

REWRITING THE “GREAT MAN” THEORY:
HISTORIOGRAPHIC CRITIQUE IN SPANISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a survey of postmodern historical fiction in 20th and 21st century Spanish American literature. It has diverse manifestations, but the defining characteristic of this kind of historical fiction is a rejection of any rigid distinction between historical and fictional discourse. This is a descriptive rather than a normative study: it examines how eight different authors use the techniques of postmodern historical fiction to develop implicit critiques of the “great man” theory of history. The Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle popularized this theory in the 1800s, and it asserts that biography is the proper model for history, namely, the biography of prominent individuals – “great men.” It treats these people as the source of history. Opposing this historiographic ideology, many authors of postmodern historical fiction see such figures as subjects that can be “written” and “re-written”; they are not the *source* of history, but the *product* of historical discourse. I conduct close readings of nine primary texts to elucidate how they challenge the “great man” historiography of four significant figures from Spanish American history: Montezuma, Simón Bolívar, Christopher Columbus, and Ernesto “Che” Guevara. I conclude that the historiographic critiques in these texts converge around three common strategies in their critiques: an extension of character from the

domain of fiction to the domain of history, the subversion of the literary genres of biography and autobiography, and a commitment to rewriting the traditional narratives of specific historical events.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, I propose to investigate nine examples of what critics such as Seymour Menton have called “the new historical novel” and what theorists like Linda Hutcheon have called “historiographic metafiction.” Although both terms refer to different literary models, they have important characteristics in common. For this reason, I treat them as subcategories of the same phenomenon: postmodern historical fiction. The nine texts I examine, all by Spanish American authors, correspond to four figures that have a significant place in the history of the Americas: Montezuma, Simón Bolívar, Christopher Columbus, and Ernesto “Che” Guevara. The fundamental argument of my dissertation is that many postmodern historical novels function as implicit critiques of the “great man” theory, a historiographic vision popularized by the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century. I do not analyze this theory as the exclusive property of Carlyle, but as a general tendency that finds its most explicit and complete defense in his writings.

Structurally, the dissertation consists of an Introduction, four chapters and a Conclusion. In the Introduction, I describe the main argument, the theoretical framework of the study, and the content of the following chapters. In the first chapter, I compare two novels that deal with the Aztec emperor Montezuma, *Concierto barroco* (1974) by Alejo Carpentier and *Llanto: novelas imposibles* (1992) by Carmen Boullosa. In the second, I analyze three texts that deal with Simón Bolívar, namely “El último rostro” (1978) by Álvaro Mutis, *El general en su laberinto* (1989) by Gabriel García Márquez, and *La ceniza del libertador* (1987) by Fernando Cruz Kronfly. In the third, I study two novels that feature Christopher Columbus as a protagonist: *Vigilia del almirante* (1992) by

Augusto Roa Bastos and *El arpa y la sombra* (1978) by Carpentier. The fourth deals with two works about Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *Los cuadernos de Praga* (1998) by Abel Posse and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* (1996) by Paco Ignacio Taibo II. The dissertation finishes with a Conclusion that summarizes the study, identifies and responds to possible critiques, and describes the implications of the investigation for future scholarship.

Before addressing the primary texts, I will describe the theoretical background. I begin with a key term of this study: postmodern historical fiction. As one might expect, there are several defining features that distinguish the postmodern variety of historical fiction from its traditional precursors. Seymour Menton begins his analysis in *Latin America’s New Historical Novel* with the following paradox: “In the broadest sense, every novel is historical since, in varying degrees, it portrays or captures the social environment of its characters, even the most introspective ones” (15). For Menton, the new historical novel - as a unique and independent phenomenon - is defined by a list of six characteristics: a preoccupation with philosophical matters, a distorted version of history, the use of real (not fictitious) historical figures as characters, metafiction, intertextuality, and certain concepts associated with the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. (22-24) Expanding on this definition, Menton states that new historical novels are characterized by their diversity: “in addition to these six characteristics, the New Historical Novel differs markedly from the traditional romantic historical novel in its far greater variety of modalities” (25). While Menton is referring specifically to the *romantic* historical novel in this passage, he still highlights an important point: postmodern

historical fiction tends towards a plurality of discourses. It does not limit itself to traditional models.

As a literary form, the historical novel comes from a long, old tradition. However, the new historical novel is fundamentally a product of the twentieth century. According to Menton, one of the first examples appears in 1949: *El reino de este mundo*, by Alejo Carpentier. (2) The new historical novel was not very relevant in the 1950s or 1960s, and the majority of its well-known texts appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, the flourishing of this literary tendency during that historical period corresponds with the epoch that many critics call “postmodernity.” As we will see below, this chronological correspondence is essential for a clear understanding of the literary phenomenon: it implies a shared worldview and critical strategy.

Another interesting aspect of Menton’s model is the relationship between the new historical novel and the so-called “Boom” in Latin America. Indeed, it is difficult to talk about one of these tendencies without mentioning the other. In the first chapter of his study, he observes that these two developments have many aspects in common.

Considering the historical record, he notes: “...The empirical evidence suggests that since 1979 the dominant trend in Latin American fiction has been the proliferation of New Historical Novels, the most canonical of which share with the Boom novels of the 1960s a muralistic scope, an exuberant eroticism, and a complex, neo- baroque (albeit less hermetic) structural and linguistic experimentation” (14).

While Menton does not include these stylistic features in his list of the new historical novel’s essential characteristics, they are, in my view, one important difference between this variant and the traditional version. Such stylistic considerations are secondary to my

analysis of the critique of Carlyle, so they do not occupy a central place in the chapters of this dissertation. Nevertheless, they are helpful for understanding the novels, and I include them where applicable. The comparison of these postmodern historical novels with the literature of the “Boom” helps to contextualize them.

For Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction has three basic characteristics: it is a self-conscious discourse, it erases the line separating fiction and history, and it understands history in textual terms. In her monograph “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History,” she establishes the parameters of the term:

Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel ... status in the parodic working of the textual past of both the “world” and literature. The textual incorporation of these intertextual past(s) as a constitutive structural element of postmodernist fiction functions as a formal marking of historicity-both literary and “worldly.” (4)

Many examples of postmodern metafiction appear non-mimetic; in other words, they do not correspond to or imitate reality as we know it. However, historiographic metafiction proposes a literary synthesis of historical reality and the narratological processes of metafiction - the processes that establish, in various ways, literature that refers to itself. For its authors, there is no contradiction between these categories. On the contrary, they are complementary and indeed necessary for the construction of a new approach to historiography.

Taking into account the central position of intertextuality in the work of Hutcheon and other scholars of historiographic fiction, it is worthwhile to consider the meaning of this term. Critics such as Roland Barthes have argued that intertextuality is a particular configuration of life. Describing the importance of memory, he affirms that the intertext

represents: "... the impossibility of living outside the infinite text - whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life" (36). Significantly, historiographic metafiction's understanding of the past goes hand in hand with this poststructuralist perspective. According to this kind of fiction, Hutcheon argues, "the past really did exist, but we can only 'know' that past today through its texts, and therein lies its relation to the literary" (10). For many authors, this textualist philosophy makes possible a synthesis of history and fiction, and this fact gives us a much clearer image of the perspective that underlies historiographic metafiction. According to this worldview, the text is not a mere document like a novel, an essay, or a film. It is something that, in a broad sense, constitutes or has primacy over historical reality.

Given the importance of the postmodern status of historiographic metafiction, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the two terms. For Hutcheon, "what we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality. In fiction this means that it is usually metafiction that is equated with the postmodern" (1). I have already commented on the self-reflexive nature of historiographic metafiction, but the significance of parody is not so obvious in this context, and it requires more explanation.

To better understand the importance of parody in my analysis of the primary texts, I turn to Margaret Rose's work, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-modern*. If one understands that a parodic work changes an original literary model, one sees the importance of quotations in the process: "...The function of the quotation in the parody can be said to connect and contrast disparate texts so that either their concealed identity

or lack of identity will be brought into the foreground with some comic effect” (77). What is more, the function of the parodic quotation is “to connect humorously unlike subjects in order to make ironic or startling comments on them which may be of a humorous and/or critical nature. This has the effect of both making the quoted text appear strange ... and of associating it with the work of the parodist in a manner in which it was not previously associated” (78). The parodic quotation can also involve a semantic change. Although the use of humor is not so important in the texts I examine in this study, they effect their critiques of the great man theory through an essentially parodic process. They tend to incorporate the Carlylean version of Montezuma, Columbus, Bolívar, and Guevara as essential parts of their narratives, “recontextualizing” or transforming it in order to critique it.

The models of Hutcheon and Menton are some of the most influential analyses of postmodern historical fiction, but there are various other critical approaches that help us to understand this phenomenon. One of them is Peter Elmore’s proposal in his book *La fábrica de la memoria: La crisis de la representación en la novela histórica hispanoamericana* (1997). Elmore’s focus is the problem of identity, a topic that is very relevant to this dissertation (and to the Bolivarian novels in particular). He holds that “una de las principales tareas de la novela histórica en la segunda mitad del siglo XX será, precisamente, el escrutinio y el desmantelamiento de las premisas esencialistas que sustentan a buena parte de las inquisiciones en la problemática de la identidad” (13). As we will see later, the national identities of many Latin American countries are closely related to the biography of certain “great men.” Taking seriously the phenomenon Elmore describes (and incorporating the analyses of Germán Carrera Damas and other critics), I

argue that the deconstruction of the Carlylean version of those figures implies the rewriting of official national identities.

Another critic that has studied postmodern historical fiction is Magdalena Perkowska. In her book *Historias híbridas: la nueva novela histórica latinoamericana*, she cites Menton's model to analyze several historical novels written at the end of the twentieth century. More specifically, the purpose of the work is to study this literary tendency "...como un locus ficcional de la reflexión acerca de la historia y el discurso histórico, producido en el contexto de las crisis actuales de las sociedades redemocratizadas y en la encrucijada de los debates posmodernos sobre la historia y el conocimiento histórico, tanto los globales ... como los específicamente latinoamericanos" (36). Like other studies, Perkowska's analysis holds that this kind of narrative erases the division between fiction and history. According to her, "...puede concebirse como un espacio discursivo ficcional en el que se articulan lecturas y reescrituras presentes del texto de la historia" (37) Although she uses analytical categories similar to those of Hutcheon and Menton (like the notions of hybrid discourse and rewriting), Perkowska's work distinguishes itself by placing postmodern historiographic fiction in a particular historical period: the late 20th century.

What is more, Perkowska helps us to understand what postmodern historical fiction is in a specifically Latin American context. The author tells us that there are two divergent schools among the intellectuals of the region:

Por un lado, son conscientes de que en tanto una exportación europeo-norteamericana, lo posmoderno puede resultar una nueva forma de hegemonía cultural y, por el otro, reconocen que re-leído y re-escrito de acuerdo con las condiciones sociales y culturales históricas del subcontinente, lo posmoderno puede devenir una teoría propia, un nuevo sistema de representación de las

relaciones sociales y culturales latinoamericanas a fines del siglo XX y a principios del XXI. (82)

If the “great man” theory represents a Western historical legacy that writers want to reject, they also seek to rewrite postmodernism. In a broad sense, her approach to postmodernism does not focus on “European-North American” cultural production or on international culture. It is a reworking of the movement with the goal of addressing the national experiences of Latin American countries, and, more specifically, national myths. Given that each “great man” in this study is connected to a certain national myth, this concept is the link between general postmodernism and the realities of particular countries.

Although the relationship between fiction and history is mainly within the purview of literary critics, various historians have contributed to our understanding of the topic. One of the most important is Hayden White, who, in his essay “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” explores the nexus between the two categories. (21) According to him, both are processes that produce meaning. Adding the third category of myth, he makes the following observation:

The systems of meaning-production shared by all three are distillates of the historical experience of a people, a group, a culture. And the knowledge provided by narrative history is that which results from the testing of the systems of meaning-production originally elaborated in myth and refined in the alembic of the hypothetical mode of fictional articulation. In the historical narrative, experiences distilled into fiction as *typifications* are subjected to the test of their capacity to endow “real” events with meaning. (21)

Seen from this perspective, the project of postmodern historical fiction is not something completely new. Narrative elements have always been part of the discipline of history, and the postmodern historical novel simply recognizes this reality in a self-conscious

way. In terms of the primary texts I study in this dissertation, the theory of the “great man” is presented less as a real theory and more as a historical narrative. In a strict sense, a theory is a relatively complete explanation of some phenomenon that is based on empirical evidence. For many authors of postmodern historical fiction, this is simply not valid in the domain of history.

To establish a model of the characteristics of the postmodern historical novel, one must place that tendency in the broader category of the historical novel. In a narratological study of historiographic metafiction, the critic Ansgar Nünning offers a useful typology. Nünning identifies five kinds of historical fiction: documentary historical novels, historical realist novels, revisionist historical novels, metahistorical novels, and historiographic metafiction. The first two correspond to the classical historical novel, and are defined in this way: “Documentary historical novels tend to foreground the conventionally backgrounded factual world. Traditional or realist historical novels ... foreground a fictitious plot against the background of some identifiable historical context” (361). These have an important point in common: the historical environment they portray does not present a rewriting of standard historical narratives. Generally, they do not offer a critique of traditional historical discourse.

On the other hand, the other three terms are united by the process of rewriting that they carry out. For Nünning, “revisionist novels rewrite history, but in contrast to historiographic metafiction they lack elements that break the aesthetic illusion and thus foreground the fictionality of a text” (361-362). In this way, they lack the self-conscious or auto-reflexive nature that characterizes metafiction. Although metahistorical novels are quite similar to historiographic metafiction, they differ in their orientation to time.

The first focuses on the present, while the second focuses on the past:

...What they [metahistorical novels] highlight is the process of historical reconstruction and the protagonists' consciousness of the past rather than a represented historical world as such. Instead of portraying a historical world on the diegetic level of the characters, metahistorical novels are generally set in the present but concerned with the appropriation, revision, and transmission of history. (364)

This observation touches upon an important point. Although both types of novel rewrite history in a similar manner, historiographic metafiction deals with the past as an object of study, and metahistorical fiction is concerned with the subjective dimension of the same. These are significant differences, but I believe that the similarities between Nünning's latter three terms, along with their comparability to Menton's model, justifies the use of the collective term "postmodern historical fiction."

Terry Eagleton's book *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is not a study of postmodern historical fiction, but it has important theoretical implications for my study. Eagleton describes the origin of aesthetics in the following way:

Aesthetics is born of a discourse of the body.... The distinction which the term 'aesthetic' originally enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not one between 'art' and 'life,' but between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind. (13)

On this account, aesthetics is not reducible to an evaluation of the external world. One cannot discuss it without talking about value judgments, but at root, it is a kind of bodily discourse. More specifically, it links the external world, the world of perception, with the individual person. Continuing his analysis, Eagleton comments on the status of the great man theory in Victorian England: "As far as the Victorian bourgeoisie is concerned, the nostalgic neo-feudalism of a Carlyle or a Ruskin can neither be credited nor entirely

disowned: eccentric and risibly unreal though such visions may be, they are nevertheless a source of ideological stimulus and moral edification which the market place ... is distressingly unable to provide” (63). Seen from this perspective, the “great man” and his heroism are a mechanism of social control. The focus on a concrete historical individual - a body - establishes the link between the Carlylean vision and aesthetics. In other words, “the aesthetic is one answer to this vexed question of how values are to be derived, in a condition where neither civil society nor the political state would seem to provide such values with a particularly plausible foundation” (63). Carlyle’s historiography has a distinct ideological function.

Other critics have interpreted Carlyle in a similar way. John D. Rosenberg, for example, sees Carlyle’s historiography as a defense of a heroic hierarchy in the context of a decline of traditional social hierarchies. Describing Carlyle’s book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, he affirms that “its attempt to substitute a new ‘Heroarchy’ for a vanishing secular and religious authority is simplistic and alarming,” and that “*On Heroes* was written out of fear that the post-Revolutionary world was drifting into anarchy” (116). In the postmodern historical novels that I study in this dissertation, one can see an implicit critique of that ideology. This is precisely why Eagleton’s analysis is relevant.

In this dissertation, I argue that certain novels rewrite history through a dialogue with the “great man” theory. According to Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish writer who popularized this historiographic vision, one should understand history as the biography of certain prominent individuals. The title of critic Lowell T. Frye’s essay, “History as Biography, Biography as History” summarizes Carlyle’s theory well. As Frye notes,

Carlyle unites these concepts in his main two works: “On History” (1830) and *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) (133). For the Scottish writer, biography and history are equivalent.

As Carlyle explains in the most developed version of the theory, *On Heroes*, “All things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these” (21). While this idea is not limited to describing the function of the “great man,” the historical event is not as important as the individual that caused it, and the biography of that person is analytically prior to other historical factors.

According to Carlyle, “great man” is a general term, and there are various subcategories. In *On Heroes*, he identifies six, which correspond to the titles of the book’s chapters: the hero as divinity, the hero as prophet, the hero as poet, the hero as priest, the hero as man of letters, and the hero as king. In the context of my study, the most important subcategory is the sixth one. For Carlyle, the term “king” is broad: it refers to any “great man” of *political* importance, and he describes it as the prototype of the five other subcategories. He writes:

The Commander over Men; he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated, and loyally surrender themselves, and find their welfare in doing so, may be reckoned the most important of Great Men. He is practically the *summary* for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual integrity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to do. (162)

All of the historical figures I analyze in this dissertation - Montezuma, Columbus, Bolivar, and Che Guevara - correspond to this kind of “great man.” Be it as emperor of

the Aztecs, representative of the Spanish crown, “liberator” of the new American republics, or revolutionary, each one fulfills a fundamentally political role. They were agents of state power, and functioned as “commanders over men.” For this reason, the novels’ critique of Carlyle’s historiography necessarily has political implications. In these works, the ideology of the “great man,” although false, is part of the life experience of Latin Americans and must be criticized or overcome.

Unlike many authors of postmodern historical fiction, Carlyle and his followers affirm a radically humanist version of history. Here, the definition of the philosopher Louis Althusser is useful. According to him, humanism consists of two propositions: “that there is a universal essence of man” and “that this essence is the attribute of ‘each single individual’ who is its real subject” (“Marxism and Humanism” 228). What is more, he tells us, “if these empirical individuals are to be men, it is essential that each carries in himself the whole human essence, if not in fact, at least in principle; this implies an idealism of the essence” (228). The historiography of the “great man” identifies a certain subject as the origin or source of historical events; the will of this subject produces history. On the other hand, postmodern historical fiction generally defends an anti-humanist perspective. According to this viewpoint, subjects are the result of discourses, social structures, or events. In this regard, postmodern historical fiction is the direct opposite of approaches like the “great man” theory.

To analyze the Carlylean perspective as the target of postmodern critique, it is helpful to consider the function of modernism. In *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman helps us to understand the Carlylean vision as a basically modern phenomenon. In this context, the notion of disequilibrium is crucial: “To be modern is to

find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (15). This dialectic is linked to what Berman calls “the great romance of construction, a crucial force in modernism from Carlyle and Marx to Tatlin and Calder, Le Corbussier and Frank Lloyd Wright, Mark di Suvero and Robert Smithson” (30). The humanism of a figure like Carlyle affirms that progress is possible, and that people can rationally construct society. For him, the “great man” is the driving force of this construction. Postmodern theory rejects this idea. It recognizes the instability that Berman describes, but it lacks the kind of optimism about progress that Carlyle has.

By placing Montezuma, Bolívar, Columbus, and Guevara at the center of their narratives and simultaneously rejecting humanism, the kind of historical fiction I analyze contains an implicit critique of the “great man” theory. The novels I analyze are based on the subversion of the Carlylean model. What does this imply with respect to postmodernism? In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon claims that the concept of “totalizing representation” is the fundamental difference between the postmodern approach to history and other historiographic orientations. For her, this notion is defined as “...the process by which writers of history, fiction, or even theory render their materials coherent, continuous, unified – but always with an eye to the control and mastery of those materials, even at the risk of doing violence to them” (63). In other words, the traditional historian seeks a global, final, objective explanation of the past. The postmodern historian questions the distinction that is implicit in this perspective: the discovery of a historical model versus the invention of one. Thus, “historical meaning may thus be seen today as

unstable, contextual, relational, and provisional, but postmodernism argues that in fact, it has always been so. And it uses novelistic representations to underline the narrative nature of much of that knowledge” (35). For the postmodern novelist, historian, or theorist, the notion of a scientific, objective historiography is a fallacy.

Although the work of the historian E.H. Carr precedes postmodernism and uses an essentially Marxist approach, it anticipates the above-mentioned distinction between discovery and invention. What is more, it helps us understand the questioning of objectivity that is present in so much postmodern historical fiction. In *What is History?* Carr describes the dichotomy between “facts of the past” and “facts of history.” He illustrates the difference between these terms with an example from Roman history: “It is a historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or after since interests nobody at all” (5-6). This implies that there is no “hard core of historical facts existing independently of the interpretation of the historian” (6). Absolute historical objectivity does not exist, and historians always take positions and interpret.

Thus, the historiographic act does not consist of the mere discovery of a neutral past. It always involves the selection of particular facts and the invention of models that correspond to them. Conscious of this process, the authors of postmodern historical novels can interweave the (apparently) distinct discourses of history and fiction. In contrast to traditional historical fiction, the postmodern variety is aware of the discovery-invention and the past-history dichotomies, and tends to make them themes. Frequently, the novels I examine in this dissertation feature historical figures that deliberately invent

their own historical identities.

In his book *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel*, literary critic Alan Robinson introduces a term that enriches our understanding of the above concepts: the notion of the “present past.” According to Robinson, even when historical fiction tries to present an objective image of the past (the “past present”), it tends to do something else: “...historiographic emplotments inevitably select matters of perceived relevance to the present, which, in retrospect, can recognize that particular events had or would come to have a significance of which historical agents at the time were usually unaware” (46). The result of this, Robinson argues, is that “historically fluctuating assessments of this significance are reflected in what a particular time and place is constructed as a usable *present past*” (46). Historical postmodern fiction is often conscious of this dynamic, and all the novels I study in this dissertation connect their treatment of past “great men” to contemporary questions (such as nationalism). The phenomenon of the present past has always existed in historiographic fiction, but postmodern novels recognize this fact and use it in a critical way.

Chapter 1, “Carlylean Historiography and the pre-Colombian World: Montezuma in *Concierto Barroco* and *Llanto: novelas imposibles*,” focuses on the representation of Montezuma in the novels of Carpentier and Boullosa. Although Carpentier wrote before the flourishing of postmodern historical fiction, his works serve as an important transition from the traditional historical novel. As José Miguel Oviedo points out in his *Historia de la literatura latinoamericana*, the author is known for his defense of a baroque aesthetic in his treatment of diverse social, cultural, and historical topics (507). His understanding

of the baroque and the postmodern historiography of other authors have significant similarities. Oviedo describes how this relationship manifests itself in *Concierto barroco*:

Tiene un complejo diseño narrativo que utiliza – como esa forma de composición musical una precisa gama de temas, tonos, motivos, timbres, variaciones y asociaciones estéticas. En sus apretadas páginas, Carpentier hace una suntuosa travesía que liga los más dispares personajes, ambientes, y situaciones: Vivaldi y un músico cubano, Stravinski y Louis Armstrong; Shakespeare y México, Moctezuma y Silvestre de Balboa, Turner y Wagner, Haendel y Scarlatti, etc. (523-524)

The structure of the novel, with its unique presentation and juxtaposition of these elements, suggests a nonlinear approach to history. In his stylistic reading of the novel, Camilo Rubén Fernández Cozmán extends the implications of such a structure: “la figura literaria que se manifiesta es el oxímoron, pues hay la lucha entre dos isotopías: la del desorden [barroco] y la de la armonía [concierto]. La instancia de la enunciación privilegia la isotopía del desorden; sin embargo, posteriormente se produce un intercambio de semas y de significados.” In the logic of the novel, the representations of Montezuma and other figures reveal a fundamental contradiction: the desire to understand history as narrative (order) versus the lack of belief in global, completely rational explanations.

While the comments of Oviedo and Fernández Cozmán provide useful context for the approaching the novel, my analysis of it focuses on two other lines of inquiry. Referencing Shelly Jarrett Bromberg’s article “Which Way Did He Go? Identity, Culture, and Nation in Alejo Carpentier’s *Concierto Barroco*,” I explore how Carpentier’s view of the baroque goes hand in hand with a historiography. In the chapter, I argue that the fluid conception of historical identity in Carpentier’s *barroquismo* closely accords with a postmodern, anti-humanist framework. It implies a view of historical agency

fundamentally at odds with the “great man” theory. Ultimately, the novel’s title points to a historical worldview that anticipates later postmodern historiography. Along with the line of inquiry Bromberg proposes, I turn to Roberto González Echevarría’s reading of the text in *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* to explain how Carpentier rewrites a specific historical event: the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Thus, along with critiquing humanist historiography, Carpentier’s novel engages in historical rewriting. It features a playful, creative reworking of history that puts it at odds with traditional historical fiction. Aside from marking it as an early example of postmodern historical fiction, this evinces a view of history as open and incomplete. Unlike other novels, *Concierto barroco* does not feature the “great man” figure (Montezuma) as a character. Nevertheless, it clearly functions as a critique of “great man” historiography by presenting another character as his impersonator.

Carmen Boullosa’s novel has a unique approach to the question of Montezuma’s historical representation. Analyzing the work of this Mexican author with Hutcheon’s theoretical framework, Carrie C. Chorba describes the vision that informs Boullosa’s recent novels. According to her, the novelist wants “...to create upon a historical basis, to surpass historiography with her imagination, to continue a history's intertextual discourse, and to enshrine a new version – one which is grounded in past documents, but has a decidedly new perspective or optic” (302). More specifically, in *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, Boullosa examines the diverse historical interpretations of Montezuma, arguing that they produce a fundamental problem: “the futility of a realistic interpretation of the ancient world of Mexico” (303). Boullosa’s works are defined by the idea of multiple historical discourses and a critique of absolute historical objectivity. I propose

that the novel's critique of Carlyle historiography has two dimensions. The first of these is a rejection of historical objectivity in favor of intertextuality. For Boullosa, history can never be the result of a "great man" like Montezuma, since he functions as a mere participant in different discourses. The second is an implicit feminist critique of the "great *man*" theory. In this novel, the Carlylean historiographic tradition is understood as a masculine perspective. Commenting on the treatment of gender in *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, Inés Ferrero Cárdenas writes:

...This second reading is instigated by the sub-novel which narrates the wandering of dust particles, those bodies who did not attain materiality and who have become a murmur, an absence that only gains presence through 'another voice' that compels the fictional authors to write. These 'silent' voices, metaphorically expressed as dust particles travelling with the wind, refer to the role indigenous women played in history and recover one of its more representative figures, la Malinche. (110)

For Boullosa, the affirmation of feminine perspectives goes hand in hand with the rejection of Carlylean historiography, which denies greatness to women.

Before turning to the next chapter, it is worth mentioning that the case of Montezuma presents us with an interesting question: how can Carlyle's theory be relevant to the premodern, pre-Columbian world? Mexican historiography typically presents the emperor in a negative light. For Patrick Johansson, he has traditionally been a tragic figure, and the interpretation of his legacy tends towards one of two poles: Montezuma as "cobarde" (29) and Montezuma as "la víctima de trágicas circunstancias históricas" (29). After comparing and analyzing original Nahuatl texts, Johansson concludes that "nunca sabemos, quizás con certeza cuáles fueron las circunstancias en las que murió el rey mexica pero los textos aquí aducidos expresan cuál era la muerte indígena que correspondía a la trágica vida del último *tlahtoani* de un imperio que llegaba a su fin"

(53). In any event, traditional historiography identifies a specific historical event with a phase of Montezuma's biography. Once more, this approach corresponds to Carlyle's historiography not because it identifies a historical figure as "great," but because it tends to understand history as biography.

Bolivarian historiography offers us one of the clearest, most illustrative, and paradigmatic examples of the "great man" theory in a Spanish American context. In his study, *El culto a Bolívar: Esbozo para un estudio de la historia de las ideas en Venezuela*, the historian Germán Carrera Damas argues that the biographies of Bolívar are characterized by "...su monotonía interpretativa y su transcurrir anecdótico. En su mayor parte, no ha superado el nivel de las vidas de santos con intención evangelizadora, y ni siquiera es posible afirmar que sus más relevantes exponentes hayan conseguido eludir la infiltración anecdótica" (41). This historiographic tradition has almost always represented Bolívar as "una figura suprema y creadora, susceptible de personificar lo más elevado y puro del alma humana al igual que la perfectabilidad del hombre" (41). For that reason, Bolívar belongs to what Carrera Damas has called "el mito carlyleano" (*Venezuela: Proyecto nacional y poder social* 238). This is not a figurative use of the term myth, as Carlylean historiography promotes the adulation of the "great man" and often conveys a pseudo-religious tone. Many ancient myths have semi-divine figures as protagonists, and the standard versions of Bolívar's biography are not so different in this regard.

Each one of the Bolivarian novels I analyze in Chapter 2 makes use of the mythical version of Bolívar, following the guidelines of postmodern historiography to criticize and subvert it. This technique sends a clear message to the attentive reader: history is a valid discipline and the past is real, but there is no final and truly objective

interpretation of its events. The purpose of postmodern historical fiction is not the denial of the past or the invention of completely new, alternative pasts. However, it does attempt to rewrite dominant narratives *about* historical events and subjects. Along with the historiographic critique they carry out, the Bolivarian novels have another interesting aspect. They serve as works of social criticism, and more specifically, as critiques of nationalist ideology. In the Venezuelan context, Carrera Damas points out, Bolívar is not only the “Liberator”: he is also “Father of the Country.” In large part, the official national identity of Venezuela is bound up with this title. Bolívar appears as the progenitor of the nation:

La confirmación del Padre de la Patria es un hecho histórico de singular trascendencia para los venezolanos.... Pero la condición de Padre de la Patria reconocida a Bolívar desborda bastante los límites de esa transfiguración histórica, porque en esa designación va implícita la noción de creador mismo de la Patria, del supremo hacedor, y una vez admitido esto se derivan consecuencias lógicas que llevan el pensamiento por caminos característicos. (*El culto a Bolívar* 96)

This dynamic is analogous to the phenomenon described by Eagleton above. A concrete historical individual is described in biological terms (as the father of a child), and this serves to inspire a kind of “national love.” In the chapter that deals with the three Bolivarian novels, “Bolívar, Myth, and History in ‘El último rostro,’ *El general en su laberinto*, and *La ceniza del libertador*,” I will demonstrate how the critique of this ideology and the critique of Carlyle’s historiography are interrelated.

The Bolivarian novels I study are variations on the same biographical model, and they have a lot of content in common but offer divergent approaches to postmodern historical fiction; the shared biographical theme is similar to a scientific control. In “El último rostro,” the Colombian Álvaro Mutis functions as a postmodern historiographer.

