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**REWRITING TRUJILLO, RECONSTRUCTING A NATION: DOMINICAN  
HISTORY IN NOVELS BY MARCIO VELOZ MAGGIOLO, ANDRÉS L.  
MATEO, VIRIATO SENCIÓN, AND MARIO VARGAS LLOSA**

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Spanish

By

Andrew B. Wolff

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The thesis of Andrew B. Wolff was reviewed and approved\* by the following

Aníbal González-Pérez  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Spanish  
Thesis Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Priscilla Meléndez  
Professor of Spanish

Julia Cuervo-Hewitt  
Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese

Thomas O. Beebee  
Professor of Comparative Literature and German

William R. Blue  
Professor of Spanish  
Interim Head of the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

## Abstract

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship over the Dominican Republic had a profound effect on the country's literary tradition. Between the years of 1930 and 1961, Trujillo carefully positioned himself at the center of all things Dominican—including the island's cultural and intellectual discourse. From the beginning of Trujillo's political career, the dictator's team of spin-doctors, carefully selected from among the Dominican intelligentsia systematically, exploited the media, poetry, prose narrative, and even popular music to construct a public persona that would eventually grow to mythological proportions.

Given the *trujillato*'s notorious use of literature in mythologizing Trujillo, it is hardly surprising that, in the years immediately following his death, Dominican writers would also employ narrative in their efforts to de/re-mythologize him. The present study examines how four prominent novelists—Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Andrés L. Mateo, Viriato Sención, and Mario Vargas Llosa—use literature to reexamine and rewrite Trujillo's 30-year rule over the Dominican Republic. These writers also typify the evolution of the Dominican novel over the last 40 years. Like other Latin American “dictator novels,” the texts studied here—which include De abril en adelante (1975), La balada de Alfonsina Bairán (1985), Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (1992) and La fiesta del chivo—call attention to both the hegemonic processes that empower and the rhetorical structures that help to shore up authoritarian rule. Building upon the ideas of Ross Chambers, René Girard, Roberto González Echevarría and others, this thesis examines how these writers' works

attempt to create “room for maneuver” between the discourse of dictatorship and the dictatorship of narrative convention. My primary assertion is that the rhetorical “free space” created by oppositional texts, when inserted into the dictator’s system of signification, creates the *potential* for readers’ desires to be shifted away from the dictator and toward a dissenting (frequently the narrative) voice. While large-scale social change brought about via readers reading novels such as those studied here is unlikely, these works chip away at the dictator’s power structure by targeting and changing his constituency one reader at a time.

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“En la literatura es bello no sólo lo bello sino también lo feo, lo asqueroso, lo monstruoso, y si no lo es, no hay literatura ni obra de arte, eso es lo que caracteriza a la literatura como algo distinto de las ciencias sociales. Un libro de historia o un reportaje sobre una dictadura muestra lo feo como feo, una obra de arte no puede hacerlo porque dejaría de ser tal, ya que carecería de ese poder de hechizar que debe tener la obra de arte para que le demos a la ficción una autenticidad y una verdad.”

—Mario Vargas Llosa in Excelsior, 5/17/2000

## Introduction:

### Rewriting Trujillo, Reconstructing a Nation: Modern Dominican History in

Novels by Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Andrés L. Mateo, Viriato Senci3n, and

Mario Vargas Llosa

“[La verdad hist3rica] no es lo que sucedi3; es lo que juzgamos que sucedi3.”—Pierre M3nard (Borges, “Pierre M3nard, Autor del Quixote”)

“I love it when they call me a dictator here! That they can say it freely refutes it. This was not the case under a real dictatorship like the Duvaliers” —Jean-Bertrand Aristide, cited by Tim Padgett in “The Once and Current President,” *Time* 5/7/2001.

“No hay peligro en seguirme.”—Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, campaign during the presidential election of 1930. (Balaguer, *Memorias de un cortesano en la ‘Era de Trujillo’* 46).

During his lifetime, Trujillo was compared with lightning, the mountain-top, the sun, the eagle, volcanic lava, Pegasus, Plato, and God. He was the object of frenetic praise and adoration that verged on megalomania. Trujillo statues, busts, and monuments were erected throughout the country; parks, streets, towns, and mountains were named in his honor; and parades were staged and special masses said for him. Signs and mottoes—“Trujillo Forever,” at village pumps, “Trujillo Gives Us Drink,” and in the hospitals, “Trujillo Cures Us”—hailed the dictator. Some cynic remarked that it was surprising that God’s name appeared first on the famous neon sign, “God and Trujillo” which hung over the harbor of the capital. When he appeared in public, Dominicans learned to remove their hats, place them over their hearts, and bow their heads. Professional propagandists—public relations firms in New York, lobbyists in Washington, and many other paid agents—championed his regime. (Wiarda, *The Dominican Republic: A Nation in Transition* 45)

In one of the relatively few critical studies of Dominican literature published in mainstream scholarly journals, Neil Larson wonders, “¿C3mo narrar el trujillato?”<sup>1</sup> To be sure, this question is the obsession of the majority of the novels published in the Dominican Republic since the early 1960s. Decades after two carloads of gunmen put an end to Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina’s dictatorship over the “cradle of the Americas” (1930-1961), both *el general3simo* and his successor, Doctor Joaqu3n Balaguer (*d.* 14 July 2002) remain conspicuously present in the Dominican novel.



Like other “dictator novels”<sup>2</sup> from within the Latin American literary tradition, contemporary Dominican texts regularly call attention to the parallels between narrative and the rhetorical processes and structures that both empowered the dictator and helped provide continuing support for his authoritarian rule—support that eventually allowed Trujillo’s administration to become “probably the strongest and most absolute dictatorship ever established in Latin America” (Wiarda 34). Starting with the premise that dictatorships exploit the narrative process to authorize their governments, these texts then impose upon their constituents “authorized” readings of the text of government, and finally endeavor to constrain reader response. Dominican writers have used the mirror of the text to reveal and exploit a certain “room for maneuver” that exists within the narrative process to battle the rhetoric of the dictatorship. Dominican dictator narratives repeat, inscribe, parody, and to some extent even rewrite the historical record, calling into question writing’s ability to represent historical events faithfully and problematizing the social conventions that grant “history” the exclusive privilege of educating future audiences about the *trujillato*. Their objective is to influence readers, to transform their opinions—and perhaps manipulate their actions—so as to minimize the chances that a dictator like Trujillo will again rise to power. In the end, however, these texts which propose to “debunk” the dictatorship inevitably do just the opposite, adding to the accretive master narrative that defines Dominican history, Dominican culture, and Dominican identity. In a way, these dictator novels create narrative “palimpsests” of the island’s recent history.<sup>3</sup> As these Dominican dictator novels are read, the distinctions between

historical fact and fiction become blurred until the two are so mixed up and interwoven in readers' minds that the factual elements in the story become contaminated and, in the purest sense, irrecoverably lost.

While many textual commentators have written about how palimpsests can demonstrate how subsequent editions of texts have mistakenly hidden, misinterpreted, or inappropriately colored the original text, I suggest that the writers studied in the following chapters—Marcio Veloz Maggiolo (Santo Domingo, 1936), Andrés L. Mateo (Santo Domingo, 1946), Viriato Senci6n (San Jos6 de Ocoa, 1941), and Mario Vargas Llosa (Arequipa Peru, 1936)—intentionally take advantage of the processes described above to critique historical accounts of both Trujillo's thirty-year dictatorship over the Dominican Republic and the years immediately following his death.<sup>4</sup> In the chapters that follow, I will study how several novels become tools of dissent against "the dictator's" ongoing rhetorical power over Dominican society and suggest why each of these cases is important for Dominican readers today. In referring to the dictator's rhetorical power, I mean the constructs that allow a dictator's words to take precedence over the will of the people, to override individual freedoms and ultimately to become univocal and unequivocal law. As a secondary objective, I will also examine the evolution of the Dominican dictator novel since 1960 (a sub-genre that for the most part represents the path of Dominican narrative in the years since Trujillo's death) and demonstrate how history and literature converge to construct the island's Master Narrative, resulting in a new cultural archive that constantly reshapes Dominican reality. I will examine how and why these writers'

works of historical fiction become palimpsests that seek to pluralize, overwrite, destabilize, transform, and move beyond their historical subtext as they attempt to symbolically erase the dictator's authority and recast the narrative of Dominican life. Finally, I will demonstrate how these texts wrestle against singular authority and amplify the intrinsic tension between the "dictator" and his constituency.

George Bornstein has pointed out one important characteristic of the tension alluded to above:

Against flux stands the concept of *authority*, which seeks to fix the form of the text (in the broad sense) and to place it in a mutually stabilizing relationship to social institutions. Authority seems to require a stable, unitary text rather than an unstable, multiple one. In establishing the text as authorized by it, authority also establishes itself as authorized by the text... Most modern political states insist on codifying or producing authoritative founding documents like constitutions setting forth their own foundation and their claim to legitimacy. (Bornstein 2)<sup>5</sup>

Even more than other Latin American dictators, Trujillo was extremely successful at creating a single, stable, unitary system of government.<sup>6</sup> Assisted by the military, supported by the United States, publicly endorsed by the Catholic Church, and outwardly championed by the Dominican Republic's social elite, Trujillo's command over the Dominican Republic was rarely challenged openly.<sup>7</sup> When it was, those who dared to oppose the dictator were subjected to a very systematic and

equally predictable process. First, they would read about their fall from favor in the “Foro público” section of the Dominican newspaper, El Caribe.<sup>8</sup> Next, they were politically, socially, and financially marginalized by those who were loyal to (or at least by those who wanted to *appear* to be loyal to) the dictator. Finally, they were imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes murdered. Whether an opponent to the government survived Trujillo’s displeasure depended heavily on the dictator’s whim.

It is significant that writing (the “Foro público”) was frequently the vehicle through which many of Trujillo’s enemies first learned of their fall from the dictator’s graces. As a practical matter, these articles helped the dictator to document publicly “injustices” perpetrated against Trujillo’s administration and helped to justify the other steps in the process outlined above that were destined to follow. Indeed, “once their findings were broadcast nationally in the *Foro público*, the entire nation was called upon to judge the crimes and misdemeanors of its citizenry and civil servants” (Derby 301). In the Dominican Republic, the public accusations published in El Caribe added to the amalgamation of “founding documents” described by Bornstein above and helped to codify the dictator’s will. In this way, narrative became an important tool in Trujillo’s struggle to dominate Dominican discourse. In fact, Trujillo’s manipulation of public narrative saturated not only the press, but nearly every aspect of Dominican cultural life. In Mito y cultura en la era de Trujillo (1993), Andrés L. Mateo notes:

La simbología discursiva del régimen trujillista habitó mágicamente la totalidad de la vida ciudadana. No había una casa de dominicano en la que éstos símbolos no estuviesen colgados de la pared, como signos rituales de la prevención y el miedo. No había un sólo acto de la vida de relación social que no estuviese mediado por la presencia intimidatoria del mito-sistema trujillista. Con el telón de fondo de la violencia, el trujillismo polarizó en forma dramática la relación entre la vida y la palabra, conminando al pensamiento teórico que legitimaba el poder, a repetir hasta el cansancio el espíritu del mito-sistema en el que embalsamó la realidad. La filosofía, la educación, la visión de la historia, la poesía, el arte, la novela, todo se transfirió al circuito del mito, del que surgía la riqueza iconográfica del hablante, del intelectual, postrada ante la majestad de esa simbología discursiva, impuesta previamente en la violencia. La palabra de los intelectuales, aplastada en el mito, se hizo entonces institución de la realidad. No se podía liberar del presente. (Mateo, Mito y cultura 15)

The documents referred to above (“El Foro Público” in El Caribe), together with others to which I will refer throughout my present study, served as a primary vehicle for mythologizing the *trujillato*. Not surprisingly, then, writing is also the vehicle which many post-dictatorial authors in the Dominican Republic have used to dissent against the dictatorship, eroding the rhetorical underpinnings of this “codification” and shifting them first toward representation and then allegorization. This “sign shifting,” whether the inevitable result of the narrative process or the

outgrowth of an intentional act by the writers, reemphasizes the ongoing processes of narration (representation, symbolization, mythologization, allegorization, reception) over its end result (codification). In other words, Dominican dictator novels use the mirror of the text to question the genesis, nature, and authenticity of Trujillo's "founding documents" and reconstruct the processes that led up to the codification of Trujillo's words. Many contemporary writers from the Dominican Republic have used their texts to unveil how the rhetoric of Trujillo's power lent power to his rhetoric. And in a society where intellectuals have long employed literature as a tool for enacting social change, these writers hope that their books will ultimately contribute in positive ways to the country's ongoing socio-political (r)evolution.

As will become evident, the writers studied here subject Trujillo's dictatorship to a process that is every bit as predictable as the one followed by the Dominican President against his political enemies as they work to dismantle symbolically the dictator's rhetorical system of power. For the most part, there is little variation across texts although, in the cases I will study here, I am able to point out some important differences that do emerge. My contention as I read Dominican dictator novels is that they deliberately exploit the parallels between history and literature in an effort to discredit and displace the "authorized" record, making it increasingly difficult to recover "history's" historical referent (in this case, the dictatorship) with any level of fidelity, and by doing so, hedge against the risk of its reappearance. These writers take written history, which they deem to be subjective, biased, influenced by its writers' perceptions and fundamentally imperfect in its representation of historical

truth, and they transform it, filling in its gaps, adding to and subtracting from it, recasting it and creating multiple versions of “history” that are at least as arbitrary as their source texts.

One by one, these narratives break down the dictator’s control over the historical record, but they also add to an accretive process that effectively re-mythologizes the *trujillato* in a way in which, though not any more accurate than its predecessors, can recreate in its readers some of the emotions felt by Trujillo’s survivors while at the same time communicating, preserving, and frequently embellishing the horror of the dictatorship in hopes of influencing the desires of readers who might not have experienced the dictatorship first-hand. As a review of Dominican cultural records (newspapers, magazines, musical lyrics, etc.) would illustrate, these texts are often held up as revelations of the dictator’s underlying “truth,” demonstrating the arbitrary nature of authority and the processes that help to establish the rhetoric of power. At this level, the process of dismantling and revealing the dictator’s rhetorical framework becomes the first step in a symbolic erasure of the dictator’s power. Empowered by this symbolic neutralization, many writers hope that their readers will feel empowered to take more pragmatic action and monitor the processes of popular authorization that allowed the dictator to obtain and later to retain his power over the Dominican people.

### **Re-mythologizing Trujillo**

By using literature to change readers' desires, these writers hope to effect change in the world. This notwithstanding, and as many scholars have pointed out during the last several years, it would be difficult to turn a blind eye to the process of re-mythologization that accompanies this rhetorical deconstruction of the dictatorship. Indeed, just as Trujillo followed a predictable pattern in the way he systematically dealt with his enemies, the process employed by Dominican dictator novels to re-mythologize the *trujillato* varies little among the country's major narrative works.<sup>9</sup> First, they attack the sensitivities of those who ultimately authorize the historical record (Dominican readers), bombarding them with examples of atrocities committed by the government and assailing their willingness to accept the "historical" record constructed by the dictator and his talented team of spin doctors. At the same time, these texts also exploit the reader's ability to experience the past vicariously through the act of reading, extending the reader's implicit authorization of the *historia oficial* described above to suggest complicity with other acts committed by the dictatorship and begin tapping into the feelings of guilt expressed by many survivors of the *trujillato*. Next, dictator novels work to reveal the arbitrary nature of the historical record and the natural inability of the sign to adequately convey historical "truth" in its entirety. They work to discredit (or de-authorize) the texts that justified and codified Trujillo's rule. Having deconstructed the system of signs and symbols used to represent the historical referent within the source text and in doing so, destabilized the Dominican metanarrative (refer to Bornstein cited above), they



reassemble those signs into new variations while preserving enough in common with the original text for the new version to maintain its own plausibility (i.e., verisimilitude).

Since multiple writers repeat this process various times for the same historical events, this repetition results in multiple plausible “histories” that are similar to yet distinct from the source text, each one offering its own believable rendition of the way its historical referent *might have been*. As readers who experienced the dictatorship personally pass away, and as time diminishes society’s memory of the *trujillato*, the reader’s choice between which historical palimpsest to accept becomes an increasingly arbitrary one. Recuperating the historical referent becomes even more hopeless than before—despite the fact that each “replica” includes its historical trace. In such an environment, the dictator’s “voice,” represented by the singular, publicly authorized *historia oficial* becomes lost in the rustle of language and entangled with competing discourses. In this way, the same rhetorical mechanisms that once set the dictator apart from other Dominicans progressively erase that difference, and the dictator’s “voice of law” becomes just another voice. In short, Dominican dictator novels underscore what Borges once observed through Pierre M  nard: that “historical truth is not what took place; it is what we *think* took place” (cited the first page of this chapter, translation and emphasis mine).

## **Critical Framework: Dominican Dictator Novels, Performance, and Historical Fiction**

The novels studied here are in a sense both ontological in that they recount Dominican history, and ontogenetic, in that they attempt to take the next step and actually (re)create it. As Allan Megill has observed, “The danger of the writer striving for an ontogenetic text is to risk becoming trapped in an implausible and highly artificial form of historical idealism” (Megill 63). Indeed, much of the critical attention that has been paid to contemporary Dominican narrative has focused on its artificiality, its formulaic nature, its obsession with Dominican history and even its naïveté. This acknowledged, a small number of Dominican writers have been significantly more successful than their contemporaries in creating literary works that move beyond these stereotypes. For them, exploiting the myth-making function to cause a particular impact on readers becomes a performative act—much like reading one of Borges’ short stories. Through the metaliterary aspects of their works, the reader is made aware that (s)he inevitably imposes an interpretation on history, actually interacting with the narrative and coloring its future. This fictionalization of history is naturally violent: there is a certain violence in distortions, omissions, and politicized renderings of history that present themselves as “authoritative texts,” as well as in the fictional transformation of historical fact. Andrés Bello once observed that it was foolish to insist upon writing a “scientific” rather than “narrative” history of the Americas, as many of the facts were lacking.<sup>10</sup> The same could apply to Dominican history, particularly between 1930 and the late 1980s to early 1990s.

Characterized in one word, the novels I study in the chapters that follow could be described as “performative” in the sense that they anticipate the reader’s active interaction, not only with the text, but also with their social subtexts.

Indeed, the way in which many writers including Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci3n, and Vargas Llosa employ the narrative process is also similar to the one employed in Bertold Brecht’s theater. Brecht sought to “activate” his dramatic audience and induce “an inquiring, critical attitude on the part of the spectator toward the events shown” on stage (Styan 231). Within Brecht’s conceptual framework of *Verfremdungseffekt*, stage events are made sufficiently “strange” by rendering them transparent (self-conscious theatre). The actors call the audience’s attention to the artifice of the dramatic performance, helping to rupture the artistic collusion between drama and spectator (often described as the “suspension of disbelief”) so that the audience can connect what they see performed on stage with conditions in the real world more easily and ultimately apply their new perception of reality toward working social changes beyond the confines of the theater.

Like Brecht’s theatre, Dominican dictator novels foreground their own creative structures, processes, and problems to draw the reader’s attention to the artifice of historical discourse and the necessity of readerly complicity in that creative process. By resisting closure and making it depend upon the reader’s interaction with the text, these texts place ultimate responsibility for external social transformations with the only entity in the narrative process empowered to act in the extratextual world: the reader (the narrative equivalent of Brecht’s active audience). Finally, by

intertwining themselves with history (both as historical events and historiography) and with other fictional works, these narratives create networks of interconnected and interwoven “nodes of opposition” or, in other words, embedded textual *systems* where it becomes impossible to discern where one narrative strand ends and another begins. Because each of these nodes retains the trace of its underlying historical referent, they eventually become inseparably connected to the dictator’s rhetorical system.

I have referred to Brecht instead of Iser, Barthes, or others who might be relevant here because, for me, the Dominican dictator novel is all about being potentially *performative*. While Dominican dictator novels do not usually call for the tyrant’s elimination (which would be excessive and rather pointless given that they are written several decades after his death), they do hope to divert readers’ desires to forms of government that empower instead of oppress. To what extent these works are/can be effective, however, is something that has been debated widely. This debate has been developed most fully, at least in terms of Latin American literature, within the broader context of the Latin American historical novel. Given this, I will now review some of the critical observations surrounding this topic that will be most relevant as I explore the Dominican dictator novel.

### **The Latin American Historical Novel**

As Noe Jitrik has observed, the Latin American historical novel differs somewhat from its European predecessors in its 1) search, not for social or economic identity but rather national legitimacy; 2) weak sense of history, due to its relative

“newness”; and 3) literary characters that are primary instead of secondary historical figures (i.e., Juan Manuel de Rosas, Henri Christophe, Pancho Villa, etc.) (Balderston 13-19). In the case of most recent Dominican literature, two of Jitrik’s three characteristics are true. The search for national legitimacy and, more particularly, a relegitimization of the Dominican people in the years following the *trujillato* is a recurring theme. Historical figures such as Trujillo and Balaguer, Pedro Santana, Buenaventura Báez, Ulises Heureaux, Juan Bosch, and the Mirabal sisters play a central role as primary characters in Dominican literature. Still, contrary to Jitrik’s assertion that the Latin American historical novel lacks a strong sense of history, it would be more accurate to say, at least in its Dominican rendition, that the Dominican novel since the dictator’s death actually fixates on history. If anything, the Dominican novel is super-cognizant and, to a great extent, critical of history. Consequently, the Dominican dictator novel is better understood using a model that synthesizes Jitrik’s observations with those of Seymour Menton.

In Latin America’s New Historical Novel, Seymour Menton proposes six characteristics of what he calls the “new historical novel.” The first characteristic he lists is the subordination of the mimetic re-creation of a given historical period to the illustration of three philosophical ideas: (a) the impossibility of ascertaining the true nature of reality or history, (b) the cyclical nature of history, and (c) the unpredictability of history in that, although history tends to repeat itself, the most unexpected and amazing events may and do occasionally appear. According to Menton, the second characteristic is the conscious distortion of history through

omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms. The third, which mirrors with Jitrik's concept of the Latin American historical novel, is the use of famous historical characters as protagonists. The fourth is the use of metafiction, or the narrator's referring to the creative process of his own text, which is frequently accompanied by Menton's fifth characteristic, intertextuality. Finally, the sixth characteristic of the new historical novel in Latin America, according to Menton, is that it subscribes to the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogic (e.g., containing two or more often conflicting presentations of events, characters, and world views), the carnivalesque, parody, and heteroglossia (the multiplicity of discourses, or the conscious use of different types of speech—Menton 23-25). Menton's observations will be validated by the novels I will study here: each of the novels studied exhibits all six of the characteristics described above. This notwithstanding, Jitrik's search for national legitimacy remains an important characteristic of recent Dominican literature as texts become a vehicle for interacting with, understanding, transforming, and ultimately re-writing the past and create a new conceptualization of "Dominicanness."

Literature's role in the construction of identity throughout Latin America has been a common topic of critical discussion. In the Dominican Republic, this is especially true. Andrés Mateo notes:

Si tú analizas los pensadores del siglo XIX dominicano, los más disímiles incluso, te vas a dar cuenta que el tema central, esencial, de sus reflexiones es la necesidad de definir una identidad, la necesidad de verificar en el proceso de

formación del estado nacional en qué momento lo definimos. Por lo tanto, yo creo que sí, que eso es un tema recurrente en la cultura dominicana. Incluso hoy día es curioso que en las campañas electorales se haya recuperado el tema de la nación, cuando nosotros tenemos ciento cincuenta y pico de años de vida republicana, cuando esa no es una angustia de nadie en América con excepción de Puerto Rico, que incluso ha llegado a una forma casi salomónica de coexistir con la necesidad de esa definición... el dominicano no, ese es un tema que se recupera siempre, que regresa, que vuelve, que es parte de las angustias y que por lo tanto, la literatura recupera. (García Cuevas 23-24)

Beyond being an important theme for Dominicans still living in the Dominican Republic, the concept of identity construction is equally if not more important to thousands of Dominicans living in the United States. Dominican migration to the United States increases annually, and, as William Luis has pointed out, many Dominicans living in the United States find themselves “looking back to understand their future. If writers on the island were trying to come to terms with the Trujillo dictatorship and the U.S. invasion of their country, those who travel to the mainland wanted to recover a lost origin” (839). To a large extent, what many Dominicans in the U.S. are searching for is what anthropologists have called “local knowledge” or, in other words, a conceptual framework of social practices unique to a particular culture or region that is handed down from generation to generation. Mark Eaton writes that local knowledge is

The kind of knowledge acquired through one's immersion in a set of communal activities, customs, rites. [It] attests to the fact that we are all social beings, that apart from the social there can be no ontology of the subject, which is to say that the self could not exist as such. National identity might seem at first to be one aspect of local knowledge, yet these identities are finally much less essential to selfhood, much more dependent on ideology. That is why narratives are needed to help confer, as if ineluctably, our citizenship rights. (171)<sup>11</sup>

For many Dominicans living in the United States, a group often described as living on the margins between two cultures, the accumulation of "local knowledge" is the great missing link in their quest to construct an identity. It is useful to note that Dominicans in the United States largely consider themselves to be "Dominicans" instead of "Americans": they dance merengue, eat Dominican food, shop at Dominican grocery stores, speak Spanish, watch Spanish TV, and generally resist assimilation into U.S. culture.<sup>12</sup> This notwithstanding, the desire to strengthen their national identities drives many young Dominicans in the United States to search for Dominican "local knowledge" in predictable ways that include traveling to the Dominican Republic to meet, socialize with, and sometimes even interview friends and extended family about life in the Dominican Republic (particularly during the Trujillo regime) or reading Dominican texts (both fictional and nonfictional) about



the *trujillato* which clearly has served as the island's primary meta-narrative in recent times. This search for self and for cultural legitimacy has become an integral part of Dominican identity, both on the island and abroad, and as such, contributes greatly to the construct of "Dominicanness." As Lauren Berlant observes:

Modern citizens are born in nations and taught to perceive the nation as an intimate quality of identity, as intimate and inevitable as biologically-rooted affiliations through gender or the family. National subjects are taught to value certain abstract signs and stories as part of their intrinsic relation to themselves, to all "citizens," and to the national terrain: there is said to be a common national "character". (20-21)

Many of these efforts to define self and nation are presented in the novels studied here. Indeed, writers such as Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci3n and Vargas Llosa have served as guides for many young Dominicans embarking on this quest for legitimacy, regardless of whether they are living in the Dominican Republic or abroad.<sup>13</sup>

Literature's importance in the process of identity construction/legitimization has been a common theme for scholars over the last several decades. Within the domain of contemporary Latin American literature, more has been written about the destructive character of historical fiction, and especially of dictator novels, than of the (re)constructive efforts mentioned above. Roberto Gonz3lez Echevarr3a has studied

how dictator narratives symbolically dismantle the dictatorship. This process can only be symbolic, he says, because as literature seeks to demonstrate “the constant presence of mystification and delusion” (4), it participates in those very processes—a different twist on the “constructive” efforts outlined previously:

This is not an act of demystification because demystifying presupposes the existence of a critical discourse capable of freeing itself from mystification and self-delusion. Literature... not only narrates, but [in doing so] tells us how. [S]uch a position implicitly reintroduces an authoritative claim; it invents a supercritical consciousness that winds up the mechanism and leaves it ticking, apparently on its own. (González Echevarría 4)

González Echevarría suggests that Latin American literature “is the equivalent of critical thought in Latin America” (3); however, instead of asserting literature’s ability to provoke readers’ actions, which I believe to be the goal of many Dominican dictator novels, González Echevarría focuses on the many Latin American narratives which have sought to symbolically dismantle Latin America’s various dictatorships, pointing out how they are probably less useful in a pragmatic sense and therefore more of a symbolic enterprise. At one point, González Echevarría compares texts’ symbolic dismantling of the rhetoric of dictatorship with Anastasio Somoza’s violent assassination which occurred after Somoza had already been removed from power:<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, blowing the dictator to bits with a rocket is an act that goes beyond political pragmatism. The kind of self-wounding both deconstructive criticism and postmodern literature carry out often has the same excessive, symbolic character. Killing Somoza after he was already deposed was a useless act, at least on the surface, but perhaps just as necessary symbolically. Modern Latin American literature may be useless in the same way. I do not pretend to know what its usefulness will be, if indeed it can be useful in any pragmatic sense, but it seems to be inevitable, much as the foregoing incident. (Voice of the Masters 5)

Since much of Dominican dictator narrative was published after Trujillo's death, it would be tempting to see this narrative opposition as merely "symbolic," especially since it has been written from a position of posthumous safety. For me, however, in the Dominican case it is not that simple. Dominican history has always been a cyclical story of dictatorship and political oppression. Beginning with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1492 and continuing through the presidency of Trujillo's neo-Trujilloist successor, Joaquín Balaguer (1960, 1962, 1966-1978, 1986-1996), the nation has perpetually been led by political strongmen and their puppets. For me, writers such as Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci6n, and Vargas Llosa take a decidedly more pragmatic approach than the one proposed by González Echevarría. As a literary scholar, Doris Sommer has probably provided the most useful reflections on Dominican literature, particularly with regard to its perceived utility in the process of

nation building. Throughout her writings, Sommer has repeatedly commented upon the notion of “foundational fictions” or narratives that help to provide the basis for national identity and legitimacy:

Generations of Latin American writers and readers [...] assumed that literature has the capacity and the responsibility to intervene in history, to help construct it as they have produced and consumed foundational novels as part of the more general process of nation building. This assertive aspect of the writing project in America doesn't entirely overwhelm literature's self-consciousness as fiction, nor the ironies that follow from knowing that the truths and programs that one writes can be —and to some degree are being—underwritten by the very nature of the enterprise. (Balderston 51)<sup>15</sup>

My primary assertions here are that the historical fiction of four writers in particular are examples of foundational fictions in the Dominican Republic during the years following Trujillo's presidency, that they intentionally revise Dominican history, and that in doing so, they assail the authority of dictatorship in ways that influence readers' desires, actions, and even self-conceptualizations. Andrés Mateo provides additional insight as to why this endeavor has been so compelling for a generation of Dominican writers, and why the *trujillato* figures so prominently in Dominican literature since the 1960s:

La idea del arte, incluso de la desvinculación con toda la literatura anterior, en ese caso específico, surgía justamente de la necesidad de establecer esas diferencias que eran en principio de carácter ideológico, pero cuyo contenido tenía una expresión política concreta. La idea era separarse del estigma del absolutismo trujillista, la idea de identificar las posibilidades de una producción espiritual que acompañara las realizaciones de la historia, las transformaciones, el ideal de una justicia social.... Yo diría que para los años sesenta sí se hizo una literatura ancilar, en el sentido en que la concebían los latinos y los griegos, es decir, de servicio. Un poco a lo que se aspiraba era poner al servicio del proceso histórico que se vivía la voz del arte, de la literatura.... No se supone hoy día, por ejemplo, que una palabra pueda llevar a un ser humano a la muerte; no se concibe, digamos, en términos políticos, pero la época que nosotros vivimos era una época que había roto con la polarización entre la vida y la palabra, porque en la era de Trujillo la vida andaba por un lado y la palabra por otro. Cuando muere Trujillo, todos nosotros quisimos encaramar la palabra sobre la vida y ese fue quizás el sentido ancilar que esa literatura tuvo: el sentido de recuperar un espacio de libertad interior que el trujillismo eclipsó por treinta y un años. (García Cuevas 9-10, 17)

José Alcántara, another of the Dominican Republic's preeminent writers in the years following the dictatorship, offers a similar but slightly different explanation: that "narrating Trujillo" is not just about recuperating personal liberties eclipsed by

the dictator's totalitarian regime, but was also about unmasking the guilty and revealing/decrying atrocities long concealed from the public view:

En fin, el pueblo siente que sus líderes le han fallado, que el gobierno es inepto y no puede resolver los problemas, que es sumamente torpe para manejar cualquier asunto. Es una crisis económica y política, pero es también una crisis de confianza en las instituciones y los gobernantes, una crisis espiritual. Se ha apoderado del hombre y la mujer promedio un sentimiento de frustración y desesperanza. Se habla de la crisis material (del agua, de la electricidad, de los alimentos) y de la crisis espiritual (de los valores, las ideologías, las costumbres). Esa crisis comienza a ser expresada por los escritores dominicanos que, más que lúcidos testigos, no hacen otra cosa que desgarrarse al interpretar la realidad que los políticos demagogos y los funcionarios serviles tratan de enmascarar. (Alcántara, Los escritores dominicanos y la cultura 161)

In summary, for many Dominican novelists, literature becomes a way of revealing that which “political demagogues and servile functionaries try to hide.” I will now explore further why literature might be an attractive tool for unmasking the dictator's abuses of power for Dominican writers, particularly given the country's quest to establish self-identity and assert national legitimacy after Trujillo. For me, the key enabler to this can be found in a certain phenomenon associated with the act

of reading in which a rhetorical buffer zone emerges where the powers of dictation are neutralized—something that has been described as “room for maneuver.”

### **Narrative as “Room for Maneuver”**

In Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative (1991), Ross Chambers argues that within contexts of political or cultural oppression, people naturally look to bring about desirable social change without violence. Chambers studies how literature gives oppressed people a position within the “given situation of power” (xi—alluding to literature’s inability to escape the oppressor’s rhetorical system, as noted above by González Echevarría) from which they can take initial steps toward realizing real (i.e., extratextual) change. Chambers calls narratives that propose to do this “oppositional,” and proposes that

between the possibility of disturbance in the system and the system’s power to recuperate that disturbance there is “room for maneuver,” and that it is in that space of “play” or “leeway” in the system that oppositionality and change can occur. But not radical, universal, or immediate change; only changes local and scattered that might one day take collective shape and work socially significant transformations. (xi)

Chambers attempts to move beyond the realm of the symbolic described by González Echevarría and into the more pragmatic paradigm of literature’s serving as

a catalyst for change conceptualized by the writers by asserting that texts have the power to influence readers' desires:

Oppositionality seeks to shift desire from forms that enslave to forms that liberate, that is, from the modes of desire that are produced by and in the interest of structures of power to forms that represent a degree of release from that repression, which is simultaneously a political oppression. (xvii)<sup>16</sup>

Like González Echevarría, Chambers notes that oppositionality is produced by the system as a part of that system. But unlike González Echevarría, he suggests that if there is room for maneuver in the universe of discourse, it occurs because no discourse can dictate its meaning absolutely—the “codification” aspired to by dictators and described by Bornstein earlier in this chapter. We understand that discourse always has the potential to mean something other than what it says, a phenomenon that creates what Chambers calls “room for maneuver.” Reading is the only process capable of activating this discursive free space. It can bring about change because, “as a function of mediation, it produces the text as the seductive occasion for a deflection of desire, a *clinamen* resulting from what is on the reader's part an act of self-recognition, involving the emergence of a desire repressed by the codes of control. The text thus mediates a shift in the forms of desire mediated by structures of power” (Chambers 235).<sup>17</sup>



Clearly, there is an intrinsic tension between Chambers' quest to understand "not what literature *is* but what it can *do*, and beyond that, the conditions of possibility that constrain what it can do [i.e., producing shifts in desire that lead to changes in reality]" (xii) and González Echevarría's reluctance to ascribe such extratextual powers to texts. Admittedly, there are many reasons why it would be difficult to attribute social change to a single reading of a text, not the least of which is that the social systems described by Chambers are highly complex and remarkably adept at squelching the effects of small, localized changes. This acknowledged, while texts themselves can do little to disempower dictators, readers *can* and *have*. The potential for the reading of a text to influence readers and deflect desires away from the dictator or, in his absence, the rhetoric of dictatorship, is relatively easy to conceptualize though potentially impossible to anticipate or measure. As a student of literature, I do not propose to know enough about social psychology or the psychology of the oppressed to suggest more than a texts' *potential* to influence readers. While the question of what literature can do (as opposed to what it is) is intriguing to me, in the chapters that follow I will limit my efforts to exploring why and, more importantly, how Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Sención, and Vargas Llosa attempt to use literature to bring about change.

### **The Dominican Dictator Novel in Latin American Literature: Literary Context**

As Mateo and Alcántara have pointed out, the idea of literature as a catalyst for change is not new in Latin American literatures. The works and writers I study in

the following chapters continue a long-running dialogue on history and politics discernible in much of the region's literature since the nineteenth century. This exchange of ideas is evident in narratives including Domingo Fausto Sarmiento's Facundo (1845), José Mármol's Amalia (1851), Miguel Ángel Asturias's El Señor Presidente (1946), Augusto Roa Bastos's Yo el supremo (1974), and Gabriel García Márquez's El otoño del patriarca (1975), to list only a few of the most prominent examples.<sup>18</sup> As others have pointed out, these writers also demonstrate critical points along the evolutionary path of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Latin American prose narrative in that with these novels we begin to recognize the creative strategies characteristic of the major literary movements over the last 100 years. For example, the search to understand the world through individual consciousness and creative experimentation includes stream-of-conscious narration, fragmentation, metafiction, and use of neologisms—all techniques that help to expose the artifice of literature, to resist closure, and to create “active” readerly environments and all of which are characteristic of Modernist literature. Of the writers to be studied here, Veloz Maggiolo provides the best example of the “new” Modernist narrative in the Dominican Republic.<sup>19</sup>

Moving beyond the characteristics of *Modernismo*, some Dominican writers also exploit the tools of literary allusion, parody, and intertextuality to expand the textual borders of their narrative works, inscribing and building upon previous narrative commentaries on Dominican life. They also politicize and regionalize literature—all traits most commonly associated with the Boom.<sup>20</sup> Although of the

writers studied here only Vargas Llosa is widely recognized as a “Boom” writer, Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, and Sención are clearly its ideological consumers, as will become evident in my study of their major works.

Perhaps more than anything else, though, these works embrace and illustrate what Linda Hutcheon has called “historiographic metafiction” by foregrounding the problematic nature of written history (recall Menton’s characteristics of the new historical novel) and “[rejecting] the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claims to truth from identity” (Hutcheon 93). Indeed, the writers studied here begin with the notion that written history doesn’t lend itself to the singular, unitary representations of historical events put forward by traditional conceptualizations. In a Brechtian way, they foreground the artifice of literature and by analogy associate it with the rhetoric of dictatorship to produce readerly estrangement from the dictator. They assert that much of the *trujillato* was built upon a myth; they use metanarrative techniques to reveal the processes of mythologization; they demonstrate how Trujillo “erased” the historical record (a topic explored extensively in Mateo’s, Mito y cultura en la Era de Trujillo); and, they attempt to justify their use of literature to resurrect and even rewrite the history of the *trujillato*.

