
BOOKS IN REVIEW

THE DICTATORSHIP OF RHETORIC / THE RHETORIC OF DICTATORSHIP: Carpentier, García Márquez, and Roa Bastos

Roberto González Echevarría
Yale University

La escritura que produce un dios subalterno—

Borges

Le *logos* est donc la *ressource* [el recurso], il faut *se tourner* vers lui, et non seulement quand la source solaire est *présente* et risque de nous brûler les yeux si nous les fixons sur elle; il faut encore se détourner vers le *logos* quand le soleil semble s'absenter dans son éclipse. Mort, éteint ou caché, cet astre est plus dangereux que jamais.

Laissons courir ces fils. Nous ne les avons encore suivis que pour nous laisser conduire du *logos* au père, et relier la parole au *kurios*, au maître, au seigneur, autre nom donné dans la *République* au bien-soleil-capital-père (508a). Plus tard, dans le même tissu, dans les mêmes textes, nous tirerons d'autres fils, et de nouveau les mêmes pour voir s'y ourdir ou dénouer d'autres desseins.

Derrida

Canasta was Batista's favorite pastime in the waning months of his regime, as if he preferred the abstract strategies of cards to the all too tangible demands of the

deteriorating military and political situation outside the presidential palace.¹ Inside he could shuffle kings, queens, and jacks, listen to their discrete rustle, deploy them according to precise laws. In the din outside, an army in rags was routing his U.S.-equipped and trained troops. By the time he quit Cuba, Batista had become as abstract as the kings on the cards.² When the U.S. withdrew its support, his army went through the motions of fighting without a sense of where the power lay. The power had vanished. It had become a figure shuffling cards on a table, a paper general. Batista disappeared, but his kind remains, as a recent picture of the dour Pinochet, staring back through dark glasses from a page of the *New York Times* grimly reminds us.

And in the seventies, after the Boom, the Latin American novel takes up again the figure of the dictator, particularly the ageing dictator, prey to the boredom of a limitless power he is on the verge of losing. But what precedes the *and* in the previous sentence? Why does the dictator return to center-stage in Latin American fiction other than simply because he is there, in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina?³ Beyond that primary, specular relationship, what is the link between dictatorship and the dictator-novel in Latin America? This question has been raised explicitly and implicitly often enough by recent criticism (and often by studying the same books analyzed here), but a good deal remains to be said about it.⁴ It seems to me that the mythic orientation of most of the criticism about the dictator-novel errs, particularly in dealing with the novels of Carpentier, García Márquez and Roa Bastos. For that reason, and in an effort to come to terms with the complexities of current Latin American literature, the answer proposed in what follows is by far more theoretical than comprehensive.

The most clearly indigenous thematic tradition in Latin American literature, the dictator and the dictator-book can be traced as far back as Bernal Díaz del Castillo's and Francisco López de Gómara's accounts of Cortés' conquest of Mexico (structurally, López de Gómara's book is the most akin to the recent dictator-novels).⁵ The modern tradition, which has its origins in Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), has produced masterpieces such as Valle-Inclán's *Tirano Banderas* (1925), Asturias' *El señor presidente* (1946), Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), and several others.⁶ What could be called the post-modern tradition consists essentially of three novels that appeared in 1974: Carpentier's *El recurso del método*, García Márquez' *El otoño del patriarca* and Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo* (*El recurso* and *Yo el Supremo* were published by Siglo XXI in Mexico and Buenos Aires, respectively; *El otoño* by Sudamericana). The revival that the dictator-novel is enjoying in these works is an inquiry not only into the nature and ways of contemporary political power, but also into the power, the energy that constitutes a literary text, particularly a novel. In this sense it is not only a revival but a reappraisal of the tradition and of the Latin American novel in general.

Sarmiento's passionate analysis of the life of Facundo Quiroga was the first full-fledged treatment of the caudillo and the first work in which, in dealing with such a figure, the author asks himself about his own relationship to such a creature. Sarmiento's book, of course, was his own way of coming to terms with Rosas' dictatorship. As a liberal with progressive ideas, Sarmiento had to ex-

plain to himself as well as to others how Rosas had come about. How could independence have bred such a monster? What had gone wrong? The drama in *Facundo* is Sarmiento's gradual realization that the caudillo could not simply be wished away with liberal ideology, that he was an inevitable product of historical and telluric forces. Facundo and Rosas are part of a historical foundation, and in Sarmiento's book they become both a foundation myth and a literary myth.⁷ From here to declaring that the caudillo was a providential figure there was but one step, and Sarmiento did not hesitate to take it. Rosas' violent regime was but a necessary upheaval that would eventually usher in the forces of progress. Rosas becomes an abstract historical entity, a cog in a large providential design. Just as Sarmiento is absorbed by this historical dialectic, so is he drawn by an equally compelling literary dialectic. Quiroga may be a barbarian, but he is a powerful, attractive figure who dominates the book, as well as the agent of a beneficial process that he understands only darkly. There is a beguiling analogy here between the caudillo and the author, another bold step that Sarmiento is not hesitant to take, and he declares in Flaubertian fashion: "I am Facundo Quiroga." At this point the modern dictator-novel is born. Sarmiento realizes that the power of his own consciousness in the book, the energy allowing him to interpret history in order to write it, is analogous to the power of his own creature, Facundo Quiroga. Nowhere is this identification of writer and dictator more evident than in the following passage about Rosas:

En fin, ya tiene [Rosas] el gobierno en sus manos. Facundo ha muerto un mes antes; la ciudad se ha entregado a su discreción; el pueblo ha confirmado del modo más auténtico esta entrega de toda garantía y de toda institución. Es el Estado una tabla rasa en que él va a escribir una cosa nueva, original; es él un poeta, un Platón, que va a realizar su república ideal según él la ha concebido; es éste un trabajo que ha meditado veinte años, y que al fin puede dar a luz, sin que vengan a estorbar su realización tradiciones envejecidas, preocupaciones de la época, plagios hechos a la Europa, garantías individuales, instituciones vigentes. Es un genio, en fin, que ha estado lamentando los errores de su siglo y preparándose para destruirlos de un golpe. Todo va a ser nuevo, obra de su ingenio; vamos a ver este portentoso.⁸

In the book, the caudillo would be a hypostasis of the author. Properly read, Sarmiento's interpretation of the writer is as complex and rich a theoretical statement as those of Flaubert or any of the other European writers of the period.

When we evoke the great novelists of the nineteenth century—Dickens, Balzac, Galdós, Flaubert—we think of powerful men whose imaginations "created" vast societies that paralleled and even rivaled the world of their times. The modern printing press gave these men enormous power, the power emanating from Rodin's head of Balzac, an imperiousness we associate with the novelist's demiurgic creativity. Lukacs is wrong when he declares that the novel is an unheroic genre.⁹ There may no longer be, as in the epic, heroic protagonists who are at the center of harmonious totalities, but there is the implicit,

powerful author, who probes the inner workings of an entire society to lay them bare in his novels, and who within the confines of the text is a partially veiled god. He has the vision afforded by a reflexive and reflective consciousness, less grandiose than Hegel's spirit, but in the fiction just as omniscient. At the end of the century, Unamuno saw clearly how the novel was the projection of a powerful self:

Sí, toda novela, toda obra de ficción, todo poema, cuando es vivo es autobiográfico. Todo ser de ficción, todo personaje poético que crea un autor hace parte del autor mismo. Y si este pone en su poema un hombre de carne y hueso a quien ha conocido, es después de haberlo hecho suyo, parte de sí mismo. Los grandes historiadores son también autobiógrafos. Los tiranos que ha descrito Tácito son él mismo. Por el amor y la admiración que les ha consagrado,—se admira y hasta se quiere aquello a que se execra y que se combate—¡Ah, cómo quiso Sarmiento al tirano Rosas!—se los ha apropiado, se los ha hecho él mismo.¹⁰

This view of the writer, which the writer fostered by his own works, is of course an ideological distortion of where power lay in nineteenth-century society. The ideology of Modernity—from the eighteenth century on—enthroned the individual.¹¹ The individual is producer and consumer. He makes his own laws to govern his conduct. The world is there for him to possess and consume. The rise of the bourgeoisie glorifies the entrepreneur, the engineer, the man of action, who believes that he alone has the necessary knowledge and energy to make the world consumable. This figure appears again and again in the nineteenth-century novel; Pepe Rey, in Galdós' *Doña Perfecta* is a good example within the Hispanic context. The image of the novelist that we saw before is the counterpart of this entrepreneur. The latter conquers whole continents through commercial colonialism, whereas the former invents new worlds and new stories. Traditional narrative repeats tales handed down by the collectivity, while the novelist "invents" new plots and characters; the man of action creates new values through his far-flung commercial ventures and his domination of nature through technology. This is why the novelist is seen to have such power in society and also why, within the text of the novel, it is he, through the voice of omniscience, who has replaced God. The third person is the novelist's unholy, yet powerful, ghost.