According to Rodolfo de Roux, history for Mutis is fundamentally an irrational process, if it can even be called a process at all. Alluding to Shakespeare, de Roux describes Mutis's vision: "...la historia humana es un cuento contado por un idiota; algo sin sentido" (229). Citing the author himself, Roux expands this description: "Lo que le fascina a Mutis de la historia es que se trata de una ficción con vidas reales que le permite la contemplación, sin posibilidad de remedio, del vano espectáculo del poder que será corroído inexorablemente por la muerte" (230). From his perspective, Mutis's text exemplifies Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction: it is a discourse that erases the lines between fiction and history. For Mutis, history is not a privileged explanation of the past: it is just one of multiple explanations. Along with the line of inquiry that Roux identifies, I also use Menton's analysis of the death mask in *La novela colombiana: planetas y satélites* and John T. Cull's comments on death as an emblem in order to problematize the issue of historical identity in Mutis's narrative.

In *La novela colombiana*, Menton explains how the story is structured by the image of the "rostro," the face. One of the characters, Colonel Napierski, describes the various faces of Bolívar that he has seen throughout the general's life, and "en efecto, la palabra 'rostro' aparece en el texto siete veces, sin contar el título y el epígrafe; la palabra más común y menos literaria, 'cara', no aparece ni siquiera una vez." (306). This relates to the face as mask: "...se le da más importancia a la máscara arquetípica de la muerte, que se justifica artísticamente como una elaboración del epígrafe" (306). I will argue that this trope leads to a questioning of Bolívar as agent of history.

Gabriel García Márquez' novel, *El general en su laberinto*, is perhaps the most well-known example of Bolivarian fiction, and is a paradigm of the subgenre. It offers

two principal characteristics: the self-insertion of García Márquez into the text and the emphasis on the corporeal representation of Bolívar. In this regard, my analysis expands on Isabel Álvarez Borland's and Silvio Sírías's readings of the novel. According to Álvarez Borland, the notion of historiographic metafiction captures the literary strategy of the book. She argues that the text is based, implicitly, on the actions of a fictional historian: "*El general* can be considered a historiographic metafiction because it dramatizes the process of historical reconstruction by means of a fictional historian who confronts the process of how official history is created" (439). For Álvarez Borland, "the critique of the historical process and the task of the historian in his recreation of Bolívar's fictional world takes various dimensions which are interrelated" (439). Who is this historian? For Álvarez Borland, the author himself fulfills this role: García Márquez tries to critically evaluate the "official history" (440) of Bolívar's life. She alludes to the author's Nobel Prize acceptance speech as evidence of his voice: "By having the fictional Bolívar argue García Márquez's own ideas regarding the Latin American predicament, the author is giving historical resonance to his own words" (444-45). Thus, it is worth considering one of García Márquez's statements from the afterword: "...los fundamentos históricos me preocupaban poco, pues el último viaje por el río es el tiempo menos documentado de la vida de Bolívar..." (258). In other words, he chose the part of Bolívar's life that would allow him the most artistic license.

The critic Silvio Sírías analyzes the novel in terms of the degradation or disintegration of the protagonist. The "Liberator" has experienced not only psychological degradation (as a result of the failure of his pan-American political project) but also physical decline. Sírías explains: "He [García Márquez] incorporates and magnifies the

human flaws and frailties of the historical figures in the retelling of the last days of the General's life. In doing so, however, García Márquez defamiliarizes for us the myth surrounding Bolívar.... Thus, the legend is disrupted and in the process the narrative enables the reader to examine the Liberator's life afresh" (188-189). In terms of Carlylean historiography, we must remember that the "great man" is a hero, and one of the traditional characteristics of this figure is strength. In the section of *On Heroes* that deals with the political hero, Carlyle describes this figure as a strong, powerful, and capable figure: "He is called Rex, Regulator, Roi: our own name is still better; King, Konning, which means Can-ning, *Able-man*" (162, emphasis added).

How does the novel *La ceniza del libertador* diverge from the other Bolivarian texts that I study in this chapter? The principal difference arises from Cruz Kronfly's attitude towards Bolívar's final voyage along the Magdalena River. He is concerned less with historical verisimilitude than Mutis or García Márquez. Recognizing that this voyage is not well documented, the critic Orlando Mejía Rivera says: "En la novela de Fernando la historia está al servicio de la ficción y no al contrario. Esto significa que los episodios biográficos, todos documentados, son interpretados de una manera libre por su Bolívar y le sirven para dar contenido a sus reflexiones y también a sus momentos delirantes" (21). Mejía Rivera adds: "En la novela de Gabo la historia es respetada de manera milimétrica por la ficción. La historia conserva el estatuto clásico de lo verdadero y la ficción se inclina con respeto ante los documentos históricos" (23). All of the Bolivarian novels are based on the same historical context, but Cruz Kronfly treats the facts of this context as the primary materials for the construction of his own history, and *La ceniza del libertador* evinces a more radical rewriting strategy. Cruz Kronfly subverts

Carlylean historiography by affirming the primacy of the narrative process over the facts of Bolívar's life, treating this "great man" as the creation and not the creator of history.

The narrative process replaces the role of the "great man."

Chapter 3, "Contesting Columbus: Historiography in the Columbian Narratives of Augusto Roa Bastos and Alejo Carpentier," focuses on one of the most controversial figures in the history of the Americas: Christopher Columbus. Extremely polarizing, people view him either as a heroic explorer or an oppressive colonizer. While many accounts of Columbus's life defend one of these two interpretations, the novels I consider in this chapter, Carpentier's *El arpa y la sombra* and Roa Bastos's *La vigilia del almirante*, try a different approach altogether. Michael Hardin describes this approach as a rejection of victimhood:

Instead of bemoaning their position as victims of history, and in the process reinscribing the hegemonic structure, these writers have chosen to challenge, undermine, or rewrite the historical narratives of the dominant culture. History, as it has been written by western Europe and the United States, has not, until recently, been recognized as a construct of a certain temporal perspective that has been used to validate the existing authority. (25)

Both poles of interpretation of Columbus correspond to Carlyle's historiography, since they envision a period of history through Columbus's life, but the novels I analyze go beyond those extremes.

Neither of the texts deny the history of oppression that Columbus represents for many Latin Americans. However, they do try to overcome the traditional discourse of victimization. Hardin observes: "To escape the consequences of the colonizer or conqueror's history, one must forget the history or must challenge the basic assumption that history is a true representation" (26). Carpentier and Roa Bastos both try to rewrite the dominant way of understanding history.

Along with the political dimension of his legacy, my examination of the novels emphasizes Columbus's awareness of his own historicity. Frederico Acevedo's "Cristóbal Colón y la literatura" analyzes the representations of the Spanish explorer in the novels of Carpentier and Roa Bastos. Affirming that "...el fundamento de su hazaña histórica es el recurso de la intertextualidad," (146) he describes a Columbus who recognizes his voyage to the Americas as an important historical act and wants to represent himself as an historical agent. According to Acevedo, "desde el primer momento ... Colón manipuló el saber de los libros y mapas, alteró los cálculos y las distancias estimadas, para obligarlos a decir lo que deseaba" (147). Acevedo adds: "una vez entra en contacto con la nueva realidad americana, pretende asimilarla a lo escrito en aquellos libros y muestra hacia ellos una fidelidad que no había observado antes, cuando elaboraba su proyecto" (147). This task is deeply contradictory, since Columbus's descriptions simply do not correspond to the reality of the Americas. He uses the strategy of intertextuality to try to suppress the contradiction: "...Colón echa mano de otros textos, de otras citas, de otras palabras para colmar la brecha que esos datos empíricos provocan en su sistema de representación" (150). In other words, Columbus manipulated and distorted the facts to construct his identity as a "discoverer." Acevedo's observations give us a very clear image of the project of the postmodern historical novel. If Carlylean historiography represents Bolívar as a "liberator," it tends to represent Columbus as the "discoverer" of the Americas. Columbus, aware of the intertextuality of history, tries to present himself as just that. Ironically, he comes to be a "great man" through the same literary strategy that underlies the postmodern historical novel. From this perspective, even "great men" are the products (not the producers) of historical discourse, and Carlylean historiography is

completely inverted.

In spite of their similar subject matter, the novels of Roa Bastos and Carpentier use different approaches to the question of Columbus. Roa Bastos's novel operates through the strategy of humanization, the same process that exists in García Márquez's book. As Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego points out, the Paraguayan author explained that he wanted to "recuperar la carnadura del hombre común" (449) in the novel. Although it follows the conventions of biography, Cornejo-Parriego explains that it is a paradigmatic example of postmodern historical fiction: "...Roa Bastos expresa, una vez más, su constante afán por la revisión y la escritura/re-escritura de la historia y reflexiona sobre el poder de ésta. La vinculación de escritura, historia y autoridad se convierte, pues, en uno de los principales ejes narrativos de la novela sobre el Almirante..." (450).

How does Carpentier's novel compare with *Vigilia*? To answer this question, one should be aware that Carpentier also presents a process of humanization. Unlike the process we see in García Márquez and Roa Bastos, his kind of humanization is based upon an autobiographical narrative structure. Roberto González Echevarría explains how "...El protagonista de *El arpa y la sombra* es Cristóbal Colón recordando su vida en el lecho de muerte – técnicamente haciendo el acto de contricción, pues espera al confesor que le ha de administrar los últimos oleos – , y releendo algunos de los textos que escribió sobre su famosa hazaña" (161). González Echevarría adds about Columbus's death, "el archivo no canoniza" (164). My reading of the novel will emphasize that Columbus's humanization is a critique of the pseudo-religious aspect of Carlyle's historiography: the "great man" as a recipient of adoration, worship and devotion. Carpentier's Columbus is the object of a failed canonization process by the Church.

Chapter 4, “Rewriting the Revolutionary: Abel Posse’s and Paco Ignacio Taibo II’s New Approaches to Understanding Che Guevara,” considers texts about the Argentine-Cuban revolutionary. As they do with Bolívar, many Latin Americans consider Guevara a liberator, and some represent him as a semi-divine figure. Commenting on this tendency, Luis Correa-Díaz observes: “El Che no solamente ha alcanzado el *status* de una especie de santo y mártir laico ... sino que ha sido cristificado: se piensa en él como en el propio Cristo, incluso se sabe que el guerrillero se identificaba con esta figura en no pocos momentos” (257). The result, Correa-Díaz explains, is that he is often represented as a regional manifestation of Christ: “El *Che* Guevara es (entre nosotros), como lo expresa desde su título la canción del argentino Daniel Toro, el ‘Cristo americano’” (257). It is certainly true that Guevara is a controversial figure in the region, and that many have a negative opinion of him. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that many representations of the revolutionary are a modern manifestation of the great man theory. Guevara exemplifies two crucial aspects of Carlyle’s historiography: the hero as producer and source of history and the hero as an object of adulation. The texts that I analyze in this dissertation criticize this mythical version of Guevara through the same strategy: a destabilization of his identity informed by reference to his own writings. As with the case of Columbus, these books present to the reader a “great man” that is not the producer of history, but the result of historical discourse.

To understand the significance of employing Guevara’s own writings against the great man theory, one must understand his place in the Marxist tradition. If the approach of classical Marxism emphasizes the role of the proletariat as a collective revolutionary subject, Guevara represents a rather different position. In a famous treatise on guerrilla

warfare, he describes the “foco” theory, based on the idea that “it is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist” (47). Guerrillas can consciously, willfully create a revolutionary situation through military action - even if the masses are not in motion. There are clear differences between the politics of Carlyle and Guevara, but both defend the role of special individuals as the drivers of historical and social progress. The construction of Guevara as a “great man” relates to his elevated status in the culture and political life of Cuba, and his personal writings trace his features.

The notion of *foco* is clearly imbued with a “heroic” vision, also a core attribute of Carlyle’s theory. Reminding one of the pseudo-religious tone of Carlyle historiography, Guevara describes the guerrilla as a priest and ascetic (79). What is more, he stresses “the organization, combat capacity, *heroism, and spirit* of the guerrilla band” (103, emphasis added). Guevara connects heroism to a project of national construction: “These [guerrilla] courses should offer elementary notions about the history of the country, explained with a clear sense of the economic facts that motivate each of the historic acts; accounts of the national heroes and their manner of reacting when confronted with certain injustices; and afterwards an analysis of the national situation or of the situation in the zone...” (151). Guevara’s political project has clear similarities with Bolivar’s: in both cases, heroic individuals serve as the basis of a collective identity.

In relation to postmodern historical fiction, this centrality of the individual and the hero are at the core of the Guevarian texts I study. In the first one, *Los cuadernos de Praga*, the discourse is (appropriately) autobiography, and this fact corresponds with one of the pillars of Carlyle’s historiography: the notion that history is biography and vice versa. In his analysis of this novel and *The Death of Che Guevara* by Jay Cantor, Frans

Weiser describes the function of (auto)biography in critiques of Guevara's myth:

Both novels initially present themselves as documents, and as such appear to obey the apparent structures and strictures of the traditional realist fiction in order to eventually subvert blind acceptance of historical texts – be they autobiography or biography – as objective and singular. When the authors claim in their ‘false documents’ to merely mediate an already existing text rather than invent it, they also parody the role of the historian who ostensibly relates (rather than creates) the events of a particular period. (703)

Posse and Cantor accept the current preeminence of this genre as a primary historical source, and use its own characteristics to criticize it or destabilize it. Therefore, pursuing that line of inquiry, my analysis of Posse's novel focuses on its problematization of biography and autobiography as historical sources.

As I have pointed out, one of the defining characteristics of postmodern historical fiction is its blurring (or erasure) of the distinction between history and fiction. The last text I consider, the Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*, offers a unique example of this dynamic. More specifically, it is a manifestation of postmodern historical fiction in a book that, at first, seems like a straightforward, traditional biography. I will argue that while the other texts take fiction as their basis and incorporate postmodern historiographic elements, Taibo's work takes biographical historiography as its template and incorporates postmodern fictional elements. They arise from different models, but converge in the same discursive territory. In his review of the book, Stephan Scheuzger describes how Taibo blends aspects of fiction and history: “El estilo corresponde con el tema, el autor sabe llamar la atención, guiar, sin imponerse, dejar libres para la reflexión los espacios que abrió la descripción. Las numerosas y a veces extensas citas del Che, que está entrelazadas en el texto, en ocasiones parecen borrar los límites entre biografía y autobiografía (¿quién está

contando?)” (201). The elements that Scheuzger identifies - the concern for stylistics, the opportunities for readers to construct Che Guevara’s life, the building of a narrative, and the experimentation with narrative voice - all suggest that this book cannot be reduced to a work of standard history or biography.

In an interview published in the journal *Caravelle*, Taibo’s comments illuminate his *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*. Although he had previously viewed history and literature as two separate categories, his perspective has evolved: “Luego empezó a cautivarme cada vez más la idea de trabajar en la historia y en la literatura como géneros paralelos e intercambiables” (284). He also affirms that, in this evolution, “...el problema era un problema de narrativa, de cómo contar historias que uno tenía, con las libertades de la ficción, con las medio libertades de la novela histórica, y buscar las zonas de cruce, las zonas pantanosas” (284). Without using the term, Taibo confirms that he is cultivating a type of postmodern historical fiction, the author’s intertextual project.

How does the text relate to the central theme of this dissertation, namely, the “great man” theory? My analysis of Taibo’s book focuses on the same dimension as my treatment of Posse’s novel: the subversion of biography and autobiography as final, authoritative kinds of historical discourse. Taibo’s conscious narrativization of Guevara’s life (and insistence that readers have space to construct the revolutionary’s biography) suggests that so-called “great men” are less the producers of history than products of historical discourse. If history and literature are interchangeable (as Taibo suggests in his *Caravelle* interview) Guevara becomes a kind of character produced by readers and writers.

Having summarized the form and content of the dissertation, I can reiterate the essential points of my study and the stages of my argument. In the first place, one must understand that the dissertation identifies a fundamental conflict between two discourses. The first of these is the “great man” theory, a historical approach that has its most explicit representation in the works of Thomas Carlyle. While *On Heroes* was published in the first half of the 19th century, Carlyle’s theory, with its emphasis on the centrality of the subject, historical progress, and the construction of a new society, strongly anticipates modernism. The second discourse is postmodern historical fiction, a phenomenon that critics like Hutcheon have theorized as historiographic metafiction and critics such as Menton have analyzed as the new historical novel. Their models (and others) capture different aspects of the same phenomenon: a movement that arises in the middle of the 20th century, flourishes along with the theory and literature of the broader postmodern movement, and is centered on the concept of rewriting.

The critic can identify at least four differences between these discourses. One of them is the dichotomy of absolutism and relativism. For the first discourse, there are final interpretations of history: it canonizes certain individuals and their actions as “great.” For the second, interpretations change and, when normative, can be oppressive. Another key point of contention is the problem of the nation. The Carlylean tradition often presents certain individuals as “fathers” of nations, while postmodern historical fiction tends to view these people as discursive products of a political-ideological nationalist project. Thus, my reading of the texts emphasizes the inversion of traditional nationalism in postmodern historical fiction. This brings us to another difference: the concept of humanism. While Carlylean historiography treats certain people as free subjects,

postmodern historical fiction calls the subject into question. These two discourses also differ with regards to the question of narrative. The Carlylean school - and related schools of historiography - tend to present history as a kind of natural, objective process. On the other hand, postmodern historical fiction tends to emphasize the connection between history and narrative. It does not deny the past, but it views history as a collection of many possible stories about the past.

Considering the basic tension between these two discourses, my fundamental task in this dissertation is to elucidate the strategies that authors use to rewrite the great man theory in *Concierto barroco*, *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, “El último rostro,” *El general en su laberinto*, *La ceniza del libertador*, *Vigilia del almirante*, *El arpa y la sombra*, *Los cuadernos de Praga*, and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*. As for the first two novels, which deal with Montezuma, the critic can identify distinct methods. The first book is an application of Carpentier’s vision of the baroque in service of historiographic critique. The second text is defined by two fundamental techniques: the use of diverse intertexts to question the notion of objective historical interpretation and the affirmation of feminine voices. The next three novels focus on the same stage of Bolívar’s life and try to bring to human scale a figure that is semi-divine in traditional historiography. The following two novels use a process of making human as well, but they do not focus on a single part of Columbus’s biography: they try to critically rewrite his entire life. The last two texts work with the biographical and autobiographical models, but propose a different strategy. They do not focus as much on Guevara as they do on the supposed authority of his (auto)biography, implicitly questioning the status of that kind of historical document as an objective description of the past.

I conclude with two necessary clarifications. First, this dissertation is a descriptive (not a normative) study of how postmodern historical novels criticize a historiographic school. I am not sympathetic to Carlyle's view of history, but this does not imply that I endorse all possible criticisms of it or that I personally agree with all theories and analyses cited in the dissertation. Second, the reader should not interpret this dissertation as a rejection of the importance of Montezuma, Bolívar, Columbus, or Guevara. I chose them precisely because they *are* historically relevant. Whether we accept Carlyle's ideas or not, various movements, historians, and theorists reacted to what these individuals did, and they are noteworthy.

CHAPTER 1

CARLYLEAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE PRE-COLOMBIAN WORLD:
MONTEZUMA IN *CONCIERTO BARROCO* AND *LLANTO: NOVELAS IMPOSIBLES*

This chapter examines the strategies that Alejo Carpentier and Carmen Boullosa use to rewrite the “great man” historiography of Montezuma in the novels *Concierto barroco* and *Llanto: novelas imposibles*. The fall of this Aztec emperor took place in early modernity, centuries prior to the development of Carlylean historiography and the mature humanist ideology that underlies it. For this reason, I do not focus on the perspective of Montezuma (or the Aztecs as a whole), but on modern historiography’s understanding of the emperor. This distinction leads to another important point: both Carpentier and Boullosa are very much concerned with what Alan Robinson refers to as the “present past.” As I mentioned in the Introduction, this concept relates to two key features of historiographic fiction: a preoccupation with historical topics that are relevant to the present, and the understanding that participants in past events tend to be ignorant of the historical importance of their actions. (Robinson 46) As far as *Concierto barroco* and *Llanto: novelas imposibles* are concerned, both dimensions of Robinson’s present past relate to a specific question: the issue of Mexican national identity. It is in this context that these novels’s critiques of “great man” historiography challenge nationalist ideology.

Alejo Carpentier’s *Concierto barroco* exemplifies several common features of postmodern historical fiction, and uses them to implicitly present an alternative to the “great man” theory. Nearly all of these characteristics are in line with the postmodern literary strategies of other other texts I examine in this dissertation. Nevertheless, Carpentier’s novel does differ in one important way. Its critique of Carlylean humanism

focuses only indirectly on a “great man” (in this case, Montezuma). According to Menton, new historical novels (such as *Concierto barroco*) tend to base their characters on real historical figures. (23) However, the events in this novel take place long after the death of the Aztec emperor. The text references his name and identity many times, but he does not actually appear as a character. I argue that this novel analyzes Latin American history without actually including its figures as protagonists. Its treatment of Montezuma indicates an anti-humanist, intertextual approach to historiography. *Concierto barroco* affirms a history without protagonists, but it does so without provisionally accepting the existence of “great men.” This is the general structure of its historiographic critique, and it is also an important point of difference between this text and later new historical novels.

With this understanding of the novel, I investigate several related aspects in it. The first of these is Carpentier’s view of the baroque. According to Shelly Jarrett Bromberg, this is a reality that “...transcends time and space” (7). This, in turn, allows him to rewrite history, and he employs specific mechanisms in that rewriting process. These include anachronistic references and passages that speak to the recreation of historical identity. Another core aspect of Carpentier’s project is the argument that European representations of the Americas are distortions. In *Concierto barroco* there are significant differences between European and American views of history. Along with this epistemological critique, I also address a key part of Roberto González Echevarría’s reading of the novel: it features an implicit reversal of the traditional narrative of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. This plot element is not gratuitous. It engages readers in historiography and challenges them to look at the past from a different perspective.

I begin my analysis of Carpentier's historiographic critique with some comments about the novel's title. For the author, the second word in the title does not just refer to a style of art or a historical period. It has a broader meaning as well. As Shelly Jarrett Bromberg points out, Carpentier's view of *barroquismo* (a theoretical perspective that affirms the baroque) "...is all that a traditional definition of the Baroque would entail: repetitions, dynamism, decadence, rejection of perfection, play between oppositions, the intent to destroy barriers between illusion and reality and a preference for forms that are open to infinity" (6). However, Carpentier modifies this definition to make it more universal. More specifically, he references the Spanish philosopher Eugene D'Ors to argue that the baroque is "...a 'human constant' that is in continual process, shifting and changing and recombining through its history" (6). According to Fernando Burgos, this analysis of the baroque has significant implications for Carpentier's understanding of historical time: "La configuración del tiempo como escenario no es una idea desconocida a las posiciones estéticas del barroco. De este modo, es la configuración ondulante del tiempo, y por lo tanto eminentemente barroca, de lo imaginario la que permite la fluidez y traslado a los diversos ámbitos a los que acceden estos dos personajes principales de la novela" (65). For Carpentier, the baroque amounts to worldview, one that that encompasses artistic production, human culture in general, and historiography. Most importantly, its emphasis on fluidity goes hand in hand with postmodern historical fiction's approach to historical identity.

In this novel, Carpentier also employs the baroque to inquire into the issue of Latin America's identity. For Carpentier, however, the baroque is not limited to a specific place or period (Bromberg 7), such as Europe in the 1600s and 1700s. It transcends these

limitations, and "...enables him to argue that the New World was Baroque even before the arrival of the Europeans" (7). It also implies that there is a "Creole spirit" in the region, one that "...is Baroque because its complex and distinct expressions are derived from an infinite array of temporal-spatial oppositions that give rise to unique, ever-changing, New World identities" (7). As we will see, the character Filomeno exemplifies the American baroque. This is because "not restricted to specific time and place, [he] is free to create and recreate his identity" (13). The notion of a free, fluid identity is at the core of Carpentier's baroque historiography, and this is at odds with Carlyle's argument in *On Heroes*. The "great man" is supposed "...to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to do" (162). There is simply no room for this kind of authoritarianism in the view of history that *Concierto barroco* articulates.

Before analyzing the novel's historiography, it is necessary to give some clarifications about the central story in *Concierto barroco*. Much of the action centers around a well-to-do Mexican's voyage to Venice. This character does not have a fixed identity. As Rosa María da Silva observes, "Sua característica principal consiste ... na carência de 'rostos', o seja, de identidade histórica, marcada no texto pela atribuição de cinco denominações diferentes (Amo, viajero, mexicano, Montezuma e indiano), substitutivas, talvez, de um possível nome próprio" (183-182). During his voyage, he has two different servants, first Francisquillo and later Filomeno. While the destiny of this character is ambiguous, he does leave Venice and Filomeno towards the end of the novel. Highlighting the Mexican's flexible historical identity, the narrator says that he will travel by train (78), an anachronistic mode of transportation.

In this context, the novel offers multiple examples of how Filomeno changes his identity. We find one of the first instances in the second chapter, where the reader finds a description of a memorable party that this character attended. The Mexican is contemplating Filomeno, and observes how “...en aquel universal concierto se mezclaron músicos de Castilla y de Canarias, criollos y mestizos, naboríes y negros” (25). Despite his shock about the “imposible armonía” of the concert, he decides that he wants Filomeno to replace his recently deceased servant, Francisquillo. Filomeno “...sería el mejor sujeto posible para heredar las galas del difunto Francisquillo, y una mañana, hechas a Filomeno las proposiciones de entrar a su servicio el forastero le prueba una casaca roja que le sienta magníficamente” (25-26). This part of the narration is important for two reasons. First, Filomeno’s connection to the “impossible harmony” of the “universal concert” is a reference to Carpentier’s vision of the baroque (an aesthetic that is not limited to Europe and Europeans). As Roberto González Echevarría points out, this has a parallel in the final chapter of the book: “Jazz is, at the end, the new beginning, that beginning already contained in the jam session of the Ospedale della Pietà: it is the ‘impossible harmony,’ the baroque concert” (*Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, 269). In this respect, Filomeno is baroque by virtue of temporal bifurcation and by his connection to baroque art. The fact that he takes on a new identity, that of Francisquillo, is further evidence of his baroque status.

As I have already suggested, the historiography of *Concierto barroco* is an anti-humanist one, and Filomeno is also important in this regard. As Monika Kaup argues, there is no one, true protagonist in this novel: “Carpentier honors the cross racial nature of the American baroque by decentering the subject of his neobaroque novel: rather than

one protagonist, there are two, first the Indian, then the black” (238). This has significant implications: “Structured in domination, the splitting of the baroque subject into two centers – one dominant and the other subordinate, white and nonwhite – also mirrors the geometry of the ellipse, which is best conceived as a deformation of the circle, the classical symbol of self-contained perfection” (239). Citing Severo Sarduy’s observation that this new Keplerian cosmology challenged the notion “...of the single center, the sun: symbol of God and king” (239), Kaup argues that the novel’s use of dual protagonists “...has effects parallel to the undermined authority of the sovereign self of European modernity” (239). This applies just as much to the historiography of the “great man,” a sovereign subject who, as the source of history, has a status somewhere between that of a king and that of a God.

Towards the end of the novel, Filomeno stops being the Creole protagonist’s servant. Before these two characters leave each other, he observes: “No entienden que lo fabuloso está en el futuro. Todo futuro es fabuloso” (77). According to Kaup, this amounts to a criticism of the modernist understanding of history: “Negating modernity’s equation of the future with progress, this statement forges a contingent link between the future and the modality of desire, the fantastic, the imaginary, the hypothetical” (240-241). In this way, we can read the characters’ conversation as an expression of postmodernist skepticism about historical progress. This is yet more evidence that the historiography underlying *Concierto barroco* is incompatible with modernist historiographies like that of Carlyle. It does not affirm “the great romance of construction,” (30) which, as Marshall Berman points out, is common to so many versions of modernism.

One of the most striking examples of Filomeno's fluid identity is in the final chapter. Here, we read about his appearance at a Louis Armstrong concert in Venice in 1956, which is a "nuevo concierto barroco al que, por inesperado portento vinieron a mezclarse caídas de una claraboya, las horas dadas por los moros de la torre del Orologio. (83) The anachronisms in this chapter serve an important purpose. They demonstrate the flexibility of the character Filomeno, who "...is equally comfortable at the Venetian carnival in the 17th century as he is, later, on his way to hear Louis Armstrong in 1956 in Venice. Not restricted to a specific time or place, Filomeno is free to create and recreate his identity..." (Bromberg 13). As Menton points out, new historical novels tend to base their characters on real historical figures (*Latin America's New Historical Novel* 22) but this transitional novel differs in an important way. The character Filomeno is not based on any specific historical figure. In the logic of this novel, he is a universal character, one that could be based on an individual from any historical period. Once more, he represents Carpentier's belief that the baroque can apply to diverse places and times.

The novel's historiography diverges from Carlylean theory in another important way. It affirms that history comes from multiple sources, rather than from a single origin. González Echevarría describes the significance of this point in the plot, observing how "the wealthy Mexican and his black Cuban servant go to Europe and there contaminate European culture with their own, setting off a series of events that will lead to a new 'Western' culture, of multiple origins, cut off from any single source that will give it shape" (*Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* 266-267). This clarifies two important aspects of the novel. First, it distinguishes Carpentier's historiography from approaches such as the "great man" theory. According to the latter, we cannot understand any event

or period without referencing a single, unique historical source, such as a biography. According to the former, history is drawn from a collection of sources, and none of them has precedence over the others. For this reason, one can say that Carpentier has an intertextual view of history. Second, González Echevarría identifies the rewriting process at work in the novel: its plot is a reversal of the standard *conquista* narrative. As we will now see, the text's references to Montezuma confirm this.

The first mention of the emperor is on page 11. Here, there is a description of a European painting of him and three other people: the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo (Cortés's companion), and Doña Marina (Cortés's indigenous interpreter). We read that this painting shows "...el máximo acontecimiento de la historia del país" (11), and learn that it depicts Montezuma in a stereotypical fashion. According to the text, he has aspects of a Roman and Aztec figure (11), and "...aparecía sentado en un trono cuyo estilo era mixto de pontificio y michoacano, bajo un palio levantado por dos partesanas, teniendo a su lado, de pie, un indeciso Cuauhtémoc con cara de joven Telémaco que tuviese los ojos almendrados" (11). The opening pages of *Concierto barroco* make one thing very clear: this is a novel about the relationship between Europe and the Americas. The subject matter of this painting – the *conquista* – is a decisive moment in the history of European-American contact. Not only is the painting a European portrayal of an event that took place in Mexico, but it depicts Aztecs as if they were figures from classical Greece and Rome.

These two features – the subject matter and the uneasy admixture of cultures – directly relate to one of Bromberg's arguments about the novel. "For Latin America," she writes, "'Creole' hybridity, based upon European and non-European blending (such as

indigenous and African) resulted in a crossover that was achieved almost exclusively at the expense of the subaltern experience” (7-8). Read in this context, the reversed historical narrative that González Echevarría identifies is a response to the violence of European-American contact.