### **Evaluating the Narrative Tradition in the Dominican Republic**

It is fair to say that much, though not all, of Dominican narrative has been so preoccupied with Trujillo that it amounts to little more than political pamphletism—whether in support of Trujillo (what I will refer to here as Trujilloist literature) or in opposition to him.<sup>21</sup> Dozens of novels treating the dictatorship are better classified as propaganda than as literature; however, there are also a small number of noteworthy novels published in the Dominican Republic—all since 1960—that struggle against the stabilizing forces of language, narrative convention, and the idea of a univocal historical record in the ways explained above. Most of them engage in a rhetorical tug-of-war with the dictator’s governing voice, establishing a triangular relationship in which the “dictator” and the writer compete for readers’ desires. They do this in hopes of influencing readers’ desires away from the dictatorship and construct not only fictional outcomes but also, to some extent, reality itself—without falling into the trap mentioned by Mario Vargas Llosa, who has spoken about the creative difficulties of writing political fiction:

La literatura de creación no puede ser un mero instrumento de divulgación de ideas o filosofías. Lo tuve siempre claro porque en mi generación tanto en Perú como en América Latina reaccionó críticamente contra esa literatura que creía que la novela podía ser un instrumento de agitación política y que podía sustituir eficazmente al panfleto. El resultado fue una literatura muy indigente, de muy buenas intenciones políticas, pero de muy pobres realizaciones

artísticas... Cuando quiero defender ideas políticas, escribo artículos, ensayos, o doy conferencias; cuando escribo ficción, siempre tengo la sensación de no sólo volcar en ellas mis ideas, mi racionalidad, sino que comparezco también en el acto de la creación con una dimensión espontánea, no racional, sentimental, intuitiva e instintiva. Sin esa dimensión menos consciente de la personalidad, la creación será fallida. (Rosales y Zamora, s.p.)

As will be seen later when I examine La fiesta del Chivo, the “instinctive, intuitive, irrational, spontaneous” elements described by Vargas Llosa above haven’t stopped the author from writing politically charged narratives. Perhaps the difference between political pamphletism and historical fiction is found in the way the material has been transformed by the artist. But the main point here is that other writers, like Vargas Llosa, have been re-writing the dictatorship via their novels. Beyond the novelists studied here, other noteworthy writers, primarily *cuentistas*, can be found in the Dominican literary corpus—Juan Bosch, Virgilio Díaz Grullón, Aída Cartagena Portalatín, José Alcántara Almanzar and Ángela Hernández are better-known writers who have written short stories instead of novels. Interestingly enough, though, the *trujillato* has been much less prominent in the Dominican short story than it has been in the Dominican novel. The Dominican novel is, for all intents and purposes, synonymous with the Dominican dictator novel—they are one and the same, and they are highly similar to other dictator narratives within the Latin American literary tradition. Indeed, for the most part, Dominican dictator novels are distinguishable

from other Latin American dictator narratives primarily in their Dominican Republic-specific subject matter and geographical context. However, Dominican literature is unique in that thematically, since Trujillo, it has been obsessed with its own national history and specifically with the governments of Trujillo and his successor, Joaquín Balaguer.<sup>22</sup> There is little effort to mask Trujillo's identity within Dominican texts, or to "universalize" the dictator to make him more accessible to non-Dominican audiences.

Dominican dictator novels are written expressly for Dominican readers.<sup>23</sup> Because they focus on Dominican history and because of the country's stormy relationship with the United States, these narratives also chronicle the U.S.'s repeated interventions in Dominican affairs, commenting upon and participating in the perennially turbulent conversation on the nature of U.S.-Caribbean relations. Finally (and not surprisingly), while many—though clearly not all—narrative texts treating the *trujillato* published between 1930 and 1961 are panegyrically *Trujilloist*, the most noteworthy Dominican novels published since 1960 openly indict the many abuses of power that were committed by Trujillo and Balaguer.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, Trujillo's death opened new creative avenues for Dominican writers. Because of this, many of the novels published in the Dominican Republic since Trujillo's death are also what Ross Chambers has called "oppositional narratives":

Oppositional discourse, the product of a (mis-) reading of the discourse of power, [is] that which mediates the deflections of desire that can change the

real. “Reading,” then, as the practice that activates the mediated qualities of all discourse, is the “moyen de moyenner” that produces oppositionality and realizes it as change. (xvi)<sup>25</sup>

### **Dictator Novels as Oppositional Texts**

Dictator novels are oppositional narratives as defined by Chambers because they reside on the margins of the dictator’s central rhetorical system. They reflect back on, comment upon, and often criticize the dictator’s system of power from its periphery, implicitly seeking to establish themselves as alternative voices in a political system where, by definition, there can be only one.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the competing voice created by these texts has the potential to draw the reader’s attention away from the dictator and to the texts themselves. In the universe of human discourse, which is that of human “reality,” oppositional behavior has a particular potential to change human behavior, by changing people’s “mentalities” (their ideas, attitudes, values, and feelings, which I take to be ultimately manifestations of *desire*), a potential that is not to be had by many other oppositional practices. This potential derives from the mysterious phenomenon of *authority*, whereby anyone, given the opportunity to speak, may use words to influence situations. Although it derives its power initially from preexisting power relationships (the right to speak is itself such a derived power), and despite the fact that it seems never to challenge these relationships openly, “oppositional authority,” once gained, has the extremely tricky ability to slowly erode the very power from which it derives. It seems almost that

power needs, or at least produces, oppositional discourse and so authorizes it, whereas the latter relies in its turn for its genuine oppositional effectiveness on the power it undermines (1-2). This undermining becomes the first step in a process that aspires to estrange the reader from the dictatorship and neutralize the dictator's hegemonic position of rhetorical centrality by creating other "nodes" or potential focal points among the dictator's constituency.

Because oppositional behavior is generally unable to produce the kinds of changes needed to overcome its encompassing social systems, it is often characterized as a survival tactic that does not challenge the power structures that are currently in place but rather takes advantage of certain circumstances set up by those structures for its own purposes. Chambers observes:

Oppositional narrative is a form of "behavior," and like other forms of oppositional behavior cannot—and does not attempt to—change the structure of power for purposes of its own. But oppositional narrative, in exploiting the narrative situation, discovers a power, not to change the essential structure of narrative situations, but to *change its other* (the "narratee" if one will), through the achievement and maintenance of authority, in ways that are potentially radical. The local and immediate oppositional success of a storyteller *also* makes possible another form of success, one that transcends the moment and makes it necessary to discuss narrative in terms that go beyond the ad hoc savoir faire and artistry deployed by oppositional subjects in general. Hearers can be



changed by successful storytelling; narrative texts have the potential to achieve ongoing readability; and therein lays a form of effectiveness that is unknown to other, nonverbal forms of oppositional behaviors. (11-12)

Chambers dedicates significant portions of his Preface and Introduction to explaining why oppositional texts are not likely to work socially *significant* changes. In doing this, he situates the practice of reading oppositional texts as part of a larger system. Basing his observations on general systems theory (an increasingly popular derivative of chaos theory), Chambers observes that the recursive nesting of textual structures within other linguistic and social systems significantly decreases the likelihood that revolutionary change will take place. Chambers notes:

At every stage... one encounters the law of oppositionality, which is that change of an oppositional kind that is generated within a system of power even as it works against it. Discursive irony invokes the “law” that produces power (Truth) against the discourse of power. It thereby mediates a shift in the desire that is itself mediated by the discourse of power in the interests of power. And this is the outcome of a practice of reading, a technology of the self, that in turn forms part of the apparatus of power. This “fatal” involvement of oppositionality in the system of power means that one should not look for dramatic ruptures, absolute disjunctures, “revolutionary” changes. The changes

it produces being themselves systemic cannot be discontinuous with the system.

(xviii)

Clearly, there is significant theoretical overlap between the approaches to oppositional narrative taken by Chambers and González Echevarría. According to González Echevarría, “it is the metaphoric foundation of the rhetoric of power that recent dictator novels have sought to undermine” (2). In other words, Latin American writers’ use of literature to question authority and reveal the rhetorical structures that empower authoritarian rule inevitably participate in a process of delusion and mystification. While these dictator narratives cannot overcome the trap of representation and present the reader with “the truth,” they inevitably contribute to the formation of a well-recognized literary trope. González Echevarría contends that the concept of “culture” in modern Latin America, “is made up of a cluster of [such] tropes that attempt to hold down and control Latin American texts by attaching them to a set of given meanings” (8). This conceptualization of culture, “has consequently been seen as a source of authority on various levels” (8), including the construction of individual and national identity and the authorization of certain written records as “history”:

The whole quest-for-identity enterprise is rooted in language and, as such, is subject to the peculiar intricacies of the medium. The concept of culture is inevitably cast in the language of literature, where not only is it prey to

ideological distortion, but cast in signs that lead not to synthesis and self-revelation, but to dispersion, concealment, indirection, and self-delusion. (13)

### **Why (re) write the *trujillato*?**

With this, we've come full circle to the point I made earlier in this chapter: that the Dominican dictator novel is part of the process of identity construction for many Dominicans. For me, this will help to answer the question, "Why re-write the *trujillato*?" Despite the awareness among these writers that identity constructed on language often risks being predicated on self-delusion, the *potential* for literature to incite social change continues to entice writers to write oppositional texts. Just as it would be impossible to determine the aggregate effect of a text on its readers, it is equally impossible to determine the effect of a text on a *single* reader. When all was said and done, it was a pickup truck bearing three or fewer disgruntled constituents that ended Anastasio Somoza's regime in Nicaragua and a comparatively small band of disaffected Dominicans that did away with Trujillo and pushed the Dominican Republic toward a political event horizon where significant social change became possible. For many writers, this potential to initiate change, albeit a small one, is enough to justify the creative effort. In a recent interview (2000), Mario Vargas Llosa explains:

Todos los latinoamericanos hemos vivido en algún momento de nuestra historia—y por desgracia hay todavía quienes la viven—la experiencia terrible

de alguien que apoyado en una fuerza nos despoja de nuestra dignidad y nosotros ayudamos en ello. Si los lectores de La fiesta del Chivo por lo menos ven esto claro, me sentiría recompensado de muchos desvelos y esfuerzos—claro, también hubo momentos muy gratos—que esta novela me ha costado.... El mayor premio literario que podría recibir es el de una América Latina en donde estas historias que cuenta La fiesta del Chivo fueran ya exclusivamente relatos de ciencia ficción. (Rosales y Zamora, s.p.)

Whether Vargas Llosa, Sención, Mateo, or Veloz Maggiolo accomplish this goal with their novels remains to be seen. Some might argue that these works ultimately helped to bring about Balaguer's defeat in 2000, though this would be difficult to prove. This notwithstanding, their novels have presented these writers with subsequent opportunities to speak out and be heard. For example, the publication of La fiesta del Chivo has afforded Vargas Llosa a new platform for his ongoing struggle against the abuses of political power in Latin America, helping to carry his voice beyond the fictional and into the social realm. Using the attention gained with the publication of his novel and its resulting controversy, Vargas Llosa has taken advantage of the public eye to attack Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, calling him "a sophisticated version of Dominican Republican strongman Rafael Leonidas Trujillo" and accusing him of using "tactics that are invisible and cannot be proven or demonstrated" in order to maintain a democratic facade and avoid international isolation (Hayes s.p.). In a similar vein, in June of 2000, Vargas Llosa condemned

César Gaviria, the head of the Organization of American States, labeling him a past supporter of Fujimori and “the epitome of mediocrity which disqualifies him morally to be part of this mission” (Oppenheimer 12A) while at the same time criticizing the OAS for its tepid response to Peru’s flawed elections:

The last time the OAS did anything useful was almost a half century ago. Since then, it has been a perfectly useless organization. That’s why its prestige is nil, why its image is that of a decrepit institution full of diplomats who have been sent there... as an early retirement, to rest, or to discreetly cure their cirrhosis on the shores of the Potomac. (Oppenheimer 12A)

Like Vargas Llosa, Viriato Sención has taken advantage of the attention gained because of his literary endeavors to convey his frustration with Dominican government to a more international audience. In an interview with Newsday shortly after the publication of his novel Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, Sención launched a frontal attack on Trujillo’s successor, Joaquín Balaguer:

Joaquín Balaguer is a legend, as a person and as a politician. He is a person who has always projected the image of a pure person who is not capable of intentional harm. I lived in that world. For me, Joaquín Balaguer was the complete opposite of the image he presented. (Wucker 29)

As we will see in Chapter III, Sención's novel focuses heavily on this disparity between Balaguer's political façade and how (according to Sención) he *really* was. The Sención example is one in which the notoriety gained through the publication of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios has turned a previously unknown writer into an "authoritative" commentator on Dominican politics, frequently sought out and often quoted by the press, particularly during the elections of 1996 (Sención was quoted in several major publications saying, "If Fernández wins, he'll be the puppet of Balaguer and the palace mafia. He [Balaguer] is sick with power; he will never give it up. They will have to drag him out of the palace"—Adams 1A) and, even more recently during Balaguer's final attempt to retake the Dominican presidency.

### **Galván, Erasure, and the Dominican Republic's Fictitious History**

Despite the difficulties inherent in trying to make direct connections between reading anti-dictator texts and fomenting socio-political change, there are several factors that might actually contribute to the success of literary attempts to influence the future attitudes of Dominican readers. For one thing, the Dominican Republic's founding story can be traced back to fiction, specifically Jesús Galván's story of Enriquillo (1882). This is, to be sure, an identity "that has literally outlived the most scrupulous and damaging criticisms of Galván's historical manipulations" (Balderston 51). As Doris Sommer has pointed out in her book Foundational Fictions (1991), Galván (1834-1910) recognized and exploited "a series of opportune erasures

that have [both] lightened the (t)rases of intervening history” (Sommer calls these erasures “*borrones*,” p. 233) and that have occurred repeatedly throughout Dominican historiography: the Conquest’s erasure of Hispaniola’s indigenous population, analogous erasures of Spanish, French, and Haitian control over the island, and similar treatment of the Devastations of 1605 and other “unmentionables” from Dominican history and culture.<sup>27</sup> But perhaps more important than these erasures is how Galván also expanded upon the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas in his “creation” of Enriquillo (Sommer 235). Since I believe that Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Sención and Vargas Llosa all do something similar with the *trujillato*, it is worth reviewing the story of Enriquillo before continuing on.

Guarocuya, the main character in Galván’s story, is the direct heir of Queen Anacaona of Jaragua and chief of the surviving Indians on the island. Christened Enrique by the Franciscans who raised him, but known by most as “Enriquillo” (a renaming that in itself is an example of historical, cultural, and identity erasure), Galván’s protagonist has come to symbolize Dominicanness for several generations. From its outset, Galván’s story sets up a tension between Enriquillo as “enlightened savage” and the “civilized” Spaniards who enslave the Indians, appropriate their personal possessions, and, in the case of Enriquillo, attempt to seduce his wife, Mencía. Eventually, Enriquillo feels compelled to “defend civilization from the civilized” (Sommer 236), leading a rebellion against the Spanish that lasts nearly 14 years and ends only after Charles V, faced with his armies’ repeated failures to subdue the rebels, concedes land and liberty to Enriquillo and his people.

Interestingly enough, Sommer also links Enriquillo and Galván's "deception" with Trujillo's ability to justify the Haitian Massacre of 1937 to his Dominican constituency—something also noted by Mateo and which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

My point here is that Trujillo's successful manipulation of historiography, which is similar to Galván's and others' throughout Dominican history and including during the *trujillato*, provides Dominican writers with a second motive for using historical fiction as a tool of political dissent. Mateo probably provides the best description of how Trujillo followed a process similar to the one employed by Galván in Enriquillo to construct a rhetorical framework for his own government:

[El] sistema de significación mitológica [de Trujillo] se conformó a partir de la deshistorización, usando el pasado como ideología, haciendo de cada mito en particular, una respuesta satisfactoria a la decepción del pasado. La dialéctica trujillista era en esto de una simplicidad aplastante: su ruptura total con el pasado atravesaba el lenguaje que el propio mito-sistema le prestaba. Cada uno de los mitos trujillistas respondía a una de las decepciones de la historia, que el pensamiento dominicano del siglo XIX había hecho angustia existencial. (15)

Specific examples of Trujillo's manipulation of written language in the dictator's attempt to produce "authoritative founding documents" (Bornstein, cited previously) will follow. My present assertion, however, is that like Galván and even



Trujillo, writers of Dominican dictator novels, including the writers I am studying here (Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci3n, and Vargas Llosa), knowingly use texts to repeat this process of historical erasure and revisionism. Literature is an ideal tool for the powerless to dissent against the historical record. Both historical fiction and historiography are functions of two principal elements: an event, real or fictional, in the past together with an authorized (i.e., socially accepted) account of the event which is unavoidably subjective, having been filtered by the writer, and finally mediated by the linguistic sign. “History” is the written account of an individual or collective memory of that event, subject to the personal experience and emotions of the *raconteur*—and memories tend to fade, or change, with time. Because of these characteristics, the historical referent is unrecoverable via the retelling and subsequent reception of a historical text, and literature, given its inherent similarities with history, can become a viable substitute to the historical record. As a result, literature can be especially effective as a tool when used subversively to combat the *memory* of the dictator rather than confront the man himself via a process of erasure similar to the one described above. In other words, the Dominican dictator novel has the potential to overwrite the memory of Trujillo, to transform that memory, and to generate a new “memory” of the dictatorship based in both fiction and fact. Given this process of replacement, these works can therefore be considered ontogenetic texts.

In “The Art of Memory in Garc3a Marquez and Vargas Llosa,” Michael Palencia-Roth makes several observations about memory and the narrative process

that are also applicable to the writers studied here. Palencia-Roth asserts: 1) that literature can be a tool for the “destruction and reconstruction of reality” (354); 2) that writing can reclaim and preserve memories (354); 3) that memories are primary components of “self-identity, history, knowledge, and the act of reading” (355); 4) that “the fabrication of history occurs when memory, individual and collective, is manipulated” (355); 5) that while reading can serve as a “path to the past... such a reconstruction of personal and historical memory through reading is simultaneously the creation of meaning” (i.e., ontogenesis). Palencia-Roth notes that making memory is “the fundamental task of the reader” (359); and that “to tell stories is to fight against death and failure, to recuperate the past by means of memory aided by the imagination” (361). In other words, according to Palencia-Roth, stories can merge with and become indistinguishable from first-hand experience for the rememberer.

The importance of the convergence of memory and reading is critical to my assertion that writers including Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, and Sención actually overwrite Dominican history by using their stories to influence the collective memory of their Dominican readers (Vargas Llosa’s book, of course, expands readership well beyond a Dominican public—something I will explore more fully in Chapter V). Palencia-Roth’s fourth point above suggests that, as the historical referent fades over time and as new narratives are added to the island’s master narration of the *trujillato*, the *Guerra de abril*, or the numerous other historical events appearing in these works, readers’ memories can be—and frequently are—overwritten by the combined narrative; history is, to varying extents, “falsified” (*ref.* Sención, Los que

falsificaron...) and readers' "path[s] to the past" lead them to update memories, meaning, identity, and knowledge with historical events fabricated by writers.

Obviously, the results of this process are significant in different ways to different groups of readers (for example, the Dominican youth living on the island, where the memory of Trujillo is still strong versus Dominican youth living in Washington Heights for whom Trujillo is something they've read about in books).

There are still more reasons that literature might be more effective in the symbolic deconstruction of authoritarianism and more likely to lead to pragmatic culture change in the Dominican Republic than in other parts of Latin America. One especially interesting reason has to do with the phenomenon of "insularity," a theme that has dominated the island's scholarly discourse for decades. Geographical, political, and socio-cultural forces have made insularity and isolation characteristic parts of Dominicanness. In terms of the present study, this has some important implications, one of which has to do with readership. As mentioned previously, Dominican books, which seldom circulate outside of the Dominican Republic due to poor distribution channels and a lack of interest by non-Dominican audiences, are written especially for *Dominican* audiences. It is not uncommon for Dominican writers to read and comment upon each others' manuscripts, participate together in literary *tertulias*, dialogue with each other in the press, cite each others' works, or review each others' latest publications. Because of this, Dominican dictator novels do not seek to change the desires of the entire world but, on a much smaller scale, those of the Dominican people—that is approximately 8.5 million people on the island and

several million more living abroad, a comparatively homogenous population with a common history, a common language, and common experiences (both “lived” and, for the reasons cited above, “vicarious”). Given these factors, the chances for “success” are much higher than they might be otherwise—particularly for a work like Sención’s which has sold millions of copies.

Yet another reason why Dominican writers continue to “narrar el trujillato” may be as a way of moving past the effects of the dictatorship’s violence and repression. One important Dominican reader considers oppositional narrative a valuable part of the psychological processes of social catharsis. Commenting on La fiesta del Chivo, José Israel Cuello, a Dominican politician and the director of Editora Taller, the island’s most important publishing house, notes:

Este libro contribuye al inicio impostergable de la contemplación de nuestras intimidades, a la ventilación necesaria de las partes dañadas que tiene el alma dominicana. Está, está pendiente de un curetaje que sólo el oxígeno del conocimiento es capaz de secar y, aunque sus huellas nunca se borren, las fisuras que marcan nuestras divisiones pasen a ser solo testimonio. (Azcarate s.p.)

On a similar note, but published more recently, and speaking from a broader perspective than Dominican literature, Idelber Avelar has suggested that writing can be a powerful vehicle for facilitating the process of mourning that the dictator’s

survivors have been denied previously. According to Avelar, the survivor's quandary—which would clearly apply to Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Sención—is one of representation, of trying to bridge the gap

between the irreducible imperative to tell and the distressing perception that language cannot fully convey that experience, that no particular listener manages to capture its true dimension or even listen attentively and sympathetically enough. If in the most basic sense the work of mourning can only take place through the telling of a story, the survivor's dilemma lies in the irresolvable incommensurability between the experience and narrative: the very diegetic organization of the past monstrosity is perceived either as an intensification or as a betrayal of one's suffering—or worse, of the suffering of another—and the survivor finds him or herself caught in a symbolic paralysis” (Untimely Present 210).

Avelar believes that this paralysis illustrates a breakdown in metaphor: “the mourner perceives the uniqueness, the singularity of the lost object as staunchly resisting any substitution, that is, any metaphorical transaction” (211). Because of this, “the entire narrative hangs on the related problems of transference, translation, vicariousness, and substitution” (213). Writing becomes “the emblem for the frustration of the phenomenological journey,” and the inability to “encompass the universal, to finish the phenomenological itinerary, is the prerequisite for the

emergence of a truth that only writing can articulate” (224). To be sure, these frustrations are inscribed in each of the texts studied here.

Examined from Avelar’s perspective, the acceptance of loss described in many dictator narratives helps the reader to move past the repressive blockage that suspended mourning. Resolution comes from moving on and accepting the fact that, although the story has not been told completely (a failure), it has been told, at least partially (a success):

Writing [becomes] the locus where the confrontation with the pathology can truly take place beyond the mere identification of the symptom, in a movement that is not simply a dive into the subject’s interiority but a decisive reconnection with the outside. What might at first appear to be a highly introspective text ends with a gesture toward an unnamed, unknown outside that represents the only possibility of activating subjective memory along with a space of intervention in the polis. One might refer to this outside as *the wholly other*, as the alterity that is no longer a simple disguise for a repetition of the past traumatic kernel but rather an otherness unrepresentable by the present, an untimely other that houses the possibility of memory and utopia. The wholly other announced by writing, the singular event as of yet unimaginable, becomes the only desirable mode of relationships with the future, beyond all finalist, teleologic, apocalyptic, and historicist cushions. (228)

Each of the novels studied here explores the tension between preserving a memory and creating a Utopia or imaginary future state whose beginning comes with the end of political oppression and the subsequent empowerment of the Dominican people (that is, the Dominican readers). In its own way, each creates a narrative buffer zone between this imaginary world (fiction) and the real world that exists outside of the text. Each speaks to “the other”, allegorizes the culture’s most familiar cultural documents, and refers back to the “barbarism that lies at their origin” (Avelar 233).<sup>28</sup>

When read within the context of the wider writings of these authors, it becomes obvious that one of the goals of Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, and Senci3n’s historical fiction has been to do exactly what Avelar and Cuello describe and what Cuello credits Vargas Llosa with doing—pushing Dominicans to reflect critically upon post-Trujillo society and begin the process of healing. That Cuello credits Vargas Llosa’s work with having initiated this process of introspection, though, is at least provocative and raises an interesting question that I’ll address later in Chapter IV: have the texts written by the Dominican writers been less effective than La fiesta del Chivo in this endeavor, and if so, why?<sup>29</sup>

Another reason Dominican writers continue to write about Trujillo is to celebrate their creative autonomy; that is to say, they write about Trujillo because now they *can*. Many of today’s Dominican writers, especially those who were students when Trujillo was killed, still remember the days when they were not free to criticize the dictatorship without significant and sometimes deadly consequences.

While freedom of expression was not an immediate result of Trujillo's death, when compared to the relative lack of freedom under Trujillo's censorship, Dominican writers have enjoyed significantly more creative liberty over the last 40 years than they did at any time during the *trujillato*. The effect of this freedom, for many authors, has been cathartic. Commenting upon the experience of intellectuals during the era of Trujillo, Andrés L. Mateo has written that:

A partir de 1930, Trujillo personificó el Estado y la clase dominante. La integración de los intelectuales al nuevo esquema del poder, se hacía condición de renunciar a todo plano ideal. Fuera del trujillismo, no había práctica intelectual posible, y ni siquiera supervivencia material. La propia aventura intelectual dominicana, y particularmente sus expresiones liberales, arribaron al trujillismo con una pobre visión de sí mismas, y con el lastre de frustraciones infinitas, de las propuestas de regeneración social, en sus vínculos con el poder político. (Mito y cultura 52)

Following Trujillo's death, Dominican intellectuals, many of whom had been pressured into using their talents for the rhetorical legitimization of the dictatorship, together with those who simply remained silent, rapidly discovered new worlds of critical thought. No longer fettered by (real or perceived) government censorship, and feeling a deep sense of complicity and, in some cases, culpability for their role (again, real or perceived) in empowering and sustaining the dictatorship either through their



writings or their silence, Dominican writers began a new era of creative productivity. In the years following Trujillo, Dominican thought was flooded with new ideas and, in particular, new attitudes about the objectivity of history that resonated with their own experiences living under Trujillo and Balaguer. Infused with a new skepticism toward history, much of contemporary Dominican writing demonstrates these writers' eagerness to disassociate themselves from Trujillo's system of power and protect the Dominican people from future actions that might engender new eras of political oppression. In his essay, "Los intelectuales en el siglo XX," Mateo describes this new attitude toward history that pervades Dominican narrative in the years following Trujillo and whose effects can be seen clearly in the writings of Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Sención, and Vargas Llosa:

Al país llegaron las ideas del pensamiento social que habían germinado en el mundo americano en los años veinte. Marxismo, sociología, economía política, arte comprometido, y hasta una nueva visión de la historia comenzaron a difundirse, en medio de una febril actividad sindical y de organización de partidos políticos, estremecidos todos por la gran movilidad social que caracteriza la época.

Esa gigantesca movilidad social tuvo también una reacción jacobina contra la interpretación de la historia, y el arte y la literatura entroncaron violentamente con los acontecimientos a partir de una práctica escritural que aspiraba a relacionar el espíritu con la historia en movimiento. De esas jornadas

surgirán movimientos como el de “Hacia una nueva interpretación de la historia”, poco después de la segunda mitad de la década de los años sesenta, en el cual toda la historiografía fue sometida a profundo cuestionamiento, a partir de los métodos diversos de las ciencias sociales que habían entrado al país. Historiadores como Franklin Franco, Emilio Cordero Michel, Hugo Tolentino, Roberto Cassá, y otros, influidos por el método del materialismo histórico, comenzarán a desmontar toda la historiografía tradicional. E intelectuales de la categoría de Frank Moya Pons iniciaron entonces lo que es hoy ya una visión total del proceso histórico dominicano, desde una intelección que se basa no sólo en la búsqueda de las fuentes tradicionales, sino en el cotejo de fuentes diversas, en el testimonio de la oralidad, y en la interpretación. (Mateo, “Los intelectuales en el siglo XX”)

### **Exposing the *trujillato*’s “Authoritative Founding Documents”**

Mateo’s point about Dominican intellectuals taking a new critical approach to historical interpretation is fundamental to the processes of historical dismantling described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. With Trujillo’s death and Balaguer’s subsequent relaxation of the government’s censorship, Dominican intellectuals were increasingly exposed first to the ideas of Marxism, then structuralism, and later post-structuralism. The natural passage of time and the increasing distance between Dominicans and the memory of the *trujillato*, together with the new willingness of Trujillo’s former collaborators to divulge their

experiences as members of Trujillo's entourage (stories generally not heard by the Dominican public during the dictatorship), contributed to the impact these new ideas had on Dominican thought and fed the ongoing (de)mythologization of Trujillo. Suddenly Dominican writers were reluctant to accept the historical record at face value. They reasoned that if written history were colored by the perceptions, self-interests, and personal experiences of its writers, not to mention by the limitations of language, then other "historical" accounts, while different from the governments' reports, could be just as feasible as the ones offered by Trujillo and his collaborators. Figuring out "what *really* happened" was largely impossible because of the reasons described above, so many Dominican writers who might have otherwise attempted to write about what actually happened during Trujillo's 30-year dominance of the country began instead to write about "what *could have* happened," generating texts that would eventually come into direct competition with the *historia oficial*. From this new perspective, Trujilloist history began to be perceived as being self-serving, meticulously crafted by the government to mythologize the dictator in an effort to win continuing support for his regime. In other words, "history" was increasingly regarded as yet another of Trujillo's propagandistic tools, just like journalism, literature, and music. Indeed, Trujillo's exploitation of these tools is well documented, especially by Mateo.

For example, during his first presidential campaign, Trujillo exploited popular stories about his exploits as a soldier to highlight and embellish the qualities that would make him an ideal president. In one case, Ernesto Vega Pagán tells how

Trujillo supposedly pursued Bonely Abreu, the notorious *Gavillero*, who repeatedly had eluded recapture after escaping from prison. According to the story, Trujillo single-handedly tracked the “terrible gavillero,” finding him “durmiendo [...], portando un foco en la mano izquierda y su pistola 45 en la derecha, le gritó: si no quiere ser muerto, ríndase, que es el Capitán Trujillo que se lo ordena” (Mateo 119). Of course, the feared criminal gave up without a fight. This account, together with numerous other stories promulgated by Trujillo’s team, contributed to the carefully crafted image of the candidate. Later, after taking office, Trujillo continued to polish this rhetorical façade, only he was now aided by the combined efforts of a group of well-organized and well-educated supporters. Quickly surrounding himself with the Dominican intelligentsia, the dictator began exploiting their skills to continue the process of mythologization begun during his campaign, using them to differentiate himself from the rest of the Dominican population.<sup>30</sup> In their role as “identity crafters,” this team of rhetorically skilled advisors would eventually rewrite many of Trujillo’s most notorious escapades as president, reframing them in a more positive way to bolster popular support for the dictator’s administration.<sup>31</sup>

Such was the case when a hurricane hit the island on September 3, 1930, destroying thousands of homes and killing 4,500 of the island’s inhabitants and causing nearly \$60 million in damages. Trujillo’s team used the President’s efforts to rebuild the country as justification to name him, “Padre de la Nueva Patria.” In fact, a concerted effort to deify the new president in this time of national crisis quickly gathered, building upon the already-existing body of mythology enshrouding the

President. Soon after the cyclone touched down, the government enacted “La Ley de Emergencia,”

y sus resultados en la reconstrucción fueron elevados a épica nacional, convirtiéndose en un momento epónimo y particularmente fortalecedor del proyecto totalitario. De momento la principal reconstrucción fue política, y cuatro años después, serviría de pretexto para cambiar el nombre de la capital en homenaje a Trujillo. (108)

Mateo notes that the efforts of the government’s talented team of spin-doctors, in concert with Dominican law, eventually provided a daily reminder to many Dominicans of Trujillo’s “munificent” contributions to the country in response to the damage caused by the storm:

La “reconstrucción” dividió mitológicamente la historia dominicana, dio inicio a la “Patria Nueva”, y creó un prototipo nacional urbano alejado el modelo rural... El mito de la “Patria Nueva” es hijo de la “reconstrucción” y constituyó una consigna extraordinariamente familiar para cualquier dominicano que haya vivido bajo la “Era”. En cada casa del país era obligatorio tener una chapa metálica, que se adquiría en el mercado local, con la imagen del dictador y la leyenda: “Generalísimo doctor Rafael Leonidas, Trujillo Molina, PADRE DE LA PATRIA NUEVA”. (108)<sup>32</sup>

Other examples of how literature was strategically employed by Trujillo's men to continue mythologizing of the dictator's reaction to the cyclone are easily found. For example, in J. Jiménez Belén's Trujillo: Héroe Inmortal (Ciudad Trujillo: Atenas, 1957), Jiménez praises Trujillo for his efforts to reconstruct the Dominican Republic, hails him as "Coloso creador de pueblos," and honors him with the following citation:

Nadie puede discutir ni quitarle la Gloria a este mortal de ser inmortal. Su figura surgirá en las páginas de nuestra historia como el más glorioso de los hijos de esta Patria Dominicana. Este pueblo de profundo fervor cristiano, hace tiempo que creó un fecundo pensamiento "DIOS Y TRUJILLO". Por eso mis sentimientos son los mismos del pueblo dominicano, creo en DIOS en las Alturas y en TRUJILLO en la tierra. (74)

Jiménez Belén's "I believe in God in the Heavens and Trujillo on earth" typifies much of Dominican literature during the *trujillato*. It is also illustrative of the prowess and processes employed by Trujillo's team in their efforts to construct "authoritative founding documents like constitutions setting forth their own foundation and claim to legitimacy" (Bornstein 2). A third example can be seen in how Trujillo's team invoked the same processes of mythologization seven years later to downplay one of the dictator's most notorious atrocities, the Haitian Massacre of

1937.<sup>33</sup> Possibly the most reprehensible example of Trujillo's bloody disregard for human life, this event actually initiated the myth of "La Paz," which even Balaguer called "la más impresionante de las manifestaciones literarias de Trujillo." Reports of this event are illustrative of the fusion of fiction with the historical record that would eventually make the two indistinguishable for many future readers. "La Paz dominicana" has been described as follows:

La paz es el mayor bien de que puede disfrutar un Pueblo. En la Paz todas las vidas están seguras. (...) el presidente trabaja incesantemente por la felicidad de su pueblo. Él mantiene la paz; sostiene las escuelas, hace los caminos, protege el trabajo de toda forma; ayuda la agricultura; ampara las industrias; conserva y mejora los puertos; mantiene los hospitales; favorece el estudio y organiza el Ejército para garantía de cada hombre ordenado.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, in this particular instance, "La Paz" was the rhetorical conversion of an act of genocide. Since Trujillo's early days in the Dominican presidency, relations with Haiti had improved notably—so much so that the Universidad de Santo Domingo suggested that Trujillo be considered for the 1936 Nobel Peace Prize for agreements he had negotiated with Haiti's President Senio Vicent. In a speech given during one of their meetings, Trujillo asserted that "en breve no habrá conflicto de frontera —mejor es decir, ya no lo hay—entre las dos Repúblicas vecinas" (Memorial dirigido al Comité Nóbel del Parlamento Noruego, 1936). Peace between the two

countries ended suddenly, however, during the last days of September and continuing through October 4, when 18,000-25,000 Haitians were exterminated near the Haitian border by Dominican soldiers following Trujillo's command. The world's reaction to this massacre was so unexpectedly severe that Trujillo, who was in the middle of a presidential campaign, was forced to withdraw from the race and be replaced by Jacinto Peynado.

Within the Dominican Republic, descriptions of the Haitian Massacre were carefully spun in a more positive light. Most accounts absolved Trujillo of all responsibility for the crime, insisting that the incident was a justified uprising of Dominican citizens living on the country's border with Haiti who had been the perpetual victims of Haitian encroachment and who finally decided to put an end to the Haitians' continual abuses. Even years after Trujillo's assassination, Balaguer used written language to diminish the brutality of this event, presenting it in terms reminiscent of the "great historical men" described by Hegel in his Philosophy of History:

El genocidio de 1937 no fue la obra de un loco ni la de un sátrapa empedernido en la abyección y en el crimen. Fue sencillamente el acto de un hombre, o de un ególatra si se quiere, que no sólo obedece a la brutalidad de sus instintos, sino también a una concepción bárbara de su destino como patriota y como gobernante. Los seres así se hallan fuera de serie y no pueden medirse con la misma vara con que se mide a la mayoría de los mortales. Si se hubiera



tratado de un acto de locura momentánea, propio de un esquizofrénico poseído por el ímpetu demoníaco del fanatismo, el crimen su hubiera detenido al cabo de algunas horas. Pero lejos de esto, continuó durante más de una semana y se llevó a cabo hasta el fin, sin que las escenas dramáticas a que dio lugar perturbaran en lo más mínimo al ánimo del hombre que ordenó esa matanza y que jamás se arrepintió de ella. (64)<sup>35</sup>

A similar portrayal of the Haitian Massacre which shifts responsibility for *El Corte* away from Trujillo is given in Ramón Marrero Aristy's Trujillo: síntesis de su vida y de su obra (Ciudad Trujillo: Impresora Dominicana, 1949):

El robo de ganados y frutos en la frontera era cosa tradicional, pero menos sensible en los tiempos en que la parte dominicana ofrecía pocas riquezas. En 1937 ya la frontera del lado nuestro era un acicate para la miseria haitiana. El contraste entre uno y otro lado resultaba violento. Y fue en este año, en que los haitianos hervían yerbas comunes en aquellos parajes para alimentarse, cuando se intensificó el robo en perjuicio de los pequeños agricultores y criadores dominicanos.

Se registraban escenas en extremo dolorosas al amanecer muchas veces nuestros campesinos sumidos en la más cruenta miseria al día siguiente de haber sido arrasadas totalmente sus labranzas y engullidos sus animales de crianza, por la voracidad del vecino, que penetraba en nuestro territorio al amparo de la

noche. Familias que habían levantado una heredad en el curso de duros años de trabajo incesante, quedaban súbitamente desposeídas, frente a la tierra pelada.

1937 marcó el límite de estos atropellos. Los esfuerzos de nuestro gobierno resultaban cada vez más infructuosos frente al Gobierno haitiano para lograr que este último pusiese coto al desorden sometiendo a sus ciudadanos al cumplimiento de las leyes. Nuestros campesinos, exasperados, hubieron de lanzarse a la lucha para defender lo que había creado con su trabajo y consagración. Se produjo el grave incidente que luego sería deformado por la malignidad de cierta prensa y ciertos aventureros internacionales que pretendieron darle a los sucesos carácter de agresión de parte nuestra. Todo ocurrió en territorio dominicano, dentro de las tierras robadas de nuestros agricultores y pequeños ganaderos.

Trujillo afrontó el grave problema. Durante semanas de tensión dramática, el derecho dominicano prevaleció al reconocer el Gobierno haitiano que bandas de merodeadores haitianos mantenían una situación violenta con sus robos y penetraciones ilegales en el territorio dominicano.

Una indemnización fue acordada para pagar el valor de las pequeñas labranzas que los haitianos dejaron abandonadas en territorio dominicano, pues los sucesos de 1937 dieron como resultado la partida definitiva de los nacionales de aquel país que vivían ilegalmente en el nuestro. Esta indemnización fue pagada por el Gobierno dominicano aún antes de su vencimiento, aunque los propósitos que la originaron no fueron cumplidos, ya

que las autoridades haitianas de entonces jamás dieron cuenta a los millares de campesinos que esperaban ser resarcidos de sus pérdidas, de haber recibido las importantes sumas de dinero que entregó el Gobierno dominicano.