As the power of the bourgeoisie recedes, as the colonialist ventures begin to fail, it is precisely the figure of the author that comes to be questioned in literature. The post-modern novel, let us say from Proust and James on, tells the tale of woe of an author fragmented, sick, who is called to task, whose apparent power has vanished. Unamuno's *Niebla* furnishes the paradigmatic example. The author, who still holds the seat of power (the setting of the scene is significant) is confronted, challenged, and cursed by the protagonist. The author no longer controls undisturbed the omniscient device of the third person, the voice of rhetorical power. In *À la recherche du temps perdu* there is a similar, though considerably more complex, situation. A sickly, hypersensitive, marginal individual, Marcel, can only exert power, if at all, over himself.

We imagine Balzac—the fictional, rhetorical Balzac—pacing up and down his study, dictating his novels with a powerful voice, playing out himself the parts of the various characters, modulating with precision the voice of the narrator. Corpus Barga (the alias for Andrés García de la Barga), in a 1923 note in *Revista de Occidente* (año 1, no. 4, pp. 132–35), discusses how Dostoevsky, harried by an avaricious editor, dictated *The Gambler* in a few weeks to a stenographer, Anna Gregorievna, who later became his wife. Corpus Barga goes on to report that from then on Dostoevsky dictated to Anna the end of *Crime and Punishment* and the whole of some of his most memorable novels, such as *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and others. It is also quite possible that Stendhal dictated *The Charterhouse of Parma*, which he is reputed to have finished in only a few weeks.

The degree of truthfulness that one can attribute to these stories and the correspondence between a modern “writerly” novelist who writes his texts and a nineteenth-century rhetorical one who dictated his works as if pronouncing a speech, are not telling here. What is important to retain is the image of the powerful writer dictating his novel, an image that we must conjure not by going back from the text to what really happened, but from the text to a pre-text, that is to say, to a locus of transformations, a mythology of writing that we could also call the realm of ideology. We can no longer imagine such a scene when we think of Marcel—the precious language, the proliferation of detail, approach the rhetoric of the intimate diary, written for oneself. James’ speculations about narrative point of view, his intense, self-conscious prefaces, the writerly nature of his works falls within the same mode. When we reach Joyce (even if he had to dictate in the latter part of his career because of failing eyesight), the dictating scene is totally out of the question. *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* have been written, to the point where a good deal of the “action” would be lost without recourse to the visual text. The difficulty of these texts lies precisely in their violation of one of the cardinal tenets of the phonological illusion: they need to be reread and they discourage any possibility of being apprehended in the flight of voice.

The great figure of the author has been replaced by the uncertain one of the writer. The former controlled whole continents and centuries, while the latter perhaps a city, twenty-four hours in the life of a nobody. But most of all what has been lost is the rhetoric of fiction. As that hypostasis of the modern individual, the powerful entrepreneur, is degraded, so is the grip of rhetoric eased. The novel was a long discourse by that third person in authority, containing snippets or long tracts of dialogue by other characters, but which was nevertheless a speech by one voice, which “told” the story; now there is no such mediation, no filtering, no power. The nineteenth-century novel was a potent, ideological instrument because through it each individual was convinced of his own power, by the boundlessness of that typically nineteenth-century faculty, the imagination. The beginning of the disintegration of the society within which it emerged makes for the change in the figure of the novelist from author to writer. This reduction is a demystification. The novel, one of society’s more persistent forms of self-analysis was also one of its more fruitful mechanisms of

self-delusion. The real author was no more powerful, even metaphorically, than the entrepreneur, who was a cog in a larger system that he could barely understand, and certainly did not control. The post-modern novel, even going as far back as Flaubert, puts a mirror, so to speak, to that image of the author-dictator, of the author-rhetor, and reveals instead a weak and fragmented *scriptor*, who is the secretary of a voice no longer enthroned, no longer his. The Latin American dictator-novel undergoes and reflects a similar process.

Sarmiento's *Facundo* evokes, in Latin American terms, the problematic outlined above. He may want to be Quiroga, but in fact has become his and Rosas' Boswellian biographer. Who is the master and who the slave in this mythology of writing? For all his barbarism, Quiroga incarnates the true will of history, while Sarmiento is a mere exegete, a commentator, the representative of an ideology. But at the same time neither *Facundo* nor Rosas "know" that they are the sacrificial victims of a broader historical beginning. *Facundo* and Rosas need Sarmiento—as the master needs the slave in Hegel's dialectic—in order to record their predestined, ritualistic immolation: the author dies, the dictator is killed, the secretary remains to tell the true story. The mythology of writing conceals an Oedipal subplot: the king, the father, is killed in order for the story to be told. Sarmiento is not really *Facundo*. When he says "I am *Facundo*," Sarmiento is really wishing for an illusory time when totalities were possible, when discourse encompassed the wholeness of being—the self and its object united in one moment of ecstatic self-delusion.

Many of the elements that we discover in *Facundo* reappear in the recent dictator-novels—*El recurso del método*, *El otoño del patriarca*, and *Yo el Supremo*. The intermediate dictator-novels, from *Amalia* to *El señor presidente*, repeat the myth of authority, while the novels of Carpentier, García Márquez, and Roa Bastos deconstruct the myth, often by returning to that original mythology of writing already set out in *Facundo*.¹² There is, in fact, a progression in that deconstruction that goes from Carpentier, to García Márquez, and finally to Roa Bastos. It is, of course, not a chronological progression, since the novels appeared simultaneously, but one in which that mythology of writing is unfolded in a kind of fictive time.

The very title of Carpentier's book announces what is at stake in his novel.¹³ *El recurso del método* is obviously a garbled version of Descartes' *Le Discours de la méthode*. The aging, capricious dictator, who surrounds himself with venal academics in *fin de siècle* Paris, where he spends most of his time, authorizes outlandish political atrocities, justifying them by allusion to some of Descartes' *dicta* (some drawn from the *Treatise on Passions*). The parodic nature of the novel is clear on this level. And, in a historical sense, the First Magistrate is the monstrous product of the application of European (i.e., French) liberal philosophy to Latin American sociopolitical problems. In the First Magistrate the *libertadores*, the *padres de la patria*, repeat themselves, but as farcical, despotic ideologues who have become the staunch defenders of class interests. He would be Sarmiento's European dream become nightmarish reality. Carpentier's Francophilic First Magistrate has turned liberal ideology into mere oratory—his forte is his rhetorical skill, his ability to deliver bombastic speeches laden with *topoi*

“borrowed” from European writers. His passion is opera, and indeed the whole of *El recurso del método* takes place in what appear to be operatic settings: the half-constructed plaza where the First Magistrate delivers a speech that turns out to be a translation of Renan’s *Prayer on the Acropolis* and the capitol housing an enormous statue representing the Motherland display the monumental yet insubstantial quality of stage-props. Indeed, one of the revolts against the First Magistrate breaks out during a performance of *Aida* that he had staged in his capital to raise the cultural level of the country. The First Magistrate’s power resides in his command of voice, a voice that externalizes that (mock) Cartesian consciousness through a rhetoric that becomes operatic; that is melodic, hollow, contrived, and ultimately ridiculous. *El recurso del método* is a kind of comic melodrama.

But if Descartes’ presence is felt from the very title, Vico also appears from the beginning. *El recurso del método* also alludes to Vico’s *ricorsi*, the convolutions of history that repeat past events in not quite mimetic fashion—repetitions that are original acts.¹⁴ Needless to say, Vico polemicized against Descartes and, in this sense, Carpentier’s novel opens up again a debate that is situated in the beginnings of Modernity. These *ricorsi* are present throughout the novel in the spiral trajectory of history, the recurrence of revolutions that eventually bring about the downfall of the First Magistrate. Each repetition leaves a residue, the nonmimetic produces a comic effect that is at the base of parody, but that also opens up to the future and the next turn of the spiral. Carpentier manages to fuse in this fashion the comic spirit of the novel with a political statement. If the caudillo, as in *Facundo*, is a providential figure, his appearance is marked by the parodic corrosion of the ideology that spawns him, and announces the coming of a revolution, a revolution that, even if carnival-like in outward appearance, will nevertheless be a significant new beginning.