There are other parts of the novel that provide evidence for González Echevarría’s and Bromberg’s arguments. Most of these are related to a production of Antonio Vivaldi’s opera *Montezuma* in Venice. Marco Katz gives an apt summary of the problem with this opera: “The performance of Vivaldi’s *Montezuma*, which the Mexican feels presents a false view of his country’s history, reveals the extent of the European misunderstanding of American culture” (36). Other critics have come to similar conclusions. Antonio Fama, for example, observes that “...el motivo que subyace en la narración de *Concierto barroco* es que la percepción europea despoja a la realidad hispanoamericana de su autenticidad” (130). In this sense, the novel critiques European-American contact on two levels. First, it speaks to the history of the European conquest of the Americas. Second, it identifies an epistemological problem: European representations of America tend to be distorted and inaccurate. For these reasons, the opera is a key plot device: it unites Carpentier’s critiques of the European-American relationship with his historiography. *Montezuma*’s title suggests that it is essentially a biographical account of the conquest. Nevertheless, the title is ironic. Carpentier ultimately uses it to *reject* biographical historiography in favor of an intertextual approach.

Before the novel introduces the opera, it describes the Mexican protagonist’s early experiences in Venice. His first conversation with one of its inhabitants illustrates the

theme of European misunderstanding. The character alternatively called “el Indiano” (here called “el Amo”) is wearing a Montezuma costume for Carnival. After he enters a café, “el Fraile Pelirrojo” (the Redheaded Friar) asks him about his identity: “¿Inca?” preguntó después, palpando los abalorios del emperador azteca. – ‘Mexicano’ – respondió el Amo, largándose a contar una larga historia que el fraile, ya muy metido en vinos, vio como la historia de un rey de escarabajos gigantes...” (36). The friar is unable to distinguish between Incans and Mexicans, and drunkenly misinterprets the protagonist’s story. The message is clear: the Europeans in this novel do not have an accurate understanding of America, nor do they really care to gain one.

Experiences like the one in the café set the tone for the protagonist’s reaction to the opera. The protagonist does not object to most of the opera. During one of the scenes, he even praises its accuracy: “¡Bravo! ¡Bravo! – clama el indiano –: ¡Así fue! ¡Así fue!’ – ‘¿Estuvo usted en eso? – pregunta Filomeno, socarrón – ‘No estuve, pero digo que así fue y basta’” (66). Filomeno’s skepticism reveals a crucial dimension of this book’s historiographic critique. Just as the Mexican protagonist questions the Europeans’ view of America, the Cuban Filomeno disputes the Creole perspective. The novel’s historiography is clear in this passage: there is no one authoritative account of history, but instead multiple perspectives on past events. No one perspective (European, Creole, or otherwise) can be taken at face value, and none of them has a privileged status.

Despite the Mexican’s positive reaction to the earlier parts of the opera, he strongly criticizes the final scene. Instead of depicting the death of Montezuma, it alters the traditional biography of the Aztec emperor. Montezuma accedes to Cortés’s wishes, and the *conquistador* befriends the Aztecs:

Hernán Cortés perdona a sus enemigos, y, para sellar la amistad entre aztecas y españoles, celébranse, en júbilos, vítores y aclamaciones, las bodas de Teutile y Ramiro, mientras el Emperador vencido jura eterna fidelidad al Rey de España, y el coro, sobre cuerdas y metales llevados en tiempo pomposo y a toda fuerza por el Maestro Vivaldi, canta la ventura de la paz recobrada, el triunfo de la Verdadera Religión y las dichas del Himeneo. (68)

Recognizing that this is contrary to the accepted historical record and to the traditional Mexican narrative of the *conquista*, the protagonist becomes outraged. He cannot accept the inaccuracy of the opera, screaming that it is false (68). He speaks with a musician about his objections: “¿Falso... qué?” – pregunta, atónito, el músico. – “Todo. Ese final es una estupidez. La Historia...” – “La ópera no es una cosa de historiadores.” – “Pero... nunca hubo tal emperatriz de México, ni tuvo Montezuma hija alguna que se casara con español”. (68) Along with illustrating the European misunderstanding of America, these passages typify two historiographic approaches. On the protagonist’s view, artistic productions must be mimetic: a work of art, such as the opera *Montezuma*, must reflect or imitate reality. There is little or no room for artistic license. According to the musician (*el músico*), there need not be that kind of close correspondence between art and the world. *Montezuma* can legitimately be a historical opera while taking certain liberties with history. History and artistic production need not be fully separate.

A few pages later, the reader learns that European misunderstanding is more than a question of inaccurate or incomplete accounts of history. It also presents America as ontologically different from Europe. Unlike Europe, whose history and experiences are real, America has a fantastic, almost magical essence. During one conversation, the Mexican protagonist becomes angry when he hears the claim that “en América, todo es fábula: cuentos de Eldorados y Potosíes, ciudades fantasmas, esponjas que hablan, carneros de vellocino rojo, Amazonas con una teta de menos, y Orejones que se nutren de

jesuitas...” (70). According to this perspective, the artistic license of the opera and America’s purportedly fabulous nature go hand in hand. Since there is supposedly no distinction between the categories of the real and the fantastic in the Americas, an artwork like *Montezuma* is possible. This belief lets the Redheaded Friar say of the opera’s subject matter: “Buen asunto; buen asunto para una ópera...” (36). While the opera has the virtue of creatively blending history and art, it has the flaw of ignoring the reality of the Americas.

Like the critique of the Carlylean version of Montezuma in Carpentier’s novel, Carmen Boullosa’s critique exists on two levels. The first of these, as I noted in the introduction, is what Carrie C. Chorba identifies as a commitment to “history’s intertextual discourse” (302). In the novel, intertextuality finds its expression, in the first place, through the use of multiple narrators. As Iliana Underwood-Holbrook observes, “historiography in *Llanto* is intimately intertwined with metafiction; multiple narrators (fictitious writers in the novel) speak of the difficulty of writing Montezuma’s novel, insatiately searching for an alternative to the official historical version and for an explanation to the contradictions, omissions, and ambiguities that surround Montezuma’s historical persona” (276). In this respect, the novel is constructed as a frustrated quest for historical truth in narrative.

In addition to this, *Llanto*’s intertextuality is a matter of Boullosa’s use of a multiplicity of sources. According to Underwood-Holbrook’s reading of the novel, the text features many different “fragments and voices” (277). As I pointed out in the introduction, critics such as Barthes have argued that intertextuality is a particular configuration of life. In the context of literature, this implies an active, constructive role

for readers. Hutcheon makes this point well in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, stating that “literary language signifies and creates; it does not imitate or even describe. Reading is therefore an active, creative, and demanding process” (98). As Underwood-Holbrook points out, Boulosa is attuned to this: “*Llanto* is a complex fragmentary work; the reader struggles to connect the many pieces that compose the novel, a collage of voices and texts revealing the effects of historical constructs in the identity of contemporary Mexico” (277). In her *Chasqui* interview with Kristine Ibsen, Boulosa makes a statement about her novel *Mejor desaparece* that, in my view, applies equally well to *Llanto*. Speaking about the world depicted in this fragmentary novel, she says: “era un mundo en el que la *organización totalitaria* era imposible, no podía ser, no podía caber en un mundo así porque está destrozado todo” (59, emphasis added). This observation resonates with Hutcheon’s concept of totalizing representation, and speaks to the postmodern conception of narrative. With this understanding of the book’s fragmentary nature, one can see that the novel treats Montezuma as a product of historical discourse rather than as a producer of history.

The second dimension of the novel’s critique of Carlylean historiography is its gender politics. Each “great man” that Carlyle discusses in *On Heroes* is just that, a man, and he is one who displays characteristics of traditional masculine ideology, some of the most prominent ones being strength, activeness, and leadership. Recalling Ferrero Cárdenas’s proposal that *Llanto*’s feminism is centered around affirming women’s voices, I can describe my line of argument. The novel’s historical commentary centers around Montezuma’s supposed resurrection in Mexico City on August 13, 1989 and his interaction with three women. They introduce him to present-day Mexico, and function as

the drivers of history through their construction of a discourse about the identity of the country and the prospects for communicating about it. In the interview with Ibsen, Boulosa describes the connection between Montezuma's apparent rebirth and those broader theoretical concerns as "...la lengua imposible de un emperador que renace en un mundo que ya no le pertenece" (56). This is the impossibility to which the novel's title speaks.

The presence of Montezuma in the text also serves as a mechanism for commenting on gender politics. More specifically, the character may be understood as a male foil, a common and important device in Boulosa's overall literary project. As Anna Marie Sandoval explains, "Although Boulosa's work is woman-centered, male characters figure in it as foils whose presence allows criticism of patriarchy" (47). It is for this reason that Boulosa's rejection of Carlylean historiography is closely intertwined with a critique of patriarchy and the sexist exclusion of women. The decentering of a "great man" like Montezuma simultaneously creates space for women's agency. It is a way of allowing female voices to conduct historiographic critique.

I begin my analysis of *Llanto: novelas imposibles* with a general overview of the form and content of the work. As Underwood-Holbrook notes, the novel is at best described as a fragmentary text. (277) It is divided into short segments not long enough to be classified as chapters; none of them exceeds five pages. As we shall see, the first part of the book's title, "llanto," has at least two possible interpretations: it could be a reference to the intradiagetic author's frustrated attempt at writing, or to the tragedy that the Montezuma story represents. The second part of the title refers to the presence of nine "fragmentos de novela," which suggest that history is an open, incomplete discourse.

While the novel is a meditation on history, it is not that alone. An important subtext of the book is a criticism of traditional Mexican nationalist ideology. As with other works of postmodern historical fiction, *Llanto* incorporates the Carlylean vision with the ultimate goal of deconstructing it. It is simultaneously an object of criticism and a necessary part of the narrative.

As does *Concierto barroco*, this novel introduces the emperor as a stereotypically regal figure. According to the narrative voice, he appears “durmiendo, soñando, envuelto en trece mantas bordadas y descansando el peso sobre las plumas de aguila y la piel de jaguar que un día recubrieron su asiento aún creyéndose colibrí aleteando en el azul que antes rodeara las bosques hasta imbricarse en las minucias de las ramas” (12). For Carlyle, the hero as king is the archetype of all “great men,” and the narration makes it clear from the start that this is the identity of Montezuma.

The appearance of Montezuma in the novel is important for another reason: it is a *reappearance*, and gives us a clear indication that the novel presents a cyclical view of time. We read that “él, cuya sustancia arraigó en el llanto, nació entonces de la risa del cielo. Si nacer es eso, retornar” (13). By identifying the act of birth with the act of returning, the narration suggests that it is a repeated action and not a one-time occurrence. This view of time is more than just an interesting philosophical question, since it implicitly connects the historical figure of Montezuma to contemporary Mexico. In the novel, he is reborn there. This may remind some readers of the Carlylean equation of biography and history, but it will soon become clear that the novel undermines the humanist logic of that perspective. In both the aforementioned regal description of

Montezuma and in this passage, the novel provisionally invokes a Carlylean version of the emperor to deconstruct it later.

The next portion of the book is introduced with the heading “por una estampida de imágenes.” This section shifts away from the present-day story of the novel to portray the final days of Montezuma and his empire. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the researcher Patrick Johannson identifies two main interpretations of Montezuma in Mexican historiography. Both of these are tragic: he is either a coward, or a victim of circumstances. (29) The impressionistic snapshots in this portion of the novel clearly favor the second view of Montezuma. He is not someone who betrayed his people: he suffered the results of the conquest with them.

Moreover, this portion of the text makes it clear that Carmen Boullosa acts in a dual role. As a producer of historiographic metafiction, she functions as both an author of fiction and as a historian: “...Boullosa is her own trilingual aide,” Carrie C. Chorba points out, “transcribing, interpreting and creating and once. She tries to piece together a coherent vision of ancient Mexico by joining Nahuatl images and icons as well as indigenous and Spanish views of Moctezuma’s death” (309). For Chorba, this project ultimately fails, as there is a “complete lack of referents” (310), and “there exists an informational void that historiographic metafiction hoped to fill with fictionalization, but in the end, the narrator deems it impossible” (310). The novel’s critique of Carlylean historiography hinges on the idea that historical referents are absent. According to that school of historiography, the “great man” must be the referent of any coherent account of the past; in other words, any description of historical events is ultimately a description of that person. For Boullosa, however, the view that history is biography is simply not a

viable option, since it is impossible to even construct a biography of Montezuma. If figures like the Aztec emperor are understood as products (rather than producers) of historical discourse, it is only logical that a lack of sources would lead to accounts in which he is little more than a name.

The notion that the Montezuma is a victim is most evident in the snapshot titled “un sueño, uno de hacía mucho tiempo” (21). Here, we read about the Spanish *conquistador* Hernando Cortés, whose forces were arguably the most important factor in the downfall of Montezuma: “El hombre que él creyó ver brillante en la distancia lo mata y permite que su sangre corra en la tierra, alimente a los malos seres que la chupan bajo el piso para que la devoren. Ceba a la noche con su sangre; el que él creyó admirable a la distancia es solo un ser despreciable, es un bicho despreciable” (21). In a sad turn of events, Cortés deceived and murdered Montezuma. Thus, the importance of the term “llanto” in the novel’s title becomes increasingly clear. The final snapshot, “el cadáver del emperador,” is also significant. Here, the narration gives us access to the thoughts of Montezuma. Contrary to what many people think, he sees the experience of being a ruler as largely negative and unpleasant. More specifically, “. . .es sino de gran trabajo, y de grande aflicción y de gran pestilencia” (32). Again, the narration makes it clear that Montezuma is a tragic figure. As the reader will observe, the whole text is imbued with this tragic vision: it colors not only the fate of Montezuma and the Aztecs, but Mexican history in general.

The next segment of the book, called “II,” introduces the “fragmentos de novela” and signals, yet again, that *Llanto* is a work of historiographic critique. Here, the

narration presents the image of dust, which represents the difficulty (or impossibility) of establishing a lasting, authoritative, account of Montezuma:

Cada uno de los puñados [de polvo] que alcanzó a agruparse en la súbita huida, en la improvisada carrera tras una voz, repetía el mensaje de la aparición de Moctezuma en la Ciudad de México de una manera diferente y algunos de ellos no tenían la consistencia suficiente para ser algo más que el deseo de contar la historia: no tenían la fuerza necesaria consigo, no tenían el vigor, o decían su mensaje de manera equívoca o equivocada. (35-6)

Recalling Ferrero Cárdenas's comment on this excerpt of the novel, the reader can recognize the image of dust as a kind of metaphor for the silenced voices of women (119). Although that is without question part of what this passage is about, I maintain that it serves a double purpose: it synthesizes the feminist message of *Llanto* with historiographic critique. As we have seen, critics like Chorba argue that Boullosa is committed to an intertextual view of history (302). The fact that the voices each give a different account of Montezuma's appearance and struggle to communicate affirms a particular view of the past: there is no single, authoritative source, but a multiplicity of sources. Certainty and closure no longer exist in historical explanation. The book proposes a historiography that serves as an alternative to Carlylean historiography, and this is necessarily tied to an affirmation of feminine voices.

After the dust passage, the book alternates between novel fragments and the core story of Montezuma's visit to contemporary Mexico City. This alternation is an attempt to blur the distinction between fiction and historical discourse, suggesting that Montezuma is a product rather than a producer of history. In this regard, the image of dust continues to be crucial. As he walks through the city with the women he meets (Laura, Luisa, and Margarita), we read the following: "...Él no podía parar. Caminando casi invisible, con sus bolsillos cargados de ceniza, de polvo, de arenilla, seguía ligero por las calles de la

ciudad buscando en quién treparse para dejar el polvo mensajero que traía consigo, siempre a gatas, pegado al pavimento, sin levantarse” (44). Here, Montezuma is a messenger. He does not produce a historical message, but merely carries it.

He is also an ineffective messenger. Shortly after that description, the narration introduces a woman who tries to use him as a source for her storytelling: “Ella, la mujer sentada cómodamente en un piso recubierto de alfombra, con dos cojines atrás de la espalda, tomó la galleta, dio un bocado, y el polvillo fino fue a dar a su boca malinterpretando todo el mensaje, cambiándolo en quién sabe qué, pero que en un principio tuvo la forma siguiente, forma que no terminó de ser por haber nacido de tan mala simiente...” (44). Her proposed story is a novel about “la complicidad entre tres amigas,” (44) which is clearly the central narrative of *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* itself. As I previously mentioned, critics like Underwood-Holbrook analyze the book as an example of (historiographic) metafiction, and this self-referring episode is clear evidence of that categorization. Beyond its typological importance, this episode serves a larger purpose: it unites the novel’s feminist affirmation of women’s voices, questioning of historiography, and implicit critique of the great man theory.

In the following narrative sequence, there is further evidence of the critical strategy at play in *Llanto*. After the three friends discover Montezuma, they decide to bring him with them. Ironically, while Montezuma was a leader in Tenochtitlan, he is now in the subordinate position of being led by the friends. In that sense, the description of his interaction with one of them is rather striking: “Él aceptaba que ella lo llevara como un niño pequeño y, apoyada bien en sus pies descalzos, pasos más allá se recargó, y a él en sus piernas en una banca de hierro forjado frente a la enorme estela de

Quetzalcóatl, para acomodarlo en sus brazos, mientras las otras dos iban avanzando hacia el coche” (52). The juxtaposition of the novel fragments and the present day narrative of the three women is an indispensable part of Boulosa’s historiographic critique, but actions and characters in that story contribute to it as well.

Although the novel fragments play an important role in how they structure the novel, they also contain very explicit commentary on the historiographic task at hand. They not only tell the story of the three friends, but they also represent an attempt to rewrite Montezuma’s biography. That task becomes clear in the third fragment, when the intradiagetic author states: “Así que no debo dudar en continuar escribiendo mi versión de la vida de Moctezuma II” (61). In this passage, we see a core strategy of postmodern historical fiction’s critique of the Carlylean theory: the text provisionally accepts biography as an authoritative historiographic model with the intention undermining it. The narrator states her intention to write her own version of the emperor’s biography, challenging the role of “great men” as creators of history. History produces them, and not the other way around.

Along with its commentary on historiographic method, the third fragment establishes the link between Boulosa’s novel and contemporary social concerns. It establishes, in Alan Robinson’s terms, the “present past” (46) of the novel: the contradictory unity of indigenous identity and Mexican nationalism. The author therefore modifies the notion that Montezuma has returned: “Mejor, Moctezuma no ha vuelto nunca. Moctezuma ha estado ahí, siempre él fue el primer cronista que escribió, con alfabeto traído de Europa, la primera versión de la conquista de su imperio” (68). Although this passage does not explicitly mention that “present past,” it does suggest the

theme of a suppressed indigenous identity. It is an identity that has always existed in Mexico, yet has not been really integrated into the nation. This contradiction becomes the basis for a questioning of Mexican nationalism in general. In Boullosa's novel, social critique is as important as historiographic criticism, and it is not really possible to discuss one without addressing the other.

Although the narrator of the novel has set for herself a clear task, it is obvious that she struggles with it. In the fifth fragment, she is frustrated at the lack of original sources to use for the novel. She complains about that difficulty: “es una necesidad estúpida querer escribir una novela de Moctezuma II. Sabios quienes al contar nuestra historia olvidan contestar nuestra historia olvidan disertar acerca de las razones de su raro comportamiento, como los que lo adjudican a que en la llegada de los españoles él vio el retorno de Quetzalcóatl...” (75). Along with the lack of historical documents that explain his behavior, the circumstances surrounding the death of the emperor are also uncertain. The author explains how, “en torno a su persona ocurre lo mismo que en torno a su muerte unos dicen que murió apedreado por las mexicas, otros que asesinado por los españoles, la verdad es que no se sabe” (76). These passages are more than an expression of the frustration of the narrator. In my view, they are one of the clearest critiques of the “great man” theory in the novel. On the Carlylean view, history may be reduced to the biography of certain prominent figures. However, the lack of contemporary sources (as in this case) can make it impossible to even write a biography. In the logic of *Llanto*, this implies that it is historical texts which are primary and determinative – not the actions of a “great man” – and that historical figures have the ontological status of characters.

The final component of Boullosa's historiographic critique is the narrative twist at the end of her novel. Throughout most of the text, there seems to be no doubt about whether or not the man dressed in imperial Aztec garb is actually Montezuma II. He is known by that name throughout the text. Moreover, several scholars and experts examine some of the man's possessions. The results of a laboratory test give unexpected results: "Los cuatro miraban los resultados de las pruebas: esos objetos, impecables, a la vista "nuevos" al pasar la prueba del carbón para saber su antigüedad, demostraban ser de, aproximadamente, el año 1500..., 1500 después de Cristo" (108). While the evidence seems to strongly indicate that Montezuma has indeed appeared in Mexico City, the intradiegetic author states, at the end of the novel, that the whole experience was based on a lie. This, she states, was merely a man *dressed up* as the emperor. (120) This may seem like a needlessly confusing or poorly constructed plot, but it serves an important purpose. Namely, it is a narrative twist that causes the reader to doubt the identity of the Montezuma character. This, in turn, has the effect of blurring the line of demarcation between biography and fiction.

As I have mentioned several times in this chapter, the novel's dethroning of the great man has a feminist consequence – one that is fundamentally concerned with the affirmation of women's voices. To better understand the theoretical implications of this, it is helpful to consider *Llanto* as one of Boullosa's contributions to a debate about the question of women's writing. Assuming it is a valid term, what distinguishes it from other forms of writing? In her article "On Female Identity," the feminist scholar Judith Kegan Gardiner provides a useful summary of the nature of this controversy. According to her, "The most common answer is that women's experiences differ from men's in profound

and regular ways. Critics using this approach find recurrent imagery and distinctive content in writing by women, for example, imagery of confinement and unsentimental descriptions of child care” (348). The alternative approach is not grounded in experience as such. According to Gardiner, it focuses on the author’s mind. “The other main explanation of female difference,” she explains, “posits a ‘female consciousness’ that produces styles and structures innately different from those of the ‘masculine mind’” (348). The debate is thus divided into two general camps. The first, which focuses on the common stylistic features of texts produced by women, exists in the broad tradition of formalist criticism. The second, which identifies a certain consciousness as the feature that distinguishes men’s writing from women’s writing, can be considered an expression of psychoanalytic criticism.

Like other authors of postmodern historical fiction, Carmen Boullosa seeks to rethink this debate. Her focus is not on stylistics or psychology, but on how women relate to a world that is understood in broadly textual terms. (As I explained in the introduction, a textualist philosophy is a common feature of postmodernism). We can now see the full significance of women’s voices in the novel: the voice, a means for communicating oral and written texts, becomes the operative mechanism of *Llanto*’s feminism. As Anna Marie Sandoval points out, she “...prefers that her work not be categorized as ‘women’s writing,’ yet it is among the most daring and innovative of Mexicana literature today. While Boullosa may resist her works being labelled, her titles suggest feminist concerns, specifically, a political agenda” (46). Thus, while it is correct to say that Boullosa’s work exists in the broad category of feminist fiction, the author takes a unique and independent stance towards that literary tradition.

To understand how this manifests itself in *Llanto*, it is helpful to consider more comments from the previously-mentioned *Chasqui* interview. Boullosa makes it clear that her primary reference point for the controversy over women's writing is the broad psychoanalytic approach: "Stevenson habla de la narrativa masculina en contra de la narrativa femenina para él la narrativa femenina es la narrativa que habla de los estados del alma, y la narrativa masculina es la narrativa que cuenta una anécdota y en la que hay acción, en la que ocurre algo" (54). While Boullosa does not reject these categories, she does try to transcend them. Continuing her discussion of "masculine narrative," she writes: "A mí me gusta este tipo de narrativa, me gusta leer la narrativa en que ocurre algo, pero mis novelas no son narrativas tradicionales, no son, precisamente, novelas varones..." (54). While she does not state it explicitly, I believe that, reading between the lines, it is clear that Boullosa views her work as an attempt to transcend the dichotomy of "women's writing" versus "men's writing." For her, the gender identity of writers qua writers and texts qua texts is fundamentally flexible. Given the fluid concept of identity that is so common in postmodernism, it is not surprising that Boullosa expresses that perspective. It is in this context that the category of voice is so important in *Llanto*.

Political scientist Stephen D. Morris's research on Mexican nationalism is valuable here. In the article "Reforming the Nation: Mexican Nationalism in Context," he identifies the indigenous question as one of the three basic "national interest discourses" (374) of Mexico, and explains how it involves a fundamental ideological tension between two perspectives. The first of these evaluates the indigenous legacy in positive terms. "...A sense of glory regarding the Indian past," Morris points out, "has long been an important part of the nation's identity. Ever since independence, governments have

trumpeted this theme to mobilize supporters and/or demobilize opponents” (374). The second is thoroughly negative, and promotes an essentially racist view of that legacy. It is “...a discourse that casts the Indian and the Indian culture as not truly Mexican, but rather as impediments to the unification of the nation and obstacles to its political, economic and cultural development; in short, a threat to the nation’s interests” (374). Thus, depending on shifting political needs, the death of indigenous civilization becomes one of two things: a source of nostalgia that serves as ideological stimulus, or a desired outcome that “paves the way” for the development of the country and its integration into modernity. Individual figures, such as Montezuma, function as personifications of the indigenous culture.

Boullosa herself has expressed similar opinions about the indigenous question in the Mexican nation-state. In the article “Más acá de la nación,” she remembers how her Mexican primary school promoted nationalist ideology: “El mayor orgullo colectivo mexicano era entonces nuestro pasado glorioso, haber, sido lo que fuimos antes de la llegada de los españoles, el imperio nahua, el ombligo del universo” (56). This sense of pride, she notes, was also tied to the notion of racial superiority. (56) She points out that children would call each other “Indian” as an insult, which was emblematic of a larger problem: “Más importante aún que el insulto era la marginación en que el país mantenía a los pueblos indios” (57). According to Boullosa, this is not accidental, but a core aspect of Mexican nationalism. With this understanding of the indigenous peoples, she observes that “el proyecto de nación posrevolucionario no los incluía. México era un país mestizo, no se debía ser de otra manera. Nuestra identidad india pertenecía al pasado. Lo que no era ‘mexicano’ como lo habían elaborado nuestros intelectuales, no era lo nuestro. Y la

lengua el español, punto. Para los demás, invisibilidad, marginación” (57). In this way, there is major contradiction in Mexican national identity: pride in an indigenous past coexists with rejection of indigenous people in the present.

Together, Morris’s and Boulosa’s observations give good reason to understand the Montezuma character as a commentary on the indigenous question. Just as the Mexican state wants to exclude indigenous people from contemporary society, the world of the novel seems to have no place for the Montezuma character. Moreover, the ambiguous fate of this character calls in to question the possibility of commenting on the historical significance of indigenous people by reference to the biography of a single person. In this way, *Llanto: novelas imposibles* synthesizes a critique of Carlylean historiography with a reflection on an issue that has both historical and present-day importance.

I contend that the critique of Carlylean historiography found in *Llanto: novelas imposibles* and *Concierto barroco* functions as an alternative to the official state ideology of the indigenous question. To understand how they do this, it is helpful to remember Eagleton’s argument that aesthetics originates as a discourse about the body. (31) In the case of Mexico, the body is indigenous culture as personified by figures like Montezuma, and whether the state paints that culture as something beautiful or ugly, it serves, in Eagleton’s words, as a “source of ideological stimulus” (63). While each novel has a different critical strategy for undermining the “great man” theory, they both have very similar implications vis-à-vis the larger quest of Mexican nationalist ideology.

In both Boulosa’s text and Carpentier’s text, the state’s version of indigenous history is laid bare: it is not a “natural” account of Mexican history or society, but

something that changes according to the current political situation. How, precisely, does this dynamic play out? In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser gives a controversial (yet influential) account of ideology. He makes a crucial point how ideology functions: it is not a totally false alternative to reality, but something that directly refers to it. Commenting on this relationship, he remarks: “However, while admitting that they [ideologies] do not correspond to reality, i.e., that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be ‘interpreted’ to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = *illusion/allusion*)” (“Ideology” 162). These two novels are attuned to the allusive function of ideology. In other words, the rhetorical device of allusion is the nexus between their status as literature and their status as sociopolitical criticism.

To see why this is the case, it is helpful to look at the basic definition of this term. An allusion is a literary mechanism that involves “an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader's familiarity with what is thus mentioned” (Baldick). Though, as we have seen, the two novels have different methods of undermining Carlylean historiography, their critical strategies converge in their take on nationalist ideology. Although there remains a significant indigenous presence in Mexico today, the fact is that the “glorious” Aztec empire is far removed from the lives and experiences of the country’s inhabitants. Events like the appearance of Moctezuma in Mexico City or a theatrical production of his life may not have immediate relevance for, say, readers in the United States or Europe. However, the target readerships of Carpentier and Boullosa are much more likely to grasp the significance. In this manner, the

narratives relate to the illusion-allusion function: they serve to deconstruct the “great man” vision at the core of official nationalist ideology, and they allude to a common cultural heritage of readers in Mexico and other Spanish American countries. In this way, the novels’s historiographic and political concerns are united in a common project.

Having investigated the characteristics of historiographic critique in *Concierto barroco* and *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, I can now summarize this chapter’s arguments and conclusions. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the preceding paragraphs, each one of these novels uses distinct strategies and techniques to undermine the “great man.” *Concierto barroco* primarily relies on an application of the baroque to historiography and a rewriting of the *conquista* narrative. Carpentier’s novel also uses other literary techniques in its attempt to deconstruct Carlylean historiography. The first of these is the novel’s presentation of the dialectic of order and disorder. Like many other examples of postmodern literature, *Concierto barroco* simultaneously expresses a desire for a rational understanding of the world and a profound skepticism about the possibility of achieving it. In conjunction with this, the book uses explicit historical commentary to question (in a self-conscious manner) traditional historiographic approaches.

As I have pointed out earlier in this dissertation, *Concierto barroco* can be considered an early example of postmodern historical fiction, while *Llanto: novelas imposibles* is a mature, paradigmatic manifestation of that literary tendency. One of its two core literary strategies centers around the notion that history is a text. It relies heavily on intertextuality and a multiplicity of sources. There is not one authoritative source of historical truth, but a variety of discourses, some of them fictional. This leaves no room for a Carlylean “great man.” Another strategy is the rejection of Carlyle’s humanist view

of history in favor of a feminist ideology that does not silence women: women's voices and perspectives are core intertexts of *Llanto*.

As in *Concierto barroco*, the strategies in *Llanto* are supported and enhanced by other techniques. The first of these is the narrative construction of Montezuma: he appears in Mexico City in stereotypical, anachronistic garb, reinforcing his status as a historical *character*. The fact that he is reborn invokes the indigenous cyclical view of time, and rejects linear time (a core aspect of Carlyle's theory). Structural components of the novel also contribute to its historiographic critique. The alternation between the core story and the novel fragments of an intradiagetic author are a central part of *Llanto*'s intertextuality (along with historical snapshots of life in the Aztec empire). In these fragments there are explicit historiographic comments, exemplifying the self-consciousness that characterizes so much postmodern historical fiction.