En esta forma quedó saneado definitivamente el territorio nacional y se desterraron con la partida de los haitianos, hábitos y costumbres que podían afectar peligrosamente la pureza de nuestras costumbres españolas y de nuestra religión católica. (67-69)<sup>36</sup>

More than anything else, the Haitian Massacre demonstrated the cohesion of Trujillo's team of spin-doctors, which included such notable Dominicans as Joaquín Balaguer, Julio Ortega Frier, Arturo Peña Batlle, and Max Henríquez Ureña, only to name a few, their willingness to manipulate history and their ability to use narrative to the President's advantage. Almost immediately, Trujillo's colleagues began rationalizing the massacre to the Dominican people and the world. Mateo comments upon the process they used to do this, together with their results, when he writes: "Su recuperación simbólica ocurre por permutación: Masacre de 1937 es igual a fronteras seguras, a integridad de la patria" (Mito y cultura 114). Having purged the frontier region of Haitians, the government immediately subsidized agricultural colonies in the depopulated regions. Once again, Jiménez Belén praises Trujillo for his "Dominicanización de la frontera" (86), noting that the dictator "encaró el problema de frente" when faced with the perpetual intrusions of Haitians into Dominican territory and the vices (violence, crime, voodoo) they brought with them. It was this

step that helped convert the murder of thousands of Haitians into “La Paz Dominicana” and morphed Trujillo into a national hero. Just as occurred with the cyclone in 1930, the Trujillo regime rewrote the Haitian massacre in a way that would ultimately help the president.

Mateo summarizes the transformational power of writing and underlines the skill of Trujillo’s spin doctors when he observes that “la Masacre tejó en la cultura trujillista una complicidad nacional y fabricó una épica silente, una conciencia plena de que no se podía estar en la ribera de un régimen que, como dice el *Eclesiastés*, ejecuta la danza sobre las tumbas de los muertos” (116)<sup>37</sup>—but there also exists a tension between speaking up in the only way that was acceptable (like Balaguer and Trujillo’s spin doctors) or not speaking up at all. As I have indicated previously, and will discuss in the chapters that follow, the concept of “silence equals complicity” quickly emerges as one reason for the proliferation of Dominican dictator novels after Trujillo’s assassination in 1961.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this will be one prominent sub-theme in Mateo’s novel, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán and a commonly-cited reason for writing about the dictator, even years after his death.

### **The Emergence of an Anti-Trujilloist Literature**

While fiction came to be seen as a tool that could potentially be used by writers to unmask and later to revise the written record of the *trujillato*, it also furnished many Dominicans a space where they could study, denounce, and later exploit its underlying causes—first by Dominican exiles living abroad during the

final years of the Trujillo administration and later, after the dictator's death, by writers living in the Dominican Republic including the four I study here. Indeed, the search for the dictatorship's origins emerges as a recurrent theme throughout the Dominican dictator novel. One early work, though not a novel, is particularly demonstrative of how Dominican writers would use literature as a tool for trying to understand why Trujillo came to power and how he was able to preserve his control over the island for such a long time. In his book, Trujillo: Causas de una tiranía sin ejemplo (published in 1960, but finished and signed in Caracas on August 19, 1959), Juan Bosch explores the psychological, biological, political, and social causes of the *trujillato*. In the end, Bosch concludes that:

La tiranía trujillista fue consecuencia de los males dominicanos. Pero la perpetuación y el monstruoso desarrollo de esa tiranía obedecen a dos razones determinantes: una, que la arritmia histórica de Santo Domingo mantuvo al país al margen de las corrientes capitalistas, lo que le ofreció a Trujillo la oportunidad de convertirse en el empresario de un desenvolvimiento industrial y financiero que ya no podía demorar más; otra, que el clima económico y político internacional creado por el estado de guerra que se adueñó del mundo a partir de la invasión de Etiopía en 1935, le permitió al dictador desenvolver al máximo sus empresas capitalistas bajo un sistema de terror político internacionalmente protegido.

Por fortuna, debido a que Trujillo resumió en su persona todas las debilidades históricas dominicanas, y debido a que sus condiciones personales fueron decisivas en la creación y en el mantenimiento de esa vasta empresa llamada el régimen trujillista, esa empresa depende vitalmente de la propia persona de Trujillo. Tal dependencia es el punto débil de la tiranía, que no perdurará un día más de aquel en que Rafael Leonidas Trujillo pierda el poder o dé la vida. Las circunstancias históricas que lo produjeron a él como ser psicológico, militar, político y económico, no se han reproducido ni se reproducirán en ninguno de sus herederos; ninguno de ellos, por tanto, podrá actuar como él. En igual medida, tampoco se reproducirán en Santo Domingo las circunstancias nacionales y extranjeras que entregaron el pueblo inerme en manos de Trujillo; de manera que el porvenir no se verá la repetición del tremendo mal encarnado en Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

Cuando ese pueblo quede libre de Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, tendrá su tercera oportunidad de conquistar un puesto al sol de la democracia. Los dominicanos estamos seguros de que sabrá aprovecharla. Nuestros hermanos de América deben compartir nuestra confianza. (174, 178-179)

Bosch's prediction that the Dominican people would seize an opportunity to accept a democratic government when Trujillo died was only partially true: while Balaguer's administration might not have been as extreme or as blatant in its political subjugation of the island as Trujillo's had been, the country was still several decades

away from its first “sunset as a democracy.” Bosch’s imagery of the sun setting on the *trujillato* and rising towards a brighter future is repeated in several of the novels studied in the following chapters. Unfortunately, as Sención is quick to point out, the political reality was another. Rather than ending the dictatorship, Balaguer extended many of the dictator’s policies and resorted to many of his predecessor’s most troubling methods to power.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, given Trujillo’s self-serving manipulation of Dominican journalism, literature, music, and other elements of popular culture described in the preceding pages, each of these media was also quickly turned against him after his death. One interesting example of how quickly popular discourse repudiated the *trujillato* can be seen in the *merengue*, a musical form famously exploited by Trujillo during his first campaigns and throughout his presidency. As Mateo notes:

En su campaña electoral de 1930, además del equipo intelectual, Trujillo se hizo acompañar de un cuarteto típico de merengue, que interpretaba a su paso temas vinculados con las consignas de su campaña. La experiencia debió ser sugerida por Rafael Vidal, quien tenía interés en la investigación de ese ritmo, y había publicado un pequeño estudio sobre “Música Vernácula”, que acompañó al Álbum Musical de Julio Alberto Hernández en 1927. El merengue tenía, además de la aceptación popular que era creciente en 1930, una condición de clase que lo hermanaba con Trujillo: ninguno de los dos eran de “primera”. Tras

su aparición discutida, el Merengue originó una reacción contraria de los sectores encumbrados de la sociedad, calificándose de “indecente”, “no apropiado”, “danza ridícula”, etc. Son numerosas las composiciones poéticas que los espíritus selectos lanzaron contra la procacidad del Merengue... Montado en esa popularidad y hermanados por el origen de clase, el Merengue dominicano se asimiló al régimen trujillista, entrando de manera despampanante a los salones de la alta sociedad y desplazando a otros ritmos vernáculos que tenían un viejo pasado señorial, como la Tumba, la Salve, etc. (Mito y cultura 206)

After Trujillo's death, however, the *merengue* was quickly turned against the man who helped it become such an integral part of Dominican culture. One *merengue* in particular, “Mataron al chivo,” emerged almost immediately as the country learned that the dictator had been killed. This song would later become an important subtext for both Bernard Diederich's Trujillo: The Death of the Goat and Mario Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo which I will study later in Chapter V:<sup>39</sup>

They've killed the goat  
On the highway  
They've killed the goat  
On the highway

Let me see



Let me see

Let me see

They've killed the goat

And they won't let me see

The people celebrate

With great joy

The Party of the Goat

The Thirtieth of May

Let's laugh

Let's dance

Let's enjoy

The Thirtieth of May

Day of Liberty

Ay, María, María, María

Sing and don't cry

Because singing you make

Honey, the hearts happy

They've killed Chapita

On the highway

They've killed Chapita

On the highway

Let's shout

Let's shout  
 In this way  
 They've killed Chapita  
 And won't let me see (Diederich ix-x)

Chambers asserts that “what [oppressed] people desire is, in the long run, a way to change without violence the way things are” (xii). In the Dominican case, it may be more a case of asserting the way things are now (or how they should be tomorrow), while preserving the memory of the way they used to be, while at the same time avoiding anything that might lead to political oppression in the future.

Given the factors set forth above, Chambers' assertion that cumulative readings of texts (whether novels or *merengues*) can influence reality doesn't seem as naive as it might otherwise. And while it might be difficult to assert a cause-effect relationship between individual readings and social change, it would be equally difficult to disprove the existence of such a link, leaving the door open to literature's potential to change real world events. It should also be remembered that the processes described above are actually inevitable at some level because they occur naturally over time as memories fade and time lessens the emotions that resulted from personal experience with Trujillo's government-sponsored violence. Because of this, in the Dominican dictator novel, “forgetting” becomes both an obstacle and an enabler in dissenting against Trujillo and reconstructing national identity in the dictatorship's wake—a matter that will be explored further in Chapters II and IV.<sup>40</sup> In the end, whether literature accelerates the process of social change is probably less important;

the dictator's rhetorical system will inevitably be swallowed up by others that come after it. Because of this, I prefer not to focus on the results of the process described above (i.e., whether texts can actually change social reality over time), but rather to how individual texts take advantage of the "room for maneuver" described by Chambers as they attempt to do so. For me, the most productive examination of Dominican dictator texts isn't found in their similarities, but rather in the unique ways in which each one revises Dominican history, regardless of whether they focus on Trujillo, Balaguer, or the United States Marines. For this reason, for the remainder of this study I will limit my comments on how individual texts use the tools above to create "room for maneuver" and what they do with that narrative play space once it has been created.

### **Review of Literature on the Dictator Novel**

A review of some of the scholarly literature on the subject of Latin American dictator narratives will help establish the broader context of my present study.

Perhaps one of the most useful (but largely unknown) starting points for understanding the historical contexts of the Latin American dictator novel is Raymond Gonzáles's dissertation, "The Latin American Dictator in the Novel" (U. Southern California 1971). Gonzáles combines a historical overview and analysis of the dictatorship in Latin America with a literary analysis of six prominent dictator texts: La sombra del caudillo (Guzmán, 1929), El señor presidente (Asturias, 1946), El puño del amo (Gallegos, 1939), La llaga (Casaccia, 1964), La fiesta del rey Acab

(Lafourcade, 1959), and El tiempo de la ira (Spota, 1960). He also studies the treatment of Latin American dictators in novels written by foreign authors, including Valle-Inclán (Tirano Banderas, 1926), Joseph Conrad (Nostromo, 1904), and Graham Greene (The Comedians, 1966). Finally, Gonzáles proposes what might be called a “taxonomy of tyrants” in which he attempts to classify the dictators inscribed within each of these novels in accordance with their similarities and differences. While his classification seems overly simple to me, the historical groundwork that Gonzáles lays while building up to his assertion, together with his analysis of the novels, is helpful for those hoping to understand the relationship between Latin American dictators and Latin American literature. Gonzáles’s work reviews the figure of the dictator from the convergence of the Spanish and Indigenous cultures to those represented in the works cited above.

In Los dictadores latinoamericanos (1976), Ángel Rama studies Carpentier’s El recurso del método (1974), García Márquez’s El otoño del patriarca (1975), Roa Bastos’s Yo el supremo (1974), Asturias’s El señor presidente (1946), and Zalamea’s El gran Burundún-Burundá ha muerto (1952). Rama studies the concept of narrative as cultural recognition, building upon the idea of the dictator as a totalizing Latin American archetype. He looks at how dictator novels resist and revise the theory of the novel while blurring the boundaries between biography, and political pamphletism.<sup>41</sup>

Another author, Mario Benedetti in El recurso del supremo patriarca (1979), retakes a theme that he had explored earlier in many of his essays (for example, see

El escritor latinoamericano y la revolución posible, Buenos Aires: Editorial Alfa Argentina, 1974) and applies it to the phenomenon of dictatorship. Like Rama, Benedetti focuses mostly on El recurso del método, El otoño del patriarca, and Yo el supremo, though he also mentions El señor presidente and Tirano Banderas. While Benedetti claims that his objective is to read these novels within the context of their writers' earlier literary work and to compare and contrast them as three contemporaries treating a common theme, he begins with the basic notion that Latin American artists are actively involved in a revolutionary struggle. Regardless of their chosen medium, their works are both artifacts of and vehicles for performing an ideological transformation of Latin America.

As pointed out earlier, while focusing attention on the dictatorship, writers also run the risk of adding to the dictator's rhetorical power. In Novelas de dictador, dictadores de novela (1977), Conrado Zuluaga argues that the reductionistic typification of the Latin American dictator by writers such as Roa Bastos, Carpentier, and García Márquez actually works against their efforts to expose the dictators:

Hemos llegado así al final de este análisis para descubrir que nuestra América Latina, tan calumniada y vilipendiada, tan oprimida y explotada, tan martirizada y saqueada, no tiene cabida en las obras de tres de los principales escritores latinoamericanos; para descubrir que ellos, en sus novelas del dictador, como la Bolivia de Melgarejo, *no tienen memoria* y contribuyen así —

consciente o inconscientemente, eso no importa—a que la verdadera historia continúe oculta a los ojos de la mayoría.

Por eso podemos cerrar este análisis teniendo presente las palabras de Benedetti:

En un país subdesarrollado donde el hambre y las epidemias hacen estragos, donde la represión, la corrupción y el agio no son un elemento folclórico, sino la agobiante realidad de todos los días, proponer el refugio en la Palabra, hacer de la Palabra una isla donde el escritor debe atrincherarse y meditar, es también una propuesta social. Atrincherarse en la Palabra viene entonces a significar algo así como darle la espalda a la realidad; hacerse fuerte en la Palabra es hacerse débil en el contorno. (121-122, emphasis is Zuluaga's)<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly enough, Zuluaga's critique of dictator novels has proven itself relevant more recently, in the tumult generated by Vargas Llosa's novel, La fiesta del Chivo (studied in Chapter V). One Dominican writer, for example, critical of Vargas Llosa's novel, has taken issue with its historical accuracy and how this might affect its readers: "Su pluma nos transporta hacia lugares y situaciones que no se ajustan a la verdad histórica, lo que podría llevar a las nuevas generaciones a desconocer a la dictadura que vivimos" (Azcarate s.p.). The question for me is whether "forgetting" described by Zuluaga is as passive as it might at first appear. I don't believe that it is. Instead, I believe that these writers are carefully *crafting* "memories" with their

writing—an act that both recognizes the inherent fallibilities of historical discourse and seeks to exploit them for other (political) means.

As noted previously, Roberto González Echevarría has studied the relationship between language and authority within the context of Latin American literature. Since I will return to González Echevarría's commentaries many times throughout my study of Dominican dictator novels, I have chosen not to provide a detailed summary of his ideas here; however, those seeking additional insight on the relationship between writing and dictatorship should consult Chapter 3 of The Voice of the Masters, "The Dictatorship of Rhetoric / The Rhetoric of Dictatorship."

The present study has been influenced by these texts and other significant readings of the Latin American historical novel, applying them directly to a different geographical context.<sup>43</sup> While many of the novels I study were published much more recently than these studies, the references I have made to them above remain relevant within the Dominican context. As noted by Mateo previously, Trujillo's death ended a stagnation of critical thought in the Dominican Republic and opened the door for "new" ideas such as these which were well known in other parts of the world. In other words, there was a lag in critical thought that is visible in the ways Dominican writers approached the dictatorship in their work. While the continuing applicability of these studies should not be surprising, the relative absence of their application within the Dominican literary context might be, though, becomes more understandable in this context.

Furthermore, while much of the commentary that is available on modern Dominican narrative has dealt with dictatorship in one way or another, none has sufficiently explained the way in which the most popular Dominican novels dissent against and seek to undermine the dictator's power through the means suggested by Chambers: that is to say, by creating a disturbance in the dictator's rhetorical system and then introducing opposing voices in hopes of refocusing the reader's attention on a competing text (or on the process of reading) and, by doing so, shifting it away from the dictator. Beyond this, none has focused on the ongoing convergence of history and fiction in the island's Master Narrative, or on its significance to contemporary Dominican readers. This thesis seeks to expand the critical discussion on Latin American dictator narratives in these areas.

### **Critical Approaches to the Dominican Dictator Novel**

While the dictator novel has attracted the critical gaze in other parts of Latin America, few scholars have focused on this genre in the Dominican Republic—and many of those who have written on this theme have published their observations only in Dominican periodicals which have extremely limited readership. Among the studies that can be found easily outside of the Dominican Republic, probably the most widely recognized studies of the dictator in Dominican literature are Doris Sommer's book, One Master for Another: Populism as Patriarchal Rhetoric in Dominican Novels (1983), Neil Larson's article, "¿Cómo narrar el trujillato?" (printed in a special issue of Revista Iberoamericana dedicated to Dominican literature), and



Estrella Betances de Pujadas's doctoral thesis on Trujillo's influence on Dominican literature. While each of these studies has made its own positive contribution to the discussion around Dominican literature, most of the literary works treated in them ended up being less noteworthy than their writers had anticipated within both the Latin American and Dominican contexts. This is especially important for my study because if, as Chambers claims, a narrative's capacity to work social transformation is contingent upon the cumulative effect of its being read by many people, then those books that are read most have the greatest potential for changing society.<sup>44</sup>

Doris Sommer's One Master for Another, for example, considers several narratives that the Dominican writer and critic, Pedro Peix, has characterized elsewhere as "underdeveloped." In his prologue to La narrativa yugulada, Peix stresses the relative immaturity of Dominican literature in general (largely appropriating the position taken by Alejo Carpentier in "Problemática de la actual novela hispanoamericana") and especially that of the Dominican novel. Other Dominican scholars have agreed with Peix's characterization of Dominican narrative, and one commonly-heard assertion within Dominican scholarly circles is that "En la República Dominicana no se escribe novelas sino historia." Peix's observations notwithstanding, together with her many essays dealing with Dominican literature, Sommer's One Master for Another has both (re)presented Dominican literature within many scholarly circles and helped to guide the initial efforts of a new generation of Caribbeanists wanting to study "worthwhile" Dominican texts.

Like One Master for Another, Neil Larson's "¿Cómo narrar el *trujillato*?" studies texts written before the publication of three of the island's more recent and most successful dictator novels to date: Andrés L. Mateo's La balada de Alfonsina Bairán (1985), Viriato Sención's Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (1992), and Mario Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo (2000). Given this, it is understandable how Larson can prematurely draw attention to "la falta de un definitivo y bien desarrollado retrato narrativo y artístico de la época de Trujillo" (90). The relative dearth of narrative fiction when the article was published in 1988 led Larson to suggest that something in Dominican culture seemed to impede the process of "collective historization" described by George Lukács, while at the same time insisting upon it (91).<sup>45</sup> To make his point, Larson bases his observations on Una gestapo en América (1941), written by Juan Isidro Jimenes Grullón, and De abril en adelante by Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, calling his selections "the best, most influential, and most typical" examples of Dominican literature since the beginning of the *trujillato*:

Con respecto al libro anterior, nuestro criterio ha sido la convicción (que tal vez se puede acusar de subjetivista) de que la narrativa de Jimenes Grullón es a la vez la mejor, la más influyente y la más tipificada de las pocas obras escritas durante los años del trujillato que no seguían fines estrictamente panfletarios.

La selección de la obra de Veloz Maggiolo quizá requiere menos explicación. De los varios textos literarios enfocados en el trujillato y escritos

después del sesenta y uno, De abril en adelante es probable el de más renombre.

(91)

Larson's optimistic assessment of Una gestapo en América hasn't borne out over time—the book remains virtually unknown within both popular and scholarly circles, even with the increased attention that has been given to Dominican studies in recent years. Instead of Jimenes Grullón, one finds mention of writers such as Pedro Peix, Viriato Sención, Andrés Mateo, Pedro Vergés, and Julia Álvarez—all writers who indeed have used literature in the ways described by Larson. On the other hand, De abril en adelante is certainly one of the Dominican Republic's most significant texts, which is why I include it here.

The third study cited above, Betances de Pujadas's "The Influence of Rafael Trujillo in Dominican Literature" (1992), is less useful to scholars researching Dominican dictator narratives than those of Larson and Sommer. While offering its readers a general idea of life in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillo years, this study treats mostly minor texts within the Dominican literary tradition and ends up being more anecdotal than scholarly. Stories from the author's family and personal acquaintances related in the work help Betances' readers better understand the circumstances under which many Dominicans lived during the Era of Trujillo, and will also provide useful helpful socio-cultural background material for reading Dominican texts; however, the study lacks analytical rigor, and, because of this, is less important as a source document for my work than the other two texts have been.

Rather than being overly critical of these studies, my reason for mentioning them is to create a context for my own ideas in order to build upon the relatively little that has been written on this topic already and to continue the critical conversation around the Dominican dictator novel.<sup>46</sup> To accomplish my goals in this study, I have chosen the four writers whose work I believe to be the most noteworthy examples of oppositional novels published since 1960: Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Andrés L. Mateo, Viriato Sención, and Mario Vargas Llosa. I have chosen to study these writers based on their prominence within contemporary Dominican literary circles, my personal opinions of their relative quality and the extent to which they exemplify the most distinguishing features of Dominican dictator novels described above. Having studied the history of Dominican narrative extensively, I also think that these novels demonstrate the evolution of Dominican narrative over the past 70 years. The primary novels I have chosen to study—Veloz Maggiolo’s De abril en adelante (1975)<sup>47</sup> and Materia Prima (1988), Mateo’s Pisar los dedos de Dios (1979) and La balada de Alfonsina Bairán (1985), Sención’s Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (1992) and Los ojos de la montaña (1997), and Vargas Llosa’s La fiesta del Chivo (2000, which, while not “Dominican” *per se*, is clearly an important element in the panorama I’m trying to present)—not only overcome the constraints of “underdeveloped fiction” described by Peix, but are also some of the most noteworthy examples of how writers have approached the characters of Trujillo and Balaguer. Using these novels, I will explore the ways in which Dominican literature first attempts to dismantle and then seeks to symbolically rewrite and in a sense re-situate dictatorial authority in hope of

moving popular support away from political oppressors, changing Dominican society for the better.

### **An Introduction to the Works and Writers to be Studied**

As noted previously, the present study focuses on four contemporary writers whose works focus on the *trujillato*: Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Andrés L. Mateo, and Viriato Sención—all important within Dominican letters—and Mario Vargas Llosa, one Latin America's most recognized writers who has recently written a novel exploring the Trujillo regime. In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce the works and writers to be studied here.

### **Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, De abril en adelante and Materia prima**

Along with Juan Bosch, Pedro Mir, Manuel Rueda, and José Alcántara Almánzar, Marcio Veloz Maggiolo is one of the few Dominican writers who have achieved international recognition. As an archaeologist, poet, short story writer, novelist, and literary critic, Veloz Maggiolo has written over 30 books and published hundreds of articles in domestic and foreign publications. As a student, Veloz studied philosophy in the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo where he has also taught since 1962. He received his doctorate in American History from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. While in Madrid, Veloz also studied archaeology and social anthropology. Outside of academia, he has served as the Dominican ambassador to Italy, Egypt, Romania, Mexico, and Bolivia.

Like many of his contemporaries, Veloz Maggiolo uses narrative to explore, deconstruct, and then reassemble the historical record of a society caught between Trujillo's dictatorship and the U.S. intervention of 1965. He has written about the *trujillato* in several of his books including El prófugo (1963), De abril en adelante: Protonovela (1975), La biografía de Sombra Castañeda (1981), La fértil agonía del amor (Premio Nacional de Cuento, 1981), Materia Prima: Protonovela (Premio Nacional de Novela 1988), and Trujillo, Villa Francisca, y otras fantasmas (Premio Libro del Año, Feria Nacional del Libro, 1997). Other well-known narratives written by Veloz Maggiolo include El buen Ladrón, Judas (Premio Nacional de Literatura, 1962), La vida no tiene nombre; Nosotros los suicidas (1965), Los ángeles de hueso (1967), and Ritos de Cabaret (1991).

Chapter II studies how Veloz Maggiolo tries to use narrative to deconstruct political oppression. His novels carefully inscribe and critique the island's long history of oppression. They both acknowledge and dissent against linguistic and narrative conventions, calling attention to the similarities between the narrative endeavor and the rhetorical processes used by oppressive régimes to subjugate the Dominican people. In exploring Veloz's attempts at narrating the *trujillato*, I will focus primarily on his two "protonovelas": De abril en adelante (1975) and Materia prima (1988, Premio Nacional de Novela). I will also examine El jefe iba descalzo (1993), a seemingly benign historical novella that proposes to introduce children to the Era of Trujillo.

**Andrés L. Mateo, Pisar los dedos de Dios and La balada de Alfonsina Bairán**

Andrés L. Mateo received his Ph.D. from the Universidad de Habana where he specialized in Latin American language and literature. He currently teaches literature in the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and is a regular columnist for the Dominican newspaper, El Siglo. He was a member of the group “La Isla,” which appeared shortly after the Guerra de Abril of 1965, and has published collections of poetry including Poesías I (1969) and Poesía de Posguerra / Joven Poesía Dominicana (1981). These publications notwithstanding, Mateo is best known for his narrative. His dissertation on the rhetorical mythologization of Trujillo, edited and published as Mito y cultura en la era de Trujillo (1993), won the Premio Nacional de Ensayo. The manuscript for Mateo’s second novel, La otra Penélope (1982) won the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1981. Set in 1968, it chronicles a love triangle in the ongoing violence that followed the Guerra de Abril. His most recent novel, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán (1992), was awarded the Premio de Novela by the Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña. In 1999, Mateo received the Premio a la Excelencia Periodística Dominicana for his column, “Sobre el tiempo presente” published in the Listín Diario, for which he continues to write today. Other essays published by Mateo include Al filo de la dominicanidad (1997) and Las palabras perdidas (2000). Between his publications and awards, Mateo is increasingly recognized as one of today’s most significant Dominican writers.

Chapter III considers the evolution of Mateo’s dictator narratives between his first novel, Pisar los dedos de Dios (1979), and his more recent one, La balada de

Alfonsina Bairán (1992). Pisar los dedos de Dios is perhaps best characterized as a political coming of age, in which the violence of the *trujillato* breaches the Eden-like compound of a Catholic school, shattering the innocence of its student body. La balada de Alfonsina Bairán begins with a similar act of dictatorial violence and then describes how the story's main character, Alfonsina, patiently awaits her opportunity for revenge. The story is narrated by a young writer who becomes obsessed with Alfonsina's history in the days immediately preceding her mysterious disappearance. It follows his efforts to reconstruct Alfonsina's life vis-à-vis the town's collective memory, excerpts from Alfonsina's diary, and his own fictional conjecture as a writer. While the written word and narrative form serve as the predominant focus for much of Veloz Maggiolo's writing, the mirror (whether depicted as actual objects, which abound in the text, or the reflection of Dominican reality through the novel's reconstruction of Alfonsina's life) serves as the primary vehicle for Mateo's study of the *trujillato*. In many ways, the stories of personal tragedy told about Bernardo Puig in Pisar los dedos de Dios and Alfonsina in La balada de Alfonsina Bairán use literature to reconstruct the fears and frustrations felt by thousands of Dominicans during Trujillo's 30-year rule over the island.

**Viriato Sención, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios and Los ojos de la montaña**

Thanks to the enormous success of his first novel, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (1992), which was one of the first Dominican novels to attack Joaquín



Balaguer's camouflaged extension of the *trujillato* directly, Viriato Sención is one of the Dominican Republic's most popular writers. With over 32,000 copies of the novel in circulation within 15 months of its initial publication, with numerous subsequent printings, and with Asa Satz's translation into English (They Forged the Signature of God, 1995), Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is clearly one of the Dominican Republic's most important and popular novels. From the beginning, Sención's first creative endeavor has been surrounded by controversy. Despite being the judges' unanimous choice for the island's Premio Nacional de Novela, the award was stripped away from the author by the Dominican Secretary of State when then-President Balaguer expressed his displeasure with the way he had been portrayed in the book. Besides Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, Sención has published another novel, Los ojos de la montaña (1997) and a collection of short stories, La enana Celia y otros cuentos (1994). Sención represents an important segment of the Dominican people: those who left the country and are currently living abroad. Following Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Sención was one of many students who left the Dominican Republic to study political science in the Instituto de Educación in Coronado, Costa Rica. Since 1979, Sención has lived in New York City where he also studied Hispanic literature at Lehman College.

Chapter IV examines Sención's two novels, first exploring the theme of collective memory in Los ojos de la montaña, and then studying the ways in which Sención not only creates "room for maneuver" in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, but also uses it, together with the tool of intertextuality, to turn the rhetoric that

empowered Balaguer against him in a way that allowed the writer to prevail against the dictator both figuratively and literally. As it follows the lives of four young students during the final days of Trujillo's government, this novel provides a fictionalized account of Joaquín Balaguer's improbable ascent from his position as Trujillo's secretary to President of the Republic. The novel's organizing metaphor is the mask, as the author, narrator, and the book's characters assume roles that hide and distort the "truth" about their respective situations. In Chapter IV, I will explain how, of the novels studied here, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios comes the closest to undermining the dictator's system of rhetoric, using literature to unmask Balaguer's neo-Trujilloist oppression despite his outward gentility and ultimately provides a viable, reader-directed alternative to the *historia oficial*.

### **Mario Vargas Llosa, La fiesta del Chivo**

La fiesta del Chivo (2000) [translated as The Feast of the Goat, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001] is Mario Vargas Llosa's most recent foray into historical fiction.<sup>48</sup> It also represents an important milestone in the trajectory of literature addressing the *trujillato*: that one of Latin America's most highly-regarded writers would approach Trujillo's story helps to call attention to and, in the minds of some, even helps to legitimize the principal subject of a literature that has typically resided on the margins of the Latin American canon.

Like the other novels studied here, as well as many written by Vargas Llosa in the past, the act of representation takes center stage in La fiesta del Chivo when

Urania Cabral returns to the Dominican Republic from her self-imposed exile in New York City to confront her childhood memories of the terror, corruption, and other abuses of power that were common on the island during the presidencies of Trujillo and Balaguer. Through Urania's memories of the past and her conversations with her extended family, Dominican history emerges from the semi-fictional chronicle of a country's struggle to overcome its past. Although the factual basis of this work has clearly undergone a fictional transformation, La fiesta del Chivo is based on the meticulous historical research that characterized many of Vargas Llosa's other novels.

In La fiesta del Chivo, as in several works by the other Dominican authors studied here, we do not see a denial of historical fact but rather its symbolization aimed at offering an alternative interpretation of historical events. Instead of writing a "what if" novel about Trujillo, or crafting a more oblique, more patently allegorical or "universal" representation of Latin American dictatorships like one might encounter in La fiesta del Rey Acáb or in Luis Rafael Sánchez's play La pasión según Antígona Pérez, Vargas Llosa mixes real names and characters with fictional ones to create a believable, if not completely historical, account of Trujillo's final days.

Possibly the more interesting discourse associated with this novel, however, is not the one between Vargas Llosa's novel and its historical referent, but rather the tension that has been created between the writer and a certain segment of his audience. Since its publication, the polemic that has followed La fiesta del Chivo has had more to do with Vargas Llosa's "authority" to narrate and, in the opinion of

some, manipulate Dominican “history” and has also extended to questioning his “authorship” of the novel, which many have alleged is full of plagiarism. Chapter V examines Vargas Llosa’s authority as a writer of historical fiction and as an outsider who voyeuristically recreates the history of a nation.

In my Conclusion, I will suggest that when Vargas Llosa says that “el mayor premio literario que podría recibir es el de una América Latina en donde estas historias que cuenta La fiesta del Chivo fueran ya exclusivamente relatos de ciencia ficción” (Rosales y Zamora s.p.), the underlying sentiment is the very reason that each of the novels studied here was written in the first place. To this end, I will re-examine how each works to achieve this desired outcome. I will show that La fiesta del Chivo also presents a watershed opportunity for changing the relationship between Dominican writers and the *trujillato* and will reassert the importance of process over product as the most valuable element in the literary dissent represented by these texts. Finally, I readdress the evolutionary path of Dominican literature as manifested in each of these four writers, and reassert the importance to future generations of readers of the ongoing convergence of literature and history as the two come together to represent life in the Dominican Republic since the 1930s.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Eugenio García Cuevas (3/7/1998), Andrés L. Mateo comments on the Dominican Republic's "literatura sin críticos": "La actividad bibliográfica de este país es alta y ya ellos no publican crítica... En este momento, no hay crítica formal, alguna gente escribe, pero no es una crítica especializada" (26). Generally speaking, the sparseness of scholarly work focusing on Dominican literature extends beyond the boundaries of the island—this will be addressed further later in this Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> By "dictator novels," I mean novels that thematically treat the character of a dictator, whether historical or fictional. Within the Latin American context, I will also generalize the concept of "dictator" to include such terms as "caudillo," "cacique," and other equivalent terms that connote essentially the same thing: "a ruler or governor whose word is law" (OED). While I have been unable to determine the genesis of the term "dictator novel," it seems to emerge within Latin American critical discourse with the publication of Alejo Carpentier's El recurso del método (1974), Gabriel García Márquez's El otoño del patriarca (1975), and Augusto Roa Bastos's Yo el supremo (1974). It is important to recognize from the beginning the link between "dictator novels" and "historical fiction," particularly within the Dominican context. This link will be discussed in further detail at various places in the present study.

<sup>3</sup> “A written document, typically on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased writing still visible, remnants of this kind being a major source for the recovery of lost literary works of classical antiquity” (American Heritage Dictionary, 1969, p. 944).

<sup>4</sup>The writers I will study here use narrative as a tool for exploring and reconstructing the *trujillato* after the dictator’s death. It is important to note that for each of these writers and their Dominican audience, Trujillo is the archetype of authoritarianism. Because of this, their writing not only addresses the political tyranny practiced by Trujillo himself, but also those of Balaguer, the United States, and other literal or figurative “dictatorships” past, present, or future. While Dominican dictator novels explore power and authority within a very specific historical context (the Dominican Republic from 1930 through the 1980s), they also participate in an ongoing dialogue that expands throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and ultimately the world. This said, their primary focus is on the Dominican Republic, largely because of the island’s long history of dictatorial rule. During the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dominican dictators have included Buenaventura Báez (1868-1874), Ulises Heureaux (1889-1899), Ramón Cáceres (1905-1911), Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1938 and 1942-1952), Jacinto Bienvenido Peynado (1938-1940), Manuel de Jesús Troncoso de la Concha (1940-1942), Héctor Bienvenido Trujillo (1952-1960), and Joaquín Balaguer (1960; 1962; 1968-1978; 1986-1996). It is also important to note that Peynado, Troncoso de la Concha, Héctor Bienvenido Trujillo,

and Balaguer were generally considered to be Trujillo's political puppets during their presidencies.

As support for my contention that Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci3n, and Vargas Llosa intentionally take advantage of the nature of fictional/historical texts to dissent against and ultimately rewrite the dictatorship, I will frequently refer to these writers' other, non-fictional writings together with their public statements as "readers" of both Dominican history and their own creative texts.

<sup>5</sup> See also Doris Sommer's Foundational Fictions, and especially her analysis of the Enriquillo myth. The importance of Enriquillo is detailed later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> The ubiquity of dictators in Latin America is well documented. In 1937 Professor J. Fred Rippy wrote, "dictators have been so numerous that the history of [...] most Latin American countries is to a large extent the biography of these imperious personalities" (see Wilgus, South American Dictators During the First Century of Independence, Washington DC: George Washington UP, 1937, page 16). With its roots running deeply back to both Spanish and indigenous branches of Latin American history, continuing through the years of Independence (even Sim3n Bol3var was skeptical of democracy, declaring that "The new states of America... need Kings with the name of President"—Blanksten 499), and into modernity, dictatorial governments have been common throughout Latin America. According to John J. Johnson, between Independence and World War I there were at least 117 known dictators in Latin America. After the War, the trend continued, giving rise to some of

the more notorious dictators in world history including Fulgencio Batista, Rafael Trujillo, Alfredo Stroessner, Anastasio Somoza, and Augusto Pinochet. Especially during the 1930s, dictatorships were highly prevalent throughout Latin America and included Trujillo (Dominican Republic, 1930-1961), Vargas (Brazil, 1930-1945), Leguía and Bustamente (Perú, 1931 and 1933-48); Ubico (Guatemala, 1931-1944), Batista (Cuba, 1933-1944 and 1952-1959), Hernández (El Salvador, 1931-44), Carías (Honduras, 1933-1944) and Somoza (Nicaragua, 1936-1957).

<sup>7</sup> After a long career in the Dominican military, begun during the American occupation of 1916-1924, Trujillo engineered the overthrow of President Horacio Vásquez in February-March of 1930. Rafael Estrella Ureña, a Trujillo supporter and head of the recently- founded Partido Republicano, assumed the presidency on March 4, simultaneously announcing that he would run on *Trujillo's* presidential ticket during the upcoming elections. A campaign of violence and intimidation was immediately launched against the opposing political party, the Alianza Nacional Progresista, which eventually withdrew from the race. Trujillo was proclaimed victor on May 24 with Estrella Ureña as his vice president. Following the elections, many of Trujillo's most outspoken opponents were persecuted and jailed. A government-condoned terrorist group known as "La 42" systematically attacked and killed a good number of Trujillo's remaining opponents. By the time Trujillo and Estrella Ureña actually took office on August 16, 1930, the *trujillato* had set the stage for a



government characterized by the bloody violence and political oppression that would last throughout the dictator's 31-year control of Dominican government.

The *trujillato* generally enjoyed a friendly relationship with the United States, partly because of Trujillo's efforts to create an American-friendly business environment and to endear himself with key U.S. political figures. He also took advantage of anticommunist sentiment in the United States to portray his government as anti-Castro, pro-U.S.A.

During the *trujillato*, there were several especially notorious crimes committed by the dictatorship that have since become integral parts of any attempt to historicize Trujillo's government: the Haitian Massacre of 1937, where between 18-25,000 Haitians were exterminated at Trujillo's order; the kidnapping and murder of Jesús de Galíndez, a graduate student and lecturer at Columbia University whose dissertation reportedly insulted the dictator and eventually cost Galíndez his life; the murder of the Dominican writer Ramón Marrero Aristy (Over, 1938, and Balsié, 1938), a long-time Trujillo supporter accused of leaking prejudicial information to NY Times reporter Tad Szulc; the murder of the Mirabal sisters, political dissidents against the government who were lured into a trap, assaulted, and killed; and the attempted assassination of Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt, first in 1951 and again in 1960. The attempts against Betancourt brought international economic sanctions against the Dominican Republic, placing crippling pressure on an already struggling economy. Little by little, Trujillo's antics alienated him from the

Dominican people and eroded public support. Finally, in 1961, a group of conspirators led by General Antonio Imbert Barreras and Salvador Estrella, who were joined by Lieutenant Amado García Guerrero, Antonio de la Maza, Juáscar Tejada, Roberto Pastoriza, and Pedro Livio Cedeño, ambushed Trujillo's car as it was driving down the highway to San Cristóbal and shot the dictator to death.

Chaos followed Trujillo's assassination as rival factions struggled for power, and the country passed through various provisional governments. On December 20, 1962, Juan Bosch won the first free election held in the Dominican Republic in several decades. He was later overthrown and the country again fell into chaos. Civil War broke out on April 25, 1965, and the U.S. government dispatched 20,000 marines to maintain order, guard American interests, and prevent a second Communist government in the Caribbean. National elections were held in June of 1966, and Joaquín Balaguer, who was serving as President when Trujillo was killed, won the presidency. Balaguer ultimately served as president of the Republic in 1960, 1962, 1966-1978, and 1986-1996. In 2000, at 94-years Balaguer ran again—despite being blind and unable to walk—, pledging a return to the days when the government financed public works and exercised close control over the national economy. Despite the fact that he lost, that Balaguer was a major contender speaks much to the potential reemergence of a Dominican dictatorship. Further historical context will be provided as relevant, especially in Chapter II (regarding the Guerra de Abril, 1965) and Chapter IV (Balaguer's version of the *trujillato*).