Vico, however, is present in more than just this representation of history, for the Cartesian *cogito* that it undermines is also an important factor in the novel’s own critique of authority. As the novel opens, the First Magistrate is awakening in his Parisian apartment (the various moments of awakening are, incidentally, a parody of *A la recherche*):

. . . But I’ve only just gone to bed. And the alarm has gone off already. Half past six. It’s impossible. Quarter past seven, perhaps. More likely. Quarter past eight. This alarm clock would be a marvel of Swiss watchmaking, but its hands are so slim that one can hardly see them. Quarter past nine. That’s not right either. My spectacles, quarter past ten. That’s it. Besides, daylight is already shining through the yellow curtains with morning brilliance. And it’s always the same when I come back to this house: I open my eyes with the feeling of being *there*, because . . .¹⁵

The First Magistrate’s mind is not filled with clear ideas, nor is he able to perceive sharply the surrounding reality. The narrative focus of the novel shifts, accordingly, from his mind to an indirect, third person, or to Peralta, his obsequious assistant and secretary. We also find this lack of precision in the historical background. The First Magistrate is not a specific historical figure, but a

composite of various Latin American dictators: Estrada Cabrera, Machado, Trujillo, Porfirio Díaz, Batista, etc. More than a mere abstraction, however, the First Magistrate is a mythic figure, in the Viconian sense: the compendium of the recollections of the people that constitute a foundation myth.¹⁶ In this sense the novel is detached from Carpentier, though careful investigation would no doubt reveal that most of the historical background comes from the Machado years in Cuba. (For Cuban readers, particularly, the novel is a sort of compendium of stories from the Machado years, told and retold since then.)

But there is a way in which the novel is not that detached from its author. One cannot but see in the melomalous, erudite First Magistrate, who divides his life between Latin America and Paris, a parody of Carpentier himself (Carpentier has also given us a self-portrait in the character of the rebellious student, whose general features, however, correspond with greater historical accuracy to Julio Antonio Mella and Rubén Martínez Villena). Carpentier's parodic self-portrait harks back to Sarmiento's solemn identification with Facundo Quiroga and the self-parody is made even more obvious in the text of *El recurso* by the presence of oblique references to Carpentier's own earlier work. The recourse, the rebound, could not but strike at the author himself, and a great deal of the significance of this novel within the field of Latin American literature lies precisely in this factor. Known for his methodical, architectural structures, Carpentier opts in *El recurso del método* for a freer, lighter construction that betrays its opera-stage quality. Singing there at the center is the First-Magistrate-Author, who can hear only the distortions of his own voice in the multiple echoes of it provided by his goons, particularly by Peralta, the parasitic secretary, who is the counterfigure of the dictator. Carpentier's novel demystifies the authority of the dictator-author by means of parody; a parody of political rhetoric in which speech is the product of a muddled mind. At the same time, Carpentier demystifies the notion of authority by an identification of himself with the dictator. Though the parody withdraws from the figure of the dictator its solemnity, Carpentier preserves the providential structure suggested by *Facundo*; he plays out this mythology of writing more thoroughly by insisting on the "passion" of the First Magistrate, whose demise is the very condition of history.¹⁷

García Márquez's anxiously awaited *El otoño del patriarca*—his first long work since *Cien años de soledad*—has a great deal in common with Carpentier's *El recurso del método*: it takes place in a mythic Latin American republic, though more specifically located in the Caribbean basin, and the figure of the dictator is again a compendium of dictators. But whereas Carpentier has set his novel at the turn of the century—between the end of the *belle époque* and the "roarin' twenties"—García Márquez's encompasses a much broader temporal span. In fact, though what could be termed the present time of the action takes place in the waning moments of the dictator's life (which must occur sometime in the early twentieth century), through his muddled memory and owing to his prodigious longevity, the novel encompasses the whole of Latin American history, from the arrival of Columbus to the heyday of U.S. imperialism (the dictator sells the Caribbean sea to the Americans to settle his foreign debt, and the Americans cart it away in numbered pieces to the Arizona desert).

Carpentier's is a mock foundation myth whose origin is Modernity; García Márquez's is a mock foundation myth whose ultimate model is Christianity itself. A great deal of fun at the expense of (particularly) Colombian popular piety is present in *El otoño patriarca* and, as in *Cien años de soledad*, the Bible lurks just beneath the surface, even in the title.¹⁸ But more to the point, the dictator, with his "holy family," his providential advent (from utterly obscure origins—he is fatherless but for more worldly reasons than Christ) to "save" the Republic, and his "resurrection" at the very beginning of the book make him a farcical *figura Christi*. This resurrection is made possible, of course, by the existence of a perfect double who is killed, allowing the dictator to catch red-handed those who revel at his wake and try to divide the spoils. There are many more instances in which New Testament scenes are evoked in this parodic fashion. Even at this substructure of myth, García Márquez's penchant for hyperbole is at work. From Sarmiento on, as we have seen, the figure of the dictator is part of a foundation myth that attempts to account for the modern history of Latin America. But García Márquez has gone further, to the very dawn of Western tradition, to show that the figure of the dictator is but a repetition of the figure of the *bouc émissaire*, a version of the repeatable story of Christ. The parodic repetition of such a basic story also involves, as we shall see, a profound reflection on the nature of the novel.

García Márquez's dictator is more primitive than Carpentier's, more like the early caudillos than the *déspota ilustrado* of *El recurso del método* (correspondingly *El otoño* is much less erudite). Kept in power by English and American imperial interests, the dictator flounders about in the tedium of absolute power, mired in a chaotic atmosphere in which terror and magic coexist, babbling clichés about the fatherland and giving outrageous orders. The history of Colombia parades in chronological disorder behind the incidents narrated—a history, as in Carpentier, rendered "mythopoetic" by individual and collective memory, without a structuring function in the sequence of events. History is simply a series of outrages perpetrated by foreign nations, by the dictator, or by both, with the object of securing and maintaining absolute power. If in *Cien años de soledad* there was a rigorous order behind the apparent discord, *El otoño del patriarca* is a chaotic universe that begins near the end and returns to it at the closing of the book without there being a sense of cyclical recurrence. It is as if everything occurred simultaneously at the end, without order. If Colonel Aureliano Buendía's all-encompassing glimpse as he faces the firing squad has the hallucinatory rigor of dreams, the dictator's senile recollections in the waning moments of his life are a confused jumble of memories. The central, repeated image in the novel is *chapaletear*, to thrash around in the mud, to muddle through, an accurate description of the text itself and of the dictator's palace. The palace, where most of the "action" takes place and a possible emblem of its fictive universe, teeming with beggars, concubines, cows and their leavings, and chickens, is made up of countless rooms; at times it recalls a Biblical temple, at others a bazaar from the *Thousand and One Nights*. One is never sure of the palace's location, nor of its interior plan; rooms connect with others or have balconies facing the courtyard or the street according to whim or need.

There are hardly any periods in *El otoño del patriarca* and no paragraphs. The rambling syntax (technically made up of a few, interminable anacolutha) moves from speaker to speaker without transition, and the topics change with equal arbitrariness. It is a syntax without a fixed subject that shatters all the usual commonplaces about point of view in fiction by exposing the grammatical conventionality of what we call perspective (the uncritical association of grammatical person, narrative voice, and the mechanics of dialogue between people). This syntactical chaos is a model of the system of power that enthrones the dictator. His power lies in *being thought to be there*, at the center, giving orders, assuring that there be a link with the origins of self and history, being the Self, the SuperSelf, the *Uberselbst* that grounds syntax and rhetoric, the Voice of the Subject. (There is an ironic mention of RCA Victor's famous commercial in which a dog recognizes the voice of his master on a phonograph record—in Spanish it simply says "La voz de su amo"—that no doubt alludes to the question of the voice and the self; the voice of the self which can be reproduced to perform an authoritative function when the self is no longer there. The voice of the master can only fool a dog.)