While each of these novels has a distinctive way of undermining Carlylean historiography, there are also important points in common. First, both question the linear view of time of approaches like the "great man" theory. In *Concierto barroco* the temporal bifurcation of Filomeno and the universality of the baroque run contrary to that view. In *Llanto*, the rebirth of the Montezuma character and its ultimate denial reenact contemporary Mexico's debate over its indigenous legacy. Second, each novel uses non-realist story elements (such as seemingly absurd anachronisms and supernatural events like resurrection) as ways to explore new views of history. This technique functions as an attempt to include fictional intertexts as legitimate tools for commenting on the past. Lastly, both novels are conscious of the "present past," and orient their historiographic critique to contemporary questions like nationalism. They deconstruct official ideology,

as conveyed in Carlylean positions. While they ultimately date from different periods and have important contrasts, they both present similar questions about history, ideology and politics.

CHAPTER 2

BOLÍVAR, MYTH, AND HISTORY IN “EL ÚLTIMO ROSTRO,” *EL GENERAL EN SU LABERINTO*, AND *LA CENIZA DEL LIBERTADOR*

In many Latin American countries, General Simón Bolívar is commonly treated as a national hero, and often has a nearly mythical status in culture and politics. In “El último rostro,” *El general en su laberinto*, and *La ceniza del libertador*, the Colombian authors Álvaro Mutis, Gabriel García Márquez, and Fernando Cruz Kronfly seek to deconstruct this Carlylean version of Bolívar, trying to liberate the man from a stale and distorted mythical discourse. As I mentioned in the Introduction, they attempt to engage with what the historian Germán Carrera Damas has called the Carlylean myth of Bolívar’s life (*Venezuela: Proyecto nacional y poder social* 238). As we have seen, the epistemological core of Carlyle’s theory is its identification of history with biography (and vice versa). While much historiography about the subject of the previous chapter, Montezuma II, fits that mold, it tends to treat him as a tragic (or even reviled) figure. On the other hand, traditional historiography about Bolívar tends to construct him as a hero, and in that sense fulfills both the letter and the spirit of *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*.

What, then, is the broader significance of Bolívar’s status as an ostensibly *heroic* “great man”? What does it mean to say that Mutis, García Márquez, and Cruz Kronfly attempt to deconstruct the *heroic* account of his life? To frame these questions, I turn to Joseph Campbell’s study of mythology, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Written from the perspective of archetypal criticism, the book provides a useful overview of the most common features of heroic narrative. According to Campbell, the archetypal version of

that narrative is something called the “hero’s journey” (210), a process that has three basic phases. The first phase represents the beginning of the journey, and manifests itself in nine possible ways. For Campbell these are: “threshold crossing,” “brother-battle,” “dragon-battle,” “dismemberment,” “crucifixion,” “abduction,” “night-sea journey,” “wonder journey,” and “whale’s belly” (210). After the hero begins the journey, the narrative shifts to the “threshold of adventure” (210). This phase, which Campbell presents as having a circular structure, is characterized by plot elements such as: “call to adventure,” “helper,” “tests,” “helpers,” “flight,” and “elixir” (210). Secondary plot elements of the “threshold of adventure” include: “sacred marriage,” “father atonement,” “apotheosis,” and “elixir theft” (210). The final phase can consist of: “return,” “resurrection,” “rescue,” and “threshold struggle” (210). The components of each phase are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is possible for them to be used together and synthesized in the same text.

With this framework, one can establish a clearer picture of the heroic rendering of Bolívar’s life. In my view, the category that Carlylean historians typically use to relate the first phase of his *hero’s* journey is threshold crossing. Summarizing traditional accounts of Bolívar’s life, historian Lester D. Langley comments that “Bolívar admirers and certainly his retinue of cultists generally attest that young Simón’s travels in Spain and France only confirmed a steadfast conviction about Spanish backwardness and oppression and his belief of inevitable separation of Spanish America” (14). On many accounts, Bolívar’s early life culminated in his witnessing the coronation of Napoleon in Paris. According to Langley, “...the impressionable Simón was awed by the compelling persona of Napoleon, who was no taller and similarly driven by ambition and ideology”

(15). In this way, “great man” historiography renders the entire phase of his life up until adulthood as a process of recognizing a historic necessity and seeing himself as the agent of its fulfillment. He crossed the threshold from the ordinary life of a student to the history-making life of a revolutionary and military commander. The next phase of his journey may be characterized as a call to adventure and series of tests. These occurred in the context of his well-known role in the Spanish American colonies’ successful wars for independence. This also is when his apotheosis into the semi-divine *Liberator* occurs. The final phase of the journey is his return to civilian life; the primary texts I examine in this chapter focus on this final period.

Regarding Carlylean historiography and the critique of it, the most important phase of life is Bolívar’s apotheosis. Bolívar’s leading role in the Spanish American wars of independence gave him a cultural status that approached divinity. While he was not on the same level of, say, the God of the Abrahamic religions, he was not a mere human. My previous citations of Germán Carrera Damas in the Introduction gave a sense of this dynamic and its relation to Carlylean historiography, but another article by the Venezuelan historian makes the nature of the cultural apotheosis even more clear. In “Simón Bolívar, el culto heroico y la nación,” Carrera Damas writes of “la socialización del culto heroico rendido a Simón Bolívar” (108); he laments “la presión que éste ejerce sobre las consciencias individual y social, hasta el punto de que por fé, conveniencia o temor, todos los venezolanos queremos dar muestras de devoción, o en toda circunstancia no ser señalados como descreídos y ni siquiera como disidentes” (108-109). The similarities between this cult of personality and the “great man” theory could not be more

clear: the history of the Venezuelan nation flows from the actions of Bolívar, and the people therefore owe him worship.

This cult of personality is, for Carrera Damas, at the very center of the ideology of Venezuelan nationalism. More than that, it permeates the entirety of the country's cultural and intellectual life. The author's description of this phenomenon emphasizes that, "Instaurado para dar legitimidad el estado nacional en circunstancias históricas específicas, el culto a Bolívar ha llegado a constituir la columna vertebral, y en no pocas ocasiones el universo, del pensamiento venezolano" (109). In this way, the figure of Simón Bolívar has become a concrete embodiment of nationhood. To a great extent, Carrera Damas observes, his cult and the concept of national identity have become one and the same in a country such as Venezuela. It is a cult on a very large scale: "Se ha extendido hasta tal punto el alcance del culto, y se ha intensificado tanto su mensaje, que en la mente de muchos venezolanos, y ello sea dicho sin entrar a establecer diferencias de nivel social o cultural, ha llegado a producirse una identificación entre los signos más elementales del culto y la nación" (109). Seen from this perspective, the Bolívar cult thus functions as an ideological system that helps to prop up and justify the Venezuelan nation state. Like other manifestations of the "great man" model, this one has an explicit political-ideological purpose. It is, in Eagleton's terms, "a source of ideological stimulus and moral edification" (63). Moreover, it is indicative of a "Hero-archy" (Rosenberg 116) that replaces declining traditional hierarchies. The Bolívar cult helps bind together an unstable social-political order.

Although Álvaro Mutis, Gabriel García Márquez, and Fernando Cruz Kronfly are not Venezuelans, they are aware of the characteristics of that cult of personality and how

it has crept into other South American countries. “El último rostro,” *El general en su laberinto*, and *La ceniza del libertador* are closely attuned to “los signos más elementales del culto,” and use them to construct and then critique the *heroic* account of Bolívar’s life. Along with the “hero’s journey,” the ideology that Carrera Damas describes is at the heart of these novels, and each text attempts to use the strategies of postmodern historical fiction to transform, rewrite, and criticize it.

With this understanding of the traditional, official Bolivarian narrative, I can now begin to analyze how each of the three literary texts critiques it. My analysis begins with a reading of Alvaro Mutis’s “El último rostro,” a narrative that focuses on the end of Bolívar’s life. While many examples of postmodern historical fiction mix two or more subgenres from Nünning’s typology (or stand between subgenres), Mutis’s text clearly exemplifies one of them: the metahistorical narrative. The critic can find the core features of this subgenre, namely “the process of historical reconstruction and the protagonist’s consciousness of that past” (364). As I already mentioned in the Introduction, this subgenre has a subjective and present-oriented approach to its historical rewriting. These typological considerations frame this narrative’s implicit critique of the “great man” theory.

As I am about to argue, Mutis’s text is a clear example of metahistorical fiction. As Ansgar Nünning explains, this kind of fiction focuses on “historical reconstruction” (364) and is usually “...set in the present but concerned with appropriation, revision, and transmission of history” (364). Significantly, novels in this category “...do not portray the past as a self-contained and complete world, but as liable to the distortions that subjective reconstructions and recollections entail” (364). In the opening paragraphs of

“El último rostro,” the narrator introduces us to the personal papers of the protagonist, Miecislaw Napierski. We read that “las páginas que van a leer pertenecen a un legajo de manuscritos vendidos en la subasta de un librero de Londres pocos años después de terminada la segunda Guerra Mundial” (1). The narrator explains that Napierski’s document is from a specific place and time, and deals with an important historical event: “Por un azar llegaron a nuestras manos los papeles del coronel Napierski y al hojearlos en busca de ciertos detalles sobre la batalla de Bailén, que allí se narra, nuestra vista cayó sobre una palabra y una fecha: Santa Marta, diciembre de 1830” (1). This is the year in which Bolívar died. The document pretends to be a primary source, a first-hand account of the days of his life. In this way, Mutis’s text thematizes the process of historiographic research.

The temporal orientation is clear: the narrator lives in the present, and uses Napierski’s diary to look back on the past. This makes its structure distinct from many other examples of postmodern historical fiction. Some of them alternate between these two temporal dimensions, often blending the two. Others are clearly situated in the past. In Mutis’s text, however, there is an unambiguous demarcation between the past and the present. While metahistorical fiction is distinct from historiographic metafiction, this text does exemplify one key aspect of Hutcheon’s model: the idea that “...we can only ‘know’ that past today through its texts...” (“Historiographic Metafiction,” 10). Napierski’s diary is the text that fulfills this role. This is the basis for Mutis’s deconstruction of “great man” historiography - which, as I stated in the Introduction, functions by reducing Bolívar to the status of a fictional character. On this strategy, the text (Napierski’s papers in this case) has primacy over the historical referents; they only

exist insofar as it exists. Since the “great man” is a character, the historical text writes him – and not the other way around. Furthermore, the reconstructive task of the manuscript discoverer speaks to a familiar theme. As Mario Barrero Fajardo puts it: “Esta declaración de principios ‘editoriales’ refuerza la idea de un discurso fragmentado [...] y reivindica un quehacer editorial que reconoce el inevitable sesgo ideológico que condiciona su desarrollo” (32). In this way, the narrative affirms two ideas that are common in postmodern historical fiction: the view that there is no single, objective interpretation of the past, and the belief that history is not a linear process, but a fragmentary one.

With this understanding, we can see the importance of the central image of this narrative: the mask. On the first page of Mutis’s text, one sees that the title is derived from “un manuscrito anónimo de la Biblioteca del Monasterio del Monte Athos, siglo XI” (1). According to that manuscript, “el último rostro es el rostro con el que te recibe la muerte” (1). As Menton points out in *La novela colombiana*, this is a reference to “la máscara arquetípica de la muerte” (306). This subject is a variation on a core topic of Mutis’s literary project. As Roux notes, the author has frequently written on the topic of “desastre y olvido que también consumirán a los ‘grandes’ de este mundo...” (232). In this regard, the image of the death mask in “El último rostro” is a manifestation of a classic *topos*: the notion that death is an equalizer. Figures in civic religions (such as the Bolívar cult) are traditionally represented as being immortal. The fact that Bolívar can have a death mask cuts against this: he shares the same fate as any other human being. His last “face” – his last identity – is the same one that all people have, regardless of their social status in life. My argument is that the Bolívar character acknowledges something

his posthumous cult ignores: death comes to all people, even so-called “great men.” Mutis’s Bolívar does not correspond with the supposedly immortal hero of Carlylean myth, and the “great man” account of his life is not valid.

From the perspective of literary history, Mutis’s narrative stands (whether intentionally or not) in the tradition of emblematic literature. According to John T. Cull, this type of literature flourished in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Influenced by the Roman poet Horace, texts from this tradition emphasize the “yoking of the verbal and the visual” (10). The relationship between these two categories arises from a specific process involving the active participation of the reader. This is because “the reader/viewer of the emblem engages an intellectual challenge. Instead of compounding interpretations, as in a painting or a poem we must discard seemingly viable possibilities until we hit upon the single axis where motto, plate, and explanatory poem all coincide” (10). All of this leads to a particular realization: “At the precise moment when the predetermined meaning is fully comprehended, the reader experiences an illuminating satisfaction” (10). Moreover, a “common motif in the Spanish emblem books portrays death as the great equalizer...” (11). In this respect, “El último rostro” functions as a contemporary version of emblematic literature in three ways: joining the anonymous historiographer in reviewing the papers of Napierski to reconstruct a period of Bolívar’s life, joining the historiographer in recognizing the historical status of Bolívar, and understanding that this process is structured around the emblem of death as an equalizer. Like other examples of postmodern historical fiction, Mutis’s text demands an active, constructive role for the reader, and it does this through a reworking of an early modern literary form.

Let us now consider the text of “El último rostro.” In the first entry of his diary, Napierski makes it obvious that he came to Santa María with a romanticized image of Bolívar. For this diarist, the *Libertador* is clearly a hero. He writes:

29 de junio. Hoy conocí al general Bolívar. Era tal mi interés por captar cada una de sus palabras y hasta el menor de sus gestos y tal su poder de comunicación y la intensidad de su pensamiento, que ahora que me siento a fijar en el papel los detalles de la entrevista, me parece haber conocido al Libertador desde hace ya muchos años y servido desde siempre bajo sus órdenes. (2)

This view of Bolívar corresponds well with the mythical, Carlyean version of the general. Mutis’s text utilizes a critical strategy that is found in other examples of postmodern historical fiction: it invokes and provisionally accepts the Carlylean model to critique and undermine it later. Napierski’s interaction with Bolívar serves to demystify the general.

The first step of this process happens two pages later. As the text recounts a conversation that the two men had in Bolívar’s room, Napierski observes: “Se me escapó el sentido de sus palabras, pero noté en los presentes una súbita expresión de vergüenza y molestia casi física” (4). As we will observe, this corporeal representation of Bolívar’s problem is far more important in García Márquez’s novel than in Mutis’s text.

Nevertheless, it stands in clear contrast to the cultic Bolívar: this individual is not a demigod, but a human being. In their analysis of how Mutis rewrites the traditional heroic, mythic version of Bolívar, Gilberto Triviños and Edson Faúndez comment on the importance of the general’s physical degradation. “El último rostro,” they argue, “se inscribe así en la serie de relatos que despliegan una poética de la derrota. El héroe se convierte en el profeta del vacío, distante ya del estruendo de las contiendas y del rostro de terror de los realistas en huida” (33). The biological process of dying is tied to a political aspiration. Death makes that aspiration impossible: “El turbulento escenario de

la vida política y la preocupación por imponer el sueño unitario lo cubren todo, sumergiendo al libertador en una cruda resistencia espiritual y una lenta muerte física” (33). In this way, the degraded body of Bolívar is symbolic of larger social implications. As I will point out later, the political context of Latin America during this period is one of instability and authoritarianism. In both Mutis’s (and García Márquez’s) texts, Bolívar’s deteriorating body is metaphorically tied to the deteriorating body politic of the region.

Moreover, Triviños and Faúndez argue, Bolívar’s deterioration represents Mutis’s engagement with a core aspect of heroism: the notion of “heroic death.” Citing Carlyle’s understanding of the hero as “un misionero del orden,” (33) Triviños and Faúndez argue that the Bolívar character “...ve en el desorden la expresión elocuente de la muerte...” (33). This kind of death, which takes place in battle, “...impone el signo distintivo del héroe” (34). Despite this, Bolívar’s impending death forces him into a difficult situation: “...atormentado por la visión del hundimiento de los nuevos países en un caos de estériles guerra’s civiles” (33). This article makes an important point about the connection between death and heroism in new accounts of Bolívar’s life. While this does not represent a defining characteristic of postmodern historical fiction, it is nevertheless a core part of Mutis’s narrative strategy. In Campbell’s terminology, it represents the Colombian author’s engagement with Bolívar’s supposed apotheosis into the *Libertador*.

Napierski’s view of Bolívar evolves at the end of his first journal entry. After he finishes his conversation with the general and retires for the night, he makes some revealing comments. He recounts that “de repente me sentí envarado y un tanto ceremonioso en medio de este aposento más que pobre y después de la llaneza de buen tono que había usado conmigo el héroe” (6). Although he uses the term *hero*, his words

suggest that he is beginning to view the general as a less distant and more regular person. His mention of the simple, unadorned bedroom underscores his changing perspective. In addition to its role in the humanizing process, this first encounter with Bolívar speaks to a changing view of history. Napierski writes:

Hay algo intemporal en todo esto, una extraña atmósfera que me recuerda algo ya conocido no sé dónde ni cuándo. Las murallas y fuertes son una reminiscencia medieval surgiendo entre las ciénagas y lianas del trópico. Muros de Aleppo y San Juan de Acre, kraks del Líbano. Esta solitaria lucha de un guerrero admirable con la muerte que lo cerca en una ronda de amargura y desengaño. ¿Dónde y cuándo viví todo esto? (6)

The seeming non-temporality of his visit with Bolívar is arguably a rejection of standard historiography. The term “history” traditionally depends on a well-defined linear model of time, from the past, to the present, to the future. Nevertheless, the supposed “great man” Bolívar does not exist in this context. While there is a clear past-present distinction from the perspective of the discoverer of the diary, the distinction seems to be very blurred for Napierski. In “El último rostro,” this character questions traditional views of historical time.

In the next conversation between Napierski and Bolívar, the purpose of Mutis’s historical critique becomes even more evident. Bolívar’s speech on the current state of the American republics leaves little room for interpretation. The first few lines suffice to give us a good sense of his perspective: “Aquí se frustra toda empresa humana... El desorden vertiginoso del paisaje, los ríos inmensos, el caos de los elementos, la vastedad de las selvas, el clima implacable, trabajan la voluntad y minan las razones profundas, esenciales, para vivir, que heredamos de ustedes” (7). Bolívar’s words evince a deep pessimism about the possibility of historical progress. The Carlylean account of his life has him as protagonist in what Marshall Berman refers to as “the great romance of

construction” (30). Nevertheless, Mutis’s character seems to have an entirely different view of his place in history: as a leader, he is basically a failure. Rodolfo de Roux (whom I have already cited on Mutis’s skepticism about history) identifies this speech as representative of the author’s own view of Spanish American independence. Roux states that, for Mutis, it had only one effect: “cambiar de amos” (242). It did not actually liberate the people of that region, but merely subjected them to new political authorities. This sense of frustration and disillusionment is at the core of Mutis’s project in “El último rostro.” By having the Bolívar character echo his own postmodern critique of traditional humanist historiography, he undermines the Carlylean myth.

The Bolívar character’s views on the differences between Europe and the Americas reveal another important dimension of Mutis’s critique. When Napierski tells him about the problems that afflict his native Poland and Europe in general, he replies that, although there is hope for Europe, “...Aquí en América, nos iremos hundiendo en un caos de estériles guerras civiles, de conspiraciones sórdidas y en ellas se perderán toda la energía, toda la fe, toda la razón necesarias para aprovechar y dar sentido al esfuerzo que nos hizo libres. No tenemos remedio, coronel, así somos, así nacimos” (8). For Bolívar, the heroism of Latin Americans or the qualities of their individual leaders is not enough to change the course of history. Despite the later Carlylean analyses of his legacy, Mutis’s Bolívar has a much more realistic assessment of his relationship to Latin American history. He does not really see himself as a hero, but instead as a failed general.

The clearest rejection of the deified Bolívar of Carlylean myth occurs towards the end of the narrative. After restating his opinion that the independence movement was futile, the Bolívar character laments that “la muerte se llevó a los mejores, todo queda en

manos de los más listos, los más sinuosos que ahora derrochan la herencia ganada con tanto dolor y tanta muerte” (11-12). Bolívar’s legacy is not one of historical progress, but of a failed political movement. Furthermore, he is not immortal even in a figurative sense. Combined with the text’s metahistorical structure which calls into question the reliability of historical documents, these representations of Bolívar send a clear message. Namely, “El último rostro” presents a historiography that is radically different from that of the “great man” theory and in line with postmodern perspectives on the past.

I now turn to Gabriel García Márquez’s Bolivarian text, *El general en su laberinto*. As I have mentioned before, it is comparable to Mutis’s narrative on at least two levels: it addresses the same historical subject matter and has a comparable critical strategy. The similarities are not accidental. In the epilogue of his novel (“Gratitudes”), García Márquez acknowledges his debt to Mutis (257). Barrero Fajardo offers a useful description of Mutis’s influence. For Barrero Fajardo, both “El último rostro” and *El general* share, “Un entramado narrativo en el que coinciden, a pesar del pregonado rigor histórico de la novela, figuras cuyo origen es posible verificar en los archivos de carácter histórico con personajes provenientes de un escenario ficcional diferente al concebido por el autor de la obra en cuestión” (32). This strategy renders it an example of postmodern historical fiction. According to Barrero Fajardo, “Esta provocadora convivencia diluye las aparentemente diáfanos fronteras entre los discursos históricos y ficcionales... (32). In other words, both novels attempt to nullify distinctions between fiction and history. As it did in “El último rostro,” this literary project ultimately has the effect of challenging traditional historiography.

Despite these important similarities, there are crucial distinctions to make between the two texts as well. While Mutis's narrative is clearly a metahistorical text, García Márquez's novel falls, as I have already noted, into the category of historiographic metafiction (Álvarez Borland 439). In terms of Nünning's typology, the second of these categories is distinguished from the first by its focus on "a represented historical world" (364). Historiographic metafiction does not feature characters like Mutis's manuscript discoverer, someone who reconstructs the past in the present. Along with this temporal difference, the two texts also present space differently. The action in "El último rostro" is basically confined to Bolívar's mansion, but the events in *El general en su laberinto* are all structured around his voyage on the Magdalena River (in Colombia). While this may seem unimportant, the river voyage ends up having symbolic significance.

As the Bolívar in Mutis's narrative, García Márquez's Bolívar is not a demigod: he is clearly mortal, and the author depicts his mortality in an exaggerated fashion. As Sírías explains, the author "...incorporates and magnifies the human flaws and frailties of the historical figure in the retelling of the last days of the General's life" (188). The reader can see this clearly early in the book, as the opening paragraph describes him taking a bath: "José Palacios, su servidor más antiguo lo encontró flotando en las aguas depurativas de la bañera, desnudo y con los ojos abiertos, y creyó que se había ahogado. Sabía que ése era uno de sus muchos modos de meditar, pero el estado de éxtasis en que yacía a la deriva parecía de alguien que ya no era de este mundo" (7). This passage alerts the reader to Bolívar's physical deterioration, nearing death. As in Álvaro Mutis's narrative, the character is depicted quite different from the powerful, virile, "great man" that exists in Carlylean historiography.

The early characterization of Bolívar gives the reader a key to two related aspects of the novel: its title and its historiographic perspective. According to critics like Sírías, this is a text defined by the bodily impotence and decay of its protagonist: "...By the end of the narrative the obstacles that Bolívar faces prove insurmountable for him, and he slips into a coma – an insurmountable labyrinth – from which he never again emerges" (180). The protagonist's words at the end of the novel are the source of the image: "'Carajos', suspiró. '¡Cómo voy a salir de este laberinto!'" (256). The author's use of the labyrinth image is not accidental but corresponds with traditional spiritual symbolism.

According to the symbologist Juan Eduardo Cirlot, the labyrinth presents two basic features. In the first place, it is a "construcción arquitectónica, sin aparente finalidad, de complicada estructura y de la cual, una vez en su interior, es imposible o muy difícil encontrar la salida" (273). This is its straightforward, literal purpose. Cirlot also notes that, in many cases, it has a representative function: "ciertas representaciones de laberintos circulares o elípticos ... han sido interpretados como diagramas del cielo, es decir, como imágenes de los astros" (273). In both cases, the labyrinth represents "la pérdida del espíritu en la creación, la 'caída' de los neoplatónicos, y la consiguiente necesidad de buscar el 'centro' para retornar a él" (273). Symbolically, the labyrinth has two meanings: it can imprison a person, and it can be the vehicle for a spiritual search. Both are evident in *El general en su laberinto*. Bolívar is trapped: his dream of a united and free Latin America is failing, and as a dying person, there is nothing he can do to reverse that process. Along with this problem, the protagonist of the novel suffers a spiritual crisis. Let us now examine how the symbolism of the labyrinth manifests itself in the text.

In one of the early parts of the novel, Bolívar shaves and puts on cologne. The narration presents this mundane act as a kind of spiritual crisis. We read: “aquella madrugada oficiaba la misa diaria de la limpieza con una servicia más frenética que lo habitual, tratando de purificar el ánimo de veinte años de guerras inútiles y desengaños de poder” (11). This is one of the first indications in the novel that García Márquez’s Bolívar is not a Carlylean hero. The “great man” is the source of historical progress, but the efforts of the protagonist have been useless. Soon after this passage, the reader encounters a conversation between Bolívar and his friend Sucre, “el Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho,” who explains to the general that the new Latin American republics are under the control of military dictatorships. Ironically, the efforts of the *Libertador* produced a situation in which “dieciséis millones de americanos iniciados apenas en la vida libre quedaban al albedrío de sus caudillos locales” (17). The narrator describes their conversation, and the pessimism of both men is obvious: “‘Es una burla del destino,’ dijo el mariscal Sucre. ‘Tal parece como si hubiéramos sembrado tan hondo el ideal de independencia que estos pueblos están tratando ahora de independizarse los unos de los otros.’ El general reaccionó con una gran viviacidad. ‘No repita las canalladas del enemigo,’ dijo, ‘aún son tan certeras como ésa’” (17). Once again, Bolívar’s efforts have failed. Aside from military dictatorships, the wars of independence have caused a crisis of disunity among the new republics.

These passages indicate that Bolívar’s degradation and failure is not just an objective process observed by other characters in the book. It is worth emphasizing that Bolívar is aware of it on a personal, subjective level. The protagonist’s visit to Honda is a striking example of this. This city has organized a celebration for him, and the narrator

recounts an incident in which: “Una niña de diez años con alas de ángel y un traje de volantes de organza recitó de memoria, ahogándose en la prisa, una oda a las glorias del general. Pero se equivocó, volvió a empezar por donde no era, se le traspapeló sin remedio, y sin saber qué hacer fijo en él sus ojos de pánico” (68). The girl’s fear turns out to be unfounded, as Bolívar does not have the same reverence for the *Libertador* myth that the residents of Honda do. As she panicks, “El general le hizo una sonrisa de complicidad y le recordó los versos en voz baja: *El brillo de su espada es el vivo reflejo de su gloria*” (68). Honda welcomes Bolívar with a girl dressed as an angel, reciting stereotypical verses of praise, but the celebration turns into a pathetic, sad affair – a kind of farce or burlesque. With his “sonrisa de complicidad,” he seems to recognize the absurdity of the cult that has grown around him.

In the novel’s present, Bolívar is self-conscious of the emptiness of the cult. Several pages later, we learn that this is a significant change in attitude in him. The cult of the “liberator” had not started during the river voyage, nor during the wars of independence; it had originated back in Bolívar’s youth. The narrator describes an episode regarding Bolívar’s penning “una proclama épica publicada días después [de un almuerzo] en un periódico de Kingston, y que la historia había de consagrar como *La carta de Jamaica*” (74). After this event, “...su padre le preguntó a Miranda [Miranda Lyndsay, a friend of Bolívar] cómo era el conspirador que tanto inquietaba a los agentes españoles de la isla y ella lo redujo a una frase: ‘*He feels he’s Bonaparte*’” (74). Bolívar had then felt a strong sense of historical purpose, superiority and identity with the paradigmatic Carlylean “great man,” Napoleon Bonaparte. In both this passage and the previous one, the cult appears ridiculous. But if in the past Bolívar had believed it, in the

present he acknowledges its absurdity. This is a dramatic change. Moreover, this moment recalls Bolívar's well-documented admiration for Napoleon, which I described earlier in this chapter. It is in that context that the reader can understand the river voyage as an extended metaphor for change.

The novel's theme of entrapment coexists with another core plot element: the river voyage. Despite Bolívar's metaphorical labyrinth, he travels somewhat extensively in the text. Much of the action in *El general en su laberinto* centers around Bolívar's voyage along the Magdalena River, a voyage that ends with his death in the city of Santa Marta. In the introduction to her recent English-language translation of the novel, Edith Grossman comments on how the trip "...takes on an overwhelming symbolic content. In the world's mythical and literary traditions, water is an eloquent symbol of radical change; we can be certain that a character who travels by water or crosses water or enters the water will experience a transformation of supreme importance" (19). Read as a metaphor for change, Grossman understands this as a journey from the mythical heights of the "great man" to the status of an ordinary human being, at the center of the labyrinth.

Having clarified the novel's critique of the "great man" version of Bolívar, I now turn to a closely related issue: the presence of historiographic metafiction in the novel. In the Introduction, I cited Isabel Álvarez Borland's observation that *El general en su laberinto* makes use of a "fictional historian" (439). As she points out, García Márquez fulfils this role (440). This occurs on two primary levels. The first level is, Álvarez Borland notes, the Bolívar character's paraphrase of the author's own assessment of Latin America (which I will describe shortly). García Márquez identifies the other level in the "Gratitudes" section, after the end of the novel. Here, he explains that he knowingly

chose to write about the most poorly documented part of the general's biography. He writes: "Por otra parte, los fundamentos históricos me preocupaban poco, pues el último viaje por el río es el tiempo menos documentado de la vida de Bolívar" (258). This biographical gap is what allows him to comment on history through fiction. It represents the author's attempt to supplement historical discourse with fictional discourse. Both this novel and the metahistorical "El último rostro" attempt to reconstruct history, but the story of *El general en su laberinto* is clearly situated in the past. This further establishes its status as historiographic metafiction. I will now present a few examples from the text to make this more concrete.

The clearest evidence that García Márquez inserts himself into the text occurs during a conversation between Bolívar and an anonymous Frenchman, "un francés que vivía al amparo de los Campillo" (116). A stereotype of a cultured European, the Frenchman arrogantly comments on the political situation of Latin America. Bolívar cannot tolerate this arrogance, and tells him: "Así que no nos hagan más el favor de decirnos los que debemos hacer ... No traten de enseñarnos cómo debemos ser, no traten de que seamos iguales a ustedes, no pretendan que hagamos en veinte años los que ustedes han hecho tan mal en dos mil ... Por favor, carajos, déjenos hacer tranquilos nuestra Edad Media" (120). The Bolívar character here functions as a mouthpiece for the author, and Álvarez Borland identifies the passage as a direct reference to García Márquez's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, where he argues that Europe presents an unreasonable standard for Latin America:

The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary. Venerable Europe would perhaps be more perceptive if it tried to see us in its own past. If only it recalled that London took three hundred years to build its first city wall, and three

hundred years more to acquire a bishop; that Rome labored in a gloom of uncertainty for twenty centuries, until an Etruscan king anchored it in history.... (cited by Álvarez Borland, 444).