<sup>8</sup> In “In the Shadow of the State: The Politics of Denunciation and Panegyric During the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1940-1958” (Hispanic American Historical Review 83.2: 295-344), Lauren Derby examines the importance of El Caribe’s “Foro público” as one of the *trujillato*’s rhetorical tools. Derby suggests that the “Foro” can be seen as evidence of the regime’s populism: “Even if the accusations were edited or complied in the National Palace, most originated in local concerns articulated via private letters or intelligence reports to the Dominican Party, and state officials could be censored or even replaced as a result of such citizens’ charges” (299).

<sup>9</sup> Dominican dictator narratives also follow a well-established pattern, followed by many Latin American writers during the 1970s, in how they caricature the dictator: “la vejez, casi de momia, del tirano, su memoria, su magnetismo, su machismo, sus innumerables queridas, su mano enguantada, su espuela, su hamaca, su fría crueldad, su amor por la madre, su ternura de padre, su aislamiento, su impenetrabilidad y su soledad” (Castellanos and Martínez 81).

<sup>10</sup>See “Autonomía cultural de América” in Ripoll, Carlos (Ed.), Conciencia Intelectual de América NY: Eliseo Torres, 1966: 48-49. Despite Lyotard’s assertions that in the postmodern period people no longer believe in “grand narratives,” many Latin American narratives, including those studied here, continue trying to make sense of history and work towards discovering (while simultaneously adding to)

Master Narratives (see Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge—1979).

<sup>11</sup>See Mark A. Eaton, "Dis(re)membered Bodies: Cormac McCarthy's Border Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies 49.1 (2003), 155-180.

<sup>12</sup>See for example Jorge Duany, "Reconstructing Racial Identity: Ethnicity, Color, and Class among Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico," Latin American Perspectives 25.3 (1998): 147-172.

<sup>13</sup>The idea of historical narratives as a powerful means of creating and manipulating national identities has been the focus of study for many students of Jewish and Post-Soviet history. One study I found to be particularly insightful when applied to the Dominican Republic is Vladimir Solonari's "Creating a 'People': A Case Study in Post-Soviet History Writing," Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 4.2 (2003): 411-38. Similarly, and within the Latin American context, Elena Poniatowska observes, "The most intimate knowledge I possess about Latin America comes from its writers, moviemakers, photographers, painters, sculptors, musicians, choreographers, dancers. The most depressing comes from its politicians and presidents" (see "Memory and Identity: Some Historical-Cultural Notes," Latin American Perspectives 19.3 (1992): 67-78).

<sup>14</sup>On this point González Echevarría cites a description of Somoza's murder published in the New York Times on September 19, 1980: "A Chevrolet pickup truck, possibly with as many as three people inside, followed General Somoza's

Mercedes-Benz. As the Mercedes approached a two-story ranch style home, the truck either passed the car or pulled up close behind. The occupants of the truck began pouring automatic weapon fire into the car. Others on the street also began firing automatic weapons. Then, from the front porch of the house, a man with a rocket launcher fired a projectile that hit the car broadside, blowing off the roof and the two front doors. The body of the driver, César Gallardo, a Nicaraguan, was blown onto the street. The car came to a stop several yards away, the badly mauled bodies of General Somoza and his advisor in the back seat.” (5)

<sup>15</sup> González Echevarría concurs with Sommer: “Until recently, education, as part of the liberal ideology on which modern Latin American nations are founded, was thought to be the solution to the continent’s questions about its own mode of being and its future. [...] Dictatorial power exists, it is thought, because there is a lack of education among the masses. Reading and writing will banish violence” (Voice of the Masters 16)

<sup>16</sup> Chambers continues, “If reading is indeed the way to make a shift that works in this way, then that is perhaps a good enough reason to justify its teaching in schools and colleges.” This is similar to the position taken by numerous Latin American idealists, as mentioned by González Echevarría in the previous note.

<sup>17</sup> To some extent, Derby applies the concept of “room for maneuver” to the “Foro público” in El Caribe mentioned earlier in this chapter: “While the practice of denunciation has been seen as evidence of state domination, it was actually a more

complex phenomenon. Even when the claims of a denunciation were patently false, they nonetheless “operated within a double field of belief and doubt,” defiling individuals through the selective revelation of public secrets and casting aspersion on the public honor of officials. Accusations of public malfeasance could be rebutted. More difficult to contest, however, were charges of amorality, such as those set forth in one accusation that decried “the personal and domestic disasters, the endless orgies, the habitual drunkenness, the welching on gambling debts, the bare-faced passing of bad checks, the broken homes and abandoned homes” that the accused, “a degenerate, a blackmailer, a traitor,” had left behind. Even if the accusations were unfounded, they were painful because of their conspicuity in the national press and the fact that they left precious little space for what Erving Goffman has termed “the arts of impression management”—individual control over one’s self-image.” (300)

Later in this study, it will become evident that Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Senci3n and Vargas Llosa understand both the power of public indictment and the room for maneuver offered by the “double field of belief and doubt” which will become an important tool in turning readers away from the kind of government oppression that has characterized much of Dominican history.

<sup>18</sup> In Los dictadores y la dictadura en la novela hispanoamericana (1989), Adriana Sandoval lists 11 novels published between 1851-1978, and refers to other narratives that have characteristics similar to those found in so-called “dictator novels” (See especially her “Introducci3n” and “Capítulo V”). One might also refer to

the notes for Chapter 3 of Roberto González Echevarría's The Voice of the Masters (pages 174-175) for a detailed discussion of dictator narratives. Finally, a more extensive review of the dictator as a literary character can be found in Jorge Castellanos and Miguel A. Martínez, "El dictador hispanoamericano como personaje literario," Latin American Research Review 16.2 (1981): 79-105.

<sup>19</sup> José Alcántara notes the influences of Pluralismo on Veloz Maggiolo, particularly in his efforts to maximize the potential effect of the text on the reader and his attempts to empower the reader as co-creator of the text: "La práctica pluralista integra los notables aportes de las vanguardias: desde Mallarmé, Joyce, los caligramas de Apollinaire, hasta las contribuciones creacionistas de Vicente Huidobro, la poesía y la crítica de Octavio Paz, el Cortázar de Rayuela, el Cabrera Infante de Tres tristes tigres, la poesía concreta brasileña, la música aleatoria. Todo ello en el marco de una preocupación dominicana, antillana, surgida en poetas y artistas que supieron incorporarse a la vanguardia universal sin negar sus esencias, sin ponerse de espaldas a su realidad sociocultural.... El hecho de que el Pluralismo emplee letras de diferentes colores, grafías diversas, trozos de partituras musicales, combinaciones aleatorias de palabras, no quiere decir que esté a favor de la gratuidad ni de la evasión. Todo lo contrario: se quiere aprovechar al máximo las posibilidades del lenguaje." (153, 154)

<sup>20</sup>In The Modern Latin-American Novel, Raymond Williams notes: "In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the writers of the Boom had considered the possibility of

writing a joint project about the archetypal Latin American dictator. They never did carry out the project together.” (99)

<sup>21</sup> In Mito y cultura, Mateo comments on Trujilloist literature and the dictator’s reaction to it: “la literatura trujillista...carece de importancia artística alguna, y repite hasta en su forma más grotesca el esquema historicista de la ideología. Contrario a la poesía, no contaba con el favor del tirano... Trujillo no dejó constancia de que alguna vez haya leído una novela. Sin el apoyo de Trujillo, plegada a la propaganda que era más efectiva, la narrativa trujillista no alcanzó el ‘lujo’ del poema, ni se difundió como la poesía, con el amplio patrocinio del gobierno” (200). Veloz Maggiolo’s Santo Domingo en la Novela Dominicana (Santo Domingo: Feria del Libro, 2002) provides a good overview of the most noteworthy examples of the Dominican novel.

<sup>22</sup> Following Trujillo’s rule over the Dominican Republic, Joaquín Balaguer continued using neo-Trujilloist tactics including election fraud and violent attacks against his political rivals during his own presidencies (1960-1962, 1966-1978, and 1986-1999).

<sup>23</sup> While the idea of universal literature exists in the Dominican literary tradition (see García Cuevas 11-20 for Mateo’s summary), there is little attempt to “universalize” Dominican literature. Indeed, this is one of the reasons frequently cited when Dominican scholars characterize their culture as being “insular.”



<sup>24</sup> As mentioned, many of the texts written between 1930 and 1961 are best classified as propaganda and have little literary value. See also Giovanni di Pietro's "La novela trujillista" in Ponencias del Congreso Crítico de Literatura Dominicana, Santo Domingo: Congreso Crítico de Literatura Dominicana, 1994 for further discussion of the *novela trujillista*.

<sup>25</sup> Chambers notes that marginalized groups are faced with the following political situation: "(1) they are not 'in power' (although they are to various degrees and in various ways empowered); (2) their 'identity' has been constructed by dominant power structures and in the interests of those structures; and (3) it is necessary to change the reality that has been constructed in this way, but starting—because there is no alternative—from the way things are now, that is, from within the 'given' situation of power. There must be a politics of oppositionality, if by that is understood the form of resistance available to the relatively disempowered." (xi)

<sup>26</sup> OED: "a ruler or governor whose word is law; *and absolute rule of a state; a person exercising absolute authority of any kind or in any sphere; one who authoritatively prescribes a course of action or dictates what is to be done*" (emphasis mine). <http://www.oed.com/>, "dictator")

<sup>27</sup> One of the major "erasures" perpetrated by Galván in Enriquillo is that of race. Sommer provides the historical background that motivated Galván to erase the African/Haitian element from Dominican culture and replace them with "Indians." Eventually, where national identity was at stake, the distinction between historical

fiction and Galván's fiction was blurred, and "any attempt to restore the missing details was not only infuriating, Rodríguez Demorizi was sure that the real Enriquillo was literally beside any empirical point. 'At the margin of a historical Enriquillo, whatever stature he may have, the legendary Enriquillo, Galván's Enriquillo, will remain undamaged for us. And we will continue to venerate him as the symbol of the beloved aboriginal race, our race.'" (Sommer, Foundational Fictions 256)

<sup>28</sup> Avelar notes that "this self-reflexive, potentially infinite chain of allegorization is not, as some versions of a self-satisfied postmodernism would have it, to be celebrated. On the contrary, the chain should always be brought to a halt, interrupted, and referred back to the desolation and misery that makes it possible... this should at least serve as the index of the infinity of a political and ethical task" (233).

<sup>29</sup> If anybody is familiar with the Dominican dictator novel, it should be Cuello. His publishing house, Editora Taller, has been the primary vehicle for publishing them, including the major works by Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, and Sención studied here.

<sup>30</sup> One example of this was Trujillo's appointment of Rafael Vidal and Roberto Despradel to his Cabinet. Both were frequent contributors to La Revista. First published in January 1926, La Revista both circulated notices and pro-Trujillo propaganda throughout the Dominican Republic's intellectual and governmental circles. Eventually (in 1928), Trujillo himself would assume control of the periodical.

Similarly, in his Memorias Balaguer notes how, during the *trujillato*, both history and literature were “puestas al servicio de ese culto a Trujillo” (76). At one point, Trujillo tried to contract with Américo Lugo to write the “official” history of the Dominican Republic, a proposition which the writer quickly rejected: “Usted recordará que en marzo de 1934 Usted me ofreció una fuerte suma de dinero para que yo salvara mi casa, a cambio de que yo escribiera la ‘Historia de la década’, lo cual era proponerme que fuera su historiador oficial, y Usted recordará asimismo que preferí perder mi casa, como efectivamente perdí” (Memorias 79-80). For further information on the role Dominican intellectuals and especially La Revista played in the mythologization of Trujillo, consult Mateo’s Mito y cultura en la Era de Trujillo pages 35-48.

<sup>31</sup> Balaguer’s presidency has also been described frequently as a political masquerade. The obvious disparity between Balaguer’s speech to the United Nations on October 2, 1961 (in which he denounced Trujillo’s tyrannical violence and declared, “En la República Dominicana está naciendo una democracia auténtica y un Nuevo estado de cosas”—Memorias 144) and his continuation of Trujillo’s legacy of electoral corruption, political terrorism, nepotistic appointments, and international posturing is frequently noted by historians. The disparity between outward appearances and the reality of the Dominican political situation has become a common topic of literary works mentioning Trujillo’s political successor.

<sup>32</sup> Mateo also situates “la reconstrucción” as the inception point, or foundational myth, of the “Era de Trujillo: “[es] una metáfora especial ineludible que

inaugura un ‘clima’, una ‘fractura’. Es presentada por los panegiristas como un momento auténticamente glorioso, no hay discurso, biografía o publicación oficial que no la refiera” (111).

<sup>33</sup> The Haitian Massacre of 1937 is known popularly as “El Corte,” both because much of the violence was carried out with machetes and knives instead of firearms and because many Haitians worked as cane cutters in the Dominican sugar fields. Interesting enough, the nickname given to the massacres, which alludes to the brutal murders carried out by Dominican soldiers *a machetazos*, demonstrates yet another difference between the government-controlled, written version of Dominican “history” and the popular, whispered version of historical events. For a detailed examination of this event, see Richard Lee Turits’ “A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic,” Hispanic American Historical Review 82.3 (2002): 589-635. Turits’ article juxtaposes *la historia oficial* with an “alternative history revealed in oral histories recorded in the late 1980s with elderly Haitians and Dominicans who lived in the northern frontier regions at the time of the massacre” (593).

<sup>34</sup> “Cartilla Cívica para el Pueblo Dominicano,” in Pensamiento vivo de Trujillo (Santo Domingo: Impresora Dominicana, 1955) page 275.

<sup>35</sup> Describing Caesar, Hegel writes: “Such are all great historical men—whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their

vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount—one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence—from the inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer worlds on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. They are men, therefore, who appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only *their* interest, *their* work.” (30)

<sup>36</sup> Along with Marrero Arísty and Jiménez Belén’s commentaries on the *trujillato*, Rafael Damirón’s Resumen (A los enemigos de Trujillo) (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora Montalvo, 1947) provides further commentary on the merits of the dictatorship. In its final pages, Damirón writes: “Para servir los intereses de una causa como la de Trujillo, hay que constituirse en contrario constante de sus enemigos, y en leales compañeros de sus amigos. Los términos medios nos resultan odiosos. Por ello nuestro trujillismo es como una bandera abierta siempre a la luz del sol y contra las penumbras que pretendan ensombrecerla. Nosotros somos trujillistas, y nada más que trujillistas” (84-85).

<sup>37</sup> The Dominican spin machine was also effective in the international political domain. When all was said and done, the Dominican government paid only \$525,000 of the \$725,000 penalty originally levied against the *trujillato* as compensation for damages and injuries occasioned by the “frontier conflicts” with Haiti. For several

years afterwards, Balaguer took credit for avoiding the full penalty—a claim recalled by Vargas Llosa in La fiesta del Chivo. See Frank Moya Pons, The Dominican Republic: A National History for further discussion.

<sup>38</sup> The same rhetorical devices that proved so successful in influencing domestic audiences were used effectively abroad to foster popular support in the United States. Dominican spin-agents, who interacted with the American press, were some of Trujillo's most valuable tools in winning and maintaining U.S. support. Most historical accounts of the *trujillato* mention Trujillo's sizeable press corps in the states. Perhaps their most notable success, however, was seen immediately after the disappearance of Jesús de Galíndez from a New York City subway station. Galíndez, a graduate lecturer at Columbia University, was writing his dissertation on "The Era of Trujillo." On Monday, March 12, 1956, friends left Galíndez at a subway entrance at Fifty-seventh Street and Eighth Avenue. He was never seen again. Most people believe that Galíndez was drugged, transported by ambulance to Amityville, Long Island, then flown to the Dominican Republic by Gerald Lester Murphy where he was executed on Trujillo's orders. Eventually, Murphy was also killed, and Octavio de la Maza, whose brother would later participate in Trujillo's assassination, was charged with Murphy's death. In this particular case, Trujillo's press agents, in collaboration with the dictator's supporters in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, were successful in directing suspicion away from Trujillo for several months. For a more detailed account, refer to Germán E. Ornes, Trujillo: Little Caesar of the Caribbean.

Also, consider reviewing relevant articles in Time and Life magazines from 1956-1959, which also show the influence of U.S. government officials in deflecting suspicion away from the Dominican government.

<sup>39</sup> “Mataron al chivo” was originally written by Balbino García and performed by “el Negrito Macabí” and la Orquesta de Antonio Morel: “Mataron al chivo y se lo comieron. Mataron al chivo y no me lo dejaron ver... Mataron al chivo, en la carretera, Mataron al chivo y no me lo dejaron ver.” The nickname “el chivo” was applied to the dictator in reference to his sexual subjugation of his ministers’ wives, of the daughters of many of the Dominican elite, and of others who attracted the dictator’s fancy. This aspect of Trujillo’s government is depicted more fully in Vargas Llosa’s novel, La fiesta del Chivo studied in Chapter V.

<sup>40</sup> In “What is a Nation?,” Ernest Renan notes that “forgetting, I would go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle] of nationality” (see Homi K. Bhabha, ed. Nation and Narration, New York: Routledge, 1990 page 11).

<sup>41</sup> One Dominican writer whose works clearly challenge the literary conventions of the novel is Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, who has published two “protonovelas.” These works will be studied in greater detail in Chapter II. Also, the fine line between literature and propaganda studied in Rama’s work will become a major worry for Mario Vargas Llosa in writing La fiesta del Chivo (see Chapter V).

<sup>42</sup> The collective loss of historical memory becomes a major theme in one of Viriato Sención's novels, Los ojos de la montaña, that will be studied briefly in Chapter IV.

<sup>43</sup> My study also benefits from readings on testimonial and documentary literature in Latin America. Dominican dictator novels have much in common with testimonial literature as described by Gugelberger and Kearney in "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America" (Latin American Perspectives 18.3 (1991): 3-14), and particularly with the sociology of testimonial narratives which give voice to those who were not allowed to speak previously. Likewise, as David William Foster has observed, it often becomes difficult to define the fictional components of historical fiction such as that studied here (*cf.* "Latin American Documentary Narrative," PMLA 99.1 (1984): 41-55), since many mainstream contemporary Latin American novels "underscore the continuity between imaginative literature and documentary in Latin American culture" (53).

<sup>44</sup> The novels studied here are more widely known than those studied previously. In fact, some of the Dominican Republic's best-selling narratives to date have been Galíndez's La Era de Trujillo, Sención's Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, and Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo, which are included in the present study. They have won literary awards in the Dominican Republic and have been disseminated much more widely than those cited in the critical works above, many enjoying significant international readerships. Given the large population of



Dominicans living abroad since the *trujillato*—a group well known for its efforts to reconnect with its cultural and reaffirm its Domincanness—international dissemination of these texts could help create an environment less conducive to political tyranny. In the case of La fiesta del Chivo, the fact that the *trujillato* has been explored by one of Latin America's best-known writers, Mario Vargas Llosa, certainly represents the potential for Trujillo's story to attract the interest of the non-Dominican world. As a Dominican-American author writing in English, Julia Álvarez's novels How the García Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) and In the Time of the Butterflies (1994—recently made into a television movie by Showtime) have also introduced the theme of the *trujillato* to wider, international audiences.

<sup>45</sup> As was the case in Spain during Franco's administration, many writers attribute the lack of top-quality Dominican narrative during the *trujillato* to government censorship. This conclusion would seem to be supported by the relative explosion of quality novels and short stories published in the Dominican Republic over the last 40 years.

<sup>46</sup> Determining which novels are significant to the Dominican context is difficult, partly because the study of Dominican literature has been largely ignored until only recently. One Dominican scholar, Bruno Rosario Candelier, has repeatedly observed that even most Dominicans are largely unfamiliar with their own literature. Those who take an interest in studying Dominican narrative meet with a relative dearth of reliable information. Most literary histories published on the island

(including Joaquín Balaguer's) are more exclusive than inclusive, often ignoring female writers and those who had fallen out of favor with the State. Other than Frank Moya Pons' recent Bibliografía de la literatura dominicana (1820-1990), indices of Dominican literature have suffered from significant omissions and inconsistencies. Later, after determining which works seem to merit further investigation, scholars are faced with the challenge of actually obtaining them. Most printings of literary works include fewer than 2,000 copies, and only a few of these find their way to major research libraries. In spite of these challenges, I believe that the available research on Dominican narrative, and particularly that performed by both Doris Sommer and Frank Moya Pons, has done much to establish a solid foundation for future investigation.

<sup>47</sup> Although De abril en adelante was written in 1970, it was not published until 1975. Many bibliographical citations of the novel incorrectly cite 1970 as the work's date of publication.

<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, the *trujillato* has also been the theme, whether implicitly or explicitly, of various novels published by non-Dominican writers. Until recently, the Chilean writer Enrique Lafourcade's La fiesta del Rey Acab (1959) was probably the most noteworthy. In Lafourcade's book, César Alejandro Carillo Acab is clearly a literary rendition of Trujillo. The novel's action, which chronicles the celebration of the dictator's birthday, takes place over a 24-hour period. Each chapter marks a specific episode during the dictator's daily routine: a parade in his honor followed by

a banquet, the execution of 17 accused conspirators, dinner, a dance, an orgy, and finally a Te Deum service offered as a tribute to him. As the celebration closes, a bomb explodes, ending the dictator's reign. These 24 hours are supplemented via the careful use of flashbacks, stream-of-conscious ruminations, and direct historical commentaries so that the novel ultimately encompasses Trujillo's 30-year rule over the Dominican Republic.

## Chapter II

### Text as Artifact, Narrative as Archaeology in Three Novels

by Marcio Veloz Maggiolo

“History, in its traditional form, undertook to ‘memorize’ the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*....

What archaeology wishes to uncover is primarily — in the specificity and distance maintained in various discursive formations—the play of analogies and differences as they appear at the level of rules of formation.”

—Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge 7, 160

Born in Santo Domingo in 1936, Marcio E. Veloz Maggiolo is one of the Dominican Republic’s most prominent intellectuals, known not only for his literary endeavors, but also for his archeological, historical, and anthropological research. As noted in my Introduction, Veloz Maggiolo is one of the few Dominican writers who have achieved international recognition. Indeed, his novels and short stories have served as an introduction to contemporary Dominican literature for many readers and, more importantly, to the political context of the Dominican Republic. One novel in particular, De abril en adelante, has become a literary “core” text for scholars and writers interested in the narrative of the *trujillato*—despite the fact that relatively little in the book treats Trujillo’s dictatorship directly. This notwithstanding, most contemporary prose written in the Dominican Republic, including the Dominican dictator novel, builds on a tradition that, in many ways, starts not with Alejandro

Ángulo Guridi (Los amores de los Indios, 1843), Manuel Jesús de Galván (Enriquillo: Leyenda Histórica Dominicana, 1879), or even Juan Bosch (La mañosa: Novela de las Revoluciones, 1936), who are frequently cited as the first real writers of prose in the Dominican Republic, but with Veloz, who is perhaps one of the first to do it well.

Veloz's creative works are influenced heavily by the experimentation of the 1960s and 70s, by French Structuralism and then post-Structuralism, and by his other research interests: history, archaeology, and anthropology. Indeed, these influences are conspicuously present in each of his major novels.

As an archaeologist, Veloz Maggiolo recognizes that a basic problem of archaeology also applies to writing and perhaps even more particularly to writing about Trujillo: that physical evidence disintegrates over time. Because tangible proof deteriorates over time, as time passes it becomes extremely difficult for us to have a perfect understanding of the historical past. Our reconstructions of the past are unavoidably incomplete, marred by holes in the verifiable body of information that must be filled in with informed conjecture and educated reasoning in order to create an overarching "story" or narrative. Thus the "true" story of the past is unrecoverable and the product of the archaeological endeavor is necessarily only an approximation or representation of what really happened. As an archaeologist, Veloz also recognizes that the best approximations of "truth" often require digging below the surface, both literally and metaphorically. Applied to his creative work, this can be seen in the techniques he uses to "activate" his readers.

As a historian, Veloz comprehends that, except for the special circumstances in which historians record events they themselves have witnessed, historical facts can be known only through intermediary sources. “Fact-finding” is just the first step in a process of selection, arrangement, and explanation of data that leads to subjective interpretation and establish the basis for creating a convincing, intellectually satisfying (but inherently flawed) representation of the past. Like other historians, Veloz Maggiolo has considered and reconsidered the theoretical foundations of historical knowledge. He has studied the relationships between imaginative literature and history, and has struggled with the notion that history may ultimately be the literary art that works upon scholarly material. This struggle frequently surfaces as a theme in Veloz’s creative writing.

Finally, as an anthropologist, Veloz Maggiolo is aware that culture is fundamentally tied to people’s ability to use language and other symbolic forms of representation to create and communicate complex thoughts. His works often textualize the problem of signifier/signified, exploring numerous positions along the continuum of representation and meaning. As a writer and first-hand witness of the *trujillato*, Veloz Maggiolo is also very aware of the distance between experience and narrative, of the fact that his experience and, by extension, that of the Dominican people cannot be translated into language adequately. This said, the deficiencies of language haven’t prevented him from trying—and the quest to represent the Dominican experience *in spite of* the obstacles presented by language are frequent themes of Veloz’s writing.

All these issues are quite evident in two of Veloz's better-known novels, De abril en adelante: protonovela (Santo Domingo, 1975) and Materia prima: Protonovela (Santo Domingo, 1988). In the pages that follow, I will study how these issues are represented in Veloz Maggiolo's writing, and suggest what they say about the *trujillato* when read from within a Dominican context. I will also consider the evolution of Veloz's novels over time, since they provide important insights about the development of narrative in the Dominican Republic since Trujillo. In order to illustrate the general evolution of Veloz's narrative, I will also examine one of his more recent works: El jefe iba descalzo (Santo Domingo, 1993).

I opened this chapter citing Foucault, who pointed out that history seeks to translate and document a memory of the past. Archaeology, on the other hand, attempts to reveal (in the sense of uncovering) "the play of analogies and differences as they appear at the level of rules of formation" (see epigraph above). Veloz Maggiolo's approach to writing is archaeological in that, throughout each of his major works, he seeks to expose the differences between the past and its written (re)presentation during the actual shaping of the text. The focus of his texts is the narrative process together with its constituent parts— content, individual words, characterization, chronology, etc.—that come together during the literary endeavor. Veloz uses narrative as his archaeological tool as he explores the discursive formation of the *trujillato*. Between this endeavor, however, and the text, there exists an inherent tension since the narrative product inevitably becomes a textual artifact, documenting a memory of the past and adding to the already-existing corpus and

consequently enabling the process of representation (and ultimately of mythologization) to continue on indefinitely.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned previously, Veloz's literary self-consciousness is manifested at many levels in his writing, particularly in his efforts to oppose narrative and linguistic convention. El jefe iba descalzo (Santo Domingo: Editora Alfa y Omega, 1993) is one of the more recent (as well as one of the more subdued) examples of this creative tendency in Veloz's work. According to its book jacket, the purpose for the text, which masquerades as a book for children, is:

Para comunicar a nuestros jóvenes toda la ambientación de una especial e importante época en la historia de la República Dominicana que incluye las circunstancias en que toma el poder Rafael L. Trujillo, los años que siguieron a su ajusticiamiento y la interrogante de cómo empezar a emplear la libertad negada durante los treinta largos años que duró su tiranía.  
(Presentación del libro)

Like other Veloz Maggiolo works, El jefe iba descalzo begins calling into question the concept of generic distinctions even before it is opened, blurring the boundaries between history and juvenile fiction, between principal and liminal texts. The book's jacket serves as a narrative frame for the story, which tells of Patricio, Juan Migraña and Bolívar, garbage men in the Dominican Republic whose job is to



gather trash from the poor section of town. The book begins explaining how a complex, bureaucratic micro-economy has sprung up around trash collection:

La basura que recogía Bolívar, o Don Albóndiga, como quiera que se llamase, provenía de casas pobres, de sitios muy tristes. Era casi siempre basura de tercera. Entre los pobres que iban al sitio de El Vertedero a ver los camiones descargar había ya una clasificación establecida: basura de primera era la que venía de los barrios ricos; en ella los pobres que acudían día por día al basural podían encontrar objetos reusables de “buena calidad” que serían revendidos en los mercados de enseres de medio uso. (3)

“Basura de segundo,” which passes through one of several specialized committees of trash pickers organized by the city council to certify its quality and accurate classification, includes objects useful in the construction of *ranchos* along the banks of the Isabela. “Basura de tercera,” as might be expected, is the least useful and includes such things as old newspapers and bottles, clothing, and mattresses whose coils could be removed and recycled.

The reader quickly recognizes that the political system of El Vertedero is a scaled-down literary reproduction of the dilapidating *trujillato*, complete with its numerous layers of bureaucracy, political corruption, favoritism, and fading memory of days gone by when Bolívar, Patricio, and Juan enjoyed a better life as minor bureaucrats in the Trujillo regime. Throughout the text, it becomes clear that the

*basura* economy is stagnant and moldering, largely due to its inability to move beyond its memory of the dictatorship. Without the strong, organizing hand of Trujillo to maintain order, the municipal infrastructure has eroded miserably.

The event in the text that helps to clarify the link between the junk yard and the *trujillato* occurs when Patricio finds a worn-out pair of army boots marked with the initials RLT on their upper portion. Unbeknown to Patricio or Bolívar—but quickly pointed out by the boots themselves which narrate the story—the initials RLT belonged to Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The boots tell their own history from 1917, when they entered the Dominican Republic with the US Marines, until several years after the dictator’s death. Along the way, they “remember” some of the dictator’s most notorious personal characteristics that have spawned a considerable amount of folklore around the figure of Trujillo: his violent tutelage under the North American army (“Pisaba duro, pateaba, y muchas veces sentí mi puntera meterse en la costilla de algún preso que iban a fusilar, siempre con soldados norteamericanos cerca, pues ellos mandaban en la isla de Santo Domingo”—18), his meticulous pulchritude (“El Generalísimo usaba perfume Colibrí, y talcos para sus ya delicados pies cada vez que se bañaba. A veces venía una dama que cortaba sus uñas... nunca después de 1930 sus uñas rompieron las medias y calcetines, pues estaban pulcramente cortadas y limadas”—32), and finally, the details of his assassination in 1961 (“Sabía que el Generalísimo había muerto. Sus pies, dentro de mí, se pusieron fríos, lentamente fríos”—32). When the story’s cast of characters, aided by Persio the local archeologist, figure out that the boots found by Patricio most likely once belonged to

Trujillo, they immediately begin concocting ways to exploit them for personal gain, effectually resurrecting the popular self-serving avarice that, according to many Dominicans, enabled Trujillo to retain power for more than 30 years. Eventually, a severe rainstorm cleanses the neighborhood, symbolically washing away both the garbage at El Vertedero and the filth associated with the *trujillato*:

El día que el diluvio terminó, El Vertedero había quedado limpio. Ni una casa, ni un perro, ni una hoja de cinc, ni un trozo de cartón. Todo se fue por los barrancos hacia el río, todo navegó río abajo durante días hasta llegar a las aguas del mar Caribe, que se fue tornando marrón en la medida en que toneladas de lodo bajaban acompañando toneladas de basura. (72)

Especially interesting is the recurring figure of the archaeologist in the works of Veloz Maggiolo—not only because of the obvious personal inscription of the author within his texts, but because, for me, Veloz Maggiolo’s literary endeavors are simply an extension of his archaeological work, as he struggles to understand the complicated and interwoven forces that enabled and sustained the *trujillato*. Despite Veloz Maggiolo’s seemingly innocuous rendition of the *trujillato* in El jefe iba descalzo, the book is clearly subversive in several ways. In terms of genre, the work blurs the lines between juvenile and adult literature, between history and fiction. It opposes narrative convention, with the boots serving as narrator. In its depiction of its characters’ selfishness, its sardonic humor is best understood by adults familiar with

the book's historical referent, due to the violent acts described in its pages, the text's contents are far from what most readers would expect to find in a storybook. Clearly, the book diverges from the government-sanctioned descriptions of the *trujillato* that dominated Dominican literature during the dictator's lifetime (see my Introduction, beginning on page 48). In the negative way it portrays the dictatorship, the book questions the dictator's authority to dominate the literary "memory" of the dictatorship by providing an alternative perspective of the regime. Finally, and most interesting for me, El jefe iba descalzo strategically shifts the dictator from a place of rhetorical centrality (narrator) to the rhetorical periphery (appearing only as a memory, narrated by his boots). The dictator's absence is one defining characteristic of Veloz's critique of the *trujillato* and one that will be encountered repeatedly as we examine the works of other Dominican writers. For them, the figurative decentralization and symbolic silencing of the dictator, whose voice dominated every aspect of Dominican life for more than 30 years, represents a certain victory—even if it is a posthumous one and only symbolic.

While El jefe iba descalzo is by no means one of Veloz Maggiolo's best-known works, it effectively demonstrates a recurring pattern throughout his narrative in which the writer and his work approach the Dominican dictatorship, not head-on, but rather in a round about manner, from a position near the margins of Trujillo's long-dominating system of discourse in the Dominican Republic. Indeed, literature lends itself well to such a task, as has been pointed out repeatedly by much of 20<sup>th</sup>-century critical thought. In terms of his creative corpus, El jefe iba descalzo is

nowhere near as experimental or as theoretical as many of Veloz's other stories and novels. Its simplicity, however, which demands less effort from his readers makes it almost certain that his position on Trujillo will be understood by everyone. In terms of the Dominican literary tradition, Veloz's evolution to a more traditional style of writing is similar to what can be seen over time in the works of others such as Hilma Contreras, Aída Cartagena, José Alcántara, Andrés Mateo, Viriato Senci3n, and even Pedro Peix. Whether this evolution can be attributed to the changing tastes of readers or to these writers' desires to communicate their messages more directly is debatable, but it is an observable trend and one that can be easily demonstrated by juxtaposing El jefe iba descalzo with Veloz's better known works, De abril en adelante and Materia prima. De abril en adelante is particularly important to my present study, since it has come to be regarded as the seminal text of the Dominican dictator subgenre.<sup>2</sup>

From its very title, De abril en adelante participates in an ambiguous game of polysemous (mis)representation. At first glance, the title seems to peer into the future, looking beyond a specific moment in contemporary Dominican history ("de abril") and towards the promise of something yet to come ("en adelante"). An informed reader will probably link the title's "abril" with a significant date in Dominican history: April 28, 1965, when the first of 42,000 American troops landed in the Dominican Republic, sent by Lyndon B. Johnson to shore up Neo-Trujilloist armies in their struggle against Juan Bosch's social-democratic government.<sup>3</sup>

For many Dominicans, the American intervention that is a critical event in this novel symbolized a blatant undermining of popular autonomy. Many Dominicans thought that sending US troops to the island really supported and in some ways even extended the tyranny and oppression that were endemic of the *trujillato*. Fittingly, at one level De abril en adelante is a novel about one individual's frustrated attempts to find his voice in the wake of Trujillo's dictatorship, the 31-year event horizon that continues to monopolize much of Dominican social and cultural discourse. Consequently, the title De abril en adelante immediately establishes a dialogue with Dominican history and the rhetoric of power at its most elemental level.

This said, the significance of "abril" should not be limited referentially to the "Guerra de Abril". The title might also be interpreted as a metonym for all of Dominican history. As Sharon Keefe Ugalde has pointed out, April is significant in each of the novel's three main sub-plots. Besides April 1965, the book treats April 28, 1605, when Hernando Montoro ignored Phillip II's orders to depopulate the northern part of the island. It also points toward April 28, 1865, when a small group of peasants rose up against the Spanish during the War of Restoration (140). At first glance, one might assume that the convergence of these three plots might introduce the potential for a shared resolution. This, however, is not the case. Instead of converging, the plots wind and twist across each other, producing a cyclical effect and demonstrating the novel's spiraling narrative structure. One implication easily drawn from this aspect of the work is that political oppression has always been a continual occurrence within the Dominican context. As Paco, the novel's main

character, works through the iterative processes of literary creation (a forward or linear chronology), his text circles between yesterday and today. Diagramed out, this cycle would look like a vortex, where the conceptual centrifugal forces combine with gravity to create a delicate balance surrounding a vacuum that pulls in and mixes historical events, but only ends when some external force ruptures the fragile state of equilibrium. Eventually, Paco's inability to break free from this recursive cycle leads to his inability to finish his book and to create the kind of narrative required by literary convention. In short, within the text Paco's narrative resists closure as the would-be writer struggles to write according to "the rules." Throughout the text, Paco's creative struggle serves a dual purpose as both the subject of and a commentary upon the nature of textual reception. At the same time, his narrative self-consciousness calls attention to the rhetoric and artifice of fiction, and narrative's dependence upon readers. Veloz Maggiolo's "protonovela" (*proto* not only in allusion to Paco's creative endeavor, but also because De abril en adelante, as a work of fiction, is *always* in the process of creation and reception) recognizes the implications of the narrative process.<sup>4</sup> For me, it is the same resistance to "closure" that both causes Paco's failure and provides Veloz Maggiolo's forward-looking novel its "success." Indeed, the novel itself becomes an excellent example of postmodern criticism, with the writer using his own work to examine the underlying rhetorical intercepts between history and fiction, calling into question the concepts of "authorship" and "authority." In The Repeating Island, Antonio Benítez Rojo

comments on the evolution of the term “author” within the postmodern frame of reference:

[One] of postmodern literary criticism’s concerns lies in demystifying the concept of the author, and erasing the “creator” aura with which modern criticism endows him. For the poststructuralist critic, looking at the literary task from the postmodern standpoint, the author, far from being a creator of words, is a technician or artisan whose job is controlled by preexisting practice or discourse; he is simply a writer. In the sustaining of this opinion, any writer’s preface would lack the requisite authority needed to take over a space, within the book, that is any different from that of the text he has written, and therefore his explanations could just as well appear within one of the work’s chapters. (Benítez-Rojo 153)

The struggle between “writership” and “authorship” mentioned by Benítez-Rojo is played out explicitly in De abril en adelante. Veloz Maggiolo’s text assumes an ambiguous role, presented to its reader as a mixture of both fiction and historiography. In De abril en adelante, this struggle is associated most closely with Paco, whose literary endeavor—which parallels Veloz Maggiolo’s own—is both the process and product of the novel. As a “Protonovela” or “preface” to a future novel, Veloz Maggiolo simultaneously “erases the aura of creator” and creates a narrative artifact documenting three periods of Dominican history (the three Aprils) as well as



a creative work of art. Just as the word “abril” resides in an ambiguous linguistic space between the novel’s title and the rest of the book, simultaneously referring to both a single incident and the recurring cycle of historical events fictionalized within the text, Veloz Maggiolo’s work resides in an ambiguous space between literature and history. The book not only vacillates between creative product and creative process, using repetition and metafictional devices to call attention to the artifice of the text, but it does so on multiple narrative levels.