Here we are far from the notion that the collective voices create the dictator. The dictator is, for the most part, absent in mind and body from the center of power. The reader is made aware both of his absence and of the need for his presence as he reads on without a sense of "whose" mind he inhabits, but once into the novel the need diminishes and we, too, abandon ourselves to the flow of the manifold, multiperson prose, a radically predicative, headless writing. This effect is of the utmost importance. The illiterate dictator rules through voice, but after a while no one pays attention, or his voice and image are reconstructed by electronic devices. The *dictator*, the one who dictates, can be *re-produced*, and it is that reproduction that rules. The same occurs at the syntactical level. The rambling syntax may at first evoke the apparent free-flow of conversation; we are at first taken aback, then reassured by what appears to be a direct transcription of a rambling monologue. But in fact, since grammatical persons do not rule this prose, it is the furthest possible thing from a dictation—it is rather a textual web, a game of mirrors that both reconstructs and deconstructs the figure of the dictator. Needless to say, we as readers are also caught and deconstructed by that game in which all our most basic expectations are shown to be arbitrary conventions. Are we [?] a second person being addressed by the text, a first person who enters the text to put it in order, or an impassive third person who just watches? Who [is, are] [you, me, we]? Without persons, or with multiple persons lacking clear ontological status—even in representational terms—or grammatical identity, there is no one to reconstruct a text that is simply there, as the most devastating critique of dictatorship beyond the more obvious political messages of the author. In his earlier "Los funerales de la Mama Grande," by making the dictator female, García Márquez had already cleared the ground for this critique of dictatorship, as I have already explained elsewhere.¹⁹

The return to Christ, the mocking of the Christ-myth through the figure of the General (of the Universe, no less) becomes more significant now. Christ,

like all great teachers in the Western tradition, did not write; his precious *dicta* were gathered and written by disciples whose collaboration produced the Bible, in the same way that Plato's work made available the Socratic dialogues.²⁰ The dictator too is supposed to rule through voice, a "voice" much like that of an author—that is to say, the tics and quirks that make writing his, the marks that identify him. This nodule of associations is clear in the novels of Carpentier and García Márquez. In both cases the problematic generated by this association is determined by a return to *Facundo*, and more precisely by a deconstruction of Sarmiento's relationship to the dictator. For in the end the dictator is shown not to be the bearer of power through voice, but a figure needed in order to show by his demise the controlling power of writing—it is not the voice, but writing, it is not the dictator-author, but the secretary-writer, who reigns, even if he is nothing but a carnival king. But the secretary, the agent of the text can only be a secretary, and the Figure of Authority is still needed: "We are Facundo-First-Magistrate-General-of-the-Universe in the texts," seem to say Carpentier and García Márquez, "but only because of a textual need borne of a certain ideology that enthrones the subject. We are *figurae*, not present-onto-ourselves bearers of the truth about Latin American history. Our texts celebrate in advance, prefigure the real absence of dictator-authors, the coming of the TEXT. But we can't do this without posing as victims, without being beheaded by our texts, without the spectacle of our own demise, without our public sacrifice. We too must be victims of a textual assault." (In Severo Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes*, the figures of the General and Mortal Pérez sketch this problematic in ways that the limitations of space do not allow us to discuss here). The novel was made possible, according to Auerbach in his classic *Mimesis*, by the advent of Christianity's *sermo humilis*, which led to the realism of certain medieval texts and then on to Cervantes. And the presence of the Christ myth at the core of *El otoño* is also a way of underlining that writing takes place in the realm of the Son, in the kingdom of this world, so to speak. But the humor, the chaos, the Asiatic disorder and sensuousness of this world of writing underline too that this is not an authoritative world, except through representation, through the theatricality of the King's public sacrifice.

Roa Bastos *Yo el Supremo* takes to their ultimate consequences many of the problems raised in *El recurso del método* and *El otoño del patriarca*. In a sense, only after reading *Yo el Supremo* can we perform on the previous two novels the sort of reading that I have suggested. For in many ways Roa Bastos' text is the most theoretical of the three, that is to say, the most detailed in its consideration of the questions of power, rhetoric, and the novel raised before.²¹

A significant difference between *Yo el Supremo* and the two other novels is that it deals manifestly with one historical figure, Paraguay's notorious Dr. Francia, and not with a composite of various dictators. The significance of this is to be found not in the relative truthfulness of this novel in contrast to the other two, but in the presenting of "facts," by which the author can attribute to history, not to himself, the very facticity of the book. This is important because Roa Bastos has exhausted the well-worn games of illusion about found manuscripts, long-lost documents recovered, and the like. *Yo el Supremo* is composed,

for the most part, of real texts by Dr. Francia or about Dr. Francia. These texts range from personal memoirs by members of the opposition to translations of chapters from the books written by two British merchants, the Robertson brothers (*Four Years in Paraguay, Comprising an Account of that Republic Under the Government of Doctor Francia*, 1838; *Letters on South America*, 1848); passages drawn from Captain Richard Burton's *Letters from the Battlefield of Paraguay* (1870—a book, incidentally, dedicated to Sarmiento); works by the French botanist Bonpland and the Swiss doctors Rengger and Longchamp; and even a text by Thomas Carlyle (actually a defense of Dr. Francia, printed first in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* in 1847 and later included in his *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*).

All of these texts are arranged by an editor who has also furnished quite a few footnotes in which he sometimes corrects what is said in one text by comparing it with another, and offers other pertinent information. These notes also tell the story of how the book was put together, and they constitute in a very real sense the most important strand in the plot of the novel. This story ends with the editor's own explanation in an "Editor's Note" where he declares his faithfulness to the texts and not to his own whims or creative impulse: "Ya habrá advertido el lector que, al revés de los textos usuales, éste ha sido leído primero y escrito después. En lugar de decir y escribir cosa nueva, no ha hecho más que copiar fielmente lo ya dicho y compuesto por otros. No hay pues en la compilación una sola página, una sola frase, una sola palabra, desde el título hasta la nota final, que no haya sido escrita de esa manera" (p. 467).

We cannot, however, take this disclaimer literally, for the editor is the final authority in this collection of texts that compose *Yo el Supremo*, no matter how weak an authority he may appear to be in comparison to an omniscient narrative voice. The body of the novel is composed of a polemical collection of versions of Paraguayan history. A mere description will no doubt make clear what I mean by polemical. There are three main kinds of texts, in addition to the footnotes, the "Editor's Note," and an occasional unclassifiable document such as a list of toys ordered by the dictator.

This first kind of text is what the Supremo dictates to his secretary, Policarpo Patiño, about what is happening in the present. This record includes the constant abuse that the dictator heaps upon his secretary ("fiel de fechos") for his alleged lack of faithfulness in taking down what he says, and also for his presumed ambition to topple the Supremo in order to become King Policarpo I. The hapless Patiño, who takes dictation while soaking his enormous, sore feet in cold water, protests his innocence throughout the novel (the big, sore feet is an obvious identification of Patiño with Oedipus).²² The story told here, as rambling and vulgar as Nixon's tapes, involves the dictator's attempt to discover the authors of a pasquinade in which it is announced that the Supremo is dead and instructions for his burial are given. The Supremo urges poor Patiño to discover the culprits, and the docile secretary pores over every single scrap of paper in the Republic (Patiño knows by heart every official document in the archives), but to no avail. The author of the pasquinade is never found, though even the paper and its watermark is scrutinized, not to mention the calligraphy, which was done in imitation of the Supremo's own handwriting.

A second kind of text is the "Circular Perpetua," or "Perpetual Memo" that the Supremo also dictates to Policarpo Patiño. This is the dictator's version of the origins of Paraguayan history, particularly of how Dr. Francia came to power owing to the squabbles between the various territories that composed the Virreinato del Río de la Plata. The "Perpetual Memo" takes us, then, to the period described by Sarmiento in *Facundo*, and there are in fact several allusions to Quiroga as well as to Rosas. These texts are the most profusely annotated by the editor, for in them the Supremo "corrects" versions given by other historical figures, not to mention those given by European travelers.

Finally there is what the Supremo writes himself in his "Private Notebook," which is mostly an account of his own life, attempts to write fiction, diatribes against Patiño and his kind, philosophical musings and ramblings, and other sundry exercises. Most poignant in this section are Supremo's words about his stepfather, whom he allowed to die without forgiving him some trivial insult (like all the other dictators, Roa Bastos' lacks a precise genealogy: history begins with him). All of these texts have been edited, for one finds in them, besides the footnotes, indications in italics and within brackets such as "on the margin it is written," "there is a hole in the paper here," etc. So that while they do not compose a homogeneous text, held together by the rhetorical power of a narrative voice, and in fact are anything but homogeneous, these texts bear the presence of the editor in these discrete marks and indications.