While the Bolívar character and García Márquez are not identical in the novel, the use of one of the author's own intertexts is clear evidence of historiographic metafiction. The insertion of the author's voice strongly suggests his self-consciousness about the writing of history.

I now turn to Fernando Cruz Kronfly's novel, *La ceniza del libertador*. As with the other texts I study in this chapter, the novel centers on the final phase of Bolívar's life. Like them, it also centers around the theme of the voyage. In the first chapter, the narrator announces Bolívar's river journey, and proclaims that "Su Excelencia ha decidido partir para siempre" (57), a phrase that is then repeated for literary effect (58). The events surrounding this departure and journey have an almost religious significance: "atrás van quedando los generales y los coroneles que peregrinaron hasta aquí para presenciar el momento de la despedida" (58). During the previous night, we read, the general had "visión de todo y de nada. Casi lo perfecto de un vacío asediado por la urgencia de lo desconocido. Tal vez así mismo debiese ser, porque Su Excelencia viene de la luz de todas las glorias imaginables. Viene de los párpados beneméritos, casi de la santidad" (58). The narrator's mention of a pilgrimage, light, glories, and saintliness are typical of the "great man" model in general and the "great man" cult of Bolívar in particular. This chapter of the novel serves an important purpose: as with so many other examples of postmodern historical fiction, it provisionally sets up a Carlylean model only to question it and deconstruct it over the course of the narrative.

Moreover, the chapter suggests a broader theme: the myth of the hero's journey. The narration makes this clear by giving a double meaning to Bolívar's river trip. It is not merely a physical voyage, but a *metaphysical pilgrimage* unto death. The narrator makes this relatively clear in the final line of the chapter, announcing that "era el comienzo del fin" (65). Here, Bolívar is in the final phase of the myth of the hero's journey, undergoing a threshold struggle that will lead to his eventual resurrection as a national symbol. As I have previously pointed out, the core, indispensable feature of the "great man" theory is the proposition that history is biography, and this frequently implies a heroic characterization of the biographical subject. In this chapter (and throughout the novel), that characterization is at stake. One of the first indications that the novel questions Bolívar's heroism when we read about a group of women who object to his sendoff as a hero: "¡Que cesen los homenajes!"; they insist that "¡No es un héroe el que se marcha sino un tirano despreciable!" (64). This moment sets the tone for the treatment of Bolívar throughout the narrative, an invalidation of the historiographic *heroic* model.

As in the other texts I previously addressed in this chapter, Kronfly's novel features a Bolívar who is aware of and rejects the "great man" model that people have constructed around him. This becomes clear in chapter 6, as he comments on his health, saying that he feels well, and his traveling companion, Colonel Santana, responds, "La patria lo necesita saludable, Excelencia." A few lines later, Bolívar asks, "¿Y de que vale mi salud si la patria se hunde en la mierda?" When Santana suggests that Bolívar could become president again, the general replies: "¿Esa es la infamia que deseas para mí? ¡Vamos! ¡Vamos! ¡No seas niño!" (102). The significance of this conversation is clear. Santana, like many other Latin Americans, views Bolívar as the *Libertador*, the man who

is uniquely responsible for independence from Spain, and a figure who can personally save the region from its political chaos. In short, Santana espouses a “great man” view of Bolívar, one which the general himself rejects as unrealistic and undesirable.

In the same chapter, the reader encounters a topic that is also important in García Márquez’s and Mutis’s texts: Bolívar’s physical deterioration. “Dentro de la tienda de campaña,” we read, “Charles Moore examina el cuerpo de Su Excelencia, lo encuentra deplorable. Casi ni respira, la pupila demasiado quieta. De inmediato ordena su traslado a Lima” (114). Moore, Bolívar’s physician, reveals a fact that totally contradicts the perspective of “great man” historiography: Bolívar’s is a body that is subject to decay and death. Presenting an argument that is similar to the thesis of Silvio Sirias’s article about *El general en su laberinto*, Menton remarks that “both novels emphasize Bolívar’s digestive and pulmonary problems, demythifying him with frequent allusions to his vomiting, his flatulence, and his periodic outbursts of foul language” (*Latin America’s New Historical Novel* 97). Indeed, Menton remarks, this is an important point of convergence between the novels of García Márquez and Cruz Kronfly: “...both authors are primarily concerned with contrasting the dying human being with the mythical continental hero” (100). That is the function of the medical character Charles Moore: in his process of examining and caring for the general, the Bolívar myth begins to disintegrate.

As I pointed out in my comments on *El general en su laberinto* in the Introduction, this kind of representation has significant implications for historiography. A classic characteristic of the “great man” is strength and vigor, and depictions of supposed “great men” as weak or sickly undercut his status. They make less plausible the prospect

of using biographies of them as historical sources. This is the ironic importance of humanizing Bolívar: by presenting him as having biological characteristics common to all humans, authors like García Márquez and Cruz Kronfly tend to undermine humanism. Postmodern historical fiction often questions the concept of the subject and denies that there is any eternal human essence, and this skepticism about humanist ideology need not deny the biological similarities between humans as members of a species.

While most of the novel's historiographic questions are implicit, it also includes a rather explicit reference to the "great man" theory. Reflecting on Bolívar's experience during the boat ride, the narrator tells us about the general's own reflections on his historical position: "Su excelencia mira el conjunto de todas las cosas, en realidad parece soñar. Toda su gloria pasada, su historia de años de héroe está a punto de quedar convertida en un triste puñado de cenizas" (118). This is one of multiple references to ashes in the novel, and gives us a clear understanding of the novel's title: *La ceniza de libertador* is a book concerned with a diminished historical legacy. Bolívar's own assessment of this fact is very telling. "Siendo ese el destino de los hombres grandes," the narrator explains, "Su Excelencia no parece dispuesto a interrumpirlo, a introducir modificaciones de último momento en ese cuadro colgado en la ventana que algunos llaman la naturaleza humana..." (118-119). The general explains, "Me iré, muchachos, sí, me marcharé a otros mundos y los dejaré a todos en la confusión que ellos mismos andan buscando. Pero yo los perdono" (119). While at first blush this may seem as an affirmation of Carlylean historiography, I believe there is reason to understand it as a rejection of "great man" theory. Is it meaningful to call a person a hero if the deeds he accomplished are comparable to ashes? How can an individual be a "great man" if such is

his “destiny”? Would not a true “great man” strive to interrupt that fate? Read with the character’s previous comments on his legacy, it seems like there is good reason to read this passage ironically.

Another telling moment happens later, in chapter 17. Bolívar and his servant José Palacios enter the dining room of the ship. The author inserts a poem in this section of the narration, and its verses are, in part, a commentary on history. They refer to a “Testigo del tiempo,” a “Cronista de lo invisible...” (215). The verses affirm that “La historia no es la verdad sino apenas el sentimiento de lo que llaman verdadero / Tejido de afectos ocultos / La historia presume una higiene imposible / No entiende que por su boca también habla el corazón” (215). This perspective is very much in keeping with postmodern views of history, which, as Hutcheon reminds us, reject “totalizing representation” (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 63), or absolute historical truth. The poet denies objective historical truth, calling history merely “the feeling of what they call true.” This comports with postmodern notions of relative historical truth and history as narrative. Similarly, the notions of history being “fabric of hidden affects” and “presum[ing] an impossible hygiene” also suggest skepticism about absolute historical truth.

The poem is significant not only because of its historiographic content, but also because of formal considerations. While *La ceniza del libertador* is clearly identifiable as a novel, it displays the formal innovations that distinguish postmodern historical novels from traditional ones. Cruz Kronfly unexpectedly inserts the poem amid dialogue and third person narration, in a way that interrupts the flow of the narrative so that it functions as a fictional intertext. Moreover, the juxtaposition of three different types of discourse in

the same text is an example of Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia." Menton identifies this as a common feature of the new historical novel, and defines it as "...the multiplicity of discourses, or the conscious use of different types of speech" (25). As with García Márquez does with the "fictional historian" mechanism, this Bakhtinian device allows Cruz Kronfly to insert his own voice into the novel. In this regard, the reader can identify a very deliberate, strategic use of self-conscious narrative – of metafiction – in *La ceniza del libertador*.

The problem of totalizing representation, which the poem implicitly deals with, also appears elsewhere in the novel. In chapter 31, Bolívar notices that someone has slipped a letter under his door. According to the letter's author (an acquaintance of Bolívar named Uldarico Clavel), "...la historia parece olvidar que la ambición, el odio, el amor, la competencia que nace de la rivalidad, la envidia, todo eso que mueve nuestro espíritu con tanta potencia, participa de un modo mucho más significativo del que se supone en el movimiento político y social de los pueblos" (321). In other words, Clavel believes that the subject (here conceptualized as the "spirit") is not primary, as so many historians think it is. If individuals participate in history, their passions and other non-rational factors constitute them. Furthermore, Clavel argues, "la ciencia que explica la historia olvida con no poca frecuencia que sus famosas leyes se cumplen a través de los hombres, quienes con sus pasiones, mezquindades o grandezas las orientan con inaudita eficacia en función de sus designios concretos" (321-322). This reiterates a postmodern theme that appears elsewhere in the book: the (im)possibility of a science of history. To Clavel, social laws are constructs that fail to explain history: "...la más implacable ley social puede quedar convertida en una pamplina en presencia de un amor loco, de

cualquier rivalidad” (322). Thus, Clavel affirms the postmodern view that scientific theory is not applicable to a field like history.

Clavel’s letter evinces a deep skepticism about standard approaches to historiography. The category *history* is meaningless without reference to the actions of human beings, but they are not truly independent. There is no room here for a “great man” figure, a unique, free subject as the source of history, and any scientific approach to understanding the past stands on very unstable ground. The attentive reader will recognize this approach as the insertion of Cruz Kronfly’s own historiographical perspective into the text. Uldarico Clavel’s letter is further evidence of the postmodern, metafictional character of *La ceniza del libertador*.

There are other aspects of the book that are relevant to this dissertation, such as the way Cruz Kronfly uses death as a theme. While death is a common, often clichéd literary topic, it is worthwhile to consider how it features as part of the novel’s rewriting process. As Menton observes, “From chapters 3 to Chapter 47, the noise, the uproar the sound of music, the sound of dancing, as well as Bolívar’s efforts to meet the captain continue but without the mystery’s growing in intensity nor varying sufficiently to maintain the reader’s interest” (99). By chapter 48, Menton points out, Bolívar and his companions go to the upper deck and discover “dust-laden books and papers and a horde of large rats” (99). As one might expect, this has significance for Menton: “As a result of Bolívar’s discovery, the reader realizes that the noise of dancing has symbolized the medieval dance of death, and the trip down the river is equated with the trip to the sea of death (325)” (99). In this way, one can read a large portion of the novel as an extended metaphor for the passing from life into death. Death is present on that structural level, but

also on a more literal level, since Simón Bolívar dies in the last chapter. This is part and parcel of Cruz Kronfly's attempt to humanize Bolívar and to deconstruct the "great man" myth surrounding him as he uses a modified version of the death as equalizer trope. Combined with the often grotesque bodily references, it functions in the text as a rewritten or parodic variant of the hero's journey.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Cruz Kronfly's novel presents a particular relationship between fiction and history, and I view this as its distinguishing feature. There, I cited Mejía Rivera's observation that *La ceniza del libertador* puts history "al servicio de la ficción" (21) to affirm that Cruz Kronfly asserts the primacy of the narrative process. In other words, he treats narrative construction as the root of the historiographic act, and treats facts of the past as raw materials to feed into it. Narrative, not the "great man," is the source of history. Cruz Kronfly's model manifests this in a few different ways. His version of Bolívar, Menton argues, "suffers because of both the artificial plot and the excessive number of poetic, neo-baroque, and at times affected descriptions – plus the occasional insertion of poetry" (100). In general, the book features a "more obviously poetic and fantastic portrayal of Bolívar" and has a "more elaborate style" (100). While it is perhaps too negative, Menton's reading captures the same quality as Mejía Rivera's analysis. Menton points out the repetition of the term *ceniza*, "and his [Cruz Kronfly's] excessive use of images built on the words *párpado* 'eyelid' and *chorrear* 'to gush forth'..." (101), as well as the religious rhetoric from the passage on page 58 (which I cited earlier in this chapter). The novel's frequently extravagant language, together with the fictional plot it superimposes on the historical context, give us a clear picture of Cruz Kronfly's intention. Narrative, especially fictional narrative, is

primary, and an attempt to deal with history can never begin with *neutral* accounts of the past. Though descriptive accounts are part of the historiographic process, the historian feeds them into the narrative, not the narrative into them.

To better understand the theoretical implications of Kronfly's operation, it will be helpful to reconsider Hayden White's comments on the relationship between narrative and history. As I already noted above, a central aspect of White's monograph "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" is the concept of meaning production. While the categories of history, narrative, and myth may seem radically different, they are all systems of discourse that produce meaning (21). They are therefore, in many cases, interchangeable. The concept of the unity of meaning-producing discourses is especially important for postmodern historical fiction dealing with a figure like Bolívar. Like the other two texts this chapter addresses, *La ceniza del libertador* engages with the mythical, Carlylean version of Simón Bolívar, simultaneously partaking in historiography and crafting a fictional narrative that debunks the myth.

It is in this context that Cruz Kronfly's privileging of the narrative process becomes important. Like E.H. Carr's distinction between "facts of the past" and "facts of history" (5-6), Cruz Kronfly's model recognizes the difficulty in giving objective descriptions of events that took place in the past. The historian's craft is necessary because of this problem. Cruz Kronfly's insistence on the priority of the narrative process merely takes that attempted solution to its logical conclusion. The fact that both history and narrative are systems of meaning-production allows an author to alter the meaning attached to Bolívar in "great man" historiography.

Now that I have considered the texts of “El último rostro,” *El general en su laberinto*, and *La ceniza del libertador*, I am able to make some concluding remarks. This chapter underscored how the Simón Bolívar myth is grounded on the heroic features of the “great man” theory. For that reason, it began with a discussion of the “hero’s journey,” the general mythic structure of Carlylean accounts of his biography. This account undergoes in the texts studied a postmodern rewriting. Along with their mocking treatment of the hero’s journey, they call attention to the nationalist ideology involved in “great man” models of Bolívar that they also subvert. In this regard, we continued the discussion of Carrera Damas’s “culto a Bolívar” thesis. Together, the hero’s journey and the discourse of that nationalist cult constitute the most concrete forms of Carlylean ideology with respect to Bolívar, and serve as points of reference for the revisionist historiography of Mutis, García Márquez, and Cruz Kronfly.

In our analysis of Álvaro Mutis’s “El último rostro” we saw how his critique of the “great man” theory hinges particularly on the image of the death mask, which triggers a process of historiographic reconstruction. When examining Gabriel García Márquez’s *El general en su laberinto* we focused, following Álvarez Borland, on his use of historiographic metafictional tropes to underscore the general’s biological deterioration and final encounter with death in his labyrinth. Finally, our reading of Fernando Cruz Kronfly’s *La ceniza del libertador* explored the writer’s attempts to warrant fiction, a fiction that exaggerates the decaying aspects of the self-aware liberator on his last journey, as historical discourse. While the texts share the same strategic goal of dismantling the “heroic” model of Simón Bolívar’s life by focusing on his non-heroic death, they undertake distinct historiographic rewriting strategies.

CHAPTER 3

CONTESTING COLUMBUS: HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE COLUMBIAN
NARRATIVES OF AUGUSTO ROA BASTOS AND ALEJO CARPENTIER

This chapter addresses the figure of Christopher Columbus in two postmodern historical novels: Roa Bastos's *Vigilia del almirante* (1992) and Carpentier's *El arpa y la sombra* (1978). As I mentioned in the Introduction, Columbus is perhaps the most polarizing and least understood figure I investigate in this dissertation. Historical assessments of him tend towards one of two interpretations: Columbus as heroic explorer, or Columbus as brutal colonizer. There is little neutral ground when it comes to interpretations of his legacy. As I will argue below, these interpretations are characterized by uncertainty: uncertainty about his biography in general and his origins in particular. As Elizabeth Kolbert notes, there are many proposals about this aspect of his life: "Cristoforo Colombo was probably born in 1451, and almost certainly in the city of Genoa. Little is known about his early life, a gap that, over the past five centuries, has been filled with all sorts of speculation; it has been variously claimed that Columbus was Spanish, Corsican, Portuguese, French, German, Greek, Armenian, and even Jewish" (par. 6).

The novels I study in this chapter present a generally critical perspective on the explorer. However, they differ significantly from a traditional negative assessment, one which still presents a biographical (and therefore Carlylean) account of the historical events in which he participated. I argue that instead of placing Columbus at the center of the history of European-American contact, these novels question the validity of humanist interpretations of the period. Following Michael Hardin (25), I further contend that these

novels dispute traditional notions of native victimhood that lie at the center of many Latin American accounts of Columbus.

The views of Columbus that Roa Bastos and Carpentier articulate stand in sharp contrast with traditional, glorified versions of the explorer. To appreciate the full force of these authors' critiques, it is helpful to consider a specific example of the "great man" model of Columbus. According to the American Studies scholar Thomas J. Schlereth, the mythology of Columbus in the United States developed into a nationalist ideology, "by which successive generations molded Columbus into a multipurpose American hero, a national symbol to be used variously in the quest for a collective identity" (937). This ideology developed in three stages, and these correspond with the growth of the country as an imperial power. The first of these is "...Columbus as a feminine, classical deity, *Columbia*, an allegorical figure symbolizing liberty and progress" (937). This version of Columbus was followed by "...the masculine, fifteenth-century European, *Columbus*, who sanctioned nineteenth-century American Manifest Destiny and western expansionism" (937). The last stage yielded the mature version of the ideology. It featured "...Columbus as the major symbol of *Columbianism*, a late nineteenth-century form of patriotic Americanism that involved cultural and political hegemony and various ethnic and religious identities" (938). The development of *Columbianism* implied that "by 1893 Columbus, along with *Columbia*, had become part of what scholars have called the civil or public religion of the United States" (963). In this way, this representation of Columbus had the defining features of the "great man" theory: an understanding of history as biography, an emphasis on heroism, the near deification of a famous individual, and an emphasis on historical progress and the construction of a new society.

Mutis, Garcia Márquez, and Cruz Kronfly seek to undermine a similarly cultic version of Bolívar. Likewise, Roa Bastos and Carpentier challenge the model of Columbus promoted by ideologies such as Columbianism.

The structure of this chapter follows that of previous ones. It contains a close reading of each novel's historiography, introduced by a discussion of important theoretical concerns. It also includes a discussion of the "present past" of the novels. As I have previously noted, this concept exists when "...historiographic emplotments inevitably select matters of perceived relevance to the present" (Robinson 46), and in this case it is the issue of Latin America's regional identity. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the two narratives which highlights their similarities and differences and summarizes their critical significance.

As in other works I study in this dissertation, the narratives of *Vigilia del almirante* and *El arpa y la sombra* rely heavily on a textualist worldview. A common feature of postmodernism, a textualist worldview understands reality as a collection of texts that we must interpret. Commenting on the protagonist of *Vigilia*, Douglas J. Weatherford observes that he "...is surrounded by texts and signs and offers a creative reading (or misreading) of his encounter with a new world" (93-94). Roa Bastos frames Columbus's engagement with the Americas as a relationship between a reader and a text. This has much broader implications extending beyond the figure of Columbus. Specifically, it raises important questions about Latin America's identity. Weatherford argues that the Columbus character experiences a transformation: "this fictional explorer frequently mentions his experiences with diverse (and often anachronistic) books and authors that form part of the cultural canon of Latin America" (93). "Along the way,"

Weatherford asserts, “he becomes an archetype: Roa Bastos envisions his traveler as the first Latin American reader, as the founder of that region’s obsessive quest to discover its true identity in texts...” (93). Throughout the first part of this chapter, I will contend that this textualist perspective is at the core of Roa Bastos’s critique of the “great man” theory. In the anti-humanist logic of his novel, texts dominate over historical subjects. As in many postmodern historical novels, texts engender subjects, not the other way around.

The title provides important context for Roa Bastos’s critical strategy in the novel. His narrative is largely an autobiographical overview “...hecho en parte en su lecho de muerte, en parte en el barco,” one which “alude a circunstancias familiares y personales – sus orígenes oscuros, sus amores – pero, ante todo, a lo que constituyó su principal obsesión: llegar a las Indias por ruta occidental” (Cornejo-Parriego, 449). The historical setting the title refers to is Columbus’s deathbed in Spain in the early 1500s. Therefore, the term “vigilia” refers to a period of sleepless waiting – in this case, for death. In this sense, the title refers to a significant moment in the establishment of Columbus’s contested legacy – a fact that, according to Margarita Zamora, is characteristic of Columbian texts in general:

Typically, the Columbian texts have been under the purview of scholars working in disciplines devoted to determining the nature of the past. They treat the texts as evidence, and their readings are based on particular assumptions about the texts’ authenticity, reliability, and accuracy. To date, there is no consensus: the Columbian texts have been deemed *both very reliable and largely untrustworthy testimonies* on the Discovery.

(3, emphasis added)

Aside from a focus on the “great man” historiography, a core theme of the chapter consists of this: the disputed, often contradictory status of the Columbian historical record.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify how this chapter's understanding of *Vigilia del almirante*'s worldview relates to other analyses I mentioned in the Introduction. The first of these is Michael Hardin's discussion of victimhood. Traditionally, the relationship between a victimizer and a victim is a subject-object dynamic: the active subject attacks and harms the passive object. But if the subject is an illegitimate category, the object disappears as well, since both terms only have meaning in relation to each other. This attempt to transcend the notion of victimhood is not a denial of Columbus's negative legacy, but rather an effort to move beyond traditional historical accounts of it.

Federico Acevedo's reading of the novel, which emphasizes how Columbus tries to represent himself as a "discoverer," likewise has anti-humanist implications. This critic points out how "Colón manipuló el saber de los libros y mapas, alteró los cálculos y las distancias estimadas, para obligarlos a decir lo que deseaba" (146). This implies that, in Columbus's case, the subject "discoverer" is a construct. Since people inhabited the Americas prior to his arrival, and history exists as a collection of texts, he must change the written historical record to produce the "discoverer" identity. Once again, the text produces the subject. Far from being a Carlylean "great man" whose freely-chosen actions drive history, Columbus depends upon historical texts. There are obvious affinities between Weatherford's analysis and those of Hardin and Acevedo, but the connection with Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego's reading is less obvious. If, as she points out, Roa Bastos wrote the novel as an attempt to humanize Columbus, how can it be an anti-*humanist* text? To solve this contradiction, it is critical to remember that postmodern historical fiction's anti-humanism is founded on a critique of the subject. Commenting on this critique in the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Gilles

Deleuze, the philosopher Laura Hengehold explains how "... these thinkers question the subject's ability to declare itself self-evidently independent of the external conditions of its own possibility, such as the language in which it expresses clear and distinct ideas, the body whose deceptions it fears, and the historical or cultural conditions in which it perceives reason or tyranny" (par. 1). On this interpretation, even if the subject is not necessarily a total illusion, it is determined at least to some degree by factors beyond itself, and only acts in the context of previously-existing structures.

As I explained earlier in this dissertation, to humanize is to emphasize biological features in common with all other *Homo sapiens* and socio-cultural characteristics in common with many of them. This is entirely compatible with the anti-humanism of the postmodern historical novel, as it does not posit any universal human essence, or require that any individual exist independently of structures. Moreover, in the context of Roa Bastos's anti-Carlylean historiography, humanization and anti-humanism even enhance each other. This is because the Carlylean "great man" is both semi-divine and the ultimate free subject. *Vigilia del almirante* presents a Columbus that does not possess either of these characteristics. It therefore cuts against Carlyle's historiography.

I now turn to the content of *Vigilia del almirante*. From a structural perspective, the most salient feature of the text is its use of multiple narrators across 52 short chapters. These include figures such as Columbus, Piloto, an anonymous present-day researcher, and a series of chroniclers. In her previously-cited article, Cornejo-Parriego describes the significance of each one of these. Columbus's narrative is fundamentally "...una narración autobiográfica en la que el Almirante hace un recorrido por su vida" (449). This biographical overview touches on multiple aspects of the explorer's life, "pero, ante

todo, a lo que constituyó su principal obsesión: llegar a las Indias por la ruta occidental” (449). Piloto’s narration reveals to us a story of another explorer, who “...según ciertas versiones, había llegado con anterioridad a las Indias por la ruta occidental y que, antes de morir, confió su secreto a Colón” (462). The researcher plays an entirely different role. Instead of presenting his own autobiography, he considers the lives of both explorers. “Este investigador,” Cornejo-Parriego explains, “aporta diferentes textos y documentos sobre las dos figuras, y, al mismo tiempo, reflexiona sobre el quehacer historiográfico” (449-450). In this way, the novel’s structure allows for historiographic commentary on at least two levels. In Columbus’s and Piloto’s narratives, it calls into question the reliability of written historical records in general and biographical ones in particular. In the researcher’s narration, it emphasizes the centrality of personal reconstruction and interpretation in the writing of history. Roa Bastos thus builds his critique around these multiple voices.

Before considering the content of their narrations, it is worth noting that the narrative structure is a historiographic commentary in its own right. As I previously noted, ideas associated with the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin are a common feature of postmodern historical fiction (Menton, *Latin America’s New Historical Novel* 24). Among these is the notion of dialogic narrative, which “...contain[s] two or more often conflicting presentations of events, characters, and worldviews” (24). Closely associated with this is heteroglossia. As far as authors of postmodern historical fiction are concerned, these concepts are related to historiography, since history and fiction are similar or identical. Although dialogic narrative and heteroglossia were originally

categories used to analyze fiction, postmodern writers treat them as equally applicable to the discipline of historiography.

Postmodern historical fiction tends to reject the idea of a neutral, totally objective interpretation of history. Documents that recount past events often conflict with each other, and individual historical texts often contain internally inconsistent perspectives. Furthermore, many historians have competing opinions about which texts and facts to use. In this regard, *Vigilia del almirante* is dialogic, since the biography of the Columbus character is contested and subject to irreconcilable interpretations. This is most evident in the sections that feature the arguments of contemporary historians. The novel also features historiographic heteroglossia, as the three distinct discourses in the text represent three different historical sources. Together with the dialogic structure, this establishes fertile ground for a critique of the “great man.” Unlike Carlylean historiography, this novel’s approach affirms a multiplicity of often inconsistent historical records. As we will see, the form of *Vigilia del almirante* is a fitting complement to the novel’s content.

Roa Bastos prefaces the book with some very revealing comments. They offer key insights into the purpose of *Vigilia del almirante* and provide strong evidence for my reading of the novel. In the preface, the author informs us that “éste es un relato de ficción impura o mixta, oscilante entre la realidad de la fábula y la fábula de la historia” (4). It is, in other words, an attempt to confront fiction and history, and therefore a clear example of postmodern historical fiction. Commenting on this perspective, Roa Bastos notes: “Su vision y cosmovisión son las de un mestizo de ‘dos mundos’, o dos historias que se contradicen y se niegan” (4). This is clearly a reference to a heteroglossic, dialogic narrative structure. These affirmations, Roa Bastos informs us, are tied to a larger

purpose. Reading between the lines, the critic can identify that purpose as a critique of the great man theory: “Es por tanto una obra heterodoxa, ahistórica, acaso anti-histórica, anti-maniquea, lejos de la parodia y del pastiche, del anatema y de la hagiografía” (4). Classical Carlylean historiography presents the “great man” in Manichean terms: he is a praiseworthy hero who must confront hostile forces. From that perspective, he is rightly the subject of hagiography. While he is not a divinity, he does transcend the status of a typical human, and this allows him to confront foes and complete world-historic tasks. The historiography of Roa Bastos’s novel clearly seeks to undermine humanist approaches like the “great man” theory.

In the novel, Columbus’s segments are stream of consciousness discourses that give the reader access to the protagonist’s thought process. After the first few pages of the book, we begin to recognize the defining feature of this character: someone conscious of his own historicity. He observes: “He traído los títulos de don, de almirante, de visorrey, de adelantado, de gobernador general. Soy el primer grande extranjero de España, fuera de España, naturalmente. Aun cuando los títulos sean falsos o estén en suspenso” (19). The explorer will only receive these titles from the Spanish crown “...cuando descubra las tierras. Si no las descubro, tendré que comerme los títulos y las algas” (19). Although he desires the titles, he is pessimistic about the likelihood of receiving them. “No he salido aún del anonimato,” Columbus explains, “No soy hasta ahora más que el feto de un descubridor encerrado en una botella” (19). The character’s identity is contingent and dependent on external factors. According to the logic of the novel, the name “Columbus” does not refer to a fixed subject. Instead, it is a constructed

identity. These early observations are the first indication that the historiography of *Vigilia del almirante* cuts against the “great man” theory.

One paragraph later, as the character is lying in bed, he expresses an idea that is a core feature of postmodern historiography. “Lo real y lo irreal cambian continuamente de lugar,” he says, “Por momentos se mezclan y engañan. Nos vuelven *seres ficticios* que creen que no lo son. Recordar es retroceder, desnacer, meter la cabeza en el útero materno, a contravida” (20, emphasis added). This statement strongly recalls Hutcheon’s argument that for postmodern historical fiction, “the past really did exist, but we can only ‘know’ that past today through its texts, and therein lies its relation to the literary” (“Historiographic metafiction” 10). According to the textualist logic of Roa Bastos’s novel, Christopher Columbus was a real individual. But given the fact that history is a subcategory of narrative, individuals featured in historical documents function as characters. For the author, the account of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas is a kind of text, and he is a character in it, one of many so-called “fictional beings” in that narrative.

There are other quotations from the Columbus character that indicate a critique of humanist historiography. Later in the text, in Part XXX, the reader encounters a dialogue between him and a priest named Fray Juan. Discussing his previous negotiations with the Spanish crown, Fray Juan tells him: “Pero ya todo eso es pasado, mi Señor Almirante” (231). Columbus disagrees, because he believes that “el pasado también es para mí futuro. Dirá su merced que mis visiones están fuera del tiempo. No sé qué es el tiempo ni sé si estamos hechos de su sustancia” (231). Columbus views himself as a “timeless” figure, someone whose relevance is not limited to a particular period. However, given Roa Bastos’s own words at the beginning of the novel and the many features of

historiographic metafiction in the text, I believe that his words have another meaning as well. As I previously noted, humanist historiographies like the “great man” theory involve a linear model of time, one in which present events precede and cause future events. This allows events to convey a robust notion of historical progress. It is probable that a statement like the above one is an instance of Roa Bastos expressing his own perspective through the voice of his protagonist. The character’s professed agnosticism about time is very close to postmodernist skepticism about linearity and progress in history. Moreover, the double meaning of Columbus’s words represents a key strategy of postmodern historical fiction. The reader finds a provisional acceptance of the “great man” model of Columbus (as a “timeless,” presumably “heroic” figure), but the character’s own view of time directly undermines it.