These are merely the first of many examples of how De abril en adelante calls attention to its own inevitable success/failure (to constitute itself, to plausibly narrate the *trujillato*, to become “historical”) by foregrounding language. Like many of its contemporaries from across the Latin American literary tradition, De abril en adelante takes this examination to its most basic unit: the linguistic sign. In constantly reminding the reader of the discrepancies between signifier and signified (repression of meaning, doorway to interpretation), history and literature, writer and author, and product and process while simultaneously communicating a message to its reader (recuperation of meaning), De abril en adelante provides a certain narrative free space described by Ross Chambers in his book, Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Text (1991):

I believe... that discourse—and notably the discourse called literary—has characteristics that enable it, in an important sense, to elude both repression and recuperation, or more accurately, to “maneuver” within the

“room” that opens up *between* the two. These are the characteristics of address that imply reading as a mode of reception inscribed *without closure* in time, and hence, history. (3, emphasis Chambers’)

Within the inherent ambiguity of metaliterary discourse, “closure” is necessarily a function of reception and interpretation. As mentioned previously, the “protonovela” De abril en adelante resists closure from its very title. Throughout the present study, the significance of De abril en adelante’s resistance to closure will become increasingly evident. It also links Veloz’s works with Chambers’ ideas about “room for maneuver.” In his book, Chambers argues against Richard Terdiman’s contention that “the apparatus of dominant discourse, unlike the text, has no final sentence and never concludes” (60). Subscribing to the theories of Derrida, Chambers proposes that “there is no stopping *texts*: in their readability lies their potential for oppositional resilience,” (3) and that “‘narrative’ as a discursive practice, is capable of producing the kinds of change that derive through reading, from the phenomenon of *acquired* authority” (3)—just as many postmodern texts seek to erase the authority that distinguishes an “author” from a narrative technician (or “writer”). As will become evident throughout the remainder of this chapter, the “unstoppability” of texts, brought about by the practice of reading, is fundamental to efforts of Dominican novelists in the years following Trujillo.

History, like metaliterary discourse, also resides in an ambiguous space between being presented and widely accepted as a replication of historical events

(authorized history) and being seen as an imperfect representation of them, sharing many similarities with creative fiction. The key difference between these two perspectives is the skepticism of individual readers, while their similarities are plausibility and persuasion. History, for example, is a text authorized by a certain group of people to tell their story. It has no closure because it develops continuously and, for a certain group of people, acquires rhetorical centrality. According to Chambers, however, narratives that are plausible enough to actually compete with “history” (which, in the works of Dominican writers, will lead to literature parodying history) are oppositional because they introduce the possibility that the reader’s attention might be shifted away from the “central” or, in other words, socially authorized text. Naturally, the result of this shift in attention (or desire) means that the newly “authorized” text also displaces its rival, if only temporarily or symbolically, pushing it away from the center and toward the rhetorical periphery. De abril en adelante, like many other dictator novels, places itself in direct competition with the existing historical record.

Stated simply, De abril en adelante explores the phenomenon of acquired authority. Through its use of metafiction as an oppositional technique, the novel seeks to expose the rhetorical structures used to authorize any narrative—an endeavor much like those undertaken by Veloz as archaeologist. In this chapter I am proposing that Veloz Maggiolo exploits both the ambiguous spaces mentioned above and the distance between *signifier* and *signified* as an oppositional tactic, using it as a tool to reveal the underlying structures and enabling processes of acquired authority. The

novel leverages this “room for maneuver” to dismantle and decentralize the rhetorical dictatorship that has characterized much of contemporary Dominican society. At the same time, the text performs a similar deconstruction of the narrative process, systematically breaking down the boundaries between narrative levels, merging the extratextual, textual, and hypotextual domains and blurring the distinction between “writers” and “readers.” The ultimate goal, though, is not contained within the text itself, but expands beyond its covers, attempting to create a writerly free space within the larger narrative system (Dominican society) that includes history, fiction, language, and metafictional/metahistorical discourse.

Instead of naively ignoring the fact that he employs the same rhetorical process to produce this “cushion” between competing discourses, which has been implied by other Veloz Maggiolo readers, Veloz Maggiolo constantly calls attention to his novel’s “failure” to break free of the dictatorial process by foregrounding the similarities between dictation and narration. Ultimately, this persistent focus on the narrative process suggests that “breaking free” was never the text’s intent. Instead, De abril en adelante seeks to empower the reader by offering him/her “room for maneuver” in both the textual *and* extratextual domains. Like Chambers, Veloz Maggiolo’s novel suggests that breaking free is ultimately a *readerly* function, and something that transcends the textual domain and occurs beyond the limits of the printed page. Because of this, while the rhetorical free space created by the text bolsters this assertion and helps create a certain “momentum” toward readerly action, the success/failure of such a reading rests with the reader.

My assertion that Veloz Maggiolo exploits deconstruction instead of unwittingly falling victim to it is contrary to at least one prominent reading of the text. In “¿Cómo narrar el trujillato?” Neil Larson reads De abril en adelante as a failed attempt to “generar un modelo narrativo adecuado a la experiencia del trujillato” (97). For me, however, Larson confuses Paco’s creative failure, which is inscribed within the pages of the text, with Veloz Maggiolo’s narrative success when he asserts that:

Veloz disfruta de una conciencia teórica muy amplia del problema que hay que enfrentar. Pero aquí también la teoría no puede avanzar más allá de sí misma, la iluminación abstracta en cuanto a la forma apropiada no logra penetrar en el contenido. La narración de Veloz no va más allá de esta etapa teórico-reflexiva. Los dogmas estéticos de la vanguardia nos animan a proclamar este esoterismo como legítimo y valeroso en sí, pero sea como sea, el vanguardismo, con toda su desconfianza en el historicismo y en los medios épicos de representación, no puede superar el neoromanticismo cuando se trata de resolver uno de los problemas objetivos, a mi modo de ver y de leer, más imperantes de la literatura dominicana. (97-8)

Larson’s essay identifies Paco’s failure, but fails to recognize its significance as it relates back to the work itself and its historical context. De abril en adelante actually both *acknowledges* and *exploits* the problem of signification, working from

within the “room for maneuver” described by Chambers in hopes of effecting social change. It is important to note, though, that the narrative never moves past the *hope* for change since actual outcomes depend entirely upon the reader—just like the conversion of De abril en adelante from *protonovela* to *novela*. Despite Larson’s assertions to the contrary, Veloz Maggiolo actually *does*, in many ways, construct a narrative paradigm, as evidenced by the attention that the work continues to draw from scholars researching Dominican literature and its influence on new generations of writers who see the book not only as a dictator novel but also as a watershed work within Dominican literature. De abril en adelante has indeed become one of the Dominican Republic’s most recognized novels and because of its prominence in the Dominican literary tradition, the book has great potential to “[ir] más allá de esta etapa teórico-reflexiva” (98) —*thanks to its ongoing interaction with its readers*.

My reading of how the book’s success depends upon the “future” referenced in its title and evident throughout the rest of the text also contradicts a more general reading offered by Doris Sommer in “Goodbye to the Revolution and the Rest.” Sommer suggests that Veloz’s work implicitly points toward Pedro Mir’s novel, Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras (1978) and that this intertextuality with Mir’s work provides De abril en adelante a certain sense of closure that it otherwise does not have on its own. For me, the novel can stand on its own and in fact subversively looks to the non-textual, historical future of the Dominican Republic and purposefully *resists* that closure, thereby perpetuating its reading/writing indefinitely. Linking De abril en adelante with Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras, as Sommer does, limits

the text's potential reach—which to me seems contradictory to the text's conspicuous efforts to resist closure. Although Sommer's argument might be insightful within the context of Dominican literary history, it is problematic in terms of pointing the reader toward the *always-unspecified* future referred to by the text—the future of the Dominican Republic which lies, to some extent, in the hands of the reader.

Described by Sommer as “a novel that intentionally fails to constitute itself as the narrative of the Revolt of 1965” (Foster 1987, 284)<sup>5</sup>, De abril en adelante follows its main character's attempt to confront his paradoxical life as a revolutionary / “pequeño burgués” in the final months of the *trujillato* and during the chaotic political events that followed the dictator's assassination in 1961.<sup>6</sup> The book has two protagonists: the writer Paco and the literary process—that is to say, Paco's struggle to write a part of the book being read by the reader. For this reason, Sharon Keefe Ugalde describes the work as, “un texto en proceso de desarrollo, conforme al modelo bahktiniano de la novela, que involucra al lector como co-creador, enlazando el placer estético” (142).

De abril en adelante tracks several story lines. In the principal one, Paco, the son of one of Trujillo's powerful henchmen (Colonel Aguirre), struggles to write a novel that will fuse time present (the Dominican Republic circa the collapse of the *trujillato* and the ensuing political confusion, North American intervention, and subsequent occupation of the island, 1961-1965) with events past: the “Guerra de la Restauración” (1861-1865) and Hernando Montoro's struggle against Phillip II (1605, frequently described as “la primera rebelión clasista de América”—63). The

narrative's unifying thread is the idea of armed intervention in the Dominican Republic:

Son, a fin de cuentas, tres capítulos de una misma tragedia: la intervención armada en Santo Domingo, la violencia, la represión de los débiles, su aplastamiento, porque afectan el poderío de los malvados de dentro y de fuera. (63)

At first, Paco's task seems relatively simple: "saber mezclar todo esto, en lograr que el resultado sea algo coherente" (63-64). As he attempts to do this, however, the complexity of his undertaking grows evident. Larson describes the enormity of Paco's task as

cómo escribir una novela que, además de impresionar a los amigos y enemigos literarios del proto-novelist, sea capaz de abarcar estéticamente el total de la historia dominicana a través de elaboraciones de un solo arquetipo de invasión y resistencia, un arquetipo que luego se repite en una serie de escenificaciones que culmina en «lo de abril». (Larson 96)

Sommer has expanded upon this notion, pointing out that Paco faces two major problems in writing what Veloz calls Paco's *protonovela*:



one relates to character construction, the other to organizing the strands of his narrative. Both challenges drive from an insufficiency of the habits that Paco and the rest have inherited from traditional narrative, which privileges verisimilitude over reality and inevitably reduces historical material to fictional preconceptions (Goodbye... 226)

Paco's struggle to create a Dominican metanarrative is that same challenge faced by other Dominican writers since Trujillo—that of reordering the Dominican universe in the absence of the dictator who was, despite all else, the country's organizing force for more than 30 years. Paco is simply a metonym for the Dominican novelist, and his struggles to create after Trujillo will become a recurrent theme in each of the other works studied here.

Paco himself comments that while his goal of mixing three storylines in and of itself is not that difficult, “cómo meterlo en una novela de manera verosímil, eso ya es otra cosa... Eso requiere una técnica” (63-4). Much to his chagrin, narrative technique is one of Paco's most conspicuous shortcomings. Because of this, Paco and Persio, the most accomplished writer among Paco's circle of acquaintances, frequently argue over the best way to organize Paco's story. Persio contends that Paco's story should be moved into the realm of allegory in order to produce a more “satisfying” narrative; Paco, on the other hand, refuses to sacrifice historicity because doing so “denies the possibilities for political change and blinds both writer and reader to those contradictions emerging during periods of transition that can be

exploited by progressive forces” (Sommer 226). In short, Paco and Persio resurrect the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s aesthetical debate on the novel, comparing it with Paco’s work and commenting upon it throughout much of the text. In the larger work, Veloz acknowledges both positions, recognizing that to some extent allegory is inherent in the writing process and that realism is a characteristic of history. While blending the two is difficult for Paco, Veloz does so effectively without it becoming “un juego snob” (25) or “una especie de masturbación encerrada en títulos que no existen y en capítulos que jamás aparecerán” (25).

As is suggested in the two quotes above, ultimate success for Paco and many other Dominican writers would be action rather than thought—that is to say, his book would somehow contribute to political change. The chances of this happening are slim, and Paco is aware of this. If there is little chance for social change, however, one may ask, “Why write?” For Paco, a certain solace is found in his willingness to resist frustration and write in spite of the *trujillato*, which was well-known for its efficiency and effectiveness at controlling artists and manipulating art. For Paco, writing becomes a way to assert his individual voice and overcome the narrative void imposed on the island during the dictatorship. In this way, writing becomes a tool of dissent against the *trujillato*. The idea of resisting invasion/oppression is echoed repeatedly throughout the novel. In his role as both the writer and first reader of his own text-in-progress, Paco quickly learns that his creative liberties are heavily constrained by a host of limiting factors including narrative convention, his readers’ expectations, the intrinsic dissimilarities between the historical referents he has

chosen to explore, social expectations of him as both an author and the son of a prominent *trujillista*, the politics and economics of publishing in the Dominican Republic, and the inability of language to express his thoughts adequately. In the end, most of the novel's internal conflict stems from Paco's inability to overcome these obstacles and produce a novel.

Added to his struggle against these limiting factors is Paco's personal battle against the anxiety of influence he feels toward other writers. Paco considers works by writers such as Joyce, Carpentier, and Vargas Llosa to be a sort of intellectual colonialism (much like the gringo attack on Santo Domingo), and his feelings toward these authors, or at least toward being compared with them, ultimately become obstacles that impede his own narrative production:

Tal vez me encuentre similitudes con Carpentier, ahora que lee a Carpentier todo lo quiere comparar con él. Joyce-Carpentier, Carpentier-Joyce. Tal vez el "finalismo" de Zinia se debe a que supo conjugar a Carpentier con Joyce o viceversa. Imagínate, tener que releer a Joyce — porque todo es Joyce—y a Carpentier. Hay que leer a tres o cuatro autores ahora. Zinia dice que Cortázar, Carpentier, y Onetti... (voy a encender el maldito radio del auto, así descanso del maldito paisaje: ...yanquis en Vietnam. Se dice que los comunistas han tenido doscientas bajas y que las tropas norteamericanas sólo un muerto (se dice, hijo de puta, siempre se dice...); sin embargo, un cable de Tass anuncia que seis helicópteros

norteamericanos fueron derribados ayer en la zona desmilitarizada... durante el combate de los últimos tres días; según Tass, los norteamericanos han sufrido unas mil doscientas bajas. El jefe Ho Chi Minh declaró ayer que Viet Nam y el Frente de Liberación no tenían nada que perder y que la guerra continuará. Señaló que el descrédito de la guerra ha comenzado a resquebrajar los cimientos morales de la sociedad y el digno pueblo norteamericano. Señaló también, que los últimos desembarcos yanquis en Santo Domingo, para aplastar el movimiento por Francisco Caamaño Deñó, son, sin duda, una muestra del temor que tiene el imperialismo a los pueblos libres...) Vargas Llosa y Fernando del Paso. Yo creo que eso no es otra cosa que la influencia del grupito Mundo Nuevo. El circulito cerrado donde no entran más escritores que los Sarduy, los Goytisolo y Rodríguez Monegal... Temprano, en domingo, la ciudad está vacía. (Tomaré el malecón —aunque sea más lejos—para ir respirando el olor del mar... Y pensar que en abril hasta el mar fue dividido por los yanquis. ¡Increíble! (32-33)

The anxiety of influence expressed by Paco is one that weighs heavily upon Dominican narrative in the years immediately following the *trujillato* as the island's writers literally struggled to catch up in terms of current theory and literary production. Moving Dominican prose from the pitifully sycophantic praise of Trujillo that dominated the country's prose during his presidency and shifting it into an era of creative experimentation weighed heavily on the minds of many Dominican writers.

As a result, much of the early work published is not a synthesis of contemporary trends in literature but, rather, a duplication of it. For a brief period, all the evolving tendencies of 20<sup>th</sup>-century creative thought are expressed simultaneously in Dominican fiction. The first fruits of this labor are generally less than noteworthy. With time and practice, however, writers like Veloz came to understand, synthesize, and begin working with these new ideas more skillfully. In the Dominican Republic, De abril en adelante has been the watershed work of this maturing post-Trujillo fiction.

Ironically, Paco's imaginary rants against literary "grupitos," intellectual colonialism, and literary convention do not prevent him from continuing on in a dysfunctional relationship with his own literary circle, which in turn only increases his creative frustration:

Todo lo resuelve el grupito, y tú lo sabes, Perucho. Y yo me estoy cansando de esto; pero no me voy a largar del país porque me digan que confundo literatura con política y que escribo cuentos que nada tienen que ver con la literatura. Me nutro de la realidad, Perucho. Ahora los grupitos comienzan a pincharme, a remover la mala sangre para que reviente; eso no lo van a ver. Se creen que no tengo hálito, que no soy capaz de escribir mil páginas. . . . (14)

In De abril en adelante, Paco's interdependence with the group is not a gratuitous one. Instead, it is similar to the other interdependencies that exist between other elements of the narrative process being explored: reader/writer; signifier/signified; and oppressors/oppressed. Indeed, Paco's relationship with the group could easily be described as a feedback loop, in which a system's output is fed back into that system as input. Feedback mechanisms are one of the many traits that characterize complex (chaotic) systems, including linguistics, writing, and politics. Another characteristic of these systems is the order that becomes apparent when one looks closely enough at their chaos. This chaos/order dichotomy is explored at many levels in the text and is especially important for Paco. Despite the fact that his participation in artistic creation results in disappointment, it simultaneously validates his otherwise bourgeois life. Both his life and his narrative are governed by certain rules of order which Paco complains about repeatedly but never really breaks. Thus, Paco's narrative dissidence never fully materializes in his work. Even so, although he is fully cognizant of his inevitable failure as a writer, he continues to write. Faced with the choice of writing (e.g., opposing the system despite his impending failure) or remaining silent, Paco writes:

Ni ruidos ni estrellas. El mar se mueve y a lo lejos se columpian en las aguas los navíos. Este es Montoro y aquel Tantoro y este otro Pintoro. Y a mí me entran ganas de mandar todo a la mierda. Para qué escribir y joder y cantar y todo eso. Para nada. Soplaban el viento y las estrellas mudaban de un espacio

a otro, como fichas de ajedrez. Y el sol, el viejo sol... Escribir esto y lo otro y lo demás... mejor el merengue: *Santo Domingo, mi amor*, lleno de luz tropical..." el barman, o el vendedor de frutas; mejor el sueño y la borrachera... y la cabeza vacía y campanillas de teléfono sonando, sonando incansablemente, como espadas. Asco, es lo que me da, asco. Para qué hablar de la sociedad, ni de la burguesía, ni de la nada. Mejor callar. Silencio, compañeros, silencio. (133)

Despite his suspicion that it might be easier to remain silent than to write, Paco pushes forward, determined to tell his story about the Dominican Republic's past. Although my focus thus far has been upon Paco's creation of his *protonovela*, the way his text establishes a dialogue with history is another important aspect of De abril en adelante. Moving beyond its commentary on narrative convention, Veloz Maggiolo takes pains to set the story within a specific geographical and historical context. In his frequent references to Dominican social and literary history, Paco presents writing as a political act and arguably, the most political action taken by either Veloz Maggiolo or Paco's *protonovela* occurs as the novel labors to establish itself as "truth" despite its being a fictional creation treating history (Vietnam, the Cold War, the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, Trujillo, etc.). In other words, within the novel, not only is writing political (as demonstrated in the struggles between Paco and the rest of his group), but writing becomes, metaphorically, *politics*. Clearly, De abril en adelante is what Roland Barthes would describe as a

“writerly” text, for it requires the reader’s active participation as it examines not only political but also linguistic and narrative authority. Requiring an active reader is especially important in dictator novels because it reflects the implied goal of activating the reader at the extratextual or political level and pushes the reader to begin the change process as described in Room for Maneuver, because “oppositionality exploits, for ‘other’ purposes, the readability of discourse on which power itself rests” (55). Keefe Ugalde notes that:

Veloz, como los otros escritores de esta narrativa, busca la expresión indirecta y el silencio para mantener el equilibrio entre el deleite del esteticismo y la lección en contra de la tiranía. Necesita encontrar patrones que involucren al lector en la experiencia del texto, porque el placer y la significación de la obra dependen de su participación, como subraya Wolfgang Iser. (133)

Along these lines, one of the most effective tools employed by Dominican dictator novels is their insertion of the reader within a recognizably historic setting—doing so also sets up an interesting paradox. At the extratextual level, creating a text that treats the cyclical nature of political tyranny in the Dominican Republic, whether instigated by Phillip II, Trujillo, or the United States, effectually sets up a parallel rhetorical system that both parodies and necessarily competes with the central discourses of power. In a way, the unimpeded publication and dissemination of De



abril en adelante, a book critical of Trujillo and of the United States' political involvement in the Dominican Republic constitutes an oppositional act against the memory of the dictator's power. In doing this, however, Veloz Maggiolo employs the same rhetorical structures used by the "colonizers" to empower his textual voice, creating a situation similar to the one described by González-Echevarría when he writes about Carpentier's El derecho de asilo:

The story leads inevitably to the conclusion that all political activity consists of the generation of sign systems whose aim is to deceive rather than to enlighten, and much less to guide; to deflect attention rather than to focus it. There seems to be no real world, no original, no truth against which to measure the validity of these signs and, although literature seems to be capable of demystifying them, it too seems to be caught up in the same process of distortion and reflection. There seems to be no way out of this circle and, like the toy train in the store, we go around and around. In this sense, literature is a sanctuary, an elaborate form of exile. (136)

The "sanctuary" or "exile" described by González-Echevarría resides within the "room for maneuver" hypothesized by Chambers for, when faced with competing rhetorical systems, the realization that there is no singly trustworthy narration empowers the reader to choose which (if any) of the various possibilities (s)he will "authorize." Veloz Maggiolo recognizes that the process of authorization is not only

the crux of reading, but is also analogous to the process of empowerment employed by other socio-political systems. Instead of accidentally falling into the “trap” of linguistic representation inherent in the narrative process, Veloz systematically brings it to his readers’ attention, positioning it as a free space on the margins of dominant discourse where the reader is offered room for interpretation and even creation. Doing this is akin to the ideological “diversion” mentioned by González-Echevarría when he writes that:

The postmodern dictator-novel shatters this delusion by showing that it represents a dream of power and authority through which the Supreme Self of postromantic ideology still secures its throne. This new novel demonstrates in its very structure that in reality dictators are not powerful telluric forces, but ideological diversions, shadows cast by the true powers in today’s world. (83)

As is often the case in highly metafictional works, Paco’s failure is largely attributable to the inherent trouble with writing—the failure of the sign. As a postmodern novel, De abril en adelante self-consciously reflects the process of writing. It dismantles the “image of the author-dictator, of the author-rhetor, and reveals instead a weak and fragmented *scriptor*, who is secretary of a voice no longer enthroned, no longer his or hers” (González-Echevarría 70). While González-Echevarría’s specific allusion cited above is to Asturias and El señor presidente, it is equally applicable to Paco, the scriptor inscribed within Veloz’s text. Throughout the

novel, Paco's frustration at his inability to express himself adequately is often manifested as a jumble of letters, a figurative stripping away of the signification afforded to the written symbol. An excellent example of this can be seen in "Anti-II" (pages 66-79), where the arbitrary nature of the sign is deliberately foregrounded:

Onos le odiconoc oenoñoc. Rop ojabad de osl setneup ed aredam  
 noreijurc sal secíar ed anu arevamirp adros. Somarim la oleic. Sol senoiva  
 naínet al amrof ed semrone senalivag sodamarancne ne le otinifni. Ni sol, ni  
 luna. La sombra, mejor dicho semisombra ardía ne sal sellac y sartseun  
 sadasip es naícah sám sased rop momentos. Gritábamos o reíamos.  
 Etnemasoisna nos tomamos de las manooooooooos y en medio de la  
 dadirucso somiv le ram, oneres; us zul son quebraba el rostro con vehemencia.  
 ¡Al arreug ! Ahora al somaíc-onoc : sal saport NORTEAMERICANAS habían  
 puesto pie en las playas de SANTO DOMINGO.... (66)

Both here and at other points in the novel where Veloz employs this technique, the text rebels against linguistic convention: words are written backwards, seemingly reflected in each other, floating between standard Spanish and its graphical inverse. For Paco, language has failed to express his ideas adequately yet, despite the linguistic chaos that inhabits the pages of the text, there is an order imposed by the author / "dictator" and, notwithstanding the arbitrary nature of the sign (as reflected in the graphemes), the reader still understands the text, reemphasizing the underlying

order. The text is unable to deconstruct itself completely, primarily because the reader, an external force, is reasserting order upon it, acting in concert with the author as co-creator. Because of this, Veloz Maggiolo has succeeded, not only because he recognizes the paradox of the sign, but also because he demonstrates that, within certain contexts, the arbitrariness of the sign becomes less important because it can be manipulated by external forces (readers) and the message will still be communicated effectively. Like Veloz's indirect critiques of the *trujillato*, De abril en adelante succeeds by saying without saying—linguistically, thematically, and structurally. Far from “failing to constitute itself,” the text instead becomes the frontrunner in a new Dominican sub-genre, and one of the most important examples of the novel in the Dominican literary tradition. By textualizing Paco's failure, Veloz Maggiolo uses the text to demonstrate that it is possible to overcome the obstacle of the sign.

The stripping away of linguistic convention mentioned above and its resulting empowerment of the writer have other analogous examples within the text that present another representation of the dictator/writer. In one of the novel's early scenes, Paco recalls a major conflict between him and his father:

En 1957 tenía yo 20 años y me habían aceptado como cadete militar en la Academia Batalla de las Carreras. Sólo estuve unos días, pero mi primera llegada a casa en uniforme fue la causa de aquel también primer gran impacto, el más fuerte de mi vida: el coronel estaba sentado en su mecedora de mimbre; leía un periódico que traía al Generalísimo y todo su cuerpo de ayudantes

militares en primera plana. Aguirre ocupaba el centro de la fotografía. El Generalísimo —decía el diario—acababa de recibir el “apoyo incondicional del pueblo que pedía su reelección”. Ya entonces habían empezado a funcionar las cámaras de tortura y se conocían los atentados contra políticos en toda el área del Caribe. Era la época en que el Generalísimo ya acusaba, con incontinencias renales, los efectos del whisky que se comentaban por todos pero que nadie conocía en particular. El coronel Aguirre me observó por encima de las gafas de sol —era día de licencia y muy de mañana—: ¡Hola, papá! le dije. Mis palabras lo irritaron, lo sacaron de quicio. Lanzó las gafas contra el piso donde se hicieron pedazos los vidrios verdiazules. Mire, carajo, dijo gritando. ¡Póngase en posición de atención! Qué papá ni que papá, ¡coño!... está usted frente a un militar de carrera al que se debe, como simple cadete, respeto ¡coño!...”. (27)

Clearly, the authoritarian father figure serves as an archetype in the text, benefiting from a symbolism that has been assigned to it as the cumulative result of social acceptance. Simultaneously, literature is presented as a subversive force. Despite his “failure” as a writer, Paco contemplates using literature to expose his father’s shortcomings (the textual analogue of what Veloz actually does to the dictatorship) which would have otherwise remained hidden from public scrutiny: in other words, Paco exploits the revelatory powers of the text. He also discovers and later models what might be called the deconstructive process and, by the end of the

novel, Paco has demonstrated his mastery of this process by applying it to the image of his father:

—Adiós, coronel... a gritos y en voz baja el comentario: ahí va el coronel (voces de un pueblo ignorante, engañado, que admiraba tus insignias, tu uniforme, tu porte, pero que ignoraba que eras tú precisamente su asesino).  
(248)

Unfortunately for Paco, his “successful” use of narrative as a tool of dissent is external to his own creative work-in-progress and outside of his realm of consciousness as a fictional character within Veloz’s text. While he can intellectually comprehend the deconstructive process, Paco’s failure lies in his inability to apply those principles to other rhetorical systems, to use the same process to deconstruct “el Padre de la Patria.” Veloz Maggiolo, on the other hand, not only uses this process to create De abril en adelante, but extends it to an event that resides in the textual and extratextual spaces of Dominican reality, as the book celebrates the Dominican potential to confront not only Trujillo, but the underlying patriarchal force that *facilitated* his rise to power and that again threatened Dominican popular sovereignty during the Guerra de Abril—the U.S. military:

—Les estamos dando, comandante, ¡Ahí en la Mella! Los cogimos en fuego cruzado. Les estamos dando.

—Desde luego que les estamos dando, compañero. Ellos son también de carne y hueso. (262)

Here again, the novel attempts to create “room for maneuver” by stripping away the sense of awe for power. This time, however, it targets multiple narrative levels. At the textual level, the novel’s treatment of the Guerra de Abril refers to historical fact. At the allegorical level, one might convincingly argue that this allusion is to the future, carried past the limits of the narrative process, of the *trujillato*, or of the Guerra de Abril and into the extratextual realm of the reader, in part, by the book’s forward-looking title.

With De abril en adelante, Veloz Maggiolo demonstrates that the metaphorical deconstruction of oppressive rhetorical systems by literature is an appropriate tool to dissent against those systems most effectively. This reading of the text is supported throughout, especially during the ongoing debate between Paco and Persio mentioned previously. In the *protonovela*, Persio insists in some situations the metaphor is less powerful than verisimilitude:

Lo mismo. Yo sería otra vez, menos poético. Dinosaurios, cadenas en lucha, etcétera. ¿No te parece que todo esto resta impacto a la prosa? Si has elegido como tema la lucha del pueblo esa literatura deberá estar dirigida al pueblo... No hables de dinosaurios, evita la metáfora. Te lo digo yo, que he hecho metáfora tantas veces. La metáfora sirve para escapar de la realidad o

aprisionarla mejor, para decirla indirectamente, sugerirla o disfrazarla. Aquí, dentro de esta temática, no podrán mantenerla viva; llegará el momento en que la realidad dirá más que la metáfora. Este es un material verde, nuevo, no soporte la poesía. Habrá un momento en que — ¿no tienes un disco, algo suave?—la metáfora se te rebele y tengas que abandonarla. (93-94)

Persio's advice ultimately hints at the reason for Paco's failure as a writer.

While Paco comes to understand the deconstructive process and instinctively applies it to his textual "father" (who is described by his colleagues as an aggregate of several people and hence little more than a fictional character), he fails to understand that this (de/re)constructive process is inevitably allegorical in nature. In his unwillingness to create metaphors and his efforts to maintain verisimilitude, Paco retains his "readerly" role, failing to extend the allegory to his own creative endeavors.

Ultimately, this inability to evolve from reader to co-creator is the limitation that traps Paco within the novel. As a character within a subplot of the novel, his fate is unavoidably predetermined by Veloz Maggiolo, the author and metaphorical equivalent of the dictator. In other words, as Veloz Maggiolo's literary creation, Paco has no self-determination: despite the fact that he is portrayed in the book, via the metanarrative process, as writing his own future. This tension between Paco's unsuccessful attempts to write his own future and Veloz Maggiolo's obvious "success" at doing the same thing, however, is presented to the reader in a way that doesn't necessarily pit Paco against Veloz Maggiolo. Instead, it points toward another



component of the narrative process: the reader. Like Paco, Veloz Maggiolo repeatedly calls the reader's attention to the fact that writing is not only inherently metaphorical but also reader-dependent. With the success of his novel and the failure of Paco's, the author suggests that the metaphor actually creates the "room for maneuver," which in turn begets the possibility of substituting one rhetorical system for another—one that is more desirable because it is more "writerly." Readers of the text, which is arguably a metonym for the dictatorship, are presented with the choice of whether to "read" the future of the Dominican Republic or "write" it. The opportunity to move past the script of the dictatorship rests entirely with them—an opportunity that is also the potential to acknowledge and accept the allegorical nature of the text, as debated by Paco and Persio.

But it is only *an opportunity*. The novel's success remains largely indeterminate because Veloz Maggiolo positions it as being conspicuously dependent on the reader's participation in the narrative process. As the text develops, the boundary between the textual and extratextual domains intentionally is made fuzzy, and one of the reader's primary tasks becomes not only distinguishing among the book's four narratives but also deciding between fiction and reality. As the reader follows Paco's progress through a process of creation whose product is the very text that is being read, (s)he becomes an implicit co-creator at both the extra-narrative (as the reader of Veloz Maggiolo's De abril en adelante) and narrative (as the reader of Paco's "protonovela") levels of the text. In this way, having created linguistic "room

for maneuver,” De abril en adelante seeks to provide its reader with a more “writerly” alternative to the dominant narrative discourse.

There are many important differences between Paco’s text and Veloz Maggiolo’s. To a large extent, this narrative “playground” is enabled through a symbolic deconstruction of the narrative process. Once again, while Paco conforms to literary convention as he creates his text, Veloz Maggiolo actively fights against it. Instead of dividing his novel into chapters, the author chooses chapters, sub-chapters, anti-chapters, supplements, documents, post-chapters, and infra-chapters, each either inscribing Paco’s creative output or inserting him within larger metahistorical and metaliterary discourses. While much of Paco’s output follows the generally accepted stylistic convention of linear time, De abril en adelante is largely written according to Paco’s stream-of-consciousness. At various points throughout Veloz Maggiolo’s novel, several of the book’s main plots converge on a single page, each inhabiting its own column, one written in black ink and the other in green. The result is a multi-vocal work that, if not nonlinear, is at least collinear between two dominant storylines. In the meantime, the process of inscription that Veloz Maggiolo uses to insert Paco’s story within an exterior rhetorical system is analogous to that used by Trujillo (or by Johnson and his 42,000 American troops) to set himself up as the dominant voice. Having established both linguistic and narrative “room for maneuver,” the text now reaches outward toward the extratextual domain. Clearly, this is one of the key divergences between Veloz’s and Paco’s books.

As mentioned previously, the tension between each “author’s” dialogue with his text leads to many of the work’s principal points of conflict. However, as the reader progresses through the narrative(s), it becomes increasingly difficult to separate Paco from the implied author, and extratextual “reality” with textual “fiction.” The fact that much of Paco’s material corresponds with events and people taken from Dominican history only adds to this confusion and increases the tension between conventional and counter-conventional writing. This tension becomes the overriding theme of Veloz Maggiolo’s narrative thread. In fact, at various points throughout the novel, Paco launches into imagined theoretical conversations with his friends/characters about the oppressive conventions of the genre, establishing an antagonistic dialogue with them through the vehicle of metafiction. In one such exchange, Paco focalizes an imaginary conversation with Samuel, a literary critic who supposedly inhabits both Paco’s circle of acquaintances and the pages of his *protonovela*:

Oye, me dice, creo que Alberto piensa escribir una novela; dice que los cuentos... ¡Bah!, que la novela es lo que vale. Ahora está enfrascado con Lukács. Dice que no quiere caer en lo de Zinia, esa novela híbrida que no desarrolla en ningún sitio ni en ningún tiempo. Ni en lo de Persio, porque hacer novela así no vale la pena. ¿Sabes cómo hizo su novela sobre Manaclas? Seguro que lo sé —pienso. Mira, dice, se escribió un capítulo soñoliento y de allí sacó quince o veinte palabras. Después empezó cada capítulo con base en

una de esas palabras, dejándose llevar por lo que la palabra le sugería —a lo psicoanálisis, si quieres—; calculó el número de páginas que cada palabra debía producir y dejó lista: Nexus 15. No te niego que la novela es técnicamente interesante, pero... Mira, Samuel —pienso decirle y no lo digo— cada quien escribe como le viene en gana y Persio hizo lo que mejor le parecía. Persio sabía lo que tenía entre manos. Primero criticas a Persio, luego lo elogias. Te pasas la vida diciéndole que es bueno, que escribe bien, que es un fenómeno y detrás vives acabando con él. Desde luego, las novelas de Zinia... y empieza a hablarme de novela. (34)

Clearly, both Paco's and Veloz Maggiolo's implicit authors subscribe to Paco's assertion that, "Cada quien escribe como le viene en gana..." Paco notes, "Quiero hacer de mi novela una especie de mundo donde se entremezclen diversos momentos históricos" (35). While he fails to do this, Veloz Maggiolo's inscription of his failure accomplishes this task successfully. This tension between the two, then, results from the differences in each writer's willingness to experiment with his writing in order to "centralize" his own creative voice. While Veloz Maggiolo's work is openly experimental, Paco's experiments never actually materialize in his literary outputs, and they are consequently doomed to reside on the narrative periphery. In the end, Paco's work remains incomplete and unsatisfactory, both to the reader, and to its "writer," while Veloz Maggiolo's inscription of Paco's failure becomes the successful text. Moreover, since Veloz Maggiolo as author has the power to predetermine Paco's

failure and as well as his own success, he has employed the same rhetorical method to power used by a dictator.

Obviously, this in and of itself is not overly subversive in nature. The oppositional side of De abril en adelante resides largely in its dialogue with another external text. Each of the four narratives within the novel interact with Dominican history, linking the work within a work to a greater, extratextual (historical) discourse. The result is the process of reading *mise en abyme*: the reader who inhabits this outer “text” reads Veloz Maggiolo, who reads Paco, who reads and transforms Dominican “history” within his stories and who in turn is read by his circle of friends as well as his critical self. This process ultimately neutralizes the distinctions between reader/writer and history/fiction by foregrounding the narrative process and by requiring the reader’s active participation in the construction of the text. In this way, De abril en adelante creates a second instance of “room for maneuver” by disintegrating the constraint of narrative roles and thereby creating a free space where the reader may choose to assume the role of reader or writer as he pleases.

Veloz Maggiolo’s foregrounding of the narrative process signals that the reader’s active participation in the creation of his *protonovela* is vital. For Chambers, activating the reader is important because the oppositional text ultimately seeks to shift the reader’s desire away from the dominant discourse and toward a parallel, reader-empowering narrative. A reader familiar with Chambers’ theories would expect the text to employ a three-part process in order to shift the reader’s desire away from the central and toward an alternative voice. First, the text seeks to align its

reader with the “victim” in hopes of triggering dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. Next, the text suggests that the identity of “victim” has been arbitrarily constructed by the dominant power structure, in part, due to the reader’s own complicity with that system. Finally, the text demonstrates that in order to overcome this undesirable situation,

it is necessary to change the reality that has been constructed in this way, but starting—because there is no alternative—from the way things are now, that is, from within the “given” situation of power. There must be a politics of oppositionality, if by that is understood the form of resistance available to the relatively disempowered. (Chambers xi)

This process is evident in De abril en adelante. By situating the story within the larger historical framework of the Dominican Republic, the author begins to foster sympathy with his intended (Dominican) audience. These feelings are intensified as the reader begins to empathize with Paco who struggles to establish his identity within a historical context in which he has been a victim. As previously mentioned, the greatest difference between Paco’s and Veloz Maggiolo’s works is that Paco *doesn’t* outwardly resist the uncontrollable forces that seek to limit his creative production while Veloz Maggiolo *does*. As Paco discovers that his role as a writer is predetermined by forces beyond his control, Veloz Maggiolo’s Dominican reader identifies with him and transfers those feelings to his/her own situation, particularly

during the tyranny of the *trujillato* and the US invasions of the island. Hence, at the narrative level inhabited by Paco, De abril en adelante actively works to create a sense of identification and comprehension between the reader and Paco.

Next, De abril en adelante concentrates on foregrounding its own systems of signification and narrative construction. By demonstrating that Paco's identity is only a fictional construct and as such, subject to reinterpretation, the author wrests subjectivity from the role assigned to Paco. In doing this, Veloz Maggiolo effectively dismantles the rhetorical processes that have empowered him as "author" to create Paco as a "character" (which by extension is the sympathetic reader) within the text.

Since this deconstruction of the narrative process is counter-conventional in that it actively seeks to destroy the reader's suspension of disbelief, the reader's conventional role is stripped away and (s)he must find another part to play in the narrative process. By vicariously "victimizing" the reader who has empathized with Paco, Veloz Maggiolo leverages the same psychological elements that convert the oppressed into oppressors and hence ensure the longevity of the dictatorial cycle. Given the opportunity, the reader naturally opts for a writerly role (*object of desire*).