Dr. Francia's fear of the pasquinade, his abuse of Policarpo Patiño (to whom he dictates his own—Patiño's—death sentence), his constant worry about writing all stem from the fact that he has found and used the power implicit in language itself. The Supremo defines power as being able to do through others what we are unable to do ourselves: language, being separate from what it designates, is the very embodiment of power, for things act and mean through it without ceasing to be themselves. Dr. Francia has also realized that he cannot control language, particularly written language, that it has a life of its own that threatens him. So, he takes it out on poor, obese Patiño, who represents the scribes that are liable even of corrupting the oral tradition:

No emplees palabras impropias que no se mezclan con mi humor, que no se impregnan de mi pensamiento. Me disgusta esta capacidad relativa, mendigada. Tu estilo es además abominable. Laberíntico callejón empedrado de aliteraciones, anagramas, idiotismos, barbarismos, paronomasias de la especie pároli/páruilis; imbéciles anástrofes para deslumbrar a invertidos imbéciles que experimentan erecciones bajo el efecto de las violentas inversiones de la oración, por el estilo de: Al suelo del árbol cáigome; o esta más violenta aún: Clavada la Revolución en mi cabeza la pica guñame su ojo cómplice desde la Plaza. Viejos trucos de la retórica que ahora vuelven a usarse como si fueran nuevos. Lo que te reprocho principalmente es que seas incapaz de expresarte con la originalidad de un papagayo. No eres más que un biohumano parlante. Bicho híbrido engendrado por especies diferentes. Asno-mula tirando de la noria de la escribanía del Gobierno. En papagayo me habrias sido más útil que en fiel de fechos. No eres ni lo uno ni lo otro. En

lugar de trasladar al estado de naturaleza lo que te dicto, llenas el papel de barrumbadas incomprensibles. Bribonadas ya escritas por otros. Te alimentas con la carroña de los libros. No has arruinado todavía la tradición oral sólo porque es el único lenguaje que no se puede saquear, robar, repetir, plagiar, copiar. Lo hablado vive sostenido por el tono, los gestos, los movimientos del rostro, las miradas, el acento, el aliento del que habla. (P. 64)

Patiño is the quintessential writer, thus Supremo's diatribe against written language and his impassionate defense of oral communication. But toward the end of his life, in one of his dialogues with Sultán, his dog, Supremo expresses fear that he might lose his speech, his ability to remember in language, and his recourse is to remember Patiño, who has become his memory. So that he too feels in the clutches of written language, as embodied by the apparently defenseless secretary.

In spite of the death penalty imposed on him, Policarpo Patiño outlives his master. He does not attain the power that Dr. Francia feared that he might achieve and dies an obscure death. But did he not have the last laugh? Did he not attain some sort of posthumous power? In a long footnote that invades nearly four complete pages of the book, the editor tells the story of how he obtained the pen Supremo used to write with. This pen, a sort of writing Aleph, could not only write, but project between the lines a series of visual images, "optical metaphors" that translated writing into a language of images. In addition, the editor supposes, the pen could also project the phonic temporality of language, thus combining simultaneously three texts. This pen is given to the editor by Raimundo "Loco-Solo," a fourth grandchild of Policarpo Patiño. There is a link, a very significant link, between the Supremo's amanuensis and the editor of the book we read. The editor, who arranges the various texts and annotates them, who thereby exercises final authority over Dr. Francia's versions of himself, is the heir of Policarpo Patiño. The editor is sort of Super-Secretary, the Bureaucrat of Bureaucrats, the Collector of Writing, the Fervent Devotee of the Letter, a Scholar, in short. There is, in fact, a complete new twist in *Yo el Supremo*, in relation to the earlier two novels: there the dictator appears as the victim who was sacrificed to history, here the sacrificial victim is Policarpo, who dies, so to speak, so that the story may be written, edited, through the ministrations of a distant heir. *Yo el Supremo* does not pretend to tell so much a founding myth as to constitute a founding text: its composition is more akin to that of sacred books, like the Bible, than to that of the versions of an oral myth that literature often seeks to emulate. Layers upon layers of texts are compiled, gathered together, edited, arranged, preserving texts at the expense of coherence or the elimination of contradiction. *Yo el Supremo* is the final victory of the text.²³

Perhaps the brief analysis of a recent book whose structure is the very opposite of the dictator-novels studied here—their correlative opposite—will serve to clarify our discussion. I am referring to Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, published in the same year as *El recurso del método*, *El otoño del patriarca*, and *Yo el Supremo*.²⁴ *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* consists

of a series of vignettes retelling salient events in Cuban history. The totalizing intention of the book is evident in that these vignettes are organized in chronological fashion and cover from the geological upheaval that lifted Cuba out of the sea to counterrevolutionary activity in the past eighteen years. *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* presents violence as the constant re-enactment of a historical birth, a dawn that announces a day that never comes. At one point (p. 198) the book refers to itself as an inventory, and this is a fairly accurate description of the detached, monotonous cadence of the narrating voice; its repetitiveness and simple syntax level off the different moments in an effort, it would appear, to reduce them to a single, abstract instance, a conglomeration of the same.

The incidents related are those that supposedly have become fable: the execution of the Indian rebel Hatuey by the conquering Spaniards; José Martí's death in Dos Ríos on 19 May 1895; the attack on the Moncada garrison by Fidel Castro and his followers on 26 July 1953; and so on. Many of these incidents are documented and are part of the official history of the island (Portuondo's standard textbook is quoted in the front matter), while others belong to what could be called historical lore. In some cases what is described is not the historical incident per se (if indeed such is possible), but its inscription in history, particularly when this inscription is visual. For instance, in the account of Hatuey's execution, mention is made of the label of the beer bearing his name; the description of the maroon slave being attacked by "Cuban hounds" is actually a description of the well-known painting by Landaluce (Víctor Patricio Landaluce, ?–1889). In other instances the inscription is of a textual nature. For example, the assassination of Manolo Castro is retold by alluding to Hemingway's "The Shot," and the plot to kill Clemente Vázquez Bello and blow up Gerardo Machado and his cabinet at the funeral will no doubt recall Carpentier's *El acoso*.

But these *urtxts* are not grafted onto the text to establish what the current cliché would call a "textual dialogue," or to manifest an "intertextuality." In fact, the opposite occurs, for all these texts are subsumed in the monotonous, impersonal and stylistically faceless narrating voice, effacing their contours, blurring away all differences, making them part of a given thematic. There is an inescapable moralistic and ideological sense to *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* that is lodged precisely in that monotony. The soothing monotone tries to persuade the reader that there will always be an established order against which futile and heroic acts of violence will be committed (there is pathos verging on bathos in many of the vignettes—Manolo Castro is killed with thirty-five cents in his pocket).²⁵ The totalizing thrust of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* and the effacement of textual differences seek to promote a transcendental truth, a truth that lies before writing, in that impersonal voice that repeats it in every instance from behind the transparency of the text. Whereas in Carpentier, García Márquez, and Roa Bastos textual heterogeneity shatters the presumed transcendence of any foundation myth, Cabrera Infante's monophonic text purports to enthrone a voice that would be "imperishable and eternal," as the book declares grandiloquently Cuba to be in the last sentence.

Besides, the totality promoted by *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* is in fact quite partial. It is significant that a book that attempts to offer a global view of

Cuban history should leave out all the violence visited upon Cuba by the United States. The Bay of Pigs invasion is a glaring absence, as are the many CIA-sponsored attacks against Cuba. Such a selective presentation of history belies the totalizing character of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* and reveals its true intention, which is what could be called the promoting of contingent political argument. The link between this book and the dictator-novel is to be found there, in that rhetoric of abstraction and power that is dismantled in texts such as *El recurso del método*, *El otoño del patriarca*, and *Yo el Supremo*.

The erosion of authority that has prevailed in post-modern Western literature has been played out, performed in Latin American literature through the recent dictator-novel. This performance consists of the cancellation of a central authority, a conscience to whom, even within the fiction, a certain intention can be attributed, an intention whose discovery would in turn be the object of our own act of interpretation. The text is there to be read without a governing purpose or meaning, a collage of other texts, gathered by a secretary who is not accountable (a “scholar” whose “objectivity” does not allow him more than the collation of texts). But this does not mean that the dictator-novel does not reflect the nature of current dictatorships; it is, in fact, a truer reflection of modern dictatorships than the previous group of novels written in the twenties and thirties. We know that it is not Pinochet who rules Chile, but a complex web of interests whose emblem could very well be International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT)—a transnational communications empire, a TEXT. Somoza, Videla, Franco in his final years, were/are also puppets of what are now called the multinationals. So perhaps the most characteristic dictator of the current age was Howard Hughes, the figurehead of a vast financial and communications empire that had no particular affiliation to any given country and whose power was not in the drugged and senile tycoon, but in the hands of the multiple secretaries, technocrats who control today’s electronic communications systems. The figure of the tottering, doped Howard Hughes, being carried from country to country by his assistants, will allow us to make some final commentaries about how the post-modern dictator-novel has reappraised and in a sense rewritten the tradition of the Latin American novel in general.