In Part XLV, after a lengthy sequence in which Columbus describes his experiences in the “New World,” an anonymous narrator states that “los relatos del capítulo anterior están entresacados del *Diario de a bordo* y en parte de los borradores del *Libro del Descubrimiento*” (323). In other words, they constitute an intertextual document. Moreover, this document presents an epistemological problem. According to the narrator, “la relación de hechos y el tono de esta carta son marcadamente diferentes de los del memorial supuestamente enviado a los Reyes. Estos quedaron sumamente ofendidos por esta falta grave al protocolo real” (323). The document is, “...compuesto con los fragmentos más incoherentes...” (325), and contains multiple “...contradicciones y contraverdades...” (327). In the Introduction, I cited Federico Acevedo’s observation that the Columbus character uses a strategy of intertextuality to represent himself as a historical figure. The comments in this chapter lend strong support to his reading of the

novel. They also seem a commentary on the contestable, unstable nature of historical documents and historical truth.

This characterization of Columbus is no mere invention of Roa Bastos. There is strong evidence for it in the personal diary of the explorer. As Stephanie Merrim's reading of that document makes clear, the diarist tended to blur the distinctions between literature, historical writing, and autobiography. In this "extraordinarily rich and often lyrical" (62) document, Columbus had a unique writing strategy. "The *Diario* itself," she observes, "represents a generic innovation, being a personal journal explicitly addressed to the Catholic Kings" (63). For that reason, he must strike a difficult balance: "In it, mindful of the Crown's expectations, Columbus must perform the delicate task of adjusting what he indeed found to what he needed to find – the Orient, gold, spices, and souls for religious conversion" (63). To complete this task, Columbus adopts the approach of an author of fiction: "To cover his failures, Columbus marshalls a 'language' of success, in the sense of a strategy, thematics, stylistics" (63). As I noted in the Introduction, postmodern historical fiction emerged as a distinct literary strategy in the 20th century, but syntheses of history and narrative have existed for a much longer time. Columbus's diary is a precursor of historiographic metafiction, so this figure is a fitting protagonist for Roa Bastos.

The six sections after Part I recount some details of Columbus's arrival in the Americas in previous voyages. These are not particularly relevant for the purposes of this chapter. Part VIII, however, is crucial to understanding the novel's historiographic critique. Titled "Cuentan los cronistas: el piloto desconocido," it recounts various attempts to accurately interpret Columbus's voyages to the Americas. *Piloto*, the explorer

who supposedly reached the Americas before Columbus, represents an epistemological problem for the historians: “En la fantasmagoría de la empresa descubridora, la velada y misteriosa presencia del Piloto anónimo precursor, es otro fantasma más” (63). This description of a figure from the past characterizes postmodern historical fiction. While the term “Piloto” once had a real, living, referent, researchers who now encounter it in historical documents are left with uncertainty. Furthermore, Roa Bastos’s chroniclers note, “su existencia real ha sido desvanecida por el halo de su leyenda y ésta, a su vez, fue dando paso a una historia no menos nebulosa pero acaso no menos real que la del propio Almirante, que los ha pegado espalda contra espalda como dos hermanos siameses” (63). As far as they are concerned, legend (a kind of narrative) necessarily mixes in or bleeds into history. In trying to construct an accurate portrayal of Columbus, they affirm that history and fiction are, to a certain extent, inseparable from each other.

While many observers would view the admixture of Columbian legend and Columbian history as deeply problematic, the chroniclers – whom Cornejo-Parriego identifies as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Francisco López de Gomara, Bartolomé de las Casas, Pedro Mártir de Anglería, and Inca Garcilaso (457) – have a very different perspective. In part VIII of the novel, they consider the two categories complementary. “¿Cómo optar entre hechos imaginados y hechos documentados?” (65), they ask as a rhetorical question. “¿No se complementan acaso en sus oposiciones y contradicciones, en sus respectivas y opuestas naturalezas? ¿Se excluyen y anulan el rigor científico y la imaginación simbólica o alegórica? No, sino que son dos caminos diferentes, dos maneras distintas de concebir el mundo y de expresarlo” (65). Fiction and historical fact, they assert, are not mutually exclusive. They coexist, and simply address different aspects

of reality. Furthermore, postmodern historical fiction frequently acknowledges an active, constructive role for readers. The chroniclers believe that: “Ambas [maneras distintas] polinizan y fecundan a su modo – para decirlo en lenguaje botánico – la mente y la sensibilidad del lector, verdadero autor de una obra que él la reescribe leyendo, en el supuesto de que lectura y escritura, ciencia e intuición, realidad e imaginación se valen inversamente de los mismos signos” (65-66). History is partially a set of facts, but also the process of reconstruction that readers undertake when interpreting accounts of the past. It is not a neutral, static field, but value-laden and in flux.

Given the status of the chronicle (“*la crónica*”) as a foundational document of Latin American literature, it is significant that these narrators are called “cronistas.” As Kathleen Ross points out in her article “Historians of the conquest and colonization of the New World: 1550-1620,” this term originated in the Middle Ages as a description of “...writing that dealt with past or present events in a straightforward unembellished manner” (107). History (“*historia*”) was a different (but closely related) discourse. This term “...implied authorship by someone who possessed the tools and learning needed in order to make inquiry into a subject, then place it into a universal context” (107). The difference between the two categories was a distinction between supposed direct description on the one hand and interpretation on the other.

During the modern era, however, the meaning of the terms changed. “By 1550,” Ross explains, “the word *crónica* was being used interchangeably with *historia* by those writing about events in the New World (Mignolo, ‘*Cartas, crónicas y relaciones*,’ 75-8), as experience became as important as learning for the historian” (107). This semantic change was associated with Spanish colonialism in the Americas: “The privileging of the

participant who can state from experience what he or she has seen, despite a lack of education is a phenomenon of New World expansion” (107). Moreover, Ross notes, “...a recurrent theme of the histories of the seventy years concerning us here could be characterized as the re-interpretation of the histories of conquest from the vantage point of a society becoming involved in the process of colonization” (107-8). Roa Bastos’s novel problematizes the concept of the “crónica.” His use of the word “cronista” is an ironic use of the term. A “cronista” supposedly has the benefit of personal, direct experience, which makes accounts better. Nevertheless, the “cronistas” in *Vigilia del almirante* are just as unsure about the accuracy of Columbus’s experiences in the Americas as anyone else. The message is clear: for postmodern historical fiction, history cannot convey objective or empirical reality.

Just as the first part of Columbus’s narrative cuts against Carlylean historiography, this part of the chroniclers’ narrative also represents a challenge to the great man theory. As I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, the *sine qua non* of the “great man” theory is a biographical model of history. History is not primarily a series of events in the past, but the biography of special individuals who supposedly cause the events. By extension, historiography is entirely dependent upon biography. If the second category does not exist, the first is impossible. This is what is at stake in the chroniclers’ portions of *Vigilia del almirante*. They attempt to write a biography of Columbus to accurately recount the history of the European-American encounter, but struggle to construct an accurate account of the explorer’s life. The consequence is clear: one cannot really construct a biography of Columbus, and this renders Carlylean historiography

impossible. The historian must look towards other frameworks to write an account of Spanish-American contact.

If Columbus's and the chroniclers' chapters are implicit historiographic critiques, the contemporary historian's portion of the novel offers explicit historiographic commentary. Part IX begins with a conversation between the historian and a colleague about "la posible autenticidad del Piloto incógnito" (41). Their conversation surveys the records of the *cronistas*, and concludes with some observations about the narrative aspect of history. The intradigetic historian explains: "tal es la diferencia que existe entre las historias documentadas y las historias fingidas que no se apoyan en otros documentos que no sean los símbolos. Las dos son géneros de ficción mixta; solo difieren en los principios y los métodos" (48). As far as this character is concerned, there is no real distinction between history and fiction. Moreover, the historian contends, historiography must be anti-humanist. It has no room for a free subject: "El historiador científico siempre debe hablar de otro y en tercera persona. El yo está vedado. Los historiadores son de hecho 'restauradores de hechos'" (48). Just as postmodern approaches deny that there can be a subject that produces history, many deny that there is a subject that can produce historiography. History is not about the historian or subjects from the past. It is a project of selecting, arranging, and interpreting facts, and the ability to carry out those tasks is predicated on the availability of reliable texts.

It is also worth noting the intradigetic historian's comments at the end of Part IX. In an explicit reference to postmodern historical fiction, this narrator says: "hay un punto extremo, sin embargo, en que las líneas paralelas de la ficción llamada historia y de la *historia* llamada *ficción* se tocan" (79). In other words, the boundaries that traditionally

separate fiction and history are sometimes blurred. This kind of discourse refers to historical figures in a particular way: “toma sus nombres e inventa una vida totalmente nueva. O finge escribir una historia para contar otra, oculta crepuscularmente en ella, como las escrituras superpuestas de los palimpsestos” (79). In other words, there are texts that blur the boundaries between the categories of *fiction* and *history* by virtue of their use of figurative language. This is precisely what Roa Bastos intends to do with *Vigilia del Almirante*. In that regard, this chapter is clear evidence that the novel is historiographic metafiction. As I have already noted, Roa Bastos’s preface calls the novel a piece of “ficción impura” that alternates between history and fiction.

Roa Bastos’s novel also addresses the question of the biographical approach to historiography. Part XXI, “FRAGMENTOS DE UNA BIOGRAFÍA APÓCRIFA,” addresses the difficulty with using biographies as a historical source. This has implications for the “great man” theory. If it is not possible to use biography as a reliable source, the theory collapses. Alluding to the opening of *Don Quixote*, the anonymous biographer writes: “En un lugar de Liguria de cuyo nombre no quiere acordarse, nació hará una cuarentena este hombre de complexión recia, crecida estatura, seco de carnes, cara alargada y enjuta, frente espaciosa con una hinchada vena en la sien derecha” (161). However, the birthplace of Columbus is not the only uncertain aspect of his life. According to the biographer, “todo en la vida del Almirante es sujeto de dudas e incertidumbres” (161), and in this spirit, revises the opening sentence of this chapter: “No solo no quiere acordarse del lugar en que nació, sino que finge haberlo por completo olvidado” (162). The overall point is clear: there are simply not enough documented details to construct an accurate biography of Columbus. Basic biographical information,

such as his birthplace, is uncertain. Indeed, many supposed facts about the explorer's life are unreliable.

According to my reading of the novel, the allusion to *Don Quixote* in this chapter is not merely a literary device used for stylistic effect, but an implicit affirmation of intertextuality. According to Hutcheon in "Historiographic Metafiction," a major implication of intertextuality is that "a literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for the reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance" (7). This implies a reformulation of the relationship between texts and authors. Citing François Lyotard's critique of traditional notions of authorship, Hutcheon argues that "much postmodern writing shares this implied ideological critique of the assumptions underlying 'romantic' concepts of author and text, and it is parodic intertextuality that is the major vehicle of that critique" (11). Postmodern approaches to historiography understand history as collections of texts which can only have meaning in relation to other texts. The romantic conception of authorship becomes obsolete. In this context, the significance of the Cervantes reference is clear: a biography of a real individual (Columbus) has similar characteristics to a fictional biography, and an account of Columbus's life is only comprehensible in association with other sources. There is no discernable "author" of history here, and therefore no place for a subject that causes historical events. The reference underscores the equivalency that postmodern writers like Roa Bastos grant to fictional and historical discourse.

Moreover, this intertext suggests that the Columbus we know through historical texts is basically a literary character. The narrator in Part XXV, "EL CABALLERO DE

LA TRISTE FIGURA,” strongly suggests this: “Cien años después vendría el *Quijote*. Pero el futuro Almirante ya lo había presentido con esa especie de premonición absorta que los héroes soñados inspiran a sus lectores ingenuos y alucinados y los impulsan a imitarlos” (197). These are specifically literary heroes: “héroes que únicamente las grandes novelas acogen y hacen revivir en sus páginas o anticipan en el juego de fantasmas que el mito con el tiempo mantiene para esparcimiento y regalo de todos” (197). The juxtaposition of Columbus and Quijote in this chapter is not accidental. For the narrator, there is a direct lineage between them because “El Caballero de la Triste Figura [Quijote] pudo tal vez ser imitado un siglo antes por el Caballero Navegante y ser éste su más notable antecesor” (197). Since Quijote is clearly a fictional character, there is only one way that Columbus could both “imitate” and antecede him: the only Columbus we have access to (the one in historical texts) is a fictional character just as much as Cervantes’s protagonist. Furthermore, in Cervantes’s novel, Quijote’s story supposedly originates in a manuscript written by the biographer Cide Hamete Benengeli. Shannon M. Polchow explains the significance of this: “He [the second intradiegetic author in the novel] enters into the narratological scene in chapter 9 and explains how he found Cide Hamete Benengeli’s manuscript and subsequently had it translated by an unknown *morisco*. His function is to find the continuation of the story and then bring it to center stage for the readers” (73). A similar process is at play in *Vigilia*: the attempt to develop a biography of Columbus by using secondhand texts that are not necessarily reliable.

The core myth of the Carlylean version of Columbus is probably the notion that he “discovered” the Americas. Together with its more general criticisms of the “great

man” theory, *Vigilia del almirante* addresses this as well. Part XLVI of the novel, “DESCUBRIMIENTO = ENCUBRIMIENTO,” gets to the heart of the discovery myth. The narrator describes how “en Guanahaní (y aún mucho antes) comienza el encubrimiento del continente que iba a llamarse América y de las sociedades indígenas que un día vendrían a ser ‘descubiertas’” (331). The absurd notion of discovering a place that was already inhabited is equivalent to covering up reality. Adding to the absurdity is the fact that Columbus was not even the first European explorer to arrive in the Americas. As the narrator explains, “no se atreve a golpear, conforme le indicara el pronauta y predescubridor, el onubense Alonso Sánchez, la inmensa puerta de agua del Orinoco, guardada por torrentes semejantes a manadas enfurecidas de bisontes, para entrar en la región continental, ‘infinita, infinitísima’, le había advertido el Piloto” (212). In this way, the novel further problematizes the “discoverer” myth.

I now turn to *El arpa y la sombra*. This work is Carpentier’s final novel, and it addresses the same general theme as *Concierto barroco*: the uneasy admixture of European and American cultures and Europe’s consistent misunderstanding of the Americas. As José Miguel Oviedo points out, the novel is situated in the context of “el fallido proceso de su [Columbus’s] canonización en la época del Papa Pío IX” (525). As I have noted, critics like Elizabeth Kolbert and Margarita Zamora draw our attention to the uncertain aspects of the Columbian record. However, this novel deals with a real, well-documented moment in the history of the Catholic Church. In the context of this study, it therefore highlights the contradictory status of Columbian historiography. Carpentier’s novel consists of three parts, which deal with “las elaboradas discusiones y gestiones pontificas” (525) and “una síntesis biográfica del Almirante, minuciosamente apegada a

copiosa documentación histórica” (525). This is all connected to the question of European-American contact. “Para el narrador,” notes Oviedo “ésta es una gran oportunidad para jugar con las confluencias y diferencias entre el mundo americano y la cultura europea, en cuya percepción del Nuevo Mundo la fantasía y la realidad juegan papeles casi indiscernibles” (525). As with *Concierto barroco*, this novel’s critique of Carlylean historiography is synthesized with a critique of European cultural epistemology.

Raquel Arias Careaga’s introductory essay for the Akal edition of the novel provides a useful framework for understanding how Carpentier achieves the synthesis. Although the Cuban author had previously explored many moments in the European (mis)representation of the Americas, “de lo que nunca se había ocupado Carpentier hasta llegar a su última novela es del momento mismo del descubrimiento, del comienzo de una relación que dará origen a todo lo que después se llamó América” (22). Carpentier thus ends his career by looking at the beginning of Europe’s flawed understanding of the Americas: “Tras haberse ocupado de tantos y tan diversos momentos históricos, Carpentier regresa al origen de todo ello decidiéndose por fin a enfrentarse al acontecimiento del viaje de Colón” (22). And as González Echevarría mentions in “Carpentier and Colón: *El arpa y la sombra*,” the novel can be read as Carpentier’s reflection on the origin and nature of the Latin American literary tradition: “La identificación de Carpentier con Colón es evidente y es lo más sugestivo en *El arpa y la sombra*, ya que por supuesto, en el esquema convencional de la historia de la literatura hispanoamericana, los textos de Colón constituyen el inicio de la tradición narrativa, el principio sin principio, la escritura de fundación” (161). Unlike *Vigilia del almirante*, this

novel does not deny the possibility of writing a biography about Columbus. It focuses on a well-documented portion of his life and presents him as a failure. He is a notable figure and it is possible to write about his life. However, it proposes that, as Columbus did not successfully bring about any historical events, he cannot be considered a “great man.”

The novel consists of three parts, each of which corresponds to the key terms in the title. Carpentier introduces the first part, “El arpa,” with a verse from the Bible, Psalm 150: “¡Lado sea con los címbalos triunfantes! ¡Lado sea con el arpa!” (9). This introduces a key theme of the book, namely, the question of whether Columbus is deserving of praise. The setting of the first pages of the book is further evidence of this. The story begins in the Vatican, and focuses on an important decision that Pope Pius IX must make: the potential beatification of Christopher Columbus. He must consider a document written by the Primate of Burdeos, who believes that “el descubrimiento del Nuevo Mundo por Cristóbal Colón era el máximo acontecimiento contemplado por el hombre desde que en el mundo se hubiese instaurado una fe cristiana y, gracias a la Proeza Impar, se había doblado el espacio de las tierras y mares conocidos a donde llevar la palabra del Evangelio...” (16). The case for Columbus’s sainthood is centered on the explorer’s role in the imperial expansion of Spain, and the corresponding opening for Christianity in a new region. The Primate of Burdeos’s argument for beatification clearly denotes the “great man” theory: Columbus as single-handedly responsible for the discovery of the Americas.

Carpentier provisionally affirms the “great man” view of Columbus in order to deconstruct it later. The narrator – in this section, an anonymous, third-person, omniscient narrator – observes: “Era evidente que la beatificación ... del Descubridor de

América constituiría un caso sin precedente en los anales del Vaticano porque su expediente carecía de ciertos respaldos biográficos que, según el canon, eran necesarios al otorgamiento de una aureola” (17). Building the case for Columbus’s beatification is, in large part, a historiographic task, one centered on the posthumous construction of a biography. This is, in short, a reference to the biographical view of history, the core aspect of the “great man” theory. The Pope in 1851 entrusted the undertaking to the French historian Roselly de Lorgues, who completed this assignment enthusiastically: “Ferviente admirador de su héroe, el historiador católico había magnificado las virtudes que agigantaban la figura del insigne marino genovés, señalándolo como merecedor de un lugar destacado en el santoral, y hasta en las iglesias...” (17). The historian views Columbus as a heroic explorer, and consciously allows this bias to guide his *Historia de Cristóbal Colón*. His deliberate effort to embellish Columbus’s deeds and personal qualities has a very clear analogue: the effort of the fiction writer who tries to create an interesting protagonist. These passages evince two core characteristics of postmodern historical fiction: the standpoint that historiography is value-laden, and the position that it is identical (or at least closely related to) fiction. Those two factors, combined with the references to biographical history and heroism, strongly suggest that this novel calls the “great man” theory into question. Once again, the Catholic Church really did try to make Columbus a saint during the papacy of Pius IX. In terms of Ansgar Nünning’s typology of historical fiction, this particular section corresponds to traditional (realist) historical fiction, which “...foreground[s] a fictitious plot against the background of some identifiable historical context” (361).

The first section of *El arpa y la sombra* is also significant from the standpoint of aesthetics. As I noted regarding Eagleton's theory of aesthetics, it is not merely the study of beauty but also an ideological framework rooted in the body. It speaks to the relationship between concrete individuals (bodies) and the world as an object of perception. This relationship can be a source of values. How does this relate to the novel? The narrative voices speak of the possibility of Columbus icons appearing in churches, "...donde se venerara su imagen" (17), one that would soon gain "...corporeidad y carácter gracias a las investigaciones guadoras de algún pincel inspirado..." (17). This serves an important ideological purpose on two levels. In that regard, the narrative voice's explanation is worth quoting at length:

Hacer un santo de Cristóbal Colón era una necesidad, por muchísimos motivos, tanto en el terreno de la fe como en el mismo terreno político – y bien se había visto, desde la publicación del Syllabus, que él, Pío IX, no desdeñaba la acción política, acción política que no podía inspirarse sino en la Política de Dios, bien conocida por quien tanto había estudiado a San Agustín. (18)

Declaring Christopher Columbus a saint would mean giving him corporeality, that is to say, it would make him a concrete, palpable presence allowing the explorer to function as a concrete symbol for the Catholic Church's religious authority and its political endeavors.

This ideological task is very much in line with Carlyle's comments on the "commander over men" in *On Heroes*. As I have already indicated, Carlyle treated the "great man" not just as a historical figure, but also as a political authority: he was both the source of history and, in critic John D. Rosenberg's words, a solution for a society that "was drifting into anarchy" (116). Read in this way, the novel clearly synthesizes its historiographic commentary with a political-ideological critique. Like most authors of

postmodern historical fiction, Carpentier recognizes that approaches like the “great man” theory are not just questionable approaches to studying the past. They are always ideological and value-laden, and necessarily have real-world implications. Carpentier, like other authors I study in this dissertation, offers a critique of the “great man” theory that is both historiographic and political.

Part II of the novel, “La mano,” like Part I, refers back to the Bible. It opens with a verse from Isaiah 23:11: “Extendió su mano sobre el mar para trastornar los reinos...” (49). While Part I is imbued with a “great man” model of Columbus, Part II depicts him as a flawed human being. This portion of the text has a narrative structure different from the first: its first-person, stream of consciousness narration enters inside Columbus while he is lying on his death bed. At this point in the novel, *El arpa y la sombra* incorporates a nonlinear chronology: Part I is set in the Vatican in the 1800s, but Columbus died centuries earlier. Part II establishes a critique of Carlylean historiography on two levels: it seeks to humanize a “great man” and affirms a postmodern chronology that is incompatible with the “great man” theory. When it opens, we encounter a dying Columbus waiting for his confessor. He is delirious, and reflects on many topics in a disorganized fashion. Among these are the significance of language. Columbus ponders the possibility of his personal legacy being preserved in words:

Entregarme en palabras y decir mucho más de lo que quisiera decir – porque (y esto no sé si podrá entenderlo bien un fraile...) a menudo *el hacer* necesita de impulsos, de arrestos, de excesos (admito la palabra) que mal se avienen, hecho lo hecho, conseguido lo que había de conseguirse, con las palabras que, a la postre, adornadas en el giro, deslastradas de negruras, inscriben su nombre en el mármol de los siglos. (51)

In this passage, we learn about the overriding concerns of Columbus. While preparing to make a confession, he doubts that the priest will really understand him: he is a man of

action, while the priest is not. Columbus views himself as a hero, and the impulses and courage that had driven him cannot be easily captured in words. His legacy cannot be expressed in or preserved by language.

Columbus's view of himself as a "man of action" is combined with an awareness of his own mortality. In one passage, he says of himself: "El yacente, de manos ya puestas en estampa de oración resignado – ¡no tanto! – a que la muerte le entre por esa puerta, y el otro, el de adentro, que trata de librarse de mí, el 'mí' que lo envuelve y encarcela, y trata de ahogarlo..." (52) Although he sees himself as someone who had a role in life as the discoverer of the Americas, he is now forced to come to terms with death. Columbus has a deeply Christian view of the implications of his impending death. He believes in an afterlife and a God, and expects to meet the deity, "y alzar las manos y clamar; y alegar y responder, y defenderme ante el dedo tenso que se me clava en el pecho, y sentenciar y apelar, alcanzar las últimas instancias de un juicio donde, en fin de cuentas, estoy solo..." (53) The most significant aspect of this passage is Columbus's conception of himself in a subordinate position, as opposed to the "great man," whom Carlyle viewed as "he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated, and loyally surrender themselves, and find their welfare in doing so..." (162). Traditional Carlylean accounts would treat Columbus as a "commander over man," but here he is merely the deity's creature.

Aside from the comments that Columbus makes in this section of the novel, its overall structure (or apparent lack thereof) is significant. The fact that this stream of consciousness narration is often confusing and seemingly random does not constitute a flaw of the novel, but a commentary by Carpentier on history and American identity. Amelia

Mondragón's article "Carpentier: Colón desde el Nuevo mundo" argues that for Carpentier, "Colón es una imagen, una construcción, un trazado interpuesto entre América y Europa, y el sentido, la orientación, el cierre definitivo que le otorga material semántico, es reclamado por Carpentier como una actividad arbitraria en donde la arbitrariedad es justamente la prerrogativa del intérprete" (59-60). Stream of consciousness narration is a fitting medium for this arbitrary activity. Moreover, the active role this narration gives the interpreter – the reader – is a core feature of much postmodern historical fiction. Mondragón also contends that "en el Colón de Carpentier, todo reconocimiento es inmediatez, hecho éste que únicamente ha podido presentarse de manera inconsciente y esquematizada en nuestro siglo" (65). Since recognition is immediacy, it is only logical that Columbus's reflections on his life are somewhat confused and disordered: he is in a state of near-death delirium. Furthermore, "la inmediatez solo puede afirmar la presencia privilegiada de los sentidos, pues el fragmento, que es la única concreción posible de contarse, es también la única verdad posible de enunciarse" (65). The fragmented quality of Columbus's discourse reminds the reader of postmodern approaches to history.

After Columbus's initial comments, there is a large portion of the chapter in which he describes his travels to the Americas on behalf of the Spanish crown. This section does not focus on any particular voyage, but is a general overview of all of them. It is a delirious recounting of various details, such as the physical appearance of the Americas and his interactions with their indigenous inhabitants. While most of this section is not directly relevant to this study, it establishes an important fact. Namely, the travels were focused on "...la gloria de Descubridor que tengo en mayor precio que

cualquier otra honra. Mi ambición ha de aliarse al secreto. De ahí que deba callar la verdad” (75). By the end of his life, it is clear that he does not believe he has fulfilled this ambition, as he observes: “...Pero puesto en el ineludible apremio de hablar, llegada la hora de la verdad, me pongo la máscara de quien quise ser y no fui: la máscara que habrá de hacerse una con la que me pondrá la muerte – última de las incontables que he llevado a lo largo de una existencia sin fecha de comienzo” (167). Here the literary trope of the death mask has a double function. It refers to the fact that Columbus is actually at the end of his life, and it symbolizes his false identity as a discoverer and hero: “la máscara de quien quise ser y no fui.” The fact that Columbus is about to die forces him to come to terms with this truth (namely, the truth of his non-heroic status and mortality).

In this regard, the last paragraph of “La mano” is also very telling. When the confessor arrives, Columbus affirms, “se alza la cortina sobre el desenlace. Hora de verdad, que es hora de recuento. Pero no habrá recuento. Sólo diré lo que, acerca de mí, pueda quedar escrito en piedra mármol. De la boca me sale la voz de otro que a menudo me habita. Él sabra lo que dice... *‘Haya misericordia agora el cielo y llore por mí la tierra’*” (168). It is significant that Columbus uses a theatrical metaphor to describe his death. As I have previously noted, postmodern approaches to history frequently draw parallels between historiography and narrative. Typically, the relevant comparison is fictional narrative, but drama can serve the same function. Along with the assertion that history is a text that can be read, another key implication of this view of history is the notion that historical figures are comparable to characters. This is the significance of the theatre-related terms “máscara,” “cortina,” and “desenlace” at the end of “La mano.” The conception of life as theatre is an important part of this novel’s historiographic critique.

The last section of the book, “La sombra,” begins with a rather explicit reference to the “great man” theory. An anonymous third-person narrator is discussing the case for Columbus’s beatification. The Church must consider one of two possible interpretations of Columbus’s life:

...examinarían los menores tránsitos de su vida conocida, determinando si podía ser considerado como un héroe sublime – así lo veían sus panegiristas – o como un simple ser humano, sujeto a todas las flaquezas de su condición, tal cual lo pintaban ciertos historiadores racionalistas, incapaces, acaso, de percibir *una poesía en actos* situada más allá de sus murallas de documentos, crónicas y ficheros. (171)

The choices are clear: Columbus is either a Carlylean “sublime hero” or a “simple human being.” As I have argued, Carlylean historiography often has a certain religious quality. The first of the two options, the proposition that he is a “great man,” is the necessary condition for sainthood, clearly illustrating that religious character. That the Church’s conditions for sainthood and Carlyle’s conditions for the “great man” coincide so closely is ideologically significant. The narration’s presentation of the beatification process in these terms lends credence to John D. Rosenberg’s previously-cited observation that Carlyle developed his theory to counter the diminishing role of traditional hierarchies, including religious ones. The narrator rejects rationalist historiography’s reliance on texts in a way that fails to capture the true significance of historical acts, but rather affirms the existence of “una poesía en actos” (171). Carpentier affirms a postmodern view of history in which texts are primary. Even in making the case that there is a history which exists beyond documents, the narrator (presumably a Church official) cannot escape “reading” Columbus’s life as if it were literature.

There are other ironic moments in “La sombra” that reveal the historiographic core of this novel. Soon after the narrator’s comments about rationalist historiography,

the reader encounters a dialogue between two priests, “el conservador” and “un joven seminarista, discípulo suyo” (172). During their conversation about the cause for Columbus’s sainthood, the older, conservative priest remarks: “Además, habría que poner un coto a eso de las postulaciones. Nosotros somos algo más que una manufactura de imágenes piadosas” (173). The descriptions of the beatification process in this chapter make the irony obvious. The narration paints the Church precisely as a manufacturer of religious images. For example, the two priests discuss the topic of mariner saints: “‘Pues entonces, estamos jodidos’ – dijo el Conservador de la Lipsonoteca Vaticana –. ‘Porque ni Santo Domingo de Lores, ni San Valerio, ni San Antonio de Padua, ni San Restituto, ni San Ramón, ni San Budoc, (¿ni lo conozco!), invocados por los marineros fueron marineros’” (175). This, according to the older priest, is a problem that requires a solution. For that reason, he adds: “‘Conclusión: Pío IX estaba en lo cierto. Necesitamos un San Cristóbal Colón’...” (175). The priest’s vulgar and cynical assessment of the need for a seafaring saint suggests that beatification is indeed the process of intentionally fabricating religious images. Columbus, as “discoverer” and saint, has to be created, just as an author creates a character, a contradiction the Church’s otherwise Carlylean view of Columbus.