Finally, by embedding the fictional elements of the novel within the reader's own historical reality, the author decreases the gap between the textual and extratextual worlds, thereby increasing the probability of transference between the desires experienced by the passive reader during his/her interaction with the text and his/her want to assume an active ("writerly") role in the narrative process. In doing so, Veloz Maggiolo creates a space of play in which the reader is free to assume a

role of empowerment. According to Chambers, this process has the potential to lead to “changes local and scattered that might one day take collective shape and work socially significant transformations” (xi) because it impels the reader to action immediately after having disaffected him/her with the dictator. However, according to another prominent theory, this same process might also lead to increased feelings of impotence, of envy or even hatred toward the author.

This interaction between author-reader-text is similar to the one described by René Girard as triangular desire: Paco (*desiring subject*) and Veloz Maggiolo (*mediator*) compete for control of the narrative process (*object of desire*).<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, the same triangular relationship can be drawn at each of the book’s narrative levels. At the text’s deepest narrative level, an example of this triangular relationship can be seen between Phillip II (*mediator*), Montoro (*desiring subject*), and Dominican sovereignty (*object of desire*). Similar relationship triangles at this level are Bosch-United States-Dominican sovereignty and Spain-Dominican peasants-Dominican sovereignty—the three plots combined in Paco’s failed *protonovela*. Moving outward, the reader quickly observes that most if not all of Paco’s relationships are triangular: Paco-Aguirre-Paco’s mother; Paco-Matilde-Melissa; Paco-Zinia-Persio, etc. As the roles of writer/reader converge, so does the triangular relationship between the reader, Paco, and Veloz Maggiolo.

One soon asks, what coherent space can contain this classificatory scheme? Certainly there is none other than language itself, which is a space



without location. Foucault, however, doesn't stop at this point. He goes on to tell us that the table [referred to by Borges in his essay, "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins"] suggests something more disquieting than incongruity. This suggestion roots itself in the notion that there are fragments of a great number of possible orders coexisting in a space that has no law and no geometry: the space of the heteroclitic, of chaos. This is where things exist without a common organizing center, or an origin, or logos, or universe, or Utopia that we have constructed with a story spun by our desires in the discourse of language. This space, where everything is hopefully confused, is the antidiscursive (anti-Utopian) space of what Foucault calls *heteropias*, that is, the (dis)ordered territory where the Other [i.e., the reader...] resides. (Benítez-Rojo 141)

Girard differentiates between *internal* and *external* mediation, based on the distance between the subject and the mediator. According to Girard, external mediation occurs when there is sufficient distance between the subject and mediator to preclude the possibility of the mediator and subject's occupying the respective centers. Since "the valet never desires what his master desires" (Girard Deceit, 9), external mediation begets no rivalry between the subject and the mediator. Consequently, "the harmony between the two is never seriously troubled" (Girard 9).

With internal mediation, on the other hand, this distance is smaller, allowing these two spheres to affect each other more or less profoundly (see Girard 9). Rivalry between the subject and the mediator occurs only when mediation is internal:

The impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator; in internal mediation this impulse is checked by the mediator himself since he desires, or perhaps possesses, the object. Fascinated by his model, the disciple inevitably sees, in the mechanical obstacle which he puts in his way, proof of the ill will borne him. Far from declaring himself a faithful vassal, he thinks only of repudiating the bonds of mediation. But these bonds are stronger than ever, for the mediator's apparent hostility does not diminish his prestige but instead augments it. The subject is convinced that the model considers himself too superior to accept him as a disciple. The subject is torn between two opposite feelings toward his model—the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice. (10)

Whereas the relationship between author and reader is figuratively one that is governed by external mediation, Veloz Maggiolo's text invites and empowers the "disciple" (reader) to participate actively in the creation of the text (*object of desire*). By eliminating the conventional boundary between author and reader, Veloz Maggiolo moves the author-reader-text relationship towards one of internal

mediation. However, by inviting the reader's participation, this relationship between author and lector becomes synergistic instead of antagonistic.

This process has even more interesting implications. Seen from a different perspective, in order for the novel to "mediate" an oppositional relationship between the reader and dictator (the goal of oppositional narrative), it must bring the reader into a triangle of *internal* mediation—the conversion from external to internal mediation must be complete. In De abril en adelante, Veloz Maggiolo accomplishes this by erasing the distinction between text and history and by linking the author-reader-text triangle with the triangle created at the extratextual level (author/active reader—"dictator"-historical text). By changing the relationship between the writer/reader alliance and the "dictator" into one of internal mediation, Veloz Maggiolo invites certain emotions that naturally accompany such rivalries. For me, this is the text's key oppositional tactic. In associating a particular act of reading (the current one) with the Dominican Republic's history, whether focused on Phillip II, on Trujillo, or on the American troops, a symbolic bond of complicity is formed based on shared experience: both the author (via this shift) and the reader (who represents Dominican society) have been displaced by the dictator. In this process, Veloz Maggiolo effectively redirects the antagonism that might normally be directed toward the author in the narrative process toward his substitute, the "oppressor." This way, De abril en adelante systematically works to divert readerly desire away from oppression via the (deconstructed) narrative process.

Citing Max Scheler's investigation of "ressentiment," Girard notes that envy, "a feeling of impotence which vitiates our attempt to acquire something, because it belongs to another" (13), would cease to exist if the envious person's imagination did not

transform into concerted opposition the passive obstacle which the possessor puts in his way by the mere fact of possession. . . . *Envy* occurs only when our efforts to acquire it fail and we are left with a feeling of impotence. (13)

By using metafiction to reveal the processes that authorize acquired authority, linking the reader with the writer and thus empowering the reader to use those same processes, Veloz Maggiolo dismantles the narrative "obstacle" that prevents the reader from writing the text—and not only the text as De abril en adelante, but also as Dominican history. Cast into the future, as is De abril en adelante from its very title, this novel suggests a future space that might be significantly more conducive to personal choice and popular sovereignty—a writerly one.

For me, the most intriguing triangular relationship is the one that is set up between De abril en adelante, the reader, and the future. The text itself authorizes this reading by foregrounding the process of reading and emphasizing the importance of the interaction between the reader and the text, while at the same time ensuring that there is no textual closure to this interaction by casting it into the future, at some indeterminate point in time after April. "Room for maneuver" necessarily exists

between the Dominican reader and his/her own future, a free space that was less than evident during historical eras such as the *trujillato* or the U.S. occupation of the island. Despite the fact that the book replicates the dictatorial process, it is capable of successfully dissenting against the dominant thread of discourses. Whereas Paco surrenders to the “trap” of the text (“oye, Aguirre, creo que estos capítulos son muy esquemáticos; como si tú también, en ese momento, usaras el idioma de los vencidos”—240), Veloz Maggiolo exploits the space between the signifier and the signified to provide his reader with discursive “room for maneuver.”

Materia Prima: Protonovela (Premio Nacional de Novela 1988-1989) represents a mid-point in the evolution of Veloz’s creative work between his more experimental works like De abril en adelante and his more conventional writing like El jefe iba descalzo. As a “protonovela,” it narrates its own creation and reception—by both its own internal characters and its external audience. In this way, Materia Prima is similar to De abril en adelante. Similarly, many of Veloz’s common themes appear throughout the text (i.e., imperialism of publishing houses—26, the recurring figure of the frustrated writer—27, the domination of the island by the dictator—87 and repeated references to other Dominican writers—82). Similarities notwithstanding, this work seems somewhat more polished and creatively mature than De abril en adelante. It is also significantly less open-ended. While De abril en adelante looks forward to an undefined point in time located somewhere beyond the limits of the text, Materia Prima’s focus is defined much more closely: the posthumous compilation of Persio’s text by his unnamed friend, a Dominican

diplomat (not unlike Veloz himself), who at one point in the story summarizes the book's narrative framework:

Un diplomático que regresa de uno de sus tantos viajes. Una mujer llamada X que sabiendo que su esposo, el escritor X está a punto de morir pide al viejo amigo que termine, “por favor”, los capítulos faltantes para poder así cumplir con un encargo de editor. Un diplomático que apenas ha escrito unos cuantos relatos y que se lanza a estudiar toda una confusa documentación en la que el escritor mezcla la realidad con la fantasía. Un asombrado diplomático que comienza a notar que él mismo es un personaje y que el escritor ha mezclado nombres y fechas, hechos y pensamientos, ilusión y crimen. (174)

The work is dedicated to Doris Sommer (whose comments on De abril en adelante were cited previously) and to Ramón Bodden, “cuasi-personaje.” The author notes that:

Los personajes de este libro fueron registrados debidamente como creación intelectual en la Oficina Nacional de Derechos de Autor. Me hubiera gustado “declararlos” en la Oficialía del Estado Civil como esos recién nacidos a cuyos padres se les exige la ficha de hospital y declaración jurada con testigos. No ha sido posible y por tal razón no poseen acta de nacimiento. Este último

inconveniente, creo, ha hecho que realmente sigan viviendo a medias. La orfandad no es sólo biológica sino que se extiende a la moral. (7)

Being an “orphan” is a recurrent theme throughout the text that is paired continually with paternity and identity construction beginning on the first page where the narrative evokes the Viceroy Diego Colón, the island’s first dictator. The text flows intermittently between present and past, history and fiction, creating in the end, “historias nebulosas” (10)—which is also how the narrator repeatedly describes his friend Persio’s literary endeavors: “Sagaz, apoyado en una serie de lectoras casi enciclopédicas, le gustaba inventar historias inciertas, teorías que entonces llamábamos “inescrupulosas”. Una de ellas era que “todo pueblo para desarrollarse ha necesitado de las dictaduras” (11).

On the one hand, the text presents Dominican history as one expression of Universal History; on the other, it self-consciously critiques the process of historization, asserting its arbitrariness and inevitable subjectivity: “la historia universal no es otra cosa que una selección maliciosa e interesada de hechos que no toman en cuenta la vida mínima de los seres” (19). Throughout the work, Dominican history is presented as the raw material that is transformed via the narrative process into fiction—while acknowledging that it is contributing to that same flawed source from which it derives:

No es importante que sepamos la historia completa; pienso que la única historia posible es la historia fragmentada que dice realidades producto de un momento único. Perseguir la historia de alguien y tratar de completarla es una traición a toda biografía. La obligación de narrar como narran los demás es algo agotador. Podría decir que durante años he escrito diversos capítulos de realidades mínimas que nunca serán parte de una novela. Los llamaba *materia prima*; estaban y están ahí como una fuente de la cual puede el novelista nutrirse e inventar. (21)

Liminal texts such as the dedicatory page cited above add to the book's numerous meta-narrative elements, which, like in De abril en adelante, include the creation of the work itself as a narrative framing device: Patricia, wife of Persio the writer, has asked the nameless narrator to finish her husband Persio's "Protonovela". The writer's task is to pull largely disconnected narrative elements (episodes, letters, dialogues, situations, interviews, characters) together into a coherent whole that chronicles the dictatorship by reconstructing the history of Villa Francisca, a slum on the outskirts of Santo Domingo. Throughout the book, several reasons are given for writing in the wake of the Trujillato: for vengeance ("ya el barrio no es el mismo, la dictadura ha desaparecido, pero aquellos que la hicieron posible, de alguna manera deben pagar un poco su pecado"—32), to link Villa Francisca to the "historia universal" (49), to make a story ("Me importa mucho hacer una historia. Más que la mía la del barrio. Más que la del barrio la de mucha gente sin historia"—67), to leave



behind a good memory (69—más vale la memoria que la invención, y he comenzado a sustituir la imaginación con el recuerdo—139), and to overcome loneliness (“Narrar sobre la narrativa es una manera de vencer la soledad. Narrar y dejar. Narrar e ir sucumbiendo ante la incapacidad de terminar ‘lógicamente’ lo narrado cuando la enfermedad te tiene acorralado y percibes la muerte en cada objeto”—23). But more than anything, Persio’s text allows his readers to vicariously experience Dominican life during and after Trujillo, since “nadie que no viviera en la Villa Francisca de los años ‘40 y ‘50 puede comprender la historia con el sentido que lo comprendemos nosotros” (16). Indeed, while in De abril en adelante Veloz Maggiolo largely writes around the dictatorship, in Materia prima he tries to write about it more directly, to narrate its effects, and the aftereffects of the *trujillato*—and later, the *balaguerato*—on the island’s intelligentsia (Carlos Deive, Marcio Veloz, Ramón Reyes—82) as well as the common man. If, as Larson asserts, De abril en adelante is a work that asks, “How does one narrate Trujillo?” Materia Prima presents at least two possible ways of doing it: one very conventional and the other its exact inverse.

The narrator’s task is to “reorganizar ideas ajenas” (23), starting with “raw material” or “materia prima” (snippets of life in the Dominican Republic during the *trujillato*), passed via letters between two “friends” (Persio and Papiro the archaeologist, who the text suggests is a literary avatar of the same person) which comprise episodes involving the book’s secondary characters, Manolo, Doña Isolina, and Emilia. This multi-layered narrative eventually becomes a single intertwined thread, masking the demarcations between literature and history, between the textual

and extratextual domains. At the same time, the text recognizes that a new story is materializing along the way:

Había en estas páginas el intento de crear nuevos tabúes sobre Villa Francisca. Un barrio sin historia, sin crónica, sin memorias capaces de contribuir con un artículo de periódico a salvar su identidad tendría como única fuente las páginas de Persio. El intentaba, como los viejos conquistadores escribir la historia del vencedor, no la de los vencidos. (148)

In this new text, historicity is secondary to the story. Historical characters blend with each other and with fictional characters, effectively re-writing the Trujillato: “No era novela, nada parecido. Simplemente Persio recogía sus recuerdos y los fundía inventando personajes con visos de una realidad que a veces era lógica y que en ocasiones revelaba su profundo interés por la confusión” (148). The text treats history as relative and, given this relativity, the reader placed in a position of power: “la historia es siempre relativa y es la propia e intransferible vida de cada quien la que le confiere un sentido de importancia” (16). The narrator repeatedly comments upon Persio’s “afán de destrucción y sustitución de la imagen real una especie de Guerra contra recuerdos y formas del pasado que odia y que desearía desacreditar” (149).

For me, this is the major proposition, not only for many of Veloz’s narratives, but also for much of mainstream Dominican literature since Trujillo. Like Persio’s work, many Dominican narratives “son a la vez que venganza, historia y justificación,

denuncia y corroboración de cuanto se ha vivido” (176). And almost always, within the Dominican context, the goal is to affect readers, to persuade them toward extratextual changes in their behavior, because, as the book says, “el futuro es consecuencia del gerundio que busca convertirse en participio” (15).

At the beginning of this chapter I underscored the significance of Veloz Maggiolo’s influence on other Dominican writers. There is, in the first chapter attributed to the creative efforts of the narrator in Veloz’s Materia Prima, “Un capítulo de prueba”, what I believe to be an important intertext between Veloz Maggiolo and the next writer I will study, Andrés L. Mateo. The chapter presents the figure of Isolina Tavárez, resting on her sofa:

Durante la noche anterior no había podido dormir. Se miró el anillo de rubíes obsequio de Paco, y tornó a recordar aquellos años de la dictadura durante los cuales, mal que bien ella tuvo su importancia señera en el barrio [...]

En su casa de madera, montada sobre una alta acera resultante de la nivelación de la calle en los años 40, Isolina volvía a tener la pesadilla: Paco, el humorista, el archipámpano de la carcajada, el rey del disparate, había muerto cuando esbirros de la dictadura le golpearon acremente con pequeños sacos de arena mojada que si bien no dejaron marcas en su piel, reventaron por dentro sus brazos, sus hígados y sus entresijos. De Paco le había quedado el guacamayo verdiazul, amarirrojo, naranjitasolado, que repetía frases

cojonudas como aquellas de “mamita llegó el obispo, llegó el obispo de Roma; mamita si usted lo viera, qué cosa linda, que cosa mona”, y las repetía con esa música que Paco les ponía cuando se burlaba a hurtadillas del generalísimo, de los familiares del generalísimo, y de algunas de las garambainas de la dictadura.

Isolina esperaba el momento de la venganza, y el momento, parecía haber llegado. (31)

For me, the figure of Alfonsina Bairán in Mateo’s La balada de Alfonsina Bairán is an intertext of Isolina Tavárez in Veloz’s Materia Prima—a variation on a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the Dominican dictator novel and, as will become evident as I examine Mateo’s work, a manifestation of one of the most salient themes throughout Veloz’s literary endeavors:

La historia se repite; como te he dicho en otras ocasiones, cambian los marcos, el tiempo es diferente, pero el hombre atraviesa el espacio, cruza el tiempo y repite hechos del pasado para confirmarlo. La futurología es la ciencia—arte—de confirmar el presente que vendrá. (87)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Note Veloz's historical context: many of Veloz's better known works are published during the 60-70s, when the metafictional process and structural exploration of the signifier/signified was *de rigor* within intellectual circles, particularly in the Dominican Republic where the influence of the French structuralists is well documented in the critical corpus.

<sup>2</sup> Note that many of the more "artful" Dominican dictator novels take this indirect approach, and that it corresponds with the position that most Dominicans assumed before the *trujillato*. During the dictatorship, taking an indirect approach was, for most, a survival tactic. While some more recent novels have taken a more direct approach (for example, Viriato Sención's Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, the majority of the works that do so tend toward pamphletism, lacking the creative quality that has helped many Dominicans relate to De abril en adelante so well.

<sup>3</sup> After spending some 24 years in exile during Trujillo's rule over the Dominican Republic, Juan Bosch (1909-2001), returned to the island and was elected President in the first free elections held in the country in 38 years. Bosch quickly embarked upon an agenda of social and economic reforms, which were viewed by his opponents (and the US government), as being too socialist. Opposition to Bosch's presidency grew over the months, until several major business groups called a general strike beginning on September 20, 1963 which paralyzed the country for two days. Five days later, a *coup d'état* replaced Bosch with a triumvirate led by Emilio de los Santos. In 1965, Bosch's supporters tried to return him to power inciting La Guerra

de Abril and provoking US President Lyndon Johnson to send 42,000 American troops to the island to prevent Bosch from reassuming the presidency. Bosch ran against Balaguer in 1966, but was overwhelmingly defeated and went into another exile. Bosch returned to the Dominican Republic in 1970 to join the opposition against Balaguer, founded the Dominican Liberation party in 1973, and ran unsuccessfully against Balaguer in 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, and 1994.

<sup>4</sup>The relationship between reader and writer is a reciprocal one: the text is construed by the reader and the reader is constrained by the text. In The Repeating Island, Antonio Benítez-Rojo has observed that “one might think that literature is a solitary art as private and quiet as prayer. Not true. Literature is one of the most exhibitionistic expressions in the world. This is because it is a stream of texts and there are few things as exhibitionistic as a text. It should be remembered that when a performer writes—the word *author* has justifiably fallen into disuse—it is not a text, but something previous and something qualitatively different: a pre-text. For a pre-text to transform itself into a text, certain stages, certain requisites, which I won’t list for reasons of space and argument, must be gone through. I’ll content myself by saying that the text is born when it is read by the Other: the reader. From this moment on text and reader connect with each other like a machine of reciprocal seductions. With each reading the reader seduces the text, transforms it, makes it his own; with each reading the text seduces the reader, transforms him, makes him its own. If this double seduction reaches the intensity of a “certain kind of way,” both the text and the reader will transcend their statistical limits and will drift toward the decentered

center of the paradoxical. This possible impossibility has been studied philosophically, epistemologically, through the discourse of postmodernism.” (Benítez-Rojo 23)

<sup>5</sup> On the topic of failure, Benítez-Rojo has made an interesting observation: “The most perceptible movement that the Caribbean text carries out is, paradoxically, the one that tends to project it outside its generic ambit: a metonymic displacement toward the scenic, ritual, and mythological forms, that is, toward machines that specialize in producing bifurcations and paradoxes. This attempt to evade the nets of strictly literary intertextuality always results, naturally, in a resounding failure. In the last analysis, the text is and will be a text *ad infinitum*, no matter how much it tries to hide itself as something else. Nonetheless, this failed project leaves its mark on the text’s surface, and leaves it not so much as the trace of a frustrated act but rather as a will to persevere in flight. It can be said that Caribbean texts are fugitive by nature, constituting a marginal catalog that involves a desire for nonviolence” (25). Many of Veloz Maggiolo’s works, including De abril en adelante and Materia Prima, explore the inevitable “failure” of texts to represent—and assert that, despite the failure predicted by Benítez-Rojo, many texts do in fact succeed.

<sup>6</sup> In the days that followed Trujillo’s assassination, many observers feared that the Dominican Republic would fall into social chaos without the dictator’s steadying influence. Over 40 US Navy ships, including the *Intrepid*, were placed on standby in the Caribbean to evacuate the estimated 2,000-5,000 Americans in the Dominican Republic should it become necessary (see the New York Times, 6/3/1961, “One of

Trujillo's assassins..."). The country remained relatively calm and evacuation was unnecessary; however, the political system remained tumultuous for several years until Joaquín Balaguer's government was reestablished in 1966. Between Trujillo's assassination in 1961, which interrupted Balaguer's presidency and 1966 the country had 12 different governments.

<sup>7</sup> Girard uses the case of Don Quixote to explain triangular desire. He notes that, while "desire" is a function of the "impassioned subject" and the "object of desire," there is often also a third element in relationship which Girard refers to as the "mediator:" "The straight line is present in the desire of Don Quixote, but it is not essential. The mediator is there, above that line, radiating toward both the subject and the object. The spatial metaphor which expresses this triple relationship is obviously the triangle. The object changes with each adventure but the triangle remains. The barber's basin or Master Peter's puppets replace the windmills, but Amadis is always present." (Deceit 2)



### Chapter III

#### Historical Reflection and Literary Self-Consciousness in the novels of Andrés L. Mateo

“Il y a toujours moyen de moyenner.”  
—Lyotard, La Condition postmoderne (1979)

“Il n’y a pas de hors-texte.”  
—Derrida, De la grammatologie (1967)

In his doctoral dissertation (published as Mito y cultura en la era de Trujillo, 1993), Andrés L. Mateo examines the processes of mythologization that helped create the notion that Trujillo was unlike other Dominican citizens. Specifically, Mateo is interested in how narrative contributed to the public persona of the dictator. The tension between the text as tool of mythologization and one of demythologization is frequently present in Mateo’s creative work, too. Building on the narrative foundation established by writers such as Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo uses literature to re-mythologize the dictator through his own lens. In his novel La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, Mateo employs the Lacanian idea of the “mirror of the text” (very popular when the text was written). The reflection, of course, is as distorted as the archaeological artifact created by Veloz—but this distortion notwithstanding, the reflection still retains enough of its original referent to make its own blending of original fact and fiction believable to readers. This process of reflection, which updates the notion of deconstruction popular when Veloz was writing De abril en adelante, can also be used to debunk the carefully crafted myth known as Trujillo. In the end, however, it inevitably “re-bunks” it. Because of this, what one character says about Alfonsina in Mateo’s novel applies to Trujillo as well: “We can never really

understand [Trujillo] by looking at his many reflections.” The question is whether we choose to use literature to try to understand the dictatorship, or whether it is used simply to trash his memory. While Alfonsina might try to do the former, Pisar los dedos de Dios is probably closer to the latter.

Pisar los dedos de Dios (Santo Domingo, 1979) Mateo’s first novel, chronicles the experiences of five young men in a Catholic school: Bernardo Puig, who has just arrived at the school, Mayía, Tuto Zabala, El Curro, and Jacinto Crespo. One evening, as the students are marching single file toward six o’clock mass, Bernardo Puig steps on a sprig of heather growing along the pathway,<sup>1</sup> inadvertently entering into his classmates’ ongoing game:

—Pisaste un dedo de Dios. (19)

According to the game, named after the Dominican equivalent of *rayuela* or hopscotch,<sup>2</sup> the person who steps on the heather must sneak into the school’s cellar and steal a bottle of sacramental wine. This act of transgression represents Bernardo Puig’s induction into the group. Later in the text, however, Bernardo assumes the role of “initiator,” introducing his friends (and by extension, the entire school) to the horrific realities of life beyond the school gates during the final years of the *trujillato*.

According to the text, Bernardo’s transgression forces the students to emerge from their *crisálidas* (“chrysalises,” p. 31) and fulfill a stark portent scrawled conspicuously on one of the school’s walls: “Fórmula: si vuelas, Paloma, te rompo

una ala, y si no vuelas, también” (41). The idea of transgression (to break a rule or law, or to go beyond the limits) is a recurring theme throughout the text, accompanied always by the notion of “breaking” or “rupture.” These transgressions become more and more egregious as the story develops, helping to establish a relationship between sin and punishment while at the same time creating a hierarchy based on the relative severity of each sin committed and the magnitude of their corresponding punishments. The book clearly juxtaposes the innocent games of youth (“Pisaste un dedo de Dios”) with the atrocities committed by the *trujillato* which are represented by the establishment’s disproportionate response to the boys’ actions. Bernardo, whose first significant act in the novel is to steal sacramental wine, will ultimately assume the role of sacrificial lamb.

As indicated previously, along with Bernardo’s arrival come certain changes in the school whose significance the boys do not initially comprehend. For example, the priests, who are usually careful to shield their students from the particulars of events taking place outside of the compound, accidentally mention the Castro-sponsored raid on Constanza (June 1959), where Dominican exiles attempted, unsuccessfully, an uprising against the *trujillato*:<sup>3</sup>

—¿Y Trujillo? —oímos todos con claridad—si invadieron, debe haber muerto.

Primero, fue un cosquilleo; después, mirar hacia un punto perdido.

Luego, la claridad del vacío, la cofia tendida sobre el espacio neblinoso en que

se abría el miedo como un pavo real; y el silencio en su origen, el más puro esqueleto del silencio golpeteando la nada, la incertidumbre de no se sabe qué certeza del tiempo, la llave del arcón donde se guardan infinitas respuestas prometidas. Más tarde, ya no era posible recordar si dijo lo que dijo, y nos retomamos con la modorra del que llega cansado de otros siglos, sin poder recordar una respuesta. (91-92)

The news of the attempted coup, which causes the boys to think about a world without Trujillo for the first time in their lives, effectively ruptures the sanctuary afforded by the school, creating a fissure through which the students can glimpse the outside world. These glimpses of the outside quickly become temptations which seduce the boys away from their state of isolated protection (innocence) and push them toward the unknown.<sup>4</sup> These temptations are ultimately symbolized by “el caserón de la vieja,” a sprawling old house across the street from the school from which

la música flotaba casi siempre después de estar en la cama... Entraba sigilosa por el boquerel del patio, y se colaba por las rendijas como forajido, cabalgando en la imaginación que la azotaba cuando se tardaba. Y luego se tumbaba tibia, con los brazos abiertos llamándonos desde el lado allá del mundo, en un túrgido resplandor de lascivia que era la paz y el pecado, la compasión y el odio, el albur agridulce y lo desconocido. (33)

Described repeatedly in the novel as Orpheus' lair,<sup>5</sup> this house's allure, derived from the unknown, proves irresistible to the boys who sneak out of the school to peek into its windows, eager to discover its mysteries and hopeful that this unknown might possibly include some sexual adventure. The woman who owns the house catches the boys, most of whom instinctively flee to the protection of the schoolyard; however, while his companions escape, Bernardo freezes at the window and as a result suffers the consequences of the boys' transgression: "una vieja nos mira con sus tetas aglobadas como la virgen de Fouquet, que grita malditos, malditos, y dice claramente que la van a pagar, madre mía, que de esta no se salvan, hijos de perra, y van a ver quién soy yo" (105).

Their neighbor's threat is not an empty one. Although their being caught frustrates the boys' efforts to learn more about what goes on inside the house, they are introduced instead to the harsh and violent realities of the dictatorship—the equivalent of God's punishment for Adam's transgression in Eden. In this case, however, the price of sin is more than expulsion from a tranquil garden or from God's presence. Instead, Trujillo's soldiers storm the school, beat Bernardo to death, then parade his broken body before his classmates as an example—something much more "adult" than the boys had previously imagined:

—Lo hemos traído para escarmentar —dijo—, para enseñarles. Estuvo a punto de asesinar a la hermana del señor Presidente, penetrando a su casa en

horas de la noche. Pero la guardia no duerme, carajo (levantó el brazo), ¡Abajo la conjura! (se dio en el pecho) ¡Viva el padre de la patria! (se le inundaron los ojos con lágrimas). (114)

Bernardo is the catalyst for the boy's initiation to the *trujillato* and the vehicle for the rupture of the school's Eden. Trujillo is first mentioned in the school shortly after Bernardo Puig's arrival, and the boy's violent death at the hands of the dictator's soldiers completely shatters the *locus amoenus* contained within the protective walls that surround the school. The violence of Bernardo's murder also ruptures the tranquility of the narrative experience, creating a tension between the historical aspects of the dictatorship and the reader's feelings toward the dictator. By activating readerly desire, Mateo also begins to push up against the boundaries of the narrative work. This is important since Mateo's goal is, in part, to use literature to reveal the dictator (see my "Introduction") or, as Barthes might say, a "staging of the father":

The pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense. In these cases, there is no tear, no edges: a gradual unveiling: the entire excitement takes refuge in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or in knowing the end of the story (novelistic satisfaction). Paradoxically (since it is mass-consumed), this is a far more intellectual pleasure than the other: an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of

the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father—which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, of the prohibitions of nudity, all collected in our culture in the myth of Noah’s sons covering his nakedness. (Pleasure of the Text 10)

While the violence of the *trujillato* undoubtedly brings an end to the boys’ innocence, it is important to note that neither the students nor the priests are ever completely absolved of their responsibility for the tragedy: the security breach, though it follows Bernardo, first enters the school through the priests before expanding because of the students’ unrestrained curiosity. As is noted by El Curro, who at the last minute decides not to accompany his friends to the house, “no se puede pisar los dedos de Dios impunemente” (97). Ironically, while it is El Curro who initially talks Bernardo into stealing the wine (“Puedes escoger. Podrías no bajar esta noche a las bodegas, estarías a salvo. Pero ¿lo has estado? El azar te ha llevado hasta aquí, es un azar que este código exista, y es un azar que pisaras un dedo de Dios... La inocencia es una mentira” 27), it is also El Curro who recognizes the inherent danger of this action and chooses not to participate—though it seems clear in the novel that when he tells his friends, “La van a pagar” (105), even he is still innocent with respect to the consequences that will follow.

It is not until this final scene that the reader fully comprehends the multi-layered meaning of the novel’s title. On one level, “pisar los dedos de Dios” is a relatively innocent children’s game. On another level, the text analogizes the fall of Adam,

placing the biblical story within a Dominican context. At this level, “pisar los dedos de Dios” (transgression) results in unavoidable punishment—the wrath of God, though in a Dominican context it is hard to forget the picture of the dictator that hung in so many Dominican homes which bore the caption, “Dios y Trujillo.” On a third level, “pisar los dedos de Dios” is the Dominican equivalent of hopscotch or *rayuela*, a literary allusion to Cortazar’s novel by the same name. Indeed, Mateo’s novel continues in *Rayuela*’s tradition in that the narrative cycles through short chapters focalized through seven narrators: Father Niemesch, Mayía, Tuto Zabala, El Curro, Bernardo Puig, Jacinto Crespo, and messages scrawled on the school’s walls. Like Rayuela, the text accommodates both linear and nonlinear readings.<sup>6</sup> Finally, as demonstrated above, “pisar los dedos de dios” alludes to offending Trujillo, the results of which were often deadly.

While in Pisar los dedos de Dios Mateo uses religious allusion to call attention to the violence of the dictatorship and allegorically to represent the Dominican Republic’s loss of innocence during Trujillo’s dictatorship over the Dominican Republic, it is not until Mateo’s third novel, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán (published in 1985, Premio Nacional de Novela UNPHU 1991), that the writer’s narrative becomes openly oppositional.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the way that Trujillo is presented indirectly via his sister, his soldiers and the violence committed in his name, in Alfonsina Trujillo’s absence is key to understanding the novel.

In La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, the process of dictation and its consequence, “dictatorship,” are closely scrutinized as the writer works to expose the rhetorical



forces that first empowered and later sustained Trujillo's authoritarian rule of the Dominican Republic. The novel, framed as the metafictional product of its own narration, functions like two mirrors facing each other. While actual mirrors do turn up often throughout the text together with the idea of metaphorical "reflection," I will focus my reading on two symbolic "mirrors" that make La balada de Alfonsina Bairán an oppositional text. The first of these "mirrors" is the text itself as it reflects the protagonist's life in the Dominican Republic during the final years of the *trujillato*. Like other Dominican dictator novels, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán provides the reader with a realistic representation of life in the Dominican Republic between 1959 and 1961.

The second "mirror" I will study is the narrative process, which parodies the dictator's rhetoric by presenting itself as a single, totalizing voice that inscribes and, in doing so, dominates all others—including the dictator's. This is especially significant because, as noted in my Introduction (page 4), a dictator's power derives largely from his ability to impose his singular governing voice over a particular group of people. While Mateo's strategy for using literature to symbolically dismantle the *trujillato* is similar to the one used by Veloz Maggiolo in De abril en adelante, the actual mechanics employed are different in Mateo and merit further examination. In La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, the object reflected in the mirror of the text, which I will call the "subject," is the "truth" about Dominican life under Trujillo's presidency.

In the physical world, objects reflected in facing mirrors are duplicated and re-duplicated, producing the effect of infinite regression. While each image is only an

optical reproduction of the subject, those images closest to the subject resemble the original most clearly and faithfully. However, with each subsequent reflection, the ensuing images lose detail, become increasingly blurry and, in doing so, necessarily lessen the prominence of the subject. Eventually, the process of reflection renders the original indistinguishable from its reproductions. In the end, the subject melds with its reflected background and the two (subject and background) essentially become one.

For me, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán employs this process of double-reflection as a subversive technique against the *trujillato*—and a much more subtle one than we saw in Pisar los dedos de Dios. By opposing a literary reproduction of the dictatorship (the foreground) with the process of dictation (the background), Mateo’s novel symbolically recreates the phenomenon described above and the dictator eventually disappears into the narrative background of the text. With each reflection, the dictator is shifted away from his customary position of central prominence and it becomes increasingly difficult for the readers to differentiate between the dictator and his reflections. By and by, the possibility that the dictator might be replaced by one of his reflections emerges. This convergence of the textualized dictator with his narrative background ultimately provides the reader with “room to maneuver.” In La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, it eventually becomes difficult, perhaps, to distinguish the narrative subject (Trujillo) from its background (Alfonsina Bairán, life in the Dominican Republic, or even the narrative process). As the dictator is shifted away from the center and toward the margins of the text, no other single character is offered up as Trujillo’s replacement. Instead, the *narrative*

*process* emerges as the novel's protagonist while the dictator, the author, and the novel all become narration's textualized outcomes. This recursive process of literary creation and reception empowers the reader, who the text acknowledges to be the most important enabler in the extratextual domain. In this way, the text seeks to mediate and redirect the reader's desire away from the dictator and toward the text. After referring to Lacan's idea that desire is indeed a phenomenon of mediation, Ross Chambers explains that

if we assume as we must that it [desire] is mediated in the first instance by the discourse of power—that what we desire and the ways in which we desire are produced for us in the interests of the maintenance of power—and if further we accept that mediated phenomena are, by virtue of the fact of mediation, vulnerable to oppositional “disturbance” in the system, then we can look for that which mediates shifts in desire. [. . .] “Reading,” then, as the practice that activates the mediated quality of all discourse, is the “moyen de moyenner” that produces oppositionality and realizes it as change. (xvi)

La balada de Alfonsina Bairán emphasizes the notion of dictation as mediation at both its thematic and structural levels. By generating multiple, opposing “reflections” of the *trujillato* and later juxtaposing them with other sources of discourse, the text aspires to wrest subjectivity away from the dictatorship, thereby decentralizing the source of political and social power in the Dominican Republic by

blending Trujillo with his background until he literally becomes engulfed by it. In this way, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán assumes a more active role in terms of the “performance” described by Roberto González-Echevarría in The Voice of the Masters:

This performance consists of the cancellation of central authority, a conscience to whom, even within the fiction, a certain intention can be attributed, an intention whose discovery would in turn be the object of our own act of interpretation. (82)

By first textualizing the dictatorship and then subordinating it to the reader’s interpretation, Mateo works from within the “room for maneuver” produced by the text’s game of reflection to create a free space in which the reader may examine his/her own attitudes toward the dictator. In the extratextual world, the outcome will always remain uncertain because it is a function of each of the text’s individual readings. Nevertheless, the narrative free space offered by the text creates the *potential* to influence its reader’s attitudes and desires. In doing so, the text invites the reader to expand the interaction between the reader and the text to encompass the dictatorship. The result is what René Girard calls “triangular desire” as the *trujillato*’s “authors” (writer, reader, dictator) compete for the right to represent their subject. Furthermore, because this invitation is extended to many readers—everyone who reads Mateo’s novel—La balada de Alfonsina Bairán bears the potential, albeit

immeasurable, to influence the desires of many people and therein incite lasting social change. In the pages that follow, I will offer several textual examples of how Mateo's novel uses the process of reflection to symbolically cancel the dictator's central authority.

As was mentioned previously, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán is constructed around the central image of its main character, Alfonsina, reflected in the mirrors of her brothel:

Pedí una “Presidente”, y miré hacia el trono de Alfonsina Bairán: pesada y dulce se observaba en el espejo. Tenía un vestido blanco y una pequeña esclavina que le caía en los hombros, el codo sobre la caja registradora, y esa alucinante sensación de actriz, de farsante. “Es como si viviera a la orilla de un resplandor —pensé— uno no puede saber hacia dónde mira esta mujer”. (71-2)

The beautiful daughter of an Arab shopkeeper, Alfonsina Bairán falls in love with Alberto Cuadra González, a Spanish philosopher and teacher who, from out of nowhere, arrives in her small town in the Dominican Republic. The two fall in love and eventually, Alfonsina and Alberto are married. One day at school, one of Alberto's students, the son of a prominent military figure, denounces the scholar to his father, apparently because of an anti-Trujillo remark made by Alberto while teaching his class.<sup>8</sup> The government executes Alberto, leaving Alfonsina behind to

“vestir santos,” a popular saying that becomes literal later in the text when the narrator describes watching the widowed Alfonsina maintain her shrine to her deceased husband in a corner of her apartment. After a self-imposed exile begun upon learning of Alberto’s assassination, Alfonsina emerges “defiantly” (39) from her house and opens the “Bar de la Turca” (40), the town’s only tavern and house of ill repute. As the bar’s matron, Alfonsina deliberately inserts herself within the degenerate subculture frequented by the dictator’s henchmen in hopes of someday winning the opportunity to avenge her husband’s murder. In this way, the “Bar de la Turca” becomes for Alfonsina, “una pieza clave de una forma de la venganza que aporta la autodestrucción” (41).

From the text’s initial pages, Alfonsina’s world is presented as one of appearances, where textual “reality” is reflected by the efforts of an unnamed narrator, a young anti-Trujillo revolutionary struggling to reconstruct Alfonsina’s mysterious life by means of his novel-in-progress. He bases this story upon a *mélange* of his own memories of Alfonsina, the testimonies of several prostitutes employed by Alfonsina in her “Bar de la Turca,” interviews with her lawyer, and various entries excerpted from Alfonsina’s diary. The story’s literary byproduct is a carefully constructed and self-conscious depiction of violence and oppression in which Mateo systematically works to equate Alfonsina’s world with the real world during the Trujillo regime.