Brian J. Mallet is right when he says that the dictator-novels by García Márquez and Aguilera Malta undermine the myth of the dictator and create a game of mirrors that corrodes the relation that earlier novels had established between myth and history.²⁶ The dictator-novels that we have been studying here explode precisely the two pillars on which the “mythic” novel rested: the author and culture, the latter understood as the homogeneous, unspoken code that gives meaning to social activity. The novel that appealed to the conjunction of these two claimed to present a transcendental truth about history by having access to the very origin and fountainhead of all signification, an origin that in the specific case of the Latin American novel took the form of the “primitive” cultures of the continent, be it Mayan in the case of Asturias or African in that of Carpentier’s. The author’s spirit—through the medium of his voice—plumbed the depths of time, conquered history, and brought forth an original truth that was the guiding power of the work. The post-modern dictator-novel shatters

this delusion, by showing that it represents a dream of power and authority through which the Supreme Self of post-romantic ideology still secures his throne. This new novel demonstrates in its very structure that in reality dictators are not powerful telluric forces, but ideological diversions, phantoms cast by the true powers in today's world. Because, by relinquishing its claim to a transcendental truth, the new novel—the textual novel we could call it—does not renounce to knowledge. On the contrary, recent Latin American fiction takes on what must appear to many to be a very “philosophical” mold. (The very title of Carpentier's novel, as we saw, alludes to a philosophical work and one could easily be reminded of *The Twilight of the Gods* by García Márquez'—Roa Bastos' too has a metaphysical Nietzschean air to it.) And indeed what the new novel has done is to include philosophy within its textual web, not to reject it for being bookish as the earlier writing had done: the separation of literature and philosophy by the fiction of the twenties, thirties, and even the fifties and sixties was a way of privileging the former while at the same time suppressing the possible power of the latter. Today's writing privileges neither, and in this, as in so much else, it may be taking a cue from Borges, who from the thirties on has included philosophy in the elaboration of his fictions not as a superior code, but as one more among the many kinds of texts produced by society.²⁷ Today's Latin American writing—the dictator-novel being one of its more compelling manifestations—includes what anachronistically we could still call philosophy.

Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo* reveals one last twist with which we must close. Policarpo Patiño does have a sort of posthumous victory, but precisely by being posthumous it reveals its lack of finality, and his dying puts him in a position analogous to that of the Supremo: both are absent from the end, neither is present to claim victory. Patiño too has been sacrificed and this uncovers the sense of the mythology of writing that has been observed in all the books analyzed. If only the holder of knowledge and power were victimized in order to make communication possible, then we would be in the presence of a kind of prelapsarian myth, which would make of this story the vestige of an initial act of exchange, prior to ideological distortion and to the differentiating mechanisms of language. By dying Patiño shows that once he has attained power over the other he must go, that the struggle for power in this mythology of writing is essentially a repetition that lacks a first, unrepeated act. In other words that the non-textual nature of the dictator, that his claim to truth and authority was also a sham, a necessary disguise needed for the ritualistic actualization of difference. The sacrifice, the Christian and Oedipal reminiscences are thereby shown to be unavoidable, but non-determining, tropes, reflections upon repetition that are themselves repetitions, translations.

The novels of the Boom—*Rayuela*, *Cien años de soledad*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*—brought about literature that no longer needed to be typical or representative of Latin America, but still were explorations of what Latin America was. All of them (perhaps *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* being the most clearly oriented toward such knowledge by its relation to Octavio Paz' *El laberinto de la soledad*) centered on the delusion that a certain total knowledge of Latin America must be sought through its literature. The post-Boom novel, as we have seen in our

study of the dictator-novel, deconstructs the assumptions about the power of the self and its representation in fiction that supported such a literary ideology. But in doing so, the novel has not replaced the myth of the self with that of a collective unconscious, nor of a class consciousness, a proletarian ideology that would replace the fallen self of the bourgeois author. In a way that correlative literary myth of the class or collective authorship is also deconstructed by the new textual novel. All such pipe-dreams are obsolete, for what the new literature is doing is dismantling literature itself, not replacing one relation of power for another within an unchanging concept of literature. And this is present not only in Borges and his heirs, though Borges' literature had been announcing this crisis for a long time. It is present in Cuba, in the work of authors such as Miguel Barnet, and others in the tradition of the *novela testimonio*. A valuable example of this trend is found in Reynaldo González' *La fiesta de los tiburones* (1979), which deals with the emergence of dictatorship in Cuba during the early republican period, but does so by combining "oral" testimony with a collage of newspaper clippings of the times, plus a critical apparatus consisting of footnotes, chronologies, etc. Perhaps González' work is the most representative of the new literature, for it combines openly and without literary games textual production and criticism, effacing the arbitrary line that literature established between these two modes of writing. But this may be a delusion on my part, a prophetic dream such as assault literary critics and scholars periodically; a dream, after all, of power, for we too are secretaries to great writers and works, and often desire to supercede them by showing how without us they could not communicate their message to mere mortals.

When the Sandinista troops entered Somoza's bunker they found on a bed a crumpled, flaccid military uniform, like a discarded skin. The snake had fled.

NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank his good friends Nicolás Shumway and Carlos J. Alonso for reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions both about form and content. Part of the research and writing of this paper was made possible by a grant from the Social Science Research Council, to which the author wishes hereby to make public his gratitude.
2. "Finally, Batista's own laziness and weakness damaged morale more than anything else: the president played canasta when he should have been making war plans; as his press secretary put it in exile, 'Canasta was a great ally of Fidel Castro.'" Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 1041.
3. This is not the place, nor am I qualified, to discuss the reasons for the emergence of dictators in Latin America and their peculiarities. There is a useful introduction to this problem by José E. Iturriaga, *El tirano en la América Latina* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, Jornadas 15, n.d. [appears to be from the forties]). Although historians and political and social scientists have elaborated much more refined and documented views of dictatorship, I am still persuaded by Mariátegui's explanation of its origins:

El caudillaje militar era el producto natural de un período revolucionario que no había podido crear una nueva clase dirigente. El poder, dentro de esta situación, tenía que ser ejercido por los militares de la revolución que,

de un lado gozaban del prestigio marcial de sus laureles de guerra, y, de otro, estaban en grado de mantenerse en el gobierno por la fuerza de las armas. Por supuesto, el caudillo no podía sustraerse al influjo de los intereses de clase or de las fuerzas históricas en contraste. Se apoyaba en el liberalismo inconsistente y retórico del *demos* urbano o el conservantismo [sic] de la clase terrateniente. Se inspiraba en la clientela de tribunos y abogados de la democracia ciudadina o de literatos y retores de la aristocracia latifundista. (José Carlos Mariátegui, *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* [Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1968 (1928)], pp. 57–58)

Nineteenth-century philosophy was enthralled by the figure of the powerful, willfull individual, from Hegel to Nietzsche. I believe that it can be stated that the first modern consideration of the figure of the political leader appears in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* in the wake of Napoleon's exploits. Hegel writes, speaking of Caesar:

Such are all great historical men—whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount—one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence—from the inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. They are men, therefore, who appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only *their* interest, and *their* work. (*The Philosophy of History*, intr. C. J. Friedrich [New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956], p. 30)

Marx's debunking of this concept of heroism in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" is well-known. From our (literary) point of view, Stendhal's consideration of Napoleon's figure through the eyes of his sensitive, artist-like protagonist in *Le Rouge et le noir* (1831) is the most suggestive. By far the most authoritative and enlightening work by a social scientist on dictatorship is Juan Linz's remarkable "Totalitarian and Authoritative Regimes," *Handbook of Political Science* 3 (Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 175–411.