The exceptions that the Vatican makes for Columbus are another interesting aspect of the historiographic critique in this chapter. During the deliberations an official identifies what is supposedly unique about the explorer: “‘Me he cansado de repetir’ – dijo el Postulador: ‘que los milagros de Colón fueron de *una índole distinta a los demás milagros. Digamos que no están ubicados; que son universales*’” (182). The Devil’s Advocate (tasked with making the case against beatification) is persuaded by this

argument: “Ya veo por qué el decreto pontifical ha sido introducido *por vía excepcional* – dijo el Abogado del Diablo con tono áspero” (182). This conversation has the effect of undermining the “great man” model of Columbus. The Postulador’s rote repetition of the rationale for Columbus’s beatification casts the whole process in a ridiculous light. It suggests that the officials merely go through the motions without caring to examine the matter at hand critically. The fact that the Devil’s Advocate is convinced by such rote argumentation only serves to underscore the criticism.

With this understanding of the historiography in both novels, we can now revisit the implications of Michael Hardin’s comments about victimhood. As I mentioned in the Introduction, he identifies an important literary practice: replacing traditional discourses of victimhood with a rewriting of dominant historical narratives. This takes place through critiquing “the basic assumption that history is a true representation” (26). As examples of this tendency, *El arpa y la sombra* and *La vigilia del almirante* suggest that although Columbus was a real person, the Columbus we know through historical texts is ultimately a construct. This figure is a product rather than a producer of history. They thus call into question the Carlylean approach to historiography, and, by extension, ideologies that center around supposed “great” historical individuals. Ultimately, Carpentier’s and Roa Bastos’s approaches attempt to lay them bare as illegitimate apologetics for state power and violence.

I conclude this chapter with a comparative summary of the two novels and some comments about the implications of my research. Structurally, both *El arpa y la sombra* and *La vigilia del almirante* have much in common: they juxtapose Columbus’s own narration with that of other narrators from later historical periods. We also see a

humanization process at play in both novels, since they each emphasize the mortality of the Columbus character. Both novels also emphasize the discursive construction of Columbus's identity as a discoverer (whether by Columbus's own account of his life or the Church's attempt to beatify him). While *El arpa y la sombra* and *Vigilia del almirante* are comparable, they differ in that Carpentier uses two narrators (Columbus and the omniscient narrator of the first and last chapter), while Roa Bastos employs many. As I noted earlier in the chapter, these include Columbus, Piloto, a present-day researcher, and a number of chroniclers. He also experiments with intertextuality and self-referentiality as a mature example of postmodern historical fiction. In terms of content, Carpentier touches upon the pseudo-religious content of Carlyle historiography in a way that Roa Bastos does not.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing the main critical implications of the research in this chapter. In the first place, it contributes to a discussion of how authors of postmodern fiction treat historical figures (that is, figures depicted by historical texts) as characters. Since a historical text refers to figures that actually did exist, traditional criticism does not treat the category of character as applicable to it. Postmodern authors question this approach. Since both historical and fictive discourse consist of texts and often have narrative structure, they suggest that character can exist in both. Furthermore, it also offers readings of novels that deal with the literal, conscious use of Carlylean historiography for ideological purposes. While this does exist in *Vigilia del Almirante*, it is most evident in the beatification proceedings in *El arpa y la sombra*. The "great man" theory is fundamentally political, and both Roa Bastos and Carpentier are closely attuned to this aspect of it.

CHAPTER 4

REWRITING THE REVOLUTIONARY: ABEL POSSE'S AND PACO IGNACIO
TAIBO II'S NEW APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING CHE GUEVARA

The Argentine-Cuban revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara is the last historical figure I study in this dissertation. Closely associated with heroism in much of Latin America, he provides, like Bolívar, an opportunity for studying a classical, Carlylean version of the “great man” theory. The Guevara cult, like the Bolívar cult, has taken on near-religious proportions, and has a similar political function. In their books *Los cuadernos de Praga* (1998) and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* (1997), Abel Posse and Paco Ignacio Taibo II present critical responses to this version of Guevara. They use autobiographical and biographical frameworks to call the Carlylean version of Guevara into question. Despite their differences, they both develop their critiques around the core of the “great man” theory: the notion that history is biography and vice versa. The first text is immediately recognizable as a novel, while the second appears as a work of history. Nevertheless, they both converge in the same discursive territory: postmodern historical fiction. As with other chapters, Chapter 4 begins with preliminary comments about historical and theoretical issues relevant to Che Guevara. It then proceeds to a close reading of each text, paying special attention to themes from Guevara’s own writings that appear in both. The chapter concludes with a comparison of *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*.

While there is a relatively limited amount of criticism devoted to these two books, researchers who have studied them focus on the authors’ critical engagement with the concept of biography. Frans Weiser, Stephan Scheuzger, and Gilda Waldman are three

critics who have produced useful research following this line of inquiry. Weiser, whose research I cited in the Introduction, argues that Posse's novel functions to "...subvert blind acceptance of historical texts – be they autobiography or biography – as objective and singular" (703). In other words, it problematizes the authority of historical sources. Scheuzger, whom I also quoted in the Introduction, notes that Taibo's book calls into question the meaning of the categories "biography" and "autobiography": "Las numerosas y a veces extensas citas del Che, que está entrelazadas en el texto, en ocasiones parecen borrar los límites entre biografía y autobiografía (¿quién está contando?)" (201). It challenges the reader to critically consider the meaning of these terms. Waldman's "La(s) vida(s) de Ernesto, el 'Che' Guevara: cuatro miradas biográficas y una novela" is another helpful overview of some recent texts about Che. In the article, she argues that Posse "...convierte al Che en un personaje novelesco, lejano a las narrativas biográficas que rondan la vida pública de Guevara pero que no abordan sus circunstancias más personales" (133). Taibo, she argues, also takes a literary approach to historical narration. The author "...construye una narración más compleja al entrelazar su propia y fluida narración con la propia voz del Che a partir de sus escritos, convirtiéndola a ésta en segunda voz narrativa" (128). Studies of *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* all point towards the authors' problematization of biography as a genre and their attempts to blend it with other modes of discourse.

Considering the emphasis on Guevara's biography in both *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*, it is worth beginning this chapter with a look at his cultural status and personal writings. As I noted in the Introduction, critics like Luis Correa-Díaz have taken notice of the distinctly *cult* status of

Guevara in much of Latin America. As Correa-Díaz points out, cultural depictions often render him as a “santo y mártir laico” who is comparable to Jesus Christ. (257)

Describing the popular homages devoted to Guevara, he argues that Guevara is frequently rendered as a resurrected figure:

Atestiguándose en la mayoría de ellos, aún cuando no se refieren a esa comparación con Cristo de manera explícita ni pretendan hacerlo por diversas razones, la resurrección o el retorno del *Che*, como un artículo de fe poética y revolucionaria; o sea han señalado/proclamado su redención de la muerte y, a veces, más radicalmente todavía, que esta muerte nunca tuvo lugar. (258)

This vision of Guevara closely accords with both the letter and the spirit of Carlyle’s “great man” historiography. Since he was a revolutionary leader, many depictions of Guevara fall under the category of the “commander over men.” But unlike other figures I have addressed in this dissertation, traditional representations of him correspond more closely with the explicitly religious versions of the “great man.” Moreover, the religious construction of Guevara is not limited to third-person cultural depictions. As I mentioned in the Introduction, he often described his own role using religious language: one of his most well-known texts, *La guerra de guerrillas* [*Guerrilla Warfare*], describes the guerrilla as a priest and ascetic (79). In this respect, Guevara contributed significantly to the religious vision of himself. In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, Thomas Carlyle proposes three distinctly religious categories of “great men”: the hero as divinity, the hero as prophet, and the hero as priest. The “great man” historiographies of Guevara combine them and the “king” (i.e., political leader) in a way that traditional accounts of Montezuma, Bolívar, and Columbus do not. Both *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* recognize the Carlylean version of Guevara and ultimately call it into question. Furthermore, the religious character of the

Guevara myth has concrete manifestations in iconic, visual representations. As this chapter will make clear, images of Guevara often present him as a saint or Christlike figure, and this has a social significance.

As with previous books that I examine in this dissertation, *Los cuadernos de Praga* includes explicit historiographic comments with the text. In his introduction to the novel, Abel Posse comments on the significance of biographies about Che Guevara: “Comprendí que las biografías, tan exactas y cuidadas, con algunas disimuladas malas intenciones y un homenaje final y sin retaceos para tanto coraje asimilado por el sistema, ya dejaban intacto lo central de Guevara, su intimidad” (10). The biographies have other common characteristics. In Posse’s view, these include “su diálogo final con la muerte, la extraña naturaleza de su última transfiguración y su soledad transformada en desafío casi desesperado” (10). This is a “desafío de suicida sublime, de quien, quizá, matándose nace” (10). Moreover, he writes, “comprendí que la mejor biografía, pegada al dato exterior y confirmable, es siempre como un esquema del biografiado, su yo de superficie” (11). Posse sees a fundamental problem with the biographies. Basing himself on Bakhtin’s argument that “la novela es el triunfo de la vida sobre la ideología” (11) Posse states the purpose of *Los cuadernos de Praga*: “Las biografías confirman al Guevara de las ideologías. Sólo la novela podía liberarlo de su imagen de profeta de liberación” (11). The novel is an attempt to uncover the real historical individual that the Che myth has obscured.

These comments reveal important facts about Posse’s historiographic perspective. In the first place, like other authors of postmodern historiographic fiction, he questions the authoritative status of biographies. For Posse, biographies in general tend to capture

only surface features of the people they describe. Biographies of Guevara often portray him in unrealistic, mythic terms – they render him as a religious figure who is the subject of transfiguration. Along with this, he grants a central role to fiction in historiography. The act of writing a historical account of Guevara’s life tends to contribute to a mythologized version of Che. For this reason, only fiction – the novel – can change his current cultural status. Posse’s views of biography and fiction are very characteristic of postmodern historiographic fiction, and they are evident in *Los cuadernos de Praga* in multiple ways.

The title of the novel refers to a specific period in Guevara’s life. After his failed military operation in Africa and before his attempt to start a revolution in Bolivia, he lived in disguise in Czechoslovakia in 1966. He supposedly wrote some notebooks there, but these texts remain undiscovered. The novel has unnumbered sections, some set in 1966 and some in the 1990s. Che’s first person reflections constitute the earlier parts. Weiser summarizes the significance of basing the novel on Che’s personal writings: “...Posse demythifies his subject by allowing the reader to access Guevara’s notebooks and fragments of letters, which reveal an individual on the verge of losing his identity as his nonfiction writing gradually unravels through a network of historical referents” (705). The novel juxtaposes Che’s reflections about his situation upon writing with another narrative thread. In this narration, a fictionalized version of the author – a character named “Abel Posse” – recounts his research on Guevara’s writings and the traveling he did to conduct it. Continuing his discussion of the theme of identity, Weiser argues that “this effect is assisted structurally by the novel’s fragmentation, as in addition to the historical thread that presents Guevara’s intimate writings, in a contemporary thread a

narrator identifying with Posse the author incorporates interviews he claims to have conducted, such that through the vastly differing evaluations of Guevara-as-subject, both writers become fragmented subjects” (705). The narrative proposes a tension between the two. With its questioning of the notion of a fixed identity, its incorporation of fragmented discourse, and its use of a nonlinear narrative chronology, *Los cuadernos de Praga* exemplifies core features of postmodern historical fiction. Ultimately, this allows Posse to build an implicit, multi-layered critique of “great man” historiography.

In the first section, Guevara announces a writing project: “Praga. 1966. Apuntes filosóficos. Café Slavia. Primera salida en solitario. Pido un té, fumo mi pipa con tabaco Amsterdamer, un lujo para el retornado guerrero. Conseguí la mesa de la ventana. Inauguro los Cuadernos de Praga” (15). In large part, this is a self-conscious text about the writing process. While he writes, Guevara wears a disguise. “He corrido treinta y seis años,” he writes, “y ahora descanso dentro de Vázquez Rojas, el comerciante, que es un poco franquista e hinca del Real Madrid, según dice la leyenda que memoricé, preparada por los servicios cubanos” (16). While some would find it stressful to live under a false identity in a foreign country, it is a relief for Che. He reflects: “descanso dentro de mi máscara. Qué alivio. Engordo en paz después de haber perdido veinticinco kilos en mi último fracaso; tratando de fundar un mundo que los negros detestan. En el corazón del Congo” (16). Che’s comments in this chapter are important for two reasons. First, they represent a trope that I have identified in other works of postmodern historical fiction: the subject of a myth or cult who privately rejects the idealized version of himself. When Che identifies his effort to start a revolution in the Congo as his “latest failure,” there is a clear message. He does not see himself as a perfect, revolutionary demigod, but as a flawed

person. Second, his comments invoke the image of the mask in both a literal and symbolic way. Disguised as Vázquez Rojas, he wears a literal mask. Moreover, the fact that he can “rest” in disguise indicates that his identity as a revolutionary is not a comfortable one to inhabit.

The mask trope appears in other parts of the novel. Che writes that “...Vázquez Rojas/Mena es más libre que el otro, el Guevara-guerrillero-heroico,” as he argues that “uno termina siendo su máscara. Y la máscara que elegí huele a muerte. La máscara, lo siento, empieza a hacer su propio camino y me lleva. De modo que, al fin de cuentas, yo no soy ni Vázquez Rojas ni el conocido Guevara de la Serna...” (91). This perspective has three main implications. First, since there is no one stable identity that persists throughout the narrator’s life, there is no identity to which a “great man” designation can adhere. Second, by presenting Che as aware of his impending death, Posse engages in a common strategy of postmodern historical fiction: constructing a character who does not really accept the “great man” model of himself. Finally, the repeated image of the mask is an example of a classic trope: the notion that life is theater. If one construes life as a series of roles that people play, there is no room for an individual who single-handedly creates history. Ultimately, Che and everyone else follows a script.

A section introduced as “nota de café” provides a particularly revealing example of the fragmentation strategy that Weiser identifies. Here, Che presents both of his identities – Vázquez Rojas and Guevara – as interacting and conversing. The chapter has significant implications for Posse’s critique of “great man” historiography. In the opening paragraph, for example, the narrative voice recounts how “hoy al afeitarme comprendí que el burgués más bien franquista que es Vázquez Rojas/Mena no tiene problema en

tratarme de igual a igual, a Guevara, el famoso. Tiene ese desparpajo seguro de quienes están definitivamente convencidos de que lo único que cuenta es el dinero y saber pasarlo bien” (47). While we previously read that Che felt very relieved wearing the Vázquez Rojas disguise, we now discover that his perspective is more complex: “Guevara sabe que, mientras esté en Praga, tendrá que aceptar este ritual o juego. Tendrá que andar revestido de burgués, lejos de su pelo castaño y de su boina con la estrella revolucionaria, imagen que lo transformó en un *logo* de la revolución mundial voluntarista. Es novedosa la sensación: se extraña a sí mismo, tiene nostalgia de su ser” (49). The chapter presents Che as divided into three parts: the revolutionary, a bourgeois, and the reflexive writer (who narrates the interaction between the first two identities). In this way, the text excludes an undivided, stable, permanent subject whom we can identify as “Che Guevara.” Posse thus constructs *Los cuadenos de Praga* as an antihumanist narrative – one which clearly leaves no room for a “great man.”

The Vázquez Rojas disguise has another important function in the text: it serves as mechanism of intertextuality. A recurring intertext in the novel is the work of the Czech author Franz Kafka. In his Vázquez Rojas identity, Guevara is very interested in Kafka. In the section I just referenced, for example he asks some students and professors where Kafka’s house is located (50). He explains that he has read a bit of Kafka’s work, “...pero no lo entendí nunca plenamente” (52). Weiser explains how the intertext develops: “As he becomes consumed by the identity of Vázquez-Rojas, Guevara frequents cafes with the literary elite and is introduced to the work of Kafka, retracing the Czech writer’s meanderings about the city” (706). There is also a connection between Posse’s narrative and the content of Kafka’s famous novella. “He [Che] even engages in

discussions of *The Metamorphosis*,” Weiser observes, “an ironic mode of referencing his own identity transformation, for ultimately, he reenacts Kafka’s last request of Max Brod; when Guevara fears that he will die, he demands that his diaries be destroyed and never revealed to the public (300)” (706). Aside from the fact that it marks the novel as a work of *postmodern* historical fiction, the Kafka intertext serves another important purpose: it presents Che as a reader. While this may seem trivial, it takes on considerable significance if one remembers the self-aware, active, constructive role postmodern historical fiction grants to readers. In this regard, the Kafka intertext ultimately suggests a Che simultaneously involved in interpreting and constructing a discourse about his experiences in Czechoslovakia.

The two narrative threads, the Vázquez Rojas identity, and the Franz Kafka intertext coexist in the novel with other modes of historiographic critique. Before turning to the Posse character’s sections, I will consider another aspect of historiographic critique in the Che character’s portion of the novel: descriptions of physical health problems. As in the Bolivarian narratives, the reader finds in *Los cuadernos de Praga* the theme of physical deterioration and weakness. “Great man” historiography often presents its figures as stronger and more virile than other humans. As part of their historiographic critique, writers who seek to challenge the Carlylean view of the past often write paradoxically frail “great man” characters. In a section that begins on page 113, Che sits in a café and imagines his participation in a battle: “Subo a mi jeep imaginario, mi jeep de comando, en la vereda del Slavia y cargo a los tres hombres de pequeña virtud, Vázquez/Benítez/Mena, y me voy con ellos para la provincia de Las Villas. Ubico también entre los críticos virtuales al señor K., natural de Praga. ¿Por qué no?” (113) In

Che's reverie, he and some other guerrillas win the battle. However, the narrative includes a striking account of Guevara's grave health problems associated with his asthma and combat injuries. He describes how, after the fighting ends, "yo me pego al inhalador. Tengo el brazo inmovilizado, entablillado. Aleida [his partner] me hace masajes en los tobillos. Me pone paños frescos en los ojos y logra hacerme dormir en profundo en dos horas" (115). The issues he has – a serious case of asthma, an injured arm and ankles, and an eye problem – suggest a weak or vulnerable character. Che is not an invincible warrior, but a normal human being.

This topic appears in other parts of Che's narrative. He describes an interaction with a doctor while being treated for asthma: "¿Cómo decirles que soy un atleta-guerrero y que ya dentro de uno o dos años nadie me contratará ni podré ofrecerse como *samurai* independiente? Un guerrero-guerrillero-heroico dura más o menos lo que un tenista, o un jugador de rugby: nunca pasará de los cuarenta" (129). At the end of the chapter, Guevara wonders: "cómo decirle al doctor Sadak que sólo necesito un cuerpo para un año o año y medio. ¿Lo suficiente para encender el horno decisivo, el último Vietnam?" (131) Two different, contradictory themes arise in Che's comments. The first is an acknowledgement that his body will not last forever, while the second is that he is still a heroic figure. Sadak's skepticism about Che's viewpoint underscores the larger point: the notion of heroism present in the "great man" theory stands on unstable foundations. Posse uses a figure closely associated with biology (a physician) to give indirect commentary on the role of the body in Carlylean historiography.

The notion of heroism undergirds the last aspect of Che's narrative I consider: the question of historical agency. Like other authors, Posse has his character offer explicit

historiographic commentary. Most of these are variations on the *foco* theory. As I noted in the Introduction, Che modified the classical Marxist conception of revolution. In his essay *La guerra de guerrillas*, he argued that “it is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist” (Guevara 47). For Che, heroic guerrilla action can essentially *will* a revolution into happening. The Che character espouses this perspective repeatedly throughout the book, and it constitutes the core of his philosophy of history. While authors like Gabriel García Márquez use their characters to espouse their own view of history, Posse has a different strategy. He has the Che character express Guevara’s position, but does so in a way that makes it appear incorrect.

In the passage I just referenced from the novel, Che mentions his plan to “ignite the decisive oven, the last Vietnam,” one example of the *foco* theory. Using the metaphor of lighting a flame, he makes his goal of using guerrilla action to spark a socialist revolution clear. However, there are other illustrations of this technique. Under the heading “Notas de Praga (últimas),” Che writes: “Otra vez el lado puro de la acción, de la guerra. Hay hombres de creación lenta y hombres de combustión rápida, que nacieron para encenderse y desaparecer” (237-238). The supposed existence of these two types of people has larger implications: “Pueden dejar detrás de ellos un momento de grandeza o caer apagados, insignificantes, como aquellas cañitas voladoras que lanzábamos al espacio en las memorables noches de Navidad de la infancia” (238). Che seems to imply that he is the second type of man, the quickly burning kind. He also suggests that he wants to belong to the first of its two subcategories, leaving a legacy of “greatness.” The implication could not be clearer: he sees himself joining a pantheon of “great men.” In Che’s view, a short life of intense action allows him to achieve that goal.

There are other passages in the novel that make the similarities between Che's notion of historical progress and that of Carlyle even more evident. He cites a passage from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*. Che citing Nietzsche may seem counterintuitive at first, but the passage fits in well with his worldview. "Axioma: hay un elemento de decadencia en todo lo que define al hombre moderno; pero junto a la enfermedad hay indicios de una fuerza y de un poder virgen," Nietzsche argues (237). Like Guevara, Nietzsche affirms that humanity consists of two types of people: "las mismas causas que determinan el empequeñecimiento de los hombres llevan a los fuertes y excepcionales a elevarse a la grandeza. Sucumben ahora innumerables individuos de tipo superior, mas los que sobreviven son fuertes como el diablo." Che cites the passage approvingly. To understand why, I turn to Leslie Paul Thiel's analysis of *The Will to Power*. Thiel explains, "any genuine advance of mankind, which for Nietzsche meant an advance of its highest exemplars, would be preceded and accompanied by disease, disorder, and deterioration (*WP* 69)" (92). As Thiel notes, this leads Nietzsche to advocate a somewhat contradictory assessment of the modern world: "Hence Nietzsche at once celebrates and loathes the modern world's spiritlessness: it is a world pregnant with greatness although its pregnancy will be marked by much suffering and nausea" (92). Che, too, sees the potential for greatness in the context of suffering. He expects to achieve greatness through personal sacrifice, and holds that widespread violence and upheaval are part of that process.

As I have previously stated, "great man" historiography exists beyond Carlyle. His work is the most well-known expression of the theory and perhaps the most complete, formalized version of it. However, there are variants of it elsewhere, and we

see one of them in the Nietzsche passage. *The Will to Power* articulates a historiography in which special individuals achieve “greatness,” and, in so doing, advance the world beyond its current degenerated state. Posse’s Che’s view of revolution essentially places guerrillas in the role of the special individuals that lie at the core of Carlyle’s and Nietzsche’s schemata of historical change. *Los cuadernos de Praga* critiques Guevara’s vision by presenting it in an exaggerated form, one that makes it appear out of touch with reality. In all parts of the book, there is a temporal critique: looking back, the reader knows that Che’s approach to revolution has failed in the Congo and will also fail in Bolivia. As we will see, Posse’s sections of the book present an explicit reference to and rejection of the *foco* theory.

As I indicated above, *Los cuadernos de Praga* consists of two narrative threads: Che’s writing of the notebooks in Czechoslovakia in 1966, and a fictionalized version of Abel Posse doing research and speaking to colleagues. This second thread takes place in Cuba, Buenos Aires, and Prague in the 1990s. Posse’s portions of the novel thus follow the model of what Ansgar Nünning calls the metahistorical novel, which, as I have noted previously, thematizes “...the process of historical reconstruction and the protagonists’s consciousness of the past rather than the represented historical world as such” (364). I now consider some illustrative examples from the second of the two threads. In a section that begins on page 123 and takes place in an unspecified year, the Posse character is in “...el valle perdido que esconde la bella Praga.” He speaks to a Czech associate named Vlášek, whom he met in 1992 (21). During the conversation, they talk about Che’s notebooks. Previously in the novel, Vlášek has personally provided Posse with photocopied versions of these documents. He recognizes their importance and makes

some telling comments about the historical identity of Che. For Posse, they clearly contribute to Guevara's cult. "Creo," he affirms, "que hay cosas de importancia decisiva. Cuando endiosen a Guevara y se escriba la biografía final, los Cuadernos estarán en el centro" (124). According to him, the publication of any final biography of Che would be a decisive step in the creation of a cult that deifies Guevara. Vlášek is skeptical of Posse's perspective, stating that "nadie conoce ese material..." (124). When Vlášek personally reviewed the material, he was surprised: "Es muy heterogéneo. Yo creí que sería más político, más preciso" (124). Adding to this observation, he calls the content of the notebooks "desparejo" (124). While this may seem like a rather mundane conversation, I believe that it serves an important purpose: to make the traditional historiographic process problematic.

Although Posse sees the publication of the notebooks as part of a final deification of Guevara, the construction of Che in *Los cuadernos de Praga* cuts against this possibility. This novel clearly presents a fragmented, alienated Guevara who has multiple, fluid identities – a far cry from any deified or "great man" figure. Vlášek's descriptions of the notebooks – heterogenous, not very precise, uneven – underscore this. In my view, this refines the historiographic role of the Posse character: he functions as a historian who eventually comes to see there cannot be an authoritative biography of Che. Gradually, his research reveals that the biographical model of historiography is flawed and limited. In this way, the narrative thread about Posse's investigation develops into a critique of the core of the "great man" theory: the biographical approach to history.

Another significant portion of Posse's narrative begins when he explores the nature of biography by describing a 1997 meeting in Buenos Aires with Jon Lee

Anderson, a well-known Che biographer. “De las cinco y seis biografías que exaltan a Guevara treinta años después de su muerte,” he explains, in the opening paragraph of this chapter, “la de Anderson es la más completa. Aunque el género biográfico es más propio de la épica y de la consagración que del viaje hacia la intimidad del personaje” (189).

Posse’s comments illustrate postmodern historiography’s skepticism towards biography. He acknowledges that “Anderson acumuló una enorme cantidad de datos” (189).

Although his text is considered authoritative and well-researched, Posse implies that even it cannot escape the limitations of the genre as a historical source. Biography, he argues, is part of the tradition of epic literature, and contributes to myth-making: instead of functioning as a meaningful investigation of a person, it typically *consecrates* its subjects. Biography treats individuals like Che as heroes, saints, or demigods. Posse’s perspective is clear. Biography, a category of literature, creates characters with a distinct ideological purpose.

Che also fulfils a literary role as a symbol. When Anderson tells Posse “es increíble el poder de Guevara como símbolo mundial,” (194) the Posse character asks: “¿Símbolo de que? ¿Qué es lo que representa el *logo* Guevara, con su boina y esa extraña mirada capturada por el fotógrafo Korda, en un lejano mitin en La Habana?” (194) Anderson has a clear answer for Posse: “–Es el espíritu de la rebeldía–me dice–. Puede que se trate de algo inmanente a la condición humana” (194). Posse objects to this, observing that “para el buen sentido de Anderson, la rebeldía sería una etapa final de la infancia del hombre. (Del hombre previo al llamado ‘fin de la Historia’.)” (194). While Posse does not disagree with Anderson about Che’s status as a symbol of rebellion, he is skeptical of the value of this symbolism. He views it not as an inherent aspect of the

human condition, but as a construct – an infantile one at that. This is another implicit rejection of “great man” historiography since, in the Carlylean tradition, the “great man” exists as a living symbol, as the embodiment of certain values. Posse expresses skepticism that any such figure exists as anything more than a fictional character.

Another key element of Posse’s narrative is, as I noted before, an explicit discussion of the *foco* theory. In one of Posse’s sections, which is set in Cuba in 1995, he quotes some of Che’s friends (who remain anonymous in the novel). As one of them explains, Che developed a well-defined strategic vision for revolutionary change in Latin America. Che viewed a then recent coup (against President Illia of Argentina) as a decisive event: “Explicó que esto aceleraría las condiciones para un levantamiento urbano y obrero en la Argentina. Estaba seguro de que, una vez encendida la mecha, Perón volcaría la gente en su apoyo. Esto es poco conocido. Pero si bien Bolivia era la base, el objetivo final sería la guerra revolucionaria en la Argentina” (250). According to the friend, Che had a specific name for this scenario. “Es lo que llamaba el Foco Continental,” and this conveyed his teleological view of history. Che saw it as “el episodio decisivo, para América y para el mundo...” (250). The fact that Posse reads about this theory in the commentary of Che’s friends communicates his view that the confident revolutionary enthusiasm so real to Che and his associates is nothing more than an artifact for a present-day researcher like Posse. *Los cuadernos de Praga* emphasizes the distance between the guerrilla’s original hope and the fact that it did not materialize. In the logic of the novel, this undermines Che’s supposed status as a “great man.”

I now consider one last aspect of the novel: how the last Posse section confirms the presence of a postmodern view of historiography. Here, the reader encounters another

conversation between him and Vlášek. Posse is in Prague again, and does not specify the year. His Czech associate emphasizes the uncertainty about the final period of Che's life regarding a dispute he had with Fidel Castro. "Algún día," he speculates, "tal vez podamos conocer el material de los soviéticos sobre todo esto. Aclararía este trillado tema" (257). Adding to this, he says: "Pero sobre los hechos de Podebrady [a place where Che stayed in Czechoslovakia] no quedan muchos datos. En esos Cuadernos de Praga están las últimas notas de Praga. Curiosas observaciones" (257). According to my reading of the text, this chapter conveys a clear message: one cannot avoid a certain *incompleteness* in the historiographic process. Since the field of history admits no final, objective explanations, the historian will always encounter doubt, have problems with sources, and need to engage in writing and rewriting.

I now turn to *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*. Before delving into the text, it is worth clarifying how I quote from it. Because I use an electronic version of the book without page or paragraph numbers, I do not include either in my quotes. To contextualize them, I state chapter numbers and titles, and, where applicable, describe where they are located in the chapters. Furthermore, the interested reader can easily search for and find the quotes in the electronic version. In this book, Taibo explicitly acknowledges the mythic version of Guevara. His understanding of the Guevara myth recalls García Márquez's treatment of Bolívar as a trapped, imprisoned figure. As Taibo writes in a note to the 42nd edition, the third revision of the book, the Argentine-Cuban revolutionary exists as

...Un fantasma que, muy a pesar de su humor cáustico y de sus reiteradas timideces, ha quedado preso en la parafernalia de la imagen y de las maquinarias, inocentes o dolosas, que se dedican a vaciar de contenido todo aquello que se les cruza a su paso para volverlo camiseta, *souvenir*, taza de café, frase célebre,

póster o fotografía, destinado al consumo. Y ésta es la condena de los que provocan la nostalgia: estar atrapados en los arcones del consumo, o en los reductos de la inocencia. Quedar preso en el limbo del mito.