Throughout the text, Mateo employs a rhetorical tactic that has been popular with other Dominican novelists writing after the *trujillato*, who in turn follow a

paradigm established by Asturias, García Márquez, and others who have written dictator narratives—that of conspicuous omission. In writing about an era in which Trujillo attempted to place himself at the center of all things Dominican, Alfonsina's story takes center stage, symbolically relegating the dictator to the narrative periphery, reducing him to little more than a literary reflection of the historical character, therein exercising a kind of suggestive defiance against the tyranny of the dictator's rhetoric. Because of this, I must clarify my earlier assertion that the dictatorship is in fact the underlying subject of La balada de Alfonsina Bairán. In a dictatorship, it might be argued that the dictator is always the subject: he resides at the center of society, and, because of this centrality, anything else automatically belongs on the periphery. This was certainly the case in the Dominican Republic, where Trujillo (like both his predecessors and his successor, Dr. Joaquín Balaguer) carefully set up a society where he resided at the Center. Balaguer comments upon the centrality of Trujillo in his memoirs:

El régimen de Trujillo fue eso y mucho más que eso. Todo el sistema político trujillista gira en torno al culto de la personalidad. Puede ser que ese rasgo se descubra también en situaciones semejantes creadas en distintos países de América, pero no con el grado que la divinización del caudillo alcanzó en la República Dominicana. Trujillo no sólo sojuzgó la voluntad, sino el pensamiento mismo de sus conciudadanos. La vida nacional, durante más de 30 años, fluctúa totalmente en torno a su nombre y obedece a las

directrices de su carácter absorbente. Muchos testimonios podrían citarse como prueba de esa absorción por un hombre de la conciencia y de la mente de infinidad de otros seres humanos. (Balaguer, Memorias 65)

Although the dictatorship may seem like only a sub-theme of the text at first glance, when read within the Dominican context its readers understand the significance of its displacement—that during the Trujillo years, the dictator was always the subject and that his absence, or any other representation of Trujillo's being shifted from his usual position of central power, is in itself a significant message in the text. As Balaguer has observed:

Trujillo no admitió jamás la presencia en el escenario en que ejerció su dominio, de ninguna figura que pudiera rivalizar con la suya. Durante su régimen, caracterizado por la influencia absorbente de su nombre y por la suma de poderes que acumuló en sus manos, todas las virtudes debieron permanecer cautelosamente enclaustradas. Aún los príncipes de la iglesia, obligados a poner los púlpitos de los intereses temporales y a mezclar las loas al déspota con las preces a la divinidad, tuvieron que permanecer reducidos, durante los 30 años de esa aberración oscurantista, a una actitud tan sumisa como el resto de la ciudadanía. (Balaguer, Memorias 68)



While Trujillo is not completely absent from the novel, Mateo's textualization of the dictatorship is indirect and almost always Trujillo exists in Alfonsina's shadow. The dictator's only major appearance in La balada de Alfonsina Bairán occurs in Chapter 5, which describes the "Desfile de reconocimiento y apoyo a la obra de gobierno del Benefactor de la Patria" allegedly held on Tuesday, February 27, 1960 (63). At this point in the novel, the narrator and his anti-Trujillo friends decide to attend the parade given to honor Trujillo. As the group passes by the Presidential box, the narrator describes his first personal glimpse of the dictator:

Donde la multitud se hizo un torbellino y se avanzaba, no por propia voluntad, sino empujado por la marea y el ruido de hombres, comenzó a aparecer la figura del dictador. Tenía un bicornio con ramas doradas, lentes oscuros y uniforme blanco. En la pechera del uniforme rebotaban los rayos de sol como en un estallido de luz, desde las medallas y condecoraciones que esplendían y, mágicamente, volvían a la multitud. No llevaba arma visible, sino una pequeña daga, también dorada, que simbolizaba, sin duda, un retoque de marcialidad. (68)

Even this brief sighting, which the narrator describes as being both ephemeral and eternal, is later depersonalized, transformed by the text into a snapshot of the dictator, only one of many reproductions of the President present during the parade.<sup>9</sup> The narrator himself comments on the artificiality of the moment that, "en fin, que la

unidad alrededor del dictador estaba pintada con gran exactitud, pero era vagamente obscena” (67). Later he recalls the fleetingness of his vision:

Lo miré y me pareció que había estado ahí una eternidad. Su imagen rodaba por los postes eléctricos, por las palmas y los cocoteros, por el aire, por el olor a salitre que a mediodía inunda la ciudad, por la ancha herida que abren los rayos de sol en el espejo de la mañana, junto a un charco de sangre, junto al silencio. Él era un absoluto que se deslizaba subrepticamente en la conciencia, y ahora estaba allí, levantando las manos para saludar, moviendo durante una eternidad los flequillos dorados de sus hombreras donde mariposean redondeles de luz; con sus grandes ojos abiertos al tiempo desnudo, sonreído, la tez rosada porque lo han maquillado para separarlo de los demás mortales, para transfundirlo en el presente y el futuro, para dejarlo caer en el pasado. Me hubiera bastado cerrar los ojos, pero sabía que era demasiado tarde, entonces pensé en el Padre Luis diciéndome que Trujillo nos retrotraía a Roma.

Fue una imagen rápida, fugaz, que atraía y ocultaba el sentido de un rostro. Estaba hecha para conmover y aplastar, con su marco sin declinación, que agotaba lo humano, y era sagrado. La vi desde el tumulto, en un celaje, avanzando a la deriva, presionado por el movimiento de esa masa sin freno que nos impulsaba a grandes trancos, como en una marea. (68-69)

In this passage, the narrator fuses Trujillo with three other objects mentioned repeatedly throughout this novel: “sol” (sun), “sangre” (blood), and “silencio” (silence)—the three elements that have come to symbolize the dictator in much of the anti-Trujillo literature. He calls Trujillo an “absolute” while simultaneously subjecting the dictator to his own perception, interpreting him for the reader. In doing this, he demonstrates that such an “absolute” is really impossible. But above all, he uses the artifice of language to present the dictator as the embodiment of tyranny past, present, and future. Strategically, once the text equates Trujillo with Tyranny, any deconstruction of Trujillo represents a parallel dismantling of Oppression, whether embodied in U.S. colonialism in the Dominican Republic (as we saw earlier in Veloz Maggiolo’s De abril en adelante), in Trujillo himself (the subject of La balada de Alfonsina Bairán), or in future dictators such as Balaguer as he is portrayed in Viriato Senci3n’s work, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios.

In describing the dictator’s ability to transcend time, the narrator relies partially on an impersonal grammatical construction: “lo han maquillado...” (They have made him up...), which wrests subjectivity from Trujillo and situates it elsewhere. In this way, even the grammatical structures support the narrative’s efforts to displace and depersonalize the dictator. In the end, Trujillo, like Alfonsina, is presented to the reader as several competing avatars: throughout much of the text he is similar to the dictator in Garc3a M3rquez’s El oto3o del patriarca—that is, he is depicted as an absent figure, manifested instead in the actions of his henchmen. When the dictator does appear personally, he is presented as if in a dream: god-like, white

and shining—but frozen in time. Having used language to freeze his glimpse of the dictator, the narrator asks one of his friends whether the friend saw Trujillo and what his reaction was. With a violence reminiscent of Bernardo Puig's beating in Pisar los dedos de Dios, his friend's response ruptures the tranquility of the dreamscape, jolting the reader back to "reality" by calling attention to the contrast between romanticized images of the dictator and this reaction which lends voice to a large number of voiceless Dominicans who grew up on the island during the dictatorship:

—¿Qué me pareció?—se repitió, saboreando la oscura marea que lo mortificaba —¡Un hijo de la gran puta!—exclamó con voz profunda. (70)

The unanticipated harshness of his friend's response shatters the narrator's illusion of the dictator's ethereal perfection, both calling attention to and unmasking the narrator's unintentional—but inevitable—mythologization of Trujillo and consequently moving the dictator away from center stage and toward the margins of the text by converting him into a puppet at the hands of an impersonal "them." In terms of the novel's structure, the fictionalized "Trujillo" will never again assume a position of centrality in the novel. In fact, the next time the reader encounters the dictator, Trujillo is once more presented as an absence whose death initiates a period of social chaos:

1961: El mundo se derrumbó como montaña de sal bajo la lluvia. Es decir, se derrumbó Trujillo, ese cabrón, que muchos de nosotros llegamos a creer que no le entraban las balas. ¡Mierda! [...] Lo que se derrumbó está ahora rebrillando en los puños frenéticos de esas multitudes que recorren las calles buscando culpables. (133-34)

Interestingly, the image of a “frozen” Trujillo during the parade as described above is presented to the reader just before the structural center of the novel. Immediately following it (but still before the book’s actual midpoint) is the scene mentioned previously in which the narrator observes Alfonsina Bairán in the mirror in her tavern. Even in terms of the physical text, Trujillo has been systematically shifted away from the center and replaced by the *image* of Alfonsina: not Alfonsina herself, but her reflection in a mirror, described by a nameless narrator inscribed within another writer’s book—a ghost. Just as opposing mirrors yield “ghost” reflections of the subject, opposing Trujillo yielded “ghosts” which inhabited the space between the narrator and the dictatorship at both the textual and extratextual levels: “Aquí se mataba por cualquier cosa, por cualquier pendejada...” (161). In fact, Mateo’s novel repays the dictator in kind, carefully reducing him to a fuzzy image throughout the majority of text. After the narrator’s epiphany of Trujillo, the next time the dictator is explicitly mentioned in the text he actually *is* a ghost: the reader does not “see” the dictator; instead, (s)he sees only the pandemonium that followed Trujillo’s death (see Chapter 10).

Since the dictator has been symbolically shifted away from his customary position of dominant discourse, the reader becomes empowered to (re)interpret Trujillo's place in the social hierarchy because now the reader has taken control of the narrative and the "dictator" is subjected to his/her interpretation: in other words, the reader is responsible for the (re)construction of the dictator via his reading/interpreting the text. In this way, the book solicits a reader-response reading, not only to the story of Alfonsina but also to the ongoing history of the Dominican Republic. Empowered by the opportunity to re-situate the dictatorship relative to Alfonsina, the reader also becomes symbolically change-enabled (e.g., in a position to exercise symbolic power over the dictator), and it logically follows that, if enough readers decide against re-centering Trujillo or future dictatorships in the Dominican Republic, the circle of power will necessarily expand to include other, more participatory forms of government. In other words, the text suggests that La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, or any other work of fiction, can become an agent for effecting lasting social change—provided that the reader does more than just read.

The fact that Mateo works to empower his reader is somewhat ironic, given the often-antagonistic attitude that his narrator expresses toward the Dominican people. When attending the parade in Chapter 5, the exchange between the narrator and his friends betrays the narrator's general frustration with the Dominican populace:

—¿Qué hay? dijo la voz sin forma de Felvio Padillo.

—Es eso —dije, señalando hacia afuera—La muchedumbre.

—¿Pero tú comprendes, no? Trujillo necesita de estas cosas, internacionalmente, lo están aislando.

—Bueno, yo soy también mi pensamiento. Todas esas gentes, su algarabía, sus cartelones, acaban por derrotarme, cedo ante ellos.

—Están ciegos, coño, o tienen miedo, es todo.

—Yo tengo miedo también.

—Pero es distinto.

—¿Distinto?

—Sí, para esa gente el mundo está bien como está, pero ni siquiera de esto se dan cuenta.

—¡Oh, es eso exactamente!

[...]

“Ahora está atribulado —pensé—no quiere hablar, no parece conocerse. Le he hecho sentir la idea que Trujillo es también esa muchedumbre”. (64-65)

The book recognizes that “Trujillo is the mob,” but it might also be said that “The mob is Trujillo,” and this reciprocating relationship is the reason that a book can spark social change. It’s also the key to the tone with which Mateo relates it to the dictatorship. A similar response occurs several chapters later, when the narrator expresses his first reaction to how the mob responds to news of the dictator’s death:

“¡Coño —me dije, aterrorizado—están adoloridos. Por la muerte de esa bestia, están adoloridos!” (123).<sup>10</sup>

Some might interpret the people's reaction to Trujillo's death as the effect of the psychological codependency that often haunts victims of abusive relationships, the description of which bolsters the novel's realism. But given the text's recurring pattern of reader-empowerment, another possible interpretation of the narrator's reaction toward the people's mourning is to link it to Mateo's efforts to instill readerly aversion toward those who might continue to sanction the political structures that had caused them so much pain during Trujillo's presidency. Since the reader's interpretation can now determine Trujillo's place within the “new” (albeit textual) social hierarchy and is thus responsible for the (re)construction of the dictator through the process of reception, the author employs the readers' own guilt, brought about by self-recognition in the mirror of the text, to further alienate them from the dictator. This is possible because many of Mateo's readers are also the people who mourned the death of Trujillo in the way described by the text. As co-creators, or perhaps potential co-conspirators, these readers now have the choice of textualizing themselves as accessories to the dictatorship, thus confirming their guilt by association, or distancing themselves from Trujillo by assuming a posture similar to the one put forward by the narrator.

The more removed the author can make his readers want to be from the dictator, the better the chance that those readers will be less sympathetic to the processes that permitted his rise—the same processes the text has laid bare through its



metafictional game of “mirrors.” In other words, in its antagonistic portrayal of a sympathetic public, Mateo’s text seeks to draw his readers away from the dictatorship and from those who would be sympathetic to it, simultaneously swaying his readers’ future desires through their experience with the text. As mentioned in my introduction, creating a disturbance in the dictator’s rhetorical system by introducing opposing voices is the ultimate goal of both the narrator (via the anti-Trujillo pamphlets he distributes) and the author (by means of his novel, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán).

Mateo’s dismantling and subsequent reconstruction of the dictator’s central authority is a painstaking process initiated early on in his novel. From its title page, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán calls into question the relationship between the subject and object. Although Alfonsina’s character enjoys titular prominence, it is in fact the *ballad* (in other words, her literary (re)creation) and not Alfonsina or even Trujillo that is the primary subject of Mateo’s novel. The narrator, who remains anonymous throughout the text, first meets his protagonist in 1959. Later in the same year, his fascination with her enigmatic personality is renewed and deepened when, now active in the anti-Trujillo movement, he is asked to work in Alfonsina’s neighborhood. The rest of the text, which covers the three-year period from 1959-1961, focuses on his efforts to reconstruct the events that transformed Alfonsina into the mysterious proprietor of the sector’s only bar/brothel and finally culminated in her mysterious disappearance. Nested within this “outer” narration, however, are at least two other significant sub-plots: that of Alfonsina’s life and the story of the Dominican Republic

during the last several years of the *trujillato*, a story that straddles both the fictional and non-fictional realms. The result of this narrative *mise en abyme* is yet another set of opposing literary mirrors, which blur the distinctions between the novel's interior and exterior components while at the same time converging the limits of the textual and extratextual domains. Even the narrator seems to lose track of these distinctions, when, in the final paragraphs of the novel he writes:

“Bartolina sueña a Alfonsina, pero Bartolina fue antes soñada por Alfonsina. Y todos los sueños de Alfonsina eran como mover su pasado, entre ramajes de árboles desolados en los que ella ponderó cosas que no fueron. Alfonsina soñó a mí, al ‘Bar de la Turca’, a los parroquianos alertos y a los dormidos; ruborizó la máscara que llevaba pero se recostó a su crimen, a su venganza; y hasta fue hermosa apoyada, en el sueño de todos, viviendo lo que habría vivido en la boca profética del advino, si su vida no fuese ahora un destino sin nombre, una carnada que únicamente el amarillo sueño de la alegre Bartolina puede rescatar, arrebatándose a lo que fue primero el sueño imposible de Alfonsina”. (168)

The quotation marks in the passage above are the implicit author's and they call attention to the artifice of creation. Conspicuously present in La balada de Alfonsina Bairán is the Unamuno-like idea of the text's character creating the author, recognized by the narrator in the final paragraph of the text when he writes, “¡Coño,

me balanceo en una historia llorona!” (168).<sup>11</sup> The interjection, “¡Coño!” first uttered in the novel’s opening paragraph not only suggests the circular nature of the text, but also that of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. This text seeks to break that cycle, which is especially evident in the last lines of the book when the narrator/author asks both himself and his reader, “¿Todo ha terminado?” (168). The novel’s multiple story lines converge in this one question at the end of the text. The question can only be answered by the reader. Yet the reader who reaches this point in the text has been “educated” by it, having participated in a metaphorical disempowerment and decentralization of the dictatorship: hence, it is possible that (s)he can choose to expand this narrative “room for maneuver” into the extratextual domain. Like Veloz Maggiolo’s De abril en adelante, Mateo’s La balada de Alfonsina Bairán seeks to postpone closure and bridge the gap between fiction and nonfiction, locating closure with the reader and his/her interaction with Dominican time present and future instead of placing it within the confines of the text.

Throughout the text, the narrator’s meta-literary reflections help to increase the reader’s awareness of the artificiality of the narrative process by making it difficult for the reader to resort to the narrative convention of “suspended disbelief.” Similarly, Mateo’s textual criticisms of Trujillo’s regime draw attention to the dictator’s means to power. Given that the text “reflects” the methods used by Trujillo to maintain his power over the country, it is ironic that the narrator, who has dedicated himself to “reflecting” upon both Alfonsina and Dominican history, declares his fear of mirrors: “Tengo miedo de los espejos; los espejos viven de sus

contrarios y descubren cosas, lugares donde vagabundeo el tiempo dejando huellas.

¡Ah, los espejos sólo se compadecen de las putas!” (90)

The narrator also repeatedly acknowledges a crucial paradox throughout the novel: while using narrative to mirror, denounce, and displace the *trujillato*, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán simultaneously reasserts the very structures used in the dictator's empowerment. In this way, Mateo's novel inevitably contributes to the ongoing mythologization of one of Latin America's most repressive dictatorships, which is precisely the paradox described by Roberto González-Echevarría in The Voice of the Masters when he writes:

Dictator novels [...] undermine the myth of dictator and create a game of mirrors that corrodes the relation that earlier novels had established between myth and history. [...] The postmodern dictator-novel shatters this delusion by showing that it represents a dream of power and authority through which the Supreme Self of postromantic ideology still secures its throne. This new novel demonstrates in its very structure that in reality dictators are not powerful telluric forces, but ideological diversions, shadows cast by the true powers in today's world. (83)

Surprisingly enough, instead of overtly working to establish credibility with the reader, as one might expect in such an endeavor, the narrator works to enshroud his text in a sense of uncertainty about the legitimacy of the (re)constructed version of

Alfonsina's life, repeatedly calling into question the recourses of history and laying bare the rhetorical foundations of Trujillo's power through a process that uses literature to parody the same processes of dictation/reception that enable authoritarian rule. In fact, this narrative parody of the dictatorial process becomes a literary motif as the narrator constantly reminds the reader of the artifice inherent in the narrative process: "Tejí la historia poco a poco, sin pasión, sin final, inclinándome sobre el silencio; quizás porque de esta manera yo podría adivinar la próxima etapa de mi vida" (11). Despite the mask of objectivity that the narrator claims to employ throughout the text, it becomes apparent that the novel is not simply the narrator's attempt to reconstruct the "sorda ficción del amor" (13) that he claims: not only does La balada de Alfonsina Bairán attempt to backfill Alfonsina's history, but it also constructs a type of collective memory of Dominican culture during the years inscribed within the text. Furthermore, although the artifice of writing is foregrounded throughout the work, it becomes clear that the author is exploiting the gap between signifier and signified, creating "room for maneuver" where he (and by extension, his readers) can symbolically rewrite history and by doing so possibly incite the Dominican people away from future oppression in the way described by the narrator when he says, "Hay que atormentar a la gente, sacudir, estamos viviendo tiempos difíciles" (50). Since the book equates silence with complicity, its own publication, at both the textual and extratextual levels, symbolically breaks the silence and stands in opposition to the regime: "uno no se puede reducir al silencio" (99).

The idea of “ghosts” (conceptually related to the idea of individual/collective memory) like the idea of reflection and of history, is developed at the thematic, structural, and allegorical levels of the text. Probably the best example of “ghosts” appearing at the text’s thematic level occurs between pages 78-88 where the narrator finds himself confronted with death—ironically, on his birthday. In order to escape from the “real world,” the narrator enters Alfonsina’s bar, orders a beer, and begins to observe the bar’s other patrons. Suddenly, the bar’s bouncer (Nelson Nova) enters the room, looks into the mirrors along the bar, and begins to shout crazily that he’s seen his dead girlfriend: “¡Está ahí —doña— la acabo de ver. Abrí la puerta y la vi. En el espejo, doña, se reía!” (79)

Alfonsina is unable to calm the crazed Nelson, who closes his fists and attacks the mirror, shattering it while screaming, “¡Muere de nuevo, perra! ¡Vuelve a morir!” (80). As Alfonsina struggles to calm Nelson, one of the bar’s patrons, el señor Matías, jumps to his feet and begins to pistol whip Nova savagely. The narrator intervenes, saving the bouncer from Matías’s jarring brutality. Matías’s homicidal wrath is quickly redirected at the narrator:

Él me miró con un acto fisiológico, sin alterarse, presentándome un ligero parpadeo involuntario que le lagrimaba el ojo derecho, sosegando el pie con el que pateaba al muchacho, levantando levemente el arma hacia mí y respirando con dificultad el aire caliente. (81)

This time Alfonsina intercedes, saving the narrator's life and avoiding an incident like the one depicted in Pisar los dedos de Dios. While helping him to escape through the back door, Alfonsina warns the narrator, "Usted no tiene idea del peligro que ha corrido... Ese hombre... pudo haberlo matado sin pestañear" (83-84).

Again, the "reflections" in this story are crucial. First, at the story-line level the incident is a duplication of the one presented earlier in the novel where Alfonsina's fiancée intervenes in a fight between a soldier and a civilian and is consequently murdered by the same man who threatens the narrator at the structural center of the story. Second, it presents Alfonsina in her role as mediator between the soldiers and the narrator. Third, since the narrator recollects the story, it constructs a sort of narrative *mise en abyme*, consequently drawing attention to the rhetorical structures upon which the narration itself is founded—in other words, the artifice of narration. Finally, it repeats the tyrannical structure of the dictatorship (dictator/populace, soldiers/populace, author/narrator text) while the dictator is absent. Since the soldier derives his power from the absent dictator, the scene demonstrates that even the President's power is mediated, to a great extent, by his strongman making his "centrality" an illusion. As González-Echevarría has pointed out, something similar happens in Gabriel García Márquez's work, El otoño del patriarca, where "the dictator is, for the most part, absent in mind and body from the center of power" (76). In La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, just as in other prominent dictator novels, "the dictator is shown not to be the bearer of power through voice, but a figure needed to show by his demise the controlling power of writing" (76).

The power of writing indeed serves as the prelude to Mateo's argument; however, its crux is that, despite the power of the pen, writing cannot recreate Alfonsina as she was. On the contrary, it can produce only unfaithful, reflected images of the subject reflected by the text—memories, or even “ghosts.” This point is made in the penultimate chapter when, after Alfonsina disappears having avenged Alberto's death by killing Matías, the narrator visits Alfonsina's lawyer, Dr. Eleuterio Cordones:

Vine, señor —expliqué con humildad— porque pensé que usted podría saber algo de ella. Después de la noche de fuego, nadie ha sabido nada. La he buscado, usted es la última persona a quien visitó, no me queda nadie más, es como si se hubiera esfumado. (157)

The lawyer explains to the narrator that it was not the Alfonsina that they knew, but rather her all-encompassing quest for vengeance “que la liberó ahora del espejo de la memoria en que permanecía fija para siempre la escena del crimen inexplicable del marido.”

—Comienzo a entender —dije— interrumpiéndolo.

—Hay un error —dijo, corriéndome—. Usted no puede entender.

(158)



The narrator cannot “understand” because of the distance between the signifier and the signified. Cordones (“laces,” in English, which is appropriate since the lawyer helps the narrator to lace together his plot and also significant in that it is *luto* or death that connects them) compares Alfonsina’s vengeance to the act of writing, making Alfonsina the author who opposed Trujillo’s totalizing voice: “— ...Ella fue superior a mí, a usted, a nosotros. Se levantó de la indefensión y construyó su venganza, paso a paso, día a día, palabra a palabra” (159). Throughout the discussion, the author repeatedly says that he feels like a “pretexto, una mera encarnación” (163) as he writes a story that he himself labels “difícil de creer” (165), a story “que lo deja sin argumento” (165) which he has nevertheless provided in order to turn the internal narration into the external book being read by the reader. Slowly, even the author begins to “disappear” into the background of the text. And in a way, Cordones is correct when he asserts that Alfonsina is superior to both the narrator and himself, for her disappearance, unlike the narrator’s or Trujillo’s countless victims’, is self-directed, an act of agency rather than of victimization.

Obviously, if the real Alfonsina is unrecoverable via narrative artifice, so is the *trujillato*. Since the novel seems to be conscious of this fact, we can speculate that the novel is actually trying to exploit it, denying the historicity of a fictional character while simultaneously fictionalizing a historical one. Like the mirrors in a funhouse which distort the images they reflect, La balada de Alfonsina Bairán distorts the *trujillato*. The result of activity depends heavily on the reader, who must ultimately decide whether or not to accept this or other renditions of Trujillo as “truth.”

Furthermore, since the true subject is lost forever, one fictive reproduction is as good as another and, because of its verisimilitude, Mateo's version of the *trujillato* has the opportunity as well as the potential to overwrite previous or less robust versions of the dictatorship. The book, then, asserts its potential to become as totalizing as the dictatorship by inscribing a decentralized version of Trujillo within its pages and offering itself up as an archi-text while at the same time acknowledging that such texts are inevitably fictional and incapable of reproducing fact accurately.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraphs, it's important to note that my reading of the Alfonsina is supported by another of Mateo's works—his doctoral thesis, Mito y cultura en la era de Trujillo (1993). Here, Mateo notes how Trujillo used a process which Mateo describes as “dehistorization” as a tool of dictatorial empowerment:

Este sistema de significación mitológica [el de Trujillo] se conformó a partir de la deshistoricización, usando el pasado como ideología, haciendo de cada mito en particular una respuesta satisfactoria a la decepción del pasado. La dialéctica trujillista era en esto una simplicidad aplastante: su ruptura total con el pasado atravesaba el lenguaje que el propio mito-sistema le prestaba. Cada uno de los mitos trujillistas respondía a una de las decepciones de la historia, que el pensamiento dominicano del siglo XIX había hecho angustia existencial. (Mito y cultura 15)

For me, Mateo has employed essentially the same process he attributes to Trujillo above in his novel La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, but this time turning it *against* the dictator. Given the way the Trujilloists used narrative to craft the dictator's persona, narrative literature provides an opportune way of de/re-constructing it:

Así, cada mito responde con autosuficiencia a la contabilidad de la mentira que el uso del pasado como ideología impuso en la “Era” (Mito y cultura 15)

Lo que resalta del trujillismo es cómo la apropiación de la sociedad en su conjunto, se realiza a través de un ‘corpus’ de legitimación cuya habla es el mito. (Mito y cultura 18)

Mateo is fully conscious of this process of legitimization employed the dictator's men and, to a large extent, actually manipulates it. Just as the “success” of De abril en adelante is undeterminable by the text and dependent upon the reader, so it is with Mateo's novels—though I believe that the care with which the dictator has been systematically decentralized, and the metafictional structures that highlight the procedural aspects of the narrative experience, point to the writer's hope that the text will provoke a more reflective outcome. Perhaps this more subtle way of dissenting against the dictatorship represents a maturation of thought from the dead end, “all you can do is hate it” approach Mateo takes in Pisar los dedos de Dios—a recognition that

the room for maneuver created by the process of reception creates an opportunity for more. In my next chapter, I suggest that Viriato Sención takes this a step farther and actually manipulates extratextual reality with his work, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The significance of heather becomes clear at the allegorical level of the text: Bernardo Puig steps on the blossoms of an evergreen plant, usually found growing in open, barren, poorly-drained soil. This act foreshadows Bernard's actions that shatter the peace and tranquillity of the school.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as *trúcalo*, *trúcamelo*, and *el muñeco*.

<sup>3</sup> Many historians believe that the insurrection in Constanza marked the beginning of the end for Trujillo, as many Dominicans became convinced they would enjoy Cuban support in their struggles against the dictatorship. See, for example, Frank Moya Pons' The Dominican Republic: A National History, pp. 371-372.

<sup>4</sup> According to Roland Barthes, the "cracking of the door" would be irresistible to the boys: "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no 'erogenous zones' (a foolish expression besides); it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is the flash itself which seduces or rather, the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" (The Pleasure of the Text pp. 9-10). "Appearance-as-disappearance" becomes the vehicle for discovery in Mateo, the catalyst that moves the reader beyond the Eden of the text and the (textualized) world beyond.

<sup>5</sup> Mateo's reference to the Orpheus myth is appropriate, though it has been transformed in this novel: "The astonishing power of song and poetry, apparently feeble and capricious, overcame assaults from warriors, the forces of nature, and the wishes of the gods" (Compte, Mythology p. 150). Later in the story, after Orpheus' lack of self control resulted in the loss of Eurydice, Orpheus never looked at another woman and surrounded himself with boys. This behavior enraged the Thracian women, who killed the poet, ripped his corpse apart, and threw the pieces into the river. While Mateo's novel contains many elements of the Orpheus story (the lure of the music from the old house, Bernardo's lack of self-control, and his eventual demise at the command of Trujillo's sister), they have been compressed and rearranged to foreshadow the novel's outcome.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike Rayuela, however, Pisar los dedos de dios does not include navigational instructions to the reader. The link between the novel's title and its narrative structure is an oblique one, most visible to readers familiar with both Dominican vocabulary and Cortazar's novel.

<sup>7</sup> Mateo's second novel, La otra Penélope (Santo Domingo: Editora Taller, 1981), is set in the Dominican Republic in 1968 and alludes to the Guerra de Abril (1965) and the ongoing corruption and government-sponsored violence, represented in the character of Dr. Latorre, the police inspector. Again, the story is an initiation story: in the first of parallel plots, Feliz Marcel Artiles becomes romantically involved with Alba Besonia. Eventually, Feliz learns that Alba is also involved with

Latorre. In the second plot, Alvaro Pascual (Feliz's friend and an activist during the Guerra de Abril) is murdered and Feliz notices Latorre near Alvaro's body in crime scene pictures published in the newspaper. As the novel's conflicts converge on the characters of Feliz and Latorre, confrontation becomes inevitable. While I will not address La otra Penélope here, it might be interesting to compare De abril en adelante and Mateo's work, both of which treat approximately the same time period. As he did with the myth of Orpheus, Mateo tweaks the myth of Penelope. Instead of focusing on Penelope as the virtuous wife who prevailed over the evil forces that sought to corrupt loyalty to husband, home and family, he focuses on the "other," unfaithful Penelope. In mythology, this is the Penelope whose affair with Hermes produced Pan. In La otra Penélope, this tension plays out via the Feliz-Alba-Latorre love triangle.

<sup>8</sup> I say "apparently..." because an overriding feeling of uncertainty surrounds the dictatorship in each of the three works studied here, emphasizing the triviality of human life during the years of oppression when political "threats" often disappeared, leaving behind only the question of what that particular person had done to offend the dictator. Interestingly, each of the novels I study pays particular attention to the victimizer. In De abril en adelante, Colonel Aguirre is subjected to the processes of textualization and symbolic defeat as his son inscribes him within the "protonovela." In La balada de Alfonsina Bairán, el señor Matías is assigned a similar role. In Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (see Chapter IV), the role is often played by Doctor Mario Ramos, a literary rendition of Joaquín Balaguer.

<sup>9</sup> The “reproductions of the President” listed by the narrator also include countless placards with their “fotos gigantes del tirano” (66) and the soldiers in dress uniforms that seemed, “por lo inmóvil, el espejo de una estatua” (68).

<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is a common theme throughout much of post-Trujillo critical thought in the Dominican Republic. Even Joaquín Balaguer mentions it in his memoirs. This mention will become the basis for one of the most frequent criticisms of him as Trujillo’s protégé and successor—a topic that will be seized upon by Viriato Sención in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, which I’ll study in detail in Chapter IV: “Nadie que no haya vivido en el país durante la “Era de Trujillo” puede medir en su exacta dimensión lo que significó moralmente para los dominicanos aquel período de nuestra historia. El hombre, en esa época, se rebajó hasta el punto de convertirse en un títere. El sentimiento de la dignidad ciudadana desapareció totalmente. La familia, como institución social, quedó resquebrajada. Pero lo peor de esa situación no radicó en la eliminación de las libertades individuales ni en la pérdida en términos absolutos del derecho a disenter. Lo peor de aquella época consistió en la aceptación por todos, o por casi todos, de aquel cataclismo social como un hecho irremediable. La voluntad del Estado, encarnada en un hombre puesto por las circunstancias por encima de todas las jerarquías tradicionales, sustituyó a todas las demás potestades hasta un nivel que no ha alcanzado ni aun en los países organizados sobre una concepción monárquica o sobre una concepción naturalista del Estado. La voz de la Iglesia, sometida poco a poco a la autoridad temporal,



desapareció prácticamente y los resortes en que descansa la institución doméstica fueron en gran parte eliminados.” (Balaguer, Memorias 91)

<sup>11</sup> At some point the boundaries between text and real world converge, bringing to mind Unamuno’s Niebla: “Mientras Augusto y Víctor sostenían esta conversación nivolesca, yo, el autor de esta novela, que tienes, lector, en la mano, y estás leyendo, me sonreía enigmáticamente al ver que mis nivolescos personajes estaban abogando por mí y justificando mis procedimientos, y me decía a mí mismo: ‘¡Cuán lejos estarán estos infelices de pensar que no están haciendo otra cosa que tratar de justificar lo que yo estoy haciendo con ellos! Así, cuando uno busca razones para justificarse no hace en rigor otra cosa que justificar a Dios. Y yo soy el Dios de estos dos pobres diablos nivolescos’” (131). La palabra de Alfonsina Bairán seeks to push beyond the limits of the text, and like Unamuno’s *nívola* and “confundir el sueño con la vela, la ficción con la realidad, lo verdadero con lo falso; confundirlo todo en una sola niebla” (143-144).

## Chapter IV

### Trapping Imposters: Narration and Authority in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios

Qui est le meilleur, le plus fort et le plus rusé, du renard ou du loup? ...Je le crois bien équivalents, et je crois que cela dépend. Tantôt, c'est Achille, tantôt c'est Ulysse, tantôt penche la balance dans ce sens, tantôt elle change ses poids, vire au guindeau dans l'autre sens. Ce jeu est une machine que va et vient, comme une pesette oscillante. Et c'est notre fléau.

— Michel Serres, Le Parasite.

No hay novela, por torpe que sea, que no encierre algún mensaje sugestivo o que no roce con algo tentador nuestro ánimo.

— Joaquín Balaguer,  
Memorias de un cortesano de la “Era de Trujillo

Born in San José de Ocoa (1941), Viriato Sención is one of the Dominican Republic's best-known living writers. Following Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Sención was one of many students who left the Dominican Republic for the university. He studied political science in the Instituto de Educación in Coronado, Costa Rica. Since 1979, Sención has lived in New York City where he also studied Hispanic literature in Lehman College. To date, Sención has published three major works: two novels, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (1993) and Los ojos de la montaña (1997), and a collection of short stories entitled La enana Celania (1994).

Both of Sención's novels explore the interrelatedness of history and fiction; and while my primary focus in this chapter will be on his better-known novel, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, in an effort to continue to develop my panoramic review of Dominican narrative through the writers studied here, I will first explore how the topic is treated in his more recent work, Los ojos de la montaña. Unlike Los

que falsificaron la firma de Dios, Los ojos de la montaña moves away from the *trujillato* and explores the myths and legends from the southern part of the island (El Maniel, a literary rendition of Sención's birthplace, San José de Ocoa) and its Afro-Hispanic culture.<sup>1</sup> As he will do in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, Sención resorts to a framing device as an excuse to tell his story. The novel's implicit author claims to have dreamed the book's content which is now being narrated to the reader. The plot follows Pedro José's life in El Maniel, his friendship with don Emeterio Balbuena (the living "archive" of El Maniel's secret history), his love affair with a prostitute, and his friendship with Tatico el de Tico. It also chronicles the gradual deterioration of a town whose secret history of racial intolerance and violence eventually leads to its condemnation and ultimately to the extinction of its inhabitants according to the will of the spirit that watches over the Loma del Zorro.

For much of the novel, Pedro José is characterized as a picaresque hero; however, in the last quarter of the book, which corresponds to the period following don Emeterio's death, the story is reminiscent of Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo—except that in Comala the dead live on indefinitely while El Maniel's citizens, whose foreheads mysteriously become marked with their death dates, become walking dead whose certain knowledge of the future catalyzes their eventual fate. Sotico Abulto, a grungy vagabond whose outward appearances foreshadow the extinction of El Maniel's townspeople, mediates between the spirit of the mountain and the town.

At the novel's outset, don Emeterio briefly tells Pedro José about how Sotico once saved the town from an outbreak of cholera, then focuses on how Sotico's heroism slowly faded from the town's collective memory:

Pasó el tiempo y así vino el olvido, que mal agradece; y muchas veces Sotico Abulto llegó a ser objeto de burlas y agresiones por gente desaprensiva, cuando, esporádicamente, reaparecía en las calles del pueblo... Aunque percibía el desprecio que su presencia provocaba, nada parecía violentar la naturaleza pasiva de Sotico Abulto, quien soportaba con indiferencia sarcasmos, humillaciones y bellaquerías. Pero algo se iría sedimentando en el pozo de su alma. (28)

When don Emeterio dies, El Maniel's history disappears with him, becoming irrecoverably mixed up with gossip, conjecture, and fiction, the result of the townspeople's poor recollection of the past. Absent don Emeterio, Sotico, the enigmatic outsider, becomes the town's only link to El Maniel's shadowed past. The town's forgetting of history seems to trigger a rapidly festering irritation deep inside Sotico. By the novel's end, his role is no longer that of savior. Instead, Sotico is portrayed as an angel of death, and extinction becomes the natural consequence of El Maniel's refusal to remember its collective past.

Ernest Renan has written: "Forgetting, I would go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical

studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle] of nationality” (590).<sup>2</sup> While Los ojos de la montaña condemns Dominican society’s propensity to forget its history, Mateo’s first and more important novel, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, leans more towards the “historical error” described by Renan and could even be read as a means of “polluting” history in an effort to move past the *trujillato* and (re)create the island’s national identity. The presence of popular mythology and the concept of “forgetting” history, combined with the idea of the “corruption” of historical discourse, are the common threads that link Sención’s two novels.<sup>3</sup> While Los ojos de la montaña is a much more traditional novel and is arguably better written (at least stylistically) than Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, the scandalous popularity of Sención’s first novel probably overshadows the writer’s other literary endeavors. Given that my primary focus is the Dominican dictator novel, the remainder of this chapter will focus on Sención’s first work, in which the previously untold secrets of Balaguer’s government take center stage.