4. In a well-documented article (the best on this topic, in my view), Bernardo Subercaseaux mentions quite a few dictator-novels; see his "Tirano banderas en la narrativa hispanoamericana (la novela del dictador, 1926–1976)," *Anales de la Universidad de Cuenca* (Ecuador), no. 33 (1978). One must agree with Subercaseaux that *Amalia*, with *Facundo* however, is the beginning of the subgenre, though Echeverría's "El madero" was probably written twenty years earlier, as Aída Cometta Manzoni has pointed out in her "El dictador en la narrativa latinoamericana" (*Revista Nacional de Cultura* [Caracas], no. 234 [1978], p. 90). Besides those already mentioned, there are already quite a few studies of the dictator-novel. Bernardo Fouques' "La autopsia del poder según Roa Bastos, Carpentier y García Márquez" (*Cuadernos Americanos* [1979], pp. 83–111), has some interesting observations, though its main point, having to do with the presence of the corpse of the dictator is difficult to grasp. Santiago Portuondo Zúñiga's "Cinco novelas y un tirano" (*Santiago* [Santiago de Cuba], no. 30 [1978], pp. 47–75), is strong on the historical background and proposes a chronological division (not of the novel but of dictatorships) that is useful; but the treatment of the novels (*Tirano Banderas*, *El señor presidente*, *El gran Burundún Burundá ha muerto*, *El otoño del patriarca* and *El recurso del método*) is not too detailed or convincing. Brian J. Mallet's "Dictadura e identidad en la novela latinoamericana" (*Arbor* [Madrid], nos. 393–94 [1978], pp. 60–64), contains many perceptive comments, such as this:

No obstante las diferencias que separan la novela de Aguilera Malta de la historia de García Márquez, el análisis que hemos propuesto indica que uno de los propósitos principales de los dos escritores es precisamente la

destitución del mito arraigado del dictador latinoamericano. Es decir, en vez de ser el personaje 'personalista, épico y excepcional' señalado por Octavio Paz como típico de los primeros caudillos, el dictador moderno se revela como el eterno juego de espejos entre el mito y la historia, el mito y la realidad cotidiana: de ahí su dinamismo interior y autónomo. Detrás de este mito, según Aguilera-Malta, encontramos solamente la mecanización y la animalidad, que dan lugar en García Márquez a la retórica monstruosa, donde la sintaxis tortuosa sirve para esconder y confundir todo, hasta la verdad esencial: el dictador no existió sino en el laberinto de una frases siempre repetidas y nunca verificadas. (P. 65)

Angel Rama's *Los dictadores latinoamericanos* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976) is one of the most ambitious works on the dictator-novel, but one that I did not find useful. There is one observation made in passing with which I concur, though with some reservations:

Hay entre ellos un paralelismo que ha permitido a Roa Bastos trasfundirse por un momento en su personaje (para de inmediato distanciarse y verlo críticamente) y dotarlo de un erizado espíritu beligerante que establece un imprevisto y original sistema de equivalencias entre el dirigente político y el escritor militante: cada uno de ellos cumple su propia lucha, en sus específicos campos, pero esas tareas son estructuralmente afines y concurren a resultados emparentados. La explicación de esta concurrencia de ambos, se extrae de que tanto el dirigente político como el escritor (cuando éste visualiza con tal amplitud su cometido creativo) son los que tienen que verse con la totalidad social desde un sitio realmente privilegiado, puesto que ocupan el centro de su funcionamiento dinámico, registran su multiplicidad, su desbordante complejidad, detectan las leyes que principalmente operan en el conjunto, se aproximan a la perspectiva histórica y cumplen la acción más notoria en la aceleración del proceso. (P. 23)

Rama fails to notice, however, that what the recent dictator-novel demonstrates is precisely the delusion on the part of both the politician and the writer of thinking themselves at a center from which they can authoritatively construct or govern a totality. Giuseppe Bellini's equally comprehensive *Il mondo alucinante. Da Asturias a García Márquez. Studi sul romanzo ispano-americano della dittatura* (Milan: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1976) contains more reliable information than Rama's monograph. Bellini's may be the best general overview available, though perhaps for that same reason his theses appear to me to be somewhat vague and his readings of the novels too thematic. Among the various useful facts in Bellini's book is the following, which gives us the anecdotal origin of various recent dictator-novels: "Gabriel García Márquez ha rivelato l'esistenza di un progetto di libro collettivo, dal titolo *Los padres de las Patrias*, dovuto all'iniziativa di Carlos Fuentes, frustrato quasi subito dall'apparizione di libri singoli di autori come Carpentier e Roa Bastos" (p. 10). I am not persuaded, however, by Bellini's thesis about the origin of the dictator-novel, particularly because of the way in which he conceives Latin American reality: "Alle radici di ognuno di questi libri sta un interesse immediato nei confronti di una realtà umana alucinante e di una espressione che continuamente si rinnova, a partir dal romanzo di Asturias" (p. 11).

Luis Pancorbo's "Tres tristes tiranos" (*Revista de Occidente*, 3ra época, no. 19 [1977], pp. 12–16) is just a review, written in the giddy style of a Spanish journalist trying to be trendy. Mario Benedetti's "El recurso del supremo patriarca" (*Casa de las Americas*, no. 98 [1976], pp. 12–23), is also a review, but much better written and with bits of interesting information. Though Benedetti's evaluations are based on somewhat dated notions of novelistic technique, I agree with his very high opinion of Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo*. I disagree, however, with his somewhat lukewarm reception of *El recurso del método*, above all when it is based on the mistaken notion that the Picaresque is a minor genre (p. 14). Angela B. Dellepiane is more thorough in her

analysis "Tres novelas de la dictadura: *El recurso del método, El otoño del patriarca, Yo el Supremo*" (*Cahiers du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien* [Caravelle], no. 29 [1977], pp. 65–87). In her "La novela de la dictadura: nuevas estructuras narrativas" (*Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* [Lima], Año 5, no. 9 [1979], pp. 99–105), Martha Paley Francescato calls attention to *El gran solitario de palacio* (1971), by the Mexican René Avilés Fabila.

5. Aida Cometta Manzoni has already noted that:

Lo cierto del caso es que este personaje político, que América ofrece como producto típico, no resulta tal, porque es España la que lo trae en los albores de nuestra historia. Si echamos una ojeada a nuestra conquista y colonización descubriremos al caudillo y al dictador en muchos rasgos de Cortés y Alvarado, Pizarro y Almagro, Lope de Aguirre y Orellana y de tantos otros españoles que llegaron al continente en pos de aventuras y ansias de riquezas. Todos ellos dominados por la fuerza y el terror, sometieron a imperios poderosos y pueblos enteros por la superioridad de sus armas y la crueldad de sus procederés y, muchas veces, pelearon el liderazgo entre ellos mismos, como en el caso de los Pizarro. ("El dictador, p. 90)

The Spaniards, however, did not bring the caudillo to America but developed the type here, when they came into contact with the peculiar sociohistorical conditions of colonial America. In terms of the dictator-novels or dictator-book the important pairings are Cortés-López de Gómara, Columbus-Bartolomé de las Casas, or Cortés-Bernal-Díaz; that is to say, the relation between the powerful political leader and the writer or editor who composes his biography or corrects it. The paradigmatic couple would in this case be Cortés-López de Gómara.

6. Bellini writes: "Con Sarmiento il personaggio del despota incomincia ad avere consistenza propria nella letteratura ispano-americana. La figura del tiranno deviene protagonista 'de cuerpo entero,' e nella traiettoria che conduce al Novecento rappresenta una concrezione significativa" *Il mondo alucinante*, p. 7). I would say definitive rather than significant.
7. "Pero indiscutiblemente el hallazgo clave de Sarmiento consiste en identificar a Facundo con un conglomerado de cualidades étnico-psicológicas, sociales, ambientales, políticas. Es un mito, en efecto; un mito negativo, de las fuerzas bárbaras" (Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Los invariantes históricos en el Facundo* [Buenos Aires: Casa Pardo, S. A., 1974], p. 23). By literary myth I mean a story or figure that literature conceives to speak about itself and inquire about its own foundation, given that literature cannot really speak about itself except by speaking about something else. For more details see my *Los reyes: Cortázar's Mythology of Writing*, in *The Final Island: The Fiction of Julio Cortázar*, edited by Jaime Alazraki and Ivar Ivask (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 63–72.
8. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo o civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas*, fijación del texto, prólogo y apéndices de Raúl Moglia (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Peuser, 1955), p. 201.
9. I am, of course, alluding to *The Theory of the Novel*, tr. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971 [1920]), and in a somewhat simplistic fashion. In a sense, Lucacs knows that the hero of the novel is the ironic all-knowing novelist, even when his total knowledge is precisely about the impossibility of knowledge. The latest Latin American writing deconstructs irony by finally moving away from the Romantic conceit of *authority*.
10. In his "Cómo se hace una novela," *Obras completas* 10 (Barcelona: Vergara S. A., 1958), p. 861.
11. A good, though somewhat limiting, history of this may be found in Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978). An exemplary exposition of the relation of the self to literary creation is contained in Paul De Man's "Ludwig Binswanger and the Sub-