Much like the Christian saints known through relics, icons, statues, and legends, standard depictions of Che are often mythic. They imprison the historical figure in a flawed, cult model. The author declares his intention to resist this myth on two levels: the positive and the negative. “He intentado,” he informs us, “que las trampas de los mitógrafos, evangelizadores de la imagen del Che, no me involucren y que los antifidelistas no me contaminen con sus obsesiones antihistóricas.” The content of Taibo’s book is ultimately oriented towards a historiographic task: transcending the mythic version of Che. In terms of form, it has a dialogic structure that incorporates two narrators. In addition to the author’s own first-person narration, the book references various personal writings of Che. These quotes express Guevara’s voice, usually in italics, and in that sense, “él es el segundo narrador de esta historia, el que importa.” Furthermore, Taibo engages in a constant dialogue with secondary sources (in the form of endnotes in each chapter). While many readers would recognize *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* as a work of “pure” history, its synthesis of historiography with a structure derived from fiction suggests otherwise. In terms of both content and form, the text is ultimately a mature example of postmodern historical fiction.

Before examining the content of the book, it is worth considering the final paragraph of the note I just cited. Here, Taibo further clarifies the role of myth in *Ernesto Guevara*. “Viví en una generación en la que el racionalismo intentaba montarse sobre el romanticismo y le daba barniz,” he reflects, “pero por mucho que perseveraba, lo romántico siempre brotaba bajo la frágil capa de pintura, nunca lo sustituía; y en la que el

marxismo chic adoptaba como cantinela el verbo ‘desmistificar’.” Taibo views this as a contradictory phenomenon. He clearly takes a position against the mythic version of Che and sees his book as an alternative to texts that propagate the myth. Nevertheless, he affirms, “soy plenamente consciente de que mistificar al Che, rehumanizar su mito por la vía literaria, (que no novelesca, esto nada tiene que ver con la ficción), la única que conozco, la de contar minuciosamente sus historias, es colaborar a la remitificación, y no me preocupa.” This is the paradox at the core of *Ernesto Guevara*. In Taibo’s view, to consciously try to humanize Che is to, on some level, propagate the myth. He recognizes that the book may have this effect but is not concerned: “creo en el derecho de los ciudadanos a los mitos.” The centrality of concepts like *humanization* and *demythification* is a common feature of postmodern historical fiction, but after reading the note, we can see that Taibo primarily *calls attention to* the myth by arguing that humanization and demythification are interdependent parts of a self-perpetuating process. And although he does not accept “great man” historiography, he does not think there is anything inherently bad about people cultivating the Che myth.

I now turn to the content of *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*, fleshing out Taibo’s unique approach to historiography. I will explore the implications this has for the “great man” theory and clarify how postmodern historical fiction makes this possible. The book is long, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address its over nine hundred pages and sixty-eight titled chapters. For this reason, I focus on chapters from three general parts of the text: those dealing with Guevara’s early life (approximately chapters one through eleven), those that relate to his participation in the Cuban revolution (roughly chapters twelve through twenty-eight), and those that deal

with the last years of his life (approximately chapters fifty through sixty-eight). In my estimation, these are the phases of Che's life that contribute the most to his mythic status, so their corresponding chapters are the ones most relevant to this dissertation.

Chapter one, "El pequeño Guevara, infancia es destino," addresses a familiar theme of Carlylean historiography: the idea that the historical mission of the "great man" begins in childhood. The chapter opens with a reflection on a 1929 photograph of a fourteen-month-old Guevara. The image, Taibo argues, symbolizes the Che cult. "Uno de los tantos marxistas de Pandora que han biografado al Che," he writes, "se obsesionará con la idea de que las imágenes de la selva tropical del nordeste argentino, de Misiones, donde circularán los días de la primera infancia de Ernesto Guevara, prefigurarán su destino en las selvas bolivianas." Taibo does not hesitate to give his own opinion on this: "No acaba de convencerme. Si infancia es destino, no lo es de una manera tan simple." The author clearly rejects the notion of history as a neutral process of reporting facts. For him, it is value-laden, as the historian takes a definite perspective, which clearly suggests that the book advocates a postmodern approach to historiography. Taibo is skeptical of claims to a scientific, objective approach to the discipline.

For Taibo, the mythic version of Guevara which the photograph symbolizes belongs to a definite tradition. Che, Taibo argues, is one member of a long line of historical figures: "...lo que sí parece evidente es que Ernesto Guevara será el último de nuestros tan queridos próceres a caballo ... en la tradición heroica de América Latina." As with many depictions of Bolívar, accounts of Che's life often construct him as a special individual, someone destined to become a history-making hero as an adult. Indeed, Taibo references Bolívar many times in the book. The first chapter sets the tone

for the critical strategy that Taibo uses. He emphasizes how a heroic narrative has been constructed about Che's life, and Guevara's participation in that construction. As in other examples of postmodern historical fiction, there exists no "great man" to naturally function as a source of history. The man's identity is wholly constructed through historical discourse.

In chapter two, "Furibundo Serna," it becomes evident that Taibo is writing an intertextual narrative. This part of the book primarily consists of Taibo's first person observations about Guevara but interspersed with pieces of dialogue. These are ostensibly from conversations of Che with childhood acquaintances. Taibo also includes in the chapter notes the full text of a childhood poem that Guevara wrote. This mixture of different discourse types and voices is a common feature of postmodern historical fiction. Taibo constructs a hybrid, intertextual text wherein the divisions between history and, in White's terms, other "systems of meaning-production" (21) are blurred. Critics like Richard Harris have noted that this is a unique feature of Taibo's text. Comparing *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* to other accounts of the revolutionary's life, Harris notes that "Taibo's style is distinguished from Anderson's and Castañeda's primarily by his frequent use of quotations from Che's writings and speeches, which he deftly weaves into his own narrative" (21). While it is, at first blush, a historical biography, the book intimates at autobiography and ultimately has much in common with works of postmodern fiction. Moreover, as I stated in the Introduction, Taibo himself has affirmed that his overall literary strategy has evolved. As he noted in an interview published in *Caravelle*, he previously viewed fiction and history as totally separate kinds of discourse but came to understand them as largely interchangeable. (284) *Ernesto*

Guevara puts into practice this evolved perspective. Taibo constructs a narrative that synthesizes historical biography and fiction.

Chapter three, “‘‘Toda esa fuerza se gasta inútilmente,’’” deals with Guevara’s well-known motorcycle journey across South America and reveals other core aspects of Taibo’s literary strategy. The opening lines give us a sense of how Taibo views Guevara – as a character. Reflecting on a photograph, he writes: “A la busca del personaje perdido. Es una foto que se puede adivinar antes de verla, anticipada. La vieja fotografía muestra el anfiteatro de una facultad de medicina; un par de docenas de estudiantes se retratan ante un cadáver desnudo y abierto en canal depositado en una plancha.” The author’s use of the term *personaje* is significant, since it refers to either a celebrity or a character, or both. Given Taibo’s comments on the Guevara myth, it is likely that for him Guevara is not just famous but fundamentally a literary figure. We can read his life as a fictional narrative.

Che functions not only as a literary figure from Taibo’s perspective, but as a writer as well. During the journey, his own lived experience becomes literary. He learns to describe his travels in narrative terms: “En el camino no solo estudia medicina,’’ Taibo writes, “va aprendiendo a narrar. En las páginas de su diario se ajusta la metáfora, mejora la descripción, aparecen observados cuidadosamente los paisajes, al mismo tiempo que se complace cada vez más en sus meditaciones.” This is yet another example of postmodern historical fiction’s tendency to present characters who both read and construct a narrative around their own lives. Taibo argues that Che – as we know him from historical texts and other cultural representations – is a character and makes the case that Che himself contributed to his self-creation in discourse. Like the Columbus novels I addressed

before, Taibo's book features a character self-conscious of his own historicity who works to build a narrative supporting his chosen identity.

At this point, it is helpful to consider how my observations on the literariness of Taibo's historical biography relate to Paul J. Dosal's review of the book. He has a negative view of *Ernesto Guevara*, and comments about how it relates to other treatments of Che's life. According to the critic, "...it is only a weak imitation of [Jon Lee] Anderson's narrative biography" (183). This is because "...Taibo did not consult the unpublished diaries of Guevara, he did not interview as many people as either Anderson or [Jorge] Castañeda, and he did not present an interpretive biography of Guevara" (183). For Dosal, this means that "as a result, his biography is not as authoritative as Anderson's or as informative as Castañeda's" (183). I believe that Dosal's negative evaluation is based on a misunderstanding. In Chapter 2, I described how García Márquez deliberately chose to write about the least documented part of Simón Bolívar's life. This absence of information allows him to problematize the authority of historical sources and to synthesize fiction with historiography. Taibo's decision to select the secondary sources he used fulfills a similar function. From the template of a standard historical work, Taibo develops an example of postmodern historical fiction. Other authors I address in this dissertation simply start with the template of fiction. But Taibo *does* use numerous sources, which he often cites in the chapter endnotes. These include primary sources like anthologies of Guevara's writings, articles he published in newspapers, and poetry and books he wrote. They also include secondary sources like scholarly articles, biographies of Che, firsthand accounts from historical contemporaries of Che, and more. While Taibo's book may not reference the same sources as Anderson's biography does, it has a

substantial bibliography. Moreover, the research it incorporates evinces a sustained dialogue between Taibo and his sources. He is not only in dialogue with Che, but with them as well.

The Cuban Revolution segment of *Ernesto Guevara* begins in earnest at the end of chapter eight, “Estaciones de paso.” At this point in the text Guevara has become extremely politicized and has moved away from a prospective career as a physician towards a career as a revolutionary. A series of events – starting with his motorcycle journey across South America – has made Guevara socially-conscious, and he is now at the point where he wants to put his social commitment into action. Taibo explains: “...Ernesto Guevara, que acaba de cumplir 27 años y que teme estarse apoltronando, despojado de su vagabundeo latinoamericano, está al borde de iniciar el recorrido de un insólito camino.” Taibo then recounts in chapter nine, “El mundo finalmente es una isla,” how Guevara meets Fidel Castro and their first conversation becomes a transformative experience for Che. Taibo explains: “la conversación inicial entre Fidel y Guevara dura ocho o diez horas, según la memoria de los testigos o de los interrogadores futuros de los testigos, y a los dos interlocutores les ha de quedar profundamente grabada en la memoria.” The discussion touched upon different topics, including Castro’s plans for Cuba. The two men “repasaron sus versiones de América Latina, hablaron de política y sobre todo de revoluciones, en particular, de la visión de Ernesto de lo sucedido en Guatemala y la idea de Fidel de la futura revolución contra la dictadura batistiana.” The two men quickly develop a political friendship. Castro soon includes Che in his plans to overthrow Cuba’s dictator Fulgencio Batista through guerrilla warfare.

The notion of heroism is central to Carlylean historiography, and discourse about Guevara and Castro's time together in Mexico is essential to the heroic element of the Che myth. Taibo's presentation of this period in Che's life points towards the "hero's journey" myth. As I explained before, the mythologist Joseph Campbell presented this as the archetypal pattern that narratives about heroes tend to follow (210). It begins with any of nine potential phases: "threshold crossing," "brother-battle," "dragon-battle," "dismemberment," "crucifixion," "abduction," "night-sea journey," "wonder journey," and "whale's belly" (210). Taibo's telling of the first meeting between Castro and Guevara presents it as an example of threshold crossing. It is deemed the period when Guevara exited his previous, ordinary life and entered the phase where he would perform heroic deeds and reach legendary status. The close correspondence between Taibo's description of Che's experience in Mexico and Campbell's model underscores the fact that Taibo's text takes a critical look at the Guevara myth. It references real events, in the life of Che, but Taibo imbues it from the "Nota del narrador" onward with a clear awareness of the power and presence of the mythology. The author implicitly advocates the position of Hayden White, who argues that fiction, history, and myth find unity as "systems of meaning production" (21). For Taibo and other postmodern authors, these categories have more in common than meets the eye.

Chapter twelve, "El desastre," describes yet another significant moment in Che's life: after a difficult journey from Mexico to Cuba by boat with Fidel Castro and some other guerrillas, he finally reaches the island. This initiates his life as a revolutionary and marks the start of the campaign to overthrow the Batista regime. The next twelve chapters recount Che's experience as one of the leaders of a revolutionary guerrilla war.

While I cannot address all sections in the scope of this chapter, I will highlight a few ways in which they critically engage with the Che myth. In chapter thirteen, “Sin destino,” Taibo highlights some characteristics of Guevara’s self-constructed identity as a hero. Once, Taibo notes, he and some comrades took refuge in a cave: “En esa cueva los cinco expedicionarios deciden asumir un pacto de muerte. Si los descubren combatirán. Nadie se rendirá. El heroísmo de la desesperanza.” In other words, Che had consciously set a goal of heroism for himself and the guerrillas. Merely achieving the political objective of the war would not suffice: it had to function as a hero-making effort for everyone involved as well. For Che, stoicism was another core aspect of becoming a hero. “Es típico del estoicismo del Che,” Taibo informs us about Che’s diaries, “que en todos los textos que ha escrito sobre estos terribles momentos no mencione la herida que trae en el cuello; ni siquiera en su diario hay comentarios sobre ésta.” Whether intentional or not, the stoicism reflects a theme I have addressed before: the physical or bodily dimension of the “great man” identity. For Che, exhibiting strength and not expressing pain constitute heroism.

The construction of a revolutionary narrative features as another theme of the guerrilla war chapters. According to Taibo, Che and his comrades did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve after the overthrow of the Fulgencio Batista regime. In the last paragraph of chapter sixteen, “Arañando la tierra,” he asks: “¿Y cuál era la voluntad política, el diseño de país que se tenía en la sierra en esos momentos? ¿Cuál el de Fidel? ¿Cuál el del Che? Probablemente ninguno, vagas ideas sobre la necesidad de una reforma agraria radical, voluntad de cambios sociales profundos, elementos socialistas a medio formular del Che.” Up until that point, they only had one real goal:

“Quizá lo único que tenían claro los hombres de la sierra era que había que acabar con la dictadura de Batista de la única forma posible: militarmente.” In other words, Taibo argues, they would not develop clear goals for their desired revolution until after the overthrow of Batista. Their effort was, at least in part, intended as a romantic mission to do something heroic, as Taibo emphasizes Che’s active participation in the construction of his myth. While many people view Guevara as a reified hero, he was much more conscious of the constructed status of that identity.

Chapter twenty, “La ofensiva,” implicitly addresses another critical theme: the liberty that a lack of sources grants the writer of a historical narrative. Describing one of the most decisive moments in the development of the guerrilla effort (the offensive of the Batista regime against the guerrillas), Taibo affirms in the first paragraph: “Quizá ésta sea la parte menos documentada de la historia militar de Ernesto Che Guevara durante la revolución cubana.” Che deliberately omitted this, he suggests, from his personal writings. According to Taibo, “El Che no dedicó ninguno de sus *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria* a la ofensiva batistiana, no han sido publicados sus diarios de esos días, si acaso los escribió, y en ‘Una revolución que comienza’ apenas si dedica un par de párrafos a la historia.” Taibo’s framing of the Batista offensive suggests a postmodern approach to historiographic narrative. He benefits from Che’s decision not to write about the Batista offensive as it frees him to engage in historical postmodern narration.

The parts of the book that recount the end of the guerrilla war and the beginning the revolutionary process in Cuba reinforce Taibo’s process. Che’s identity as a hero arguably solidifies when he and the guerrillas enter Havana. In chapter twenty-six, “El largo enero del 59,” Taibo recounts the words of Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo (one of the rebel

leaders) about the entry of a guerrilla column into the capital: “Luego arriba Gutiérrez Menoyo con el II Frente de Escambray, que se acuartela en el Instituto del Vedado.

Había entrado ‘heroicamente’ en La Habana. Pensamos que podría ser una maniobra

para tratar de hacerse fuertes, de tomar algo, de impulsar alguna cosa. Ya los

conocíamos, pero cada día los conocíamos más.” This outside observer who was present

while the event took place clearly suggests that the guerrillas made a deliberate effort to

appear heroic when entering Havana. As Taibo had suggested, becoming heroic was not

secondary but at the core of the mission. Several paragraphs later, in the same chapter,

Taibo emphasizes the tension between the image portrayed and the reality of this

situation. After entering Havana, Che “ha pasado las últimas horas aterrorizado, pensando

que la guarnición batistiana lo quería envenenar y negándose a comer y beber. ¿Así es la

victoria? ¿Un ingreso sin pena ni gloria a mitad de la noche en un cuartel cuyo jefe lo

entrega antes de que se lo pidan?” The implication is clear: Che’s self-constructed

identity as a hero, as a “great man,” conflicts with the world around him. Once more,

Taibo presents this version of Che as a character participating in the narrative of his own

life. In service of his strategy of combining fictional and literary discourse, he imbues

Che with an inescapable literary agency throughout the narrative.

In the first paragraph of chapter twenty-eight, “No se puede soñar a la sombra de una pirámide,” Taibo anticipates the next phase of Che’s life. “El 12 de junio,” he writes,

“el Che se convierte en uno de los primeros embajadores itinerantes de la joven

revolución cubana.” This chapter describes the beginning of his career as an “itinerant

ambassador,” and opens the last of the three sections of Taibo’s text that I study; the

section deals with Che’s guerrilla efforts in Africa, his time in Prague, his incursions,

capture and death in Bolivia, and the aftermath of his death. I focus on two of these. I address first the chapter about Prague, since it serves as a useful point of comparison with Posse's novel. Next, I consider Taibo's account of Guevara's death, as this helps the critic understand the religious dimension of the Che myth.

Che's status as a global ambassador for revolution takes a series of difficult turns. After a failed guerrilla effort in Africa, he finds himself in exile in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The opening lines of chapter fifty-one, "Praga: el frío, la soledad," describe the historiographic significance of this period. "Al historiador le gustaría poder apelar nuevamente a la voz del propio Che," Taibo explains. In his view, this leads to a historiographic problem: "No hay manera de evadir ese tono narrativo, esa sinceridad cabrona, ese sentido del humor cáustico; pero al igual que tantos otros materiales, los diarios que debió haber escrito tras su salida de África, los hipotéticos 'cuadernos de Praga', si es que existen, no han sido hechos públicos." Aside from raising significant questions about historical sources, the Prague period has profound ideological significance. It represents gaps and contradictions in the heroic, "great man" narrative of Che's life. Taibo uses it to implicitly critique that approach to historiography and advocate for a postmodern understanding of the past. After mentioning the issue of the Prague notebooks, he remarks: "Si a esto se añade que los cronistas cubanos rehúyen como la peste bubónica la imagen de un Che deprimido y derrotado, muy poco o casi nada se ha hablado sobre el periodo 'frío', que transcurre entre fines de febrero del 66 y julio del mismo año." According to Taibo, this puts historians like himself in a difficult position. "Por lo tanto," he complains, "sólo quedará intentar reconstruir a partir de elementos sueltos y de muy diversa índole aquella inicial 'Primavera de Praga.'" This

period cuts against the dominant “great man” narrative of Che’s life and serves to undermine the historiography it presupposes. It problematizes traditional historiography’s supposed overreliance on an empiricist, source-based model.

In this chapter, Taibo addresses Posse’s novel in an endnote. He has a negative evaluation of it: “Abel Posse ha escrito una novela sobre los meses de estancia de Che en Praga. Una novela, *Los cuadernos de Praga*, sin pretensiones testimoniales y con muy poco ajuste a los hechos, con todas las libertades de la ficción, quizá demasiadas.” Despite his criticism of the liberties Posse takes with historical facts, Taibo makes the following comment about his own writing in chapter fifty-one: “El capítulo está armado como un rompecabezas con pequeños fragmentos de testimonios variados....” Taibo may dislike Posse’s supposed lack of dialogue with historical sources. Nevertheless, he implicitly acknowledges that both his book and *Los cuadernos de Praga* have a similar historiographic project. Each text thematizes a process of reading and rewriting history. *Ernesto Guevara* does this in chapter fifty-one by constructing a “jigsaw puzzle” of historical sources that the reader must actively engage with, and *Los cuadernos de Praga* does it by recounting the fictional research project of Abel Posse.

I now turn to the last sections of Taibo’s text: those that deal with Che’s death at the age of 39 and his posthumous significance. In chapter sixty-two, “Las 18 horas de La Higuera,” we find Taibo’s account of Guevara’s death. After a failed foco incursion attempt in Bolivia, the Bolivian military has captured Che. The chapter centers on his death, but I focus on one detail: his last words (as quoted by Mario Terán, one of his executioners). Before two members of the Bolivian military shoot him, he proclaims: “*Tira, cobarde, que vas a matar a un hombre.*” He says it again, phrasing it slightly

differently: “*Póngase sereno, usted va a matar a un hombre.*” Che’s immediate message seems to be that the executioners should not confuse Che’s death with the end of the revolutionary movement. Yet in the context of Taibo’s narrative, it has significance as an apparent denial of the “great man” theory: he becomes again an individual whose greatest achievement is to remain human. As Taibo tells it, the historical Guevara is more multidimensional than the mythic version of Che.

The last chapter of the book (chapter sixty-eight, “Imágenes y fantasmas”) stresses how Che’s death helped cement his mythology. Here, Taibo includes an anecdote that we can understand as a practical summary of that dynamic: “En una iglesia de Matanzas, Cuba, Ernesto Guevara se encuentra en un retablo, perdido en medio de los santos de una corte celestial católica; sin embargo, en una iglesia en el estado de Tamaulipas, México, comparte una esquina de un mural con el diablo.” The portrayal of Che as a saint and devil is not limited to popular expressions and Cuban state representations. It appears in many contexts, some of them counterintuitive. “En octubre del 97,” for example, “la Radio Vaticana dedicó un encendido panegírico a este hombre que nunca creyó en dios, ‘santo laico de todos los pobres’.” For Taibo, the powerful mythic version of Che exists on a large scale. Near the end of the chapter, however, he emphasizes its contradictions. Taibo believes that “los mitos son propiedad de las sociedades. Están allí para ayudarlas a construir pedacitos de utopía, para crear santorales, imágenes, referencias, estilos de actuación, una moral, que adoptar.” Nevertheless, he argues, myths are problematic: “Pero hay que tener cuidado con los mitos porque tienen una buena cantidad de falsedades.” For Taibo, mythology serves a legitimate function in society. It can act as a source of social cohesion. However, it is

never a wholly accurate depiction of the world. For this reason, myth-building historiographic approaches like the “great man” theory are flawed.

I now offer some remarks to compare and contrast *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*. In the first place, they both take biography as their template, and seek to gradually undermine its status as an authoritative historical source. Posse and Taibo assume a reader who accepts biography as historically authoritative, but gradually reveal contradictions in the biographies they present. Second, each book has a fundamentally intertextual approach to historiography. Posse’s novel alternates between two narratives: one narrated by a fictionalized version of himself, the other narrated by a fictionalized version of Che. Taibo includes in his own writing that of Che and his contemporaries. He does this in a way that allows them to act as co-narrators. While these comparisons relate to form, *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* also have nexuses in terms of their content. The most salient of these is their presentation of a fragmented protagonist. Posse does this primarily by writing a protagonist with a double identity: Che and Vázquez Rojas. Taibo emphasizes the tension between the non-mythic Ernesto Guevara and the mythic Che. This split identity explains the significance of the Argentine revolutionary’s dual name in the title: *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*. Another important similarity is Che’s status as an active reader in both novels. Whether it be the reading he does during the motorcycle journey across South America, or the reading he does while living in exile, or in the midst of his guerrilla incursions, both novels present him as consciously interpreting and constructing a narrative about his personal experience. In this regard,

both texts depict a Che actively involved in making himself a character in a narrative about his own life.

There are also some differences between the two texts that are worth noting. First, as I noted before, *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* differs from all the other narratives I study in this dissertation in a major way: it uses the template of historical biography, while they use the template of fiction. *Ernesto Guevara*, unlike the other texts, incorporates formal historical research and includes notes. Second, although they are both examples of postmodern historical fiction, *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara* belong to different subcategories. Posse's novel evinces metahistorical fiction, while Taibo's book does not fit easily into any of Nünning's classifications. Third, Taibo explicitly addresses the religious dimension of the Che myth in a way that Posse does not. Posse's novel recognizes the popularity of Che as a symbol and the cult of personality around his image and legacy and mentions the "transfiguration" (10) of Che. However, Taibo makes the religious aspect much more explicit (as in his anecdote about the altar). The last important difference is each text's approach to the process of historical research. As I noted in my comments on chapter fifty-one of *Ernesto Guevara*, Taibo conceives of the chapter as a "jigsaw puzzle" based on fragmented historical sources. This format exists to varying degrees in other chapters. Throughout the book both Taibo and the reader attempt to construct a narrative about Che's life by using sources that do not always cohere easily. Posse, on the other hand, creates a story whose theme is the difficulty of historical research. It is an explicitly fictionalized account of the historiographer's project. Despite these differences, though, both *Los cuadernos de*

Praga and *Ernesto Guevara* present innovative approaches to deconstructing the “great man” historiography of Che and extricating the historical Guevara from myth.

CONCLUSION

The preceding study explored how eight different Latin American authors blend historiography and narrative to critique a specific ideology: the “great man” theory. In their narratives, Carpentier, Boullosa, Mutis, García Márquez, Cruz Kronfly, Roa Bastos, Taibo, and Posse construct implicit critiques of the Carlylean ideology of history by using postmodern literary strategies. While each text observes unique approaches, they have a common vision: the rejection of a rigid distinction between the discourses of history and fiction. I conclude my study of the texts in this section by emphasizing global themes rather than individual texts. The Conclusion has three goals: to summarize the most important points of the dissertation, to respond to some possible objections, and to identify the implications of the dissertation for future research.

While the texts have similarities and differences, I believe there is more that unites them than separates them. One universal feature is the authors’ understanding of character. Traditionally, character has been treated as a purely fictional category, the description of an imaginary rather than a real person, and absent from historical discourse. However, as Seymour Menton notes in his study of the new historical novel, that literary phenomenon features “...the use of real (not fictitious) historical figures as characters...” (23). This tendency exists in virtually all categories of postmodern historical fiction, and not just the one Menton addresses in *Latin America’s New Historical Novel*. Since we cannot interact with figures like Montezuma, Bolívar, Columbus, or Guevara, we only have access to texts written by and about them. Therefore, many postmodern authors reason, historical figures function as textual creations, just like totally fictional characters. This exemplifies the perspective that

Hutcheon describes in “Historiographic Metafiction”: “the past really did exist, but we can only ‘know’ that past today through its texts, and therein lies its relation to the literary” (10). This treatment of character is perhaps the most important underlying mechanism that allows postmodern authors to blend history and fiction. One can trace most manifestations of the history-fiction synthesis back to it.

This extension of character to the domain of history leads to the second key point of the dissertation: the subversion of biography and autobiography. As I have emphasized in this dissertation, the “great man” theory centers on the notion that history and biography are equivalent. The equation applies just as much to autobiography. Since, according to the Carlylean approach, all of history flows directly from the actions of “great men,” biographies and autobiographies function as the proper models for historiography. While some of the texts, such as Taibo’s book, subvert this perspective in an explicit, conscious way, all of them do it implicitly. They all seek to present that “great men” exist as products of historical discourse rather than producers of history. More than any other factor, the perspective that character applies to both fiction and history allows authors to do this. Since we can only access the past through texts, they reason, historiography excludes the possibility of individuals being primary. Biography and autobiography are legitimate modes of discourse, but they cannot form the basis of historiography.

Finally, rewriting also underlies the texts I study in this dissertation. In addition to presenting narratives that subvert the Carlylean model, they all revise the standard narratives of historical events, some in more radical ways than others. As I noted in Chapter 1, *Concierto barroco* presents a frank reversal of the *conquista* narrative (from

the Americas to Europe rather than the other way around). Some feature subtler types of rewriting. The implicit rejection of the dominant heroic narrative of Che's life in *Los cuadernos de Praga* and *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che* illustrates this. Yet despite these differences, none of the texts merely accept standard historical narratives. For their authors, historical discourse consists of multiple changing versions of past events. Just as authors revise novels and short stories, recast classical theatre in a contemporary context, or blend parts of existing works into new narratives, historians revise historiographies. Although the "great man" theory is the most salient object of critique in these novels, they also cut against historiographies that treat history as final and objective.

I now consider a few possible objections to my study, which relate to each of the previous three points. I have strived to make this a descriptive examination, one that refrains from value judgments about the historiographic approaches of the nine novels I address. Some readers of this dissertation may object to the expanded conception of character in postmodern historical fiction. They may argue that, although both fiction and history exist as modes of discourse, historical figures are fundamentally different from characters. Theoretically, characters in a novel can come almost entirely from an author's imagination, with only vague, general similarities to people. Descriptions of historical figures, on the other hand, are constrained by events in a person's life. While this distinction has validity in some circumstances, it fails to acknowledge gaps in the historical record (as with Montezuma) and cases where historical figures consciously create narratives about their own lives (as with Columbus and Guevara). Whether one advocates a postmodern understanding of history or not, authors like Carpentier,

Boullosa, Mutis, García Márquez, Cruz Kronfly, Roa Bastos, Taibo, and Posse remind us to have a healthy skepticism about potential lacunae and inconsistencies in the historical record.

Critics may also raise an objection regarding biography. While they may not advocate the “great man” theory, they may argue that historiography cannot avoid all references to biography. They could argue that even when it seeks to describe events without emphasis on individuals, there are always *participants* involved: events always involve actions, and biography always has a role in historiography. I agree that biography lurks into historiography. However, individuals need not function as the source or cause of history. What distinguishes Carlylean historiography from other approaches is that it treats them as *prior* to all other factors in history. Its so-called “biographical” approach to historiography elevates biography over everything else. For this reason, I believe that Carpentier, Boullosa, Mutis, García Márquez, Cruz Kronfly, Roa Bastos, Taibo, and Posse do manage to articulate historiographies substantially different from the “great man” theory. Even a book like *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como el Che*, which the author consciously constructs as a biography, demonstrates the extent to which other historical factors influence and determine biography.

Given the radical rewriting of historical discourses found in these novels, critics could also object to them as unjustified historical revisionism. They might argue that a commitment to rewriting history only serves to sow confusion, or that it risks obscuring well-established facts. The rewriting process can certainly be misapplied, and there is always some level of risk in attempting to retell history. However, I do not think there is evidence that Carpentier, Boullosa, Mutis, García Márquez, Cruz Kronfly, Roa Bastos,

Taibo, and Posse abuse the rewriting process. They may choose to fill in gaps in the historical record with fictional occurrences, present historical events in a nonlinear fashion, or recontextualize historical periods for use in a plot (as with the reversal of the *conquista* narrative in *Concierto barroco*). However, I consider it important to distinguish between approaches that deny the data, and approaches that question, rearrange it, and acknowledge its gaps.

This dissertation is not by any means an exhaustive study of the subject matter, but I hope that it makes a modest contribution to contemporary discussions about the nexuses between history and fiction. More specifically, I hope that it can serve as a small part of the basis for further research on manifestations of “great man” historiography in literature – not just the “great man” historiography of Montezuma, Bolívar, Columbus, and Guevara, but of other notable figures as well. In my view, variants of “great man” historiography are still relatively widespread both in popular culture and in academic contexts, and perhaps this dissertation will help future scholarship identify and critically examine other examples of it.

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