedness of people is portrayed through the key relationships in the novels, which tend to represent the dominance of connections over bonds. All of these combine to reveal Rey Rosa as an author with a truly global body of work.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

I opened this dissertation with the statement that Guatemalan literature receives much less attention in the Hispanic American canon than other countries, and that Guatemala's long and violent history of civil war and dictatorships, guerrillas and counterinsurgencies, made literary production difficult. This tumultuous political history contributed greatly to the preference for a politically committed, national focus in its literature. This is not so unusual in the greater regions of Central or Latin America, and neither is the gradual shift away from that singular emphasis. However, the length and intensity of the violence in Guatemala are an important reason behind the resistance to embrace those authors or works that do step outside the bounds of politically committed literature, writing at home if possible or in exile if necessary from a cosmopolitan or global perspective. Through the analysis of works by Miguel Ángel Asturias, Augusto Monterroso and Rodrigo Rey Rosa, I have attempted to outline a trajectory toward a more global perspective in the literature of Guatemalans.

*El Señor Presidente*, *Hombres de maíz*, and *Mulata de Tal* reveal Asturias' focus on the nation of Guatemala. They are examples of nation-building attempted through creative endeavors, and they echo Castany Prado's description of works of national literature. Also apparent through the examination of the three novels is Asturias' desire to see the nation reinvented and his deep disappointment at the reality of the outcomes.

Monterroso's earlier works, written at the end of Guatemala's Democratic Spring, certainly demonstrate his interest in the social and political issues of the time. Nevertheless, that sense of obligation to his country is not as palpable as his cosmopolitanism in the majority of his body of work. This opened him up to criticism,

but Monterroso's lack of focus on specifically Guatemalan themes should not be read as a sign of detachment from the problems facing that country. Monterroso obviously felt a deep connection to Guatemala, but narrating that nation was not on his agenda. The idea that one can be both a cosmopolitan and rooted in your home country or region was clear to Monterroso in his defense of Jorge Luis Borges, another author who was criticized for a lack of focus on his home country. "In illo tempore" is an essay from *La palabra mágica* that deals with Borges' treatment as a "Europeanized" author:

Parece que en la Argentina a Borges se le acepta o se le rechaza de plano. Es fácil sospechar quiénes son los que se pronuncian por esta última actitud. Bien los conocemos. Son aquellos que enamorados de la selva americana (que no conocen) creen ver en aquel que no se recrea describiendo la presumible belleza selvática, las tediosas fiebres brasileñas o la deplorable sequía del agro mexicano, un enemigo de lo que con modestia llaman "su" América. ¡Como si la selva o el desierto no fueran, menos que temas literarios, objetos de pesadumbre! En todo caso, la acusación de europeísmo enderezada contra Borges, si ni injusta en exceso, está suficientemente desmentida en lo que a despegue de la patria se refiere, con el fervor de *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, con los poemas de su etapa "criollista", hasta (hay para todos los gustos) con sus inteligentísimas interpretaciones de letras de tangos, en las que éstas siempre adquieren una sospechada dignidad. Sabemos también, por fortuna, que en nuestro medio se trata de extranjerizante o malinchista a cualquiera que se atreve a afirmar que XX, europeo, se expresa con relativa mayor claridad, digamos, que Cantinflas.<sup>268</sup>

Like Borges, Monterroso did not always focus specifically on his homeland in his writings. "In illo tempore" cleverly rebukes those who would attempt to categorize a supposedly "Europeanized" author as necessarily disconnected from his country. Such either/or arguments have already proved inadequate.

Globality is the vital component to Rey Rosa's body of work. Nations and national themes are present, but are always portrayed from a perspective of global interconnectedness. Nation-building endeavors are absent from his narrations. In fact, the image of the nation of Guatemala is often discredited and even dismantled in his works

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<sup>268</sup> Augusto Monterroso, "In illo tempore" in *La palabra mágica* (México: Ediciones Era, 1983), 106-107.

through the symbolic end of the family line. Globality is also revealed through the portrayal of seemingly perpetual migrations that lead to increased interaction among different groups and cultures. Moreover, the era of virtual connections as opposed to deeper human bonds can be perceived throughout his body of work. Together, these points reflect the period of intense globalization during which the works were composed. The deterritorialization exhibited in some of Rey Rosa's works has elicited comments and criticisms similar to those received by Monterroso for his extraterritoriality, for example the persistent question of whether or not he considers himself a Guatemalan writer. As was the case with Monterroso, Rey Rosa rejects such absolutist reasoning and instead asks to *which* Guatemala the person is referring.

As with any large project, this investigation has brought to my attention certain topics that could not be covered here, but should be noted as worthy of further study. One is that this phenomenon of increasing globality in literature is of course not limited to Guatemala, and the framework of this study could be applied to the literature of other regions. Some studies do exist, for example *Entre lo local y lo global: La narrativa latinoamericana en el cambio de siglo (1990-2006)*, edited by Jesús Montoya Juárez and Ángel Esteban, and published in 2008. Nevertheless, this is still a fairly recent development in literary studies and there is still much more to say on the matter. Another area that deserves further consideration is the relationship between globalization and the *novela negra*. In Rey Rosa's works alone, there is a great deal of evidence of the influence of the *noir* style, and it would be interesting to study his body of work from that perspective. Finally, I am interested in the manifestations of globalization in the recent works of women authors of Central America or perhaps even the larger region of Latin

America. There is a lack of scholarship on what women are writing, and since this study focused on male authors, I am particularly curious to see if globalization is manifesting in similar ways in women's works.

What has come out of this project in part is a more complete understanding of Guatemala's history, politics, and literature, and the way these interact in a world that is experiencing an ever more intense process of globalization. Beyond that lies a renewed appreciation for the work of the authors, philosophers, literary theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other scholars whom I have studied and cited in the course of this investigation. I hope that through my work I have contributed something that will help to further the discussion of the concepts of the national, the cosmopolitan, and the global with regard to all literatures, and not just Guatemala's. After all, the dissolution of such categories is already underway.

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