- limitation of the Self," in his *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 36–50. For a brief, though clarifying, synthesis of some current notions of the self and their relation to writing, see Sylvère Lotringer, "The 'Subject' on Trial," *Semiotext (e)* 1, no. 3 (1975), pp. 3–8, and Julia Kristeva's "The Subject in Signifying Practice," *Ibid*, pp. 19–26.
12. A significant detail here is that Cara de Angel, the dictator's secretary in *El señor presidente*, is killed by the tyrant.
 13. Some of the documentation for what I say here may be found in my *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 256–74. Beyond reviews of *El recurso* and the articles and books in which it is seen in relation to other dictator-novels, there are the following, generally not recommendable pieces: Terry J. Peavler's "A New Novel by Alejo Carpentier" (*Latin American Literary Review* 3, no. 6 [1975], pp. 31–36); Jaime Labastida's "Alejo Carpentier: Realidad y conocimiento estético. (Sobre *El recurso del método*)" (*Casa de las Americas*, no. 87 [1974], pp. 21–31); and José Vila Selma, *El 'último' Carpentier* (Madrid: Artes Gráficas Clavileño, 1978). For further bibliographical details the reader may consult the *Guía bibliográfica a Carpentier* that Klaus Müller-Bergh (University of Illinois at Chicago Circle) and I have in preparation.
 14. In my *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* I have studied the impact that the *Revista de Occidente* and in general Ortega y Gasset's publishing ventures had on Carpentier and other writers who began their work in the twenties and thirties. Vico was one of the thinkers very much in vogue during the period and a rather useful gloss of his philosophy was published then that could very well have been Carpentier's introduction to the author of *The New Science*: Richard Peters, *La estructura de la historia universal en Juan Bautista Vico*, traducción del alemán por J. Pérez Bances (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1930). I was not aware of the existence of this book when I wrote *The Pilgrim at Home*, but came upon it in the private library of my dear friend and colleague Emir Rodríguez Monegal, to whom I hereby express my gratitude. In a forthcoming book on the relationship between the notion of culture and the idea of literature in modern Latin America I take up again, from a different perspective, the topic of the relationship between European thought and Latin American literature. No serious work on the influence of Vico on Latin American letters has been done, though it is in my view a very promising subject.
 15. *Reasons of State*, translated from the Spanish by Frances Partridge (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 9. The translation reads fine but contains one crucial error: on page 197 it says "Santicló' who brought toys to children *three days* before the Three Magi . . ." It should, of course, say *thirteen*. The importance of the number lies in Carpentier's manipulation of the liturgical year, particularly of the time of Advent.
 16. Considering the "erudite" nature of Carpentier's fiction I was surprised to find in Cuba that most readers considered *El recurso del método* as his most accessible novel because they could recognize many of the incidents narrated.
 17. Carpentier had written two dictator-works before *El recurso del método: El reino de este mundo* and *El derecho de asilo. El reino de este mundo* (1949) was a fantasy of order, a secret order, wrought by the author of the prologue, as I have studied in my "Isla a su vuelo fugitiva: Carpentier y el realismo mágico" (*Revista Iberoamericana* 40, no. 86 [1974], pp. 9–64). The English version of this became the third chapter of my *Pilgrim. El derecho de asilo* (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1972) deals not so much with a dictator as with, significantly, a "Secretario de la Presidencia y Consejo de Ministros." I have devoted a few pages to this story in my book on Carpentier, but discuss it more thoroughly in "Literature and Exile: Carpentier's 'Right of Sanctuary,'" a paper delivered at Yale as part of a symposium on "Revolution/Counter-Revolution" that will appear soon. Within the arguments put forth in this paper, *El derecho de asilo* should be seen as a fiction beyond *Yo el Supremo*'s. Here the Secretary, a figure of the writer, changes countries and returns to his own as ambassador from his present one. S. Jiménez Fajardo's "Carpentier's *El derecho de asilo*: A Game Theory" (*Journal of Spanish Studies-Twentieth Century* 6 [1978], pp. 193–206) is an intelligent reading of the story.

18. My student, Isabel Vergara, has analyzed the interplay between the history of Colombia and Biblical and Christian lore in her "Mito e historia en *El otoño del patriarca*," M.A. Thesis, Cornell University, 1977.
19. "Big Mama's Wake," *Diacritics* 4, no. 4 (1974), pp. 8–17. There is, it seems to me, a clear relationship between Carpentier's dream of order in *El reino de este mundo* and its deconstruction in his dictator-novel *El recurso del método* and García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* and *El otoño del patriarca*. On the idea of order in *Cien años* I have written "With Borges in Macondo" (*Diacritics* 2, no. 1 [1972], pp. 57–60). The most suggestive work on *El otoño* is Julio Ortega's "El otoño del patriarca" (*Hispanic Review* 46 [1978], pp. 421–46), in which I find much to agree with.
20. See, for example, Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 16–17. A more detailed account of the philosophical and mythological "repression" of writing at the expense of voice may be found in Derrida's "La pharmacie de Platon," a text that first appeared in *Tel Quel* (nos. 32 and 33) and was later collected in *La dissemination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975). I am particularly indebted to this latter text for my reading of the dictator-novel.
21. It seems clear to me that Roa Bastos has read some Derrida. Rama (*Los dictadores*, p. 24) alludes vaguely and confusedly to "experimentaciones narrativas que debemos a la lingüística sistemática de hoy;" and Fouques mentions Derrida to support his own metaphorical system, based on the corpse of the dictator (the "Pharmacie," which he does not cite, would have been more useful). The most detailed and valuable criticism of *Yo el Supremo* is contained in the *Seminario sobre Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos* (Poitiers: Publications du Centre de Recherches Latino-Américaines de l'Université de Poitiers, 1976). Of the six pieces contained in this fine volume I found Rubén Bareiro Saguier's "La Historia y las historias en . . ." the most insightful because it shows how, through a figural presentation of history, Roa Bastos alludes to Stroessner. Though I admire the detailed nature of Jean Andreu's reading and learned a good deal from it ("Modalidades del relato en *Yo el Supremo* de Augusto Roa Bastos: lo Dicho, el Dictado y el Diktat"), in my view he allows himself to be blinded by Supremo's claims about his own power and fails to take into account the full import of the roles of Patiño and El Compilador. Other pieces in the volume contain good background information and curiously re-enact the polemic about Francia's good or evil nature. I was disappointed by Nicasio Perera San Martín's "La escritura del poder y el poder de la escritura," in spite of the appealing title. I also found useful background information in *Comentarios sobre Yo el Supremo* (Asunción: Ediciones Club del Libro no. 1, 1975), by Beatriz Alcalá de González Oddone, Ramiro Domínguez, Adriano Irala Burgos and Josefina Plá.
22. Oedipus means "swollen feet," according to Lévi-Strauss in his now famous essay "The Structural Study of Myth" (*Structural Anthropology*, tr. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf [New York: Anchor Books, 1967], pp. 202–28). The problems with the feet, Lévi-Strauss argues, has to do with "a universal characteristic of men born from the Earth that at the moment they emerge from the depths they cannot walk or they walk clumsily" (p. 212).
23. There can be no better definition of Text than *Yo el Supremo* itself, but Roland Barthes' "From Work to Text" offers a more conventional characterization, from which I quote the following:

The Text . . . practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as "the first stage of meaning," its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*. . . . The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define 'what the work means') but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of the symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die); the work—in the best of cases—is *moderately* symbolic (its symbolic runs out, comes to a halt); the

Text is radically symbolic . . . (*Image. Music. Text*, tr. Stephen Heath [New York: Hill and Wang, 1977], pp. 158–59)

24. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974). There is an excellent translation by Suzanne Jill Levine: *View of Dawn in the Tropics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
25. Melodrama is one of the characteristics of Cabrera Infante's work, particularly in his early stories, collected in *Así en la paz como en la guerra*. It is also a very important element in *Tres tristes tigres*, though in this book melodramatic situations are defused by breaking down the narrative sequence and mixing several strands of the plot.
26. "Dictadura e identidad," p. 65.
27. Borges is one of the quoted sources of Derrida's "La pharmacie de Platon," as he is of so much of current French criticism (See Emir Rodríguez Monegal's "Borges and *la nouvelle critique*," *Diacritics* 2, no. 2 [1972], pp. 27–34). For Borges' influence on García Márquez see my "With Borges in Macondo." The relation between Derrida's and Borges' texts should be studied in detail. One can anticipate that, besides Borges' influence on Derrida, there is also a coincidence in their sources, to wit: both Borges and Derrida refuse to read Western tradition as the product of only Graeco-Roman antiquity, choosing instead to make manifest the productive marginal and polemical contribution of the Semitic world (both Arabic and Hebraic). If Derrida seems so akin to the Hispanic tradition it is obviously because of the strong Semitic element in Spanish history. "La pharmacie de Platon" had a branch in Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* and nearly all of the important Kabbalists were from Spain. Carpentier also pays homage to this tradition in *El siglo de las luces*, a text that can be read as a Kabbalistic allegory, as I have endeavored to show in the last chapter of *The Pilgrim at Home*. One should see in relation to all this the work of my dear friend and colleague, Harold Bloom, particularly his *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).