Many writers treating Latin American dictatorships have sought to accomplish three outcomes. First, writers such Asturias in El Señor Presidente and Roa Bastos in Yo el supremo have tried to reveal the rhetorical structures supporting the dictator’s power, to demonstrate its lack of “essence,” and to expose its intrinsic arbitrariness. Second, they try to show how popular “authorization” permitted the dictator to maintain his position of power. Finally, these writers have sought to incite the reader’s disillusionment with the dictatorship, using literature as a tool for shifting readerly desires away from the dictator and toward something else— often the

narrative process itself— in hopes of displacing the dictator from the rhetorical center and in doing so, achieving a symbolic instance of dictatorial “disempowerment.”

In accomplishing these objectives, however, as many readers have pointed out before, dictator novels inevitably rely upon the same rhetorical structures they seek to expose, falling into a well-known trap of working to subvert one hegemonic system only to replace it with another. Viriato Sención’s Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (Santo Domingo, 1992) clearly participates in this longstanding struggle between the dictator and the rhetoric of dictatorship as Sención works to achieve the three objectives set forth above. Yet despite falling into this rhetorical “trap” so well known to students of post-modern theory, this particular novel is unique in that it first advertises and then strategically manipulates the unique characteristics of language to break away from the physical limits of the text and symbolically checkmate a modern dictator in both the fictional and nonfictional worlds. In the rest of this chapter, I will explain how Viriato Sención skillfully uses narrative to subvert the power of Trujillo’s political successor, Joaquín Balaguer, paradoxically trapping him within the “room to maneuver” described by Chambers, while simultaneously demonstrating to the reader the potential for achieving a certain kind of personal freedom.

From its very title (translated by Asa Satz as They Forged the Signature of God, 1995), Sención’s novel explores the concept of mediation and the rivalry between power and empowerment, between authority and authorization, between authenticity and forgery. As is seen in many other dictator novels, the literary world created by Sención closely imitates its historical referent— in this case, the final

months of the *trujillato* and the inception of Dr. Joaquín Balaguer's own repressive government over the island. As a (re)construction of Dominican life under Balaguer, the text inevitably is at odds with the "historia oficial" offered by the government. In this particular case, whereas Balaguer (who was also a writer and literary historian) sought personally to dictate the written history of both Trujillo's and his own presidencies, the novel creates an alternative version of the "facts." Faced with multiple versions of the Dominican story, and particularly within this one that proposes to shorten the distance between "real world" and "fiction" presented in the government's version, the reader is ultimately provided with an opportunity to choose which of the two versions of "history" (s)he determines to be the more credible representation of what *really* happened during the regime. Obviously, Sención's re-reading of the dictatorship becomes a more viable candidate for the privilege of being a "historical" representation (and therefore a bigger threat to the regime) when the dictator's credibility is suspect in the eyes of the reader— and Balaguer's presidency, which was known for its secrecy, provided plenty of informational "gaps" that created high levels of popular suspicion toward the government. In such an environment, the text that will ultimately "win" will be the one that most convincingly fills in the gaps in the reader's understanding of the historical record based on its verisimilitude and his/her understanding of and personal experience with the underlying historical events. Hence, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios competes directly with Balaguer's rendition of Dominican politics.

This said, it is important to note that there can never be a “winning” text in the sense of a complete, unbiased reporting of historical fact. The constant manipulations of historiography by Trujillo’s spin machine, led by Balaguer, combined with Dominicans’ natural tendency to villainize the dictatorship, make it extremely difficult to separate fact from fiction. Instead, “history” becomes the text that is authorized by its readers and accepted by them as being factual. Whether authorized by their readers as “history” or labeled as “fiction,” both narratives further mythologize the dictatorship. This process is similar to the one described by Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces when he observes that “the prime function of mythology [is] to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in contrast to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back” (11).<sup>4</sup> Stated in another way, mythology seeks to overcome the realities of life with narrative. By extension, Senci3n’s novel hopes to carry the Dominican Republic past Balaguer’s government of the country. In doing so, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios has the potential to become the quintessential Dominican mythology by creating a narrative palimpsest of what actually happened during Balaguer’s presidency. Whether the text is successful at re-mythologizing the *trujillato* depends entirely upon the reader.

There is some indication that Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios has indeed re-mythologized Balaguer’s extension of the *trujillato*. Vanessa 1lvarez, the owner of one Dominican bookstore, notes:



I'm old enough to affirm that the book doesn't have anything that's not true. It satisfies me that someone had enough courage to put things so bluntly. It's important for young people who don't know many details about this country's history. (Kolker 14A)

Obviously, there is much in the novel that is untrue; however, that certain readers think highly of the book because of its "historical" value demonstrates fiction's ability to overwrite history, particularly where readers are already suspicious of history. While reaction to Sención's bastardization of history has been received well by many Dominican readers, the same cannot be said for Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo. The difference in reaction will be examined more closely in a later chapter.

While Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is similar to the other novels I have studied so far in how it establishes a dialogue with the historical record, it is also very different from many of its Dominican counterparts in one important way. While Marcio Veloz Maggiolo's De abril en adelante and Andrés L. Mateo's La balada de Alfonsina Bairán implicate Joaquín Balaguer in dictatorial violence only through his association with the *trujillato*, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is the most noteworthy work to attack Balaguer's continuation of Trujillo-like domination of the country directly—and to do so while Balaguer was still alive and in power (1992).<sup>5</sup> The novel's direct attack on the current President combined with Balaguer's reputation for being mysterious about his personal life has resulted in a Dominican best seller. With over 32,000 copies of the text in circulation within 15 months of its

initial appearance, with its ongoing publication, and with Satz's translation into English, Senci3n's novel has become one of the Dominican Republic's most important and popular literary works. Even more than a decade after its publication, people from all walks of life remember the novel vividly, demonstrating the impact that literature can have on people. In terms of the present discussion, the novel's large, international readership also positions it as an important contender for the right to represent "historically" the governments of Rafael Trujillo and Joaqu3n Balaguer, especially since a growing number of people actually remember the novel better than they do the *trujillato*.<sup>6</sup>

The book's premise is one of revealing the mysteries of Balaguer, creating multiple levels of tension between fact and fiction both inside and outside of the text itself. Indeed, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios demonstrates the tension and underlying violence between the two texts— a violence common throughout Caribbean literature. Antonio Ben3tez-Rojo has noted:

Notwithstanding this deliberate manipulation, it has been impossible to effect a complete elimination of the violence that lies deep in the marrow of this or any other Caribbean historical theme. If someone had to define, at once, the meta-archipelago's historical novel and its folk narrative, using just two words, these would be, unquestionably: *revelar* (to reveal and to re-veil in Spanish), *violencia*. (215)

While set in the Dominican Republic, this novel reflects many of the characteristics of Caribbean literature. Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios tells the story of three Dominican youths: Antonio Bell, Arturo Gonzalo, and Frank Bolaño. The three become friends while attending the same seminary, their friendship growing largely from their common contempt for the school's symbolic authority. None of the boys has chosen to become a priest, and none actually believes the dogma he is being taught in the seminary. Instead, each of the three (who represent the lower, middle, and upper social classes respectively) has been sent to the school in an attempt to shield their parents from the “qué dirán popular”—in other words, to help their families maintain appearances.

From the novel's outset, the reader notes significant incongruity between what *is* and what *seems to be*. In the first part of the book, Sención constructs a world of dissimulation where the boys struggle to avoid being exposed as religious impostors and consequently getting expelled from the school. Yet even at the seminary not everything is as it seems and, despite the Church's public support of “Tirano,” there is a strong undercurrent of dissent against the dictator that becomes evident in the story. Tutored by a revolutionary Cuban priest, Antonio begins plotting Tirano's downfall. When the President's personal secretary, Doctor Mario Ramos (a literary type of Balaguer), discovers Antonio's insurrection, he immediately perceives an opportunity to gain some desired political advantage against the Church. In his ironically urbane style, Ramos shrewdly exploits the priests' fear of being held responsible for

Antonio's subversion and consequently angering the dictator and endangering the Church's tenuous relationship with the government.

As Ramos skillfully manipulates this tense political situation, the reader can see the disparity between Dr. Ramos's polished demeanor in public and his callous and calculating handling of Antonio's sedition. Ramos's characterization is the first important link between the textual world of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios and extratextual Dominican reality, between Doctor Mario Ramos and Doctor Joaquín Balaguer, Trujillo's secretary and political successor who, like Ramos, was well-known for his public façade of civility that masked the bloody reality of his own system of political oppression. Several years after having published Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, Sención commented on Balaguer's political façade:

Balaguer is a person who has always projected the image of a pure person who is not capable of intentional harm. I lived in that world. For me, Joaquín Balaguer is a monster, like none other in Latin America. There have been tyrants and corrupt democrats before him, but Balaguer is a totally different species. (Adams 1996)

Sención's contempt for Balaguer is clearly demonstrated through the irony and hypocrisy described in the episode where Ramos and the priests discuss Antonio's future. The book presents the reader with priests who scapegoat Antonio instead of mediating for him or providing him with amnesty, indicting the Church's

apparent complicity with Tirano's government. It shows the priests adopting Tirano's terroristic methods as they struggle to protect their tenuous relationship with the government and to maintain the appearance of having authority. Throughout the book, the priests' actions parallel Ramos' in that, like the dictator's secretary, the priests actively work to expand their power within a system that could just as easily repress them. What they do is also akin to what Viriato Sención does as he (re)writes Dominican history with his novel, using methods not unlike the dictator's to assert his own version over *la historia oficial*. In the end, as Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios attempts to reveal the potential of the people to disempower the dictatorship and effect social change, it employs the same methods employed by Tirano to maintain his power: mediation and rhetoric. It is no coincidence that Ramos (like Balaguer) is a writer and expert at using these tools to his benefit—the novel makes this clear. That Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios establishes a discourse that directly competes with the one offered by Ramos and, by logical extension, with Balaguer will become especially important as readers of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios associate Sención's fictionalized rendition of “history” with external reality.

Making this link is key to unlocking the novel's potential to instigate social change. As the text encourages the reader to participate in its own creation, the hope is that the reader will continue his “writerly” role in the extra-textual domain. As José del Castillo, a Dominican sociologist, has pointed out, the book has the potential to influence people, and not just its readers: “More important than the number of people who read the book is the number of people talking about it. This is more of an oral

than reading culture. In offices, in collective taxis, everyone talks politics.” Castillo also observes that, although they relish discussing Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, many Dominicans still become uneasy if linked personally to their observations, ascribing their fear to years of repression under Trujillo and during Balaguer’s first regime (Kolker 14A). Nevertheless, many believe that the novel has had and will continue to have a real influence on the Dominican people.

As I have asserted, one important step in creating a plausible alternative to the historical record is basing it on verifiable fact. Throughout the novel, Senci3n repeatedly attempts to couch his fiction with non-fiction. He refers to Tirano / Trujillo as “Rafaelito” (77), emphasizes Balaguer / Ramos’s fondness for poetry (117), notes the presence of the Dominican state newspaper, “El Caribe” (151), and inscribes a well-known instance of electoral fraud committed by Balaguer’s presidential campaign within the novel (195-198). But besides simply including historical events in the novel, Senci3n also resorts to fiction to further develop several of the government’s most famous and potentially scandalous “secrets” including the enigmatic relationship between Balaguer and his sisters and the President’s physical and sexual deterioration during his later years. By combining what was *known* about Balaguer’s government with what the Dominican people often suspected, the text suggests that in the Dominican world the “reality” behind the dictator’s public mask has now been made public by Senci3n. Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is important for many Dominicans because it becomes a written archive of “the real story” behind Balaguer—the first in print. While setting itself up as a historical

archive, the novel suggests that Dominican reality is one that can be known only through mediating narratives.

It is actually this lack of “essence” that provides the thematic basis for the novel: if all representations of Balaguer’s government are inevitably mediated, none can be true—they must all be *forgeries* as pointed out in Sención’s title.<sup>7</sup> If both Balaguer’s and Sención’s versions are equally suspect, it is left up to the reader to “authorize” one particular version of “history” over another. Obviously, the choice is an arbitrary one, and Sención’s version of history becomes just as plausible and therefore a direct competitor with Balaguer’s. In this way, the novel empowers the reader, who consequently becomes implicated in the “(re)writing” of history.<sup>8</sup> Along the way, the dictator, whose goal is to exercise absolute power over his constituency, is symbolically disempowered because he is unable to maintain complete control over the text. One might say that Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is successful at some level in its quest to replace the official version of Dominican history with an acceptable (fictional) substitute, thereby pitting the author against the dictator. This replacement has been achieved through a symbiotic relationship between the reader and the text—but not all narrative relationships in the book are symbiotic.

In Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, the process of rewriting history is partially carried out through “reflecting” parallel adversarial relationships across each of the novel’s narrative levels. At the textual layer, the primary conflict is between the fictional versions of the “dictator,” the “author,” and the rest of the novel’s characters. At the intratextual level (fiction versus non-fiction), the conflict is between reader and

“dictator” as he is portrayed in the text. Finally, at the extratextual level, the novel becomes the vehicle for both representing and inciting the antagonism between the writer and the dictator, as each side vies for the right to address the reader and to represent the dictatorship according to its own interpretation.

Similar to what we saw in Chapter II (page 145) with Veloz Maggiolo, these various relationships also provide excellent examples of René Girard’s “triangular desire.” For example, in the episode where Ramos and the priests are discussing Antonio’s fate after being caught conspiring against the government, Girard’s triangle becomes quite evident. At the textual level, the bishop (*desiring subject*) and the politician (*mediator*) compete for control over the Dominican people (*object of desire*, represented by Antonio). At the intratextual level, Sención the implicit author (*desiring subject*) competes with Ramos (*mediator*) for the affections of the people. At the extratextual level Sención competes directly with Balaguer, not only hoping to gain popular affection but also for the right to represent the government through narrative. Here, determining who plays the role of “mediator” and who plays the “desiring” subject eventually becomes impossible. Girard explains that “The closer the mediator gets to the desiring subject, the more the possibilities of the two rivals merge and the more insuperable becomes the obstacle they set in each other’s way” (26). At the textual level, instead of simply eliminating Antonio as he has done with other enemies of the state, Ramos shrewdly forces the priests to sacrifice the boy in order to save themselves, effectively converting Antonio into a classic example of a scapegoat and underlining the priests’ own hypocrisy. Nevertheless, as predicted by



Girard, nobody “wins” in the political tug-of-war between Ramos and the Church because neither rival gains complete control over Antonio. Instead, Antonio is smuggled from the seminary by his friends, Frank and Arturo.

At the intratextual level, the figure of the writer clearly participates in the rhetorical deconstruction of the dictatorship. An excellent example of this can be found in Librado Santos’s metaliterary “unmasking” of the blind and decrepit Ramos/Balaguer during his sixth and most dubious “reelection,” where the poet’s (Librado’s) imagined speech blatantly contradicts recognizable historical events with what *should have* but *didn’t* actually happen: “Nada me obstaculiza la ascensión al Solio Presidencial por Sexta vez, pero siento en mi pecho la abrumadora carga de la duda sobre la legitimidad de mi triunfo electoral... quiero descargar mi conciencia e irme tranquilamente a la paz de mi casa” (198). Obviously, Ramos/Balaguer would never have accepted such a speech. Because of this, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios calls attention to the disparity between the dictator’s façade of integrity and his outward actions— when accused of ballot fixing, both Ramos and Balaguer dispense with any second thoughts they might (or should) have and simply take office. In order to complete what is already presented as Balaguer’s mockery of justice, Sención ridicules the politically sacrosanct act of taking the oath of office by converting it into a farcical act:

— Dígale ahora que levante el brazo derecho; voy a proceder a tomarle juramento— murmuróle el juez al General [...]

El señor Magistrado cambió de lugar con el ayudante militar, para que el doctor Ramos pudiese oír el rosario de compromisos a los que estaría obligado como jefe de gobierno, so pena de desafiar los embates de las iras divinas.

— Señor Presidente de la Asamblea Nacional, ¡Juro! ¡Juro! ¡Juro! ¡Juro! ¡Juro! ¡Juro! Y seguiré jurando por los siglos de los siglos...

— Excelencia, no soy el Presidente de la Asamblea Nacional, yo soy el juez Celestino Collado, su viejo amigo y condiscípulo. La Asamblea Nacional no logró ponerse de acuerdo para elegir bufete directivo; por eso me mandaron a buscar y por eso vine.

— Ah, ¿es usted el señor Magistrado? Bueno... pues da lo mismo.— Y procedió el doctor Ramos a levantar de nuevo la mano derecha, con tanta torpeza, que un par de veces dio su pescozón al micrófono; y ya, con la mano firme, dijo— : Rejuro por las cenizas de Alfonso el Sabio; por las lágrimas de Beatriz la Sin Ventura; juro por el pecho heroico donde flameó orgullosamente el lienzo tricolor; por el roído cerebro de Ruggieri; por el recuerdo sagrado de Pittini, el que fuera Arzobispo y Primado; juro por...

— ¡Acabe de jurar, ya, por favor, Excelencia!— lo interrumpió el juez.  
(200-201)

The scene described above regained popular attention during Balaguer's final attempt to win the presidency (in 2000), as Dominicans recalled the decrepit

caricature offered by Senci3n and compared it with the man before them, noting that the two were strikingly similar. The Miami Herald (5/17/2000, “Dominicans Flood Polls...”) noted that Balaguer, “has been all but blind for the past 25 years and inches along in a stooped shuffle with the help of his aides... his campaign appearances have been rare and brief, and he has occasionally appeared to nod off. Two months earlier, the Herald quoted an unnamed Western diplomat who quipped “He has hit the campaign trail with amazing vigor, compared to the mummy-like state of last year. We suspected he was alive, but you could not prove that by his public appearances” (Tamayo). Bernardo Vega, former Dominican ambassador to the United States, observed that Balaguer’s campaign “[is] a very perverse example of Caribbean magical realism. It’s the redeemer coming back. The messiah. Except there is no messiah” (Fineman 21A). Vega wasn’t the only one to feel this way about Balaguer’s candidacy in 2000. Not one to remain quiet regarding Balaguer (and whose novel instantly “qualified” his opinion with the international press and the Dominican people), Senci3n himself commented frequently on Balaguer’s candidacy: “He [Balaguer] is sick with power; he will never give it up. They will have to drag him out of the palace...” (Adams 1996).

Throughout the novel and as demonstrated above, Senci3n frequently employs dark humor to cut through the customary layers of presidential decorum and thereby expose the dictator’s humanity, effectively stripping away the aura of wonder that normally sets the dictator apart from his constituents. But perhaps the most interesting example of how Senci3n manages to deconstruct the dictatorship at the intratextual

level occurs when Frank Bolaño informs the reader that Arturo authored a novel, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, which was published around 1992 (312). In his memoirs, Frank also tells about the fate incurred by Arturo for speaking out against Ramos by way of his book:

La página 114 es de un sólido negro, y en la siguiente se lee una estremecedora revelación: “El luto con que visto esta página es un tributo póstumo a Arturo Gonzalo, en cuya persona se cometió, el 31 de marzo de 1993, el único crimen ordenado, clara y directamente, por boca del doctor Mario Ramos. (316)

Arturo is linked to Sención as the implied author of the novel by the name and publication date of his text. By extension, Arturo’s literary attack on the dictatorship becomes Sención’s own. Yet again, nobody “wins” in the fictional struggle between Arturo and Ramos. While Arturo has spoken against Ramos by way of his novel, the dictator’s retaliation only perpetuates the struggle between the two characters further, resulting in a “historical” record documenting Ramos’s violence. This said, there is significantly more to the paragraph above than is immediately evident. Compare Sención’s text cited above with the following paragraph:

Esta página se inserta en blanco. Durante muchos años permanecerá muda, pero un día hablará, para que su voz sea recogida por la historia.

Callada, como una tumba cuyo secreto a voces se levantará, acusador, cuando el tiempo permita levantar la losa bajo la cual permanece yacente la verdad.

Su contenido se deja en manos de una persona amiga que por razones de edad está supuesta a sobrevivirme y que ha sido encargada por mí hacerlo público algunos años después de mi muerte. (295)

In his blackened page memorializing Arturo's death ordered by Ramos, Sención actually parodies Joaquín Balaguer's own memorial to Orlando Martínez Howley, a Dominican journalist who disappeared mysteriously during the early part of Balaguer's presidency and whose death has often been attributed to an order from Balaguer (Memorias de un Cortesano de la "Era de Trujillo"). As he does elsewhere in the novel, Sención uses fiction to complete and supplement the historical record with the popular one, while at the same time directly revealing/re-veiling Balaguer's own narrative efforts.

The significance of this passage will be discussed later; however, it is important to point out that Sención's attack shatters the wall between the real world and fiction in his allusion to Martínez's disappearance and parody of Balaguer's own narrative about the case. For me, Sención models a certain kind of behavior for the reader, who he hopes will move the battle from the furtive realm of fiction into the real world. Clearly, the theme of authority occupies a prominent position within the novel, which could easily be read as an oppositional text. The work implies that Order can be found in the rigors of narrative creation where the world's chaos can be

systematized by the processes of textualization. Foregrounding this process of textualization calls attention to the artificial and arbitrary nature of the procedures used by the dictator to first gain and to later maintain his power. Since “there is no power without authority and no authority that is not authorization and so obtained through mediation, dependent as it is on the concurrence and perhaps the complicity of others” (Chambers 185), Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios seeks to demystify these processes via the mirror of the text. In other words, the novel presents itself as a recognizable analogue of the Dominican situation. Upon its achieving readerly recognition of life under Balaguer, the book, authorized by the reader, attempts to fill in the gaps in the dictatorial narration with “what inquiring minds want to know” in an effort to divert attention away from the manipulative process it uses in order to establish its own power over the reader. The text parodies both the dictator and the dictatorial process with the goal of disauthorizing the *caudillo*. In the mirror of the text, the real-life dictator suddenly and ironically finds himself faced with his own literary likeness. Put simply, both in the episode noted above, and throughout the book, Viriato Sención “forges” the dictator’s signature.

Another example of the text being used as a mirror occurs when Frank thwarts his interrogation by the feared chief of police, Nathaniel Piro Cristóbal (pp. 205-231), and again later when he and Arturo blackmail the corrupt local politician, Vetusto Santaro (pp. 296-305) by commandeering the dictator’s “voice,” masquerading as his emissary in order to suppress one of Arturo’s political rivals. These self-conscious moments within the text act as mirrors that allow the reader to vicariously recognize

his/her own complicity with the process of dictatorial empowerment, whether literally or figuratively. The text implicates the reader's complicity with the dictatorship by association: the reader empowers the author, who mimics the dictator. By extension, the reader symbolically empowers the dictator by reading the book. The gap between the textual and extratextual domains is left for the reader to bridge while reading the text. Along the way, the reader has been systematically "conditioned" by the text to feel repulsion toward collaborating with the dictator. In this way, the text tries to influence the reader's desire, shifting it away from the dictator. As indicated by Chambers, this is the first step in undermining the reader's authorization of the dictatorship:

Desires can be changed because they are mediated by power: being mediated, they are subject to the operations of appropriation and seduction—operations that are not exploitive or violent when their effect is maieutic, and when the deflection of desire results from a self-education, an awareness of the damage done, to ourselves and to others, by the desires that are controlled by power. (Chambers 232)

As one might expect, the "people" — whether fictional entities or real personages— are the common denominator in the equation of social change and the point where the textual, intratextual, and extratextual narratives converge. This explains why "room to maneuver" must be a function of readerly interpretation. In

order to even reach the extratextual level, the reader must accept that Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios is an allegory of the Dominican Republic and link Viriato Sención with Arturo Gonzalo and Mario Ramos with Joaquín Balaguer. This is why Sención takes such great pains to bridge the extratextual and textual narrative domains. Throughout the text Sención makes it clear that Tirano is Trujillo and that Ramos is Balaguer, hence setting up a parallel (and uncomplimentary) literary rendition of Balaguer's "disguised" continuation of Trujillo's dictatorship with the intent of diverting the reader's desire away from the dictator and persuading him/her that life under Balaguer is unacceptable:

Las ancianas y ancianos de la ciudad sabían que estos tiempos eran mucho, mucho más difíciles y angustiosos que los de principios de siglo, que del siglo anterior. Sabían que esta miseria de hoy era más temible menos llevadera que cualquier miseria registrada en la memoria de los hombres; . . .Estas cárceles de hoy son peores que las cárceles de la época de Tirano. (201, 220)

I say "disguised" because, unlike his predecessor, Balaguer was careful to hide many of his abuses from the world outside the Dominican Republic. Clearly, by repeatedly connecting the textual domain with extra-textual reality, Sención presents the novel as an allegory of Dominican life— something that becomes especially clear in the second part of the novel. While the first part of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios focuses on the scapegoating of Antonio by both Church and State, the second



part (including its epigraph)<sup>9</sup> is much more self-conscious, frequently exposing its rhetorical structure and, in doing so, acknowledging the possibility of its own negation. González-Echevarría writes:

The emergence of the figure of the writer, who can bear no authority except that of negation, pries apart the relationship between authority and voice. The mythology of writing involving the dictator is one in which the link between identity and literature is undone. The specificity of Latin American culture and literature comes in the back way, as it were, in the form of the character embodying authority: the toppled dictator/author. (14)

While the second half of the book may seem out of place to some of Sención's readers, it makes perfect sense in light of González-Echevarría's commentaries. At the intratextual level Sención is the toppled author described by González-Echevarría. However, having assumed the dictator's rhetorical means to power through the writing and publication of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios and therein shifting the dictator from the center of discourse to its periphery, Sención as author now indicates to his reader that he is very much aware of his predicament. Anticipating Balaguer's reaction to his novel, and recognizing the possible consequences of its publication, Sención makes an effort to save his own life. By inscribing Balaguer within the figure of Mario Ramos, and by predicting his own assassination by the dictator within the novel, Sención both anticipates and textualizes Balaguer's reaction

to the book, thereby rendering the dictator's most powerful tool completely useless: in order to regain absolute authority, Balaguer's response must contradict the one predicted by Sención. After the publication and rapid dissemination of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, to kill Sención would be to allow him one final act of self-determination and validate Sención's "reading" of his government. It would also lend credibility to the other scandalous claims Sención makes throughout his novel. Joaquín Balaguer must contradict Sención's prediction in order to maintain the public *appearance* of complete control: Balaguer has been "checkmated" by Sención. In other words, the dictator has been disempowered by literature. Sención as the author, though empowered by the narrative, has gained his power through the same rhetorical processes used by the dictator to achieve his own place. The result is another, textual "dictatorship," patterned after Balaguer's. That is to say, both the author and the dictator have been "toppled" by Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios. This time the contest remains undecided, for the outcome depends on the reader and not the writer or the dictator. The reader, on the other hand, has achieved a sort of autonomy. (S)he can now realize the arbitrariness of the dictator's power. (S)he can also recognize that the author and dictator have essentially merged into a single figure. All that is left is for the reader to interpret (not only in the sense of achieving a personal understanding of, but also in terms of *performing* through reading) the text.

This brings us to what is probably the most enigmatic section of the book, and one that lends itself especially well to a mythological reading of the text.<sup>10</sup> One of the novel's subplots mixes a story about a cockfight with the disappearance of Antonio's

father, Cástulo Bell. At midnight on the second Sunday in January, 1950, several hours after Cástulo's rooster had triumphed in his first fight over a soldier's (Cocolo Cantera's) animal in the local ring, thereby humiliating the soldier in public, friends of the Bell family knocked at the door and notified Santiago, Cástulo's father, that his son had been taken prisoner by an Army patrol about 15 minutes earlier. After Santiago had searched for various months and made numerous inquiries after his son's whereabouts, Cástulo still had not surfaced and his disappearance was chalked up to dictatorial politics (31). In the novel, as Santiago tells Antonio about his father's death, he openly expresses his feelings about the situation: "Cada cual tiene su destino, y el de tu padre fue esa muerte tan temprana y tan absurda, producto ella del rencor de un infame, e hija bastarda de la barbarie de este país de mierda" (43).<sup>11</sup>

Exactly one year later Santiago's prized rooster, Juanito (a descendent of Cástulo's bird), again beats one of Cocolo Cantera's cocks, Pata'e'criminal, in a fight (33-5). As he releases his rooster, Santiago shouts, "¡Carajo, Juanito, pierde si quieres!" (38). In the ensuing battle, Juanito kills Pata'e'criminal. Then, while still soaked in his rival's blood, Juanito "emitía por su garganta un sonido gutural y cavernoso que parecía venir de otro mundo, mientras se paseaba, intranquilo, alrededor del gallo muerto" (40). As Cocolo Cantera enters the ring to retrieve his dead rooster, Juanito attacks and brutally kills the soldier:

Los espolones del pinto se fueron agrandando como dagas, y... con una rapidez vertiginosa, los fue metiendo en el corazón de Cocolo y después

en los ojos y por toda la cara, hasta dejarlo convertido en una máscara de sangre, muertecito, en el centro del redondel. (40)

Santiago interprets Cantera's death as a sort of supernatural reprisal against the person guilty of his son's disappearance, hence inviting a mythological interpretation of both this and another significant segment of the text when Juanito resurfaces in the novel's final scene and again avenges himself, this time attacking the Dictator. By this time, Ramos is old and decrepit. As he is being readied for his weekly "date" with several prostitutes, a rooster's crow disturbs the president, who orders his general to quiet the bird:

— General, detenga el canto de ese gallo: parece como si estuviera aquí en el cuarto.— El doctor Ramos se lleva ambas manos a los oídos— . ¿Y qué es eso que se oye allá afuera, General?— agrega.

— Son las campanas de las iglesias: estarán tocando durante toda la noche— responde el General.

— No, General, no me refiero a las campanas: lo que oigo son voces extrañas, como de muertos. Salga e investigue si hay gente escondida en el patio. Y otra cosa, General; aproveche de una vez para eliminar al gallo, no lo puedo resistir más. (322)

The General leaves President Ramos and never returns. Outside are heard the sounds of wings and shrieks. The President nervously goes to investigate, and the book's final scene is reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock's classic movie, The Birds:

Quien le respondió fue el gallo. Su canto parecía venir, multiplicado, desde todos los ángulos. El doctor Mario Ramos extendió los brazos y se puso a girar sobre sí mismo. No podía ver, a un metro de sus pies, el cuerpo tendido del general Elermoso: tampoco las sombras de los muertos, las cuales penetraban al jardín desde la calle. Allá, como en otro mundo, las campanas de bronce seguían tocando: llegaban como un eco lejano, fúnebre. Amanecía. El Siglo XXI estrenaba sus primeros rayos de sol. (323)

The first sunbeams of the 21<sup>st</sup> century clearly suggest hope for a future after Balaguer. Ramos's death scene is also reminiscent of the final chapter of Carpentier's El reino de este mundo, when Ti Noel, after observing the aristocracy of Santo Domingo, realizes that a cycle of slavery was about to begin again:

El anciano comenzaba a desesperarse ante ese inacabable retoñar de cadenas, ese renacer de grillos, esa proliferación de miserias, que los más resignados acababan por aceptar como prueba de la inutilidad de toda rebeldía. Ti Noel temió que también le hicieran trabajar sobre los surcos, a pesar de su edad. Por ello, el recuerdo de Makandal volvió a imponerse a su

memoria. Ya que la vestidura de hombre solía traer tantas calamidades, más valía despojarse de ella por un tiempo, siguiendo los acontecimientos de la Llanura bajo aspectos menos llamativos. Tomada esa decisión, Ti Noel se sorprendió de lo fácil que es transformarse en animal cuando se tienen poderes para ello. Como prueba, se trepó un árbol, quiso ser ave, y al punto fue ave. (Carpentier 138)

In Carpentier's novel, the animagus eventually turns himself into a gander, attempts to join a flock of geese, and is rejected by them, pushed toward the margins of the flock that "aparecía ahora como una comunidad aristocrática, absolutamente cerrada a todo individuo de otra casta" (142). In his rejection, Ti Noel learns...

Ti Noel comprendió pronto que, aunque insistiera durante años, jamás tendría el menor acceso a las funciones y ritos del clan. Se le había dado a entender claramente que no le bastaba ser ganso para creerse que todos los gansos fueron iguales. Ningún ganso conocido había cantado ni bailado el día de sus bodas. Nadie, de vivos, lo había visto nacer. Se presentaba, sin el menor expediente de limpieza de sangre, ante cuatro generaciones en palmas. En suma, era un meteco.

Ti Noel comprendió oscuramente que aquel repudio de los gansos era un castigo de su cobardía. Mackandal se había disfrazado de animal, durante

años, para servir a los hombres, no para desertar del terreno de los hombres.

(142)

Ti Noel's epiphany helps him to realize that "el hombre sólo puede hallar su grandeza, su máxima medida en el Reino de este Mundo" (143). He climbs onto the table, looks toward the heavens which had been darkened smoke, and "lanzó su declaración de guerra a los nuevos amos, dando orden a sus súbitos de partir al asalto de las obras insolentes de los mulatos vestidos" (143):

Y desde aquella hora, nadie supo más de Ti Noel ni de su casaca verde con puños de encaje salmón, salvo, tal vez, aquel buitre mojado, aprovechador de toda muerte, que esperó el sol con las alas abiertas: cruz de plumas que acabó por plegarse y hundir el vuelo en las espesuras de Bois Caimán. (144-43)

The intertextual coincidence that Ti Noel and Cástulo Bell both seem magically to turn into birds in the Dominican Republic and in the context of rebellion against a dictator makes Sención's ending seem, perhaps, like a continuation of Carpentier's, a continuation of Ti Noel's battle cry extending it into to the story of another "mulato," Balaguer. This intertextuality serves to inscribe Balaguer's dictatorship within a larger history of tyranny on the island and throughout 20<sup>th</sup>-

century Latin American literature. The instance of magic realism also invites a mythological reading of Sención's ending.

At one level, the rooster in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios could be read as a metonym for the general populace who eventually avenges the wrongs of the dictatorship—cockfighting was, for many years, the national sport of the Dominican Republic and is often used as a symbol of the Dominican people. However, cockfighting is also an important symbol within the widespread Caribbean practice of Santería.<sup>12</sup> As a fighter, the rooster symbolizes pride, power, and aggression—and because of this, is the preferred sacrifice for many Voodoo gods including Elegua (the trickster-warrior and God of roads who often opens the path for Iku, death), Changó (the warrior-womanizer and an “Orisha of the Orishas,” since he rules his people from the heavens), Babalu-Ayé (a womanizer who, like Lazarus, is raised from the dead), and Ogún (the ruler of metals and protector of warriors). Moreover, the rooster is a key element in the *asentado* or initiation ritual into Santería, wherein roosters are commonly rubbed on the inductee (a cleansing ritual where his/her impurities are transferred to the birds) or even sacrificed to the Orisha near the end of the induction ceremony (see Núñez, Santería). Interpreting Juanito as an allusion to these gods (or to their synthesis within a single entity) yields several possible readings. If seen as a representation of Elegua, Juanito most closely relates to the figure of Sención as author and trickster. Like Elegua, Sención proves himself powerful and capable of inflicting great (rhetorical) harm if angered. He is also capable of changing destiny—and frequently does so through deception, regularly blocking the petitioner's path to



happiness by the manipulation of his/her own request (i.e., *words*). Sención's pen would correspond to Elegua's ever-present staff, which the author rises metaphorically to strike Balaguer on the head— one of the Orisha's favorite pranks. The path guarded by the author / Orisha, then, would be the road to the future; and since Elegua is also the messenger of the Orishas, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios would contain an anti-dictatorial "message" to be passed on to its reader.<sup>13</sup>

If, on the other hand, Juanito were read as Ogún or Changó, he would most closely resemble Ramos / Balaguer: a powerful, licentious glutton, controller of wealth (Ogún) or of thunder (Changó), blood-loving, and a master of disguises (Ogún). Juanito's attack could therefore be interpreted as Balaguer's own transgressions returning to him and causing his downfall.

Finally, if Juanito symbolizes Babalu-Ayé, Balaguer becomes the child-god who inherits from his father, Olodumare, the "power to be every woman's lover" (Núñez 61)— on the condition that he abstain from female contact on the Thursday of Easter. According to legend, Babalu-Ayé breaks his vow, is stricken with Leprosy, and consequently dies. He is eventually resurrected when Oshún (the flirtatious goddess of love and Changó's wife) revives the aged and feeble Olodumare's long-lost libido and the thankful Orisha agrees to revive his son. Surely, the fact that Juanito is a "gallo pinto" (Babalu-Ayé's sacrificial animal must be a *spotted* rooster) coupled with the presence of the collies in the presidential palace (319— Babalu-Ayé is always accompanied by dogs) and Sención's descriptions of the aging Ramos's sexual impotence in the final pages of the novel, where Ramos

las sentaba [a las prostitutas] sobre sus piernas, tomábales las manos, olíales el perfume por la zona del cuello... las apretaba contra su pecho para sentir la fuerza de los senos... [y] finalmente, con palabras paternales, entregábales el cheque de cien pesos y, dulcemente, las despedía. (318)

brings the myth of Babalu-Ayé to the reader's mind and links Balaguer to the god who was ultimately toppled by his own lasciviousness.

There probably is not a single, clear-cut reading of the mythological symbolism embodied in Juanito. Instead, the implication of retribution by the rooster is left to the reader. Still, given the cultural significance of Santería in the Caribbean, its potential symbolism should not be ignored. Likewise, it is important to note that whether or not the rooster actually kills Ramos is left open to interpretation. The text demands that the reader remain active until its very end, filling in its "gaps" according to his/her own personalized understanding. Yet in terms of triangular desire the message of the novel's final scene is more determinate. At the intratextual level, the author (*desiring subject/mediator*) eliminates Ramos (*desiring subject/mediator*) by means of the common people (*object of desire*, represented by Juanito). At the extratextual level, one might say that Senci3n's novel calls for the popular overthrow of Balaguer. Like in the novel, Balaguer's future depends completely on the reader. However, the reader must move beyond past appearances to ascertain the significance of this supernatural event. Moving past superficial appearances is clearly one of

Senci3n's rhetorical goals for his reader, as it is necessary to read the text allegorically and, ultimately, to demythologize the figure of the dictator.

Here I should note that there was, in fact, dictatorial retaliation against the novel, although Balaguer's reaction was somewhat less drastic than that predicted by Senci3n in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios. Despite being the judges' unanimous choice for the island's Premio Nacional de Novela, the Dominican Secretary of Education, Jaqueline Malag3n, refused to open the envelop containing the winner's name and announced that there would be no award given, claiming that sensible Dominicans would thank her (Kolker 14A). Most believe that Malag3n was acting on Balaguer's behalf.

So far, I have explained how Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios participates in the theoretical deconstruction of the Dominican authoritarian state with the goal of disturbing (agitating, unsettling, interrupting, hindering) the Dominican Republic's chronic state of tyrannical rule. It unmaskes Balaguer, whose appearances attest to his gentility while his actions reveal his tyranny. It foregrounds the rhetorical instruments that empower him, snatches them away, and turns them against the dictator via the narrative process. In Senci3n's skillful manipulation of narrative rhetoric we see that, despite Gonz3lez-Echevarr3a's assertion that Latin American literature is "bent on demolishing authority without dutifully offering viable alternatives of order," Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios does indeed imply an optimistic future, situating this hope in the individual reader and his/her ability to, by understanding the processes of authoritarian dictation, deny the tyrant's absolute control. Given the book's large

international audience, its potential to actually influence society is much greater than that of other novels written to protest Dominican dictatorship, eventually tainting the collective “memory” of Balaguer’s presidency, particularly for those without firsthand knowledge of life under Balaguer. Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios prevails not only by showing its readers what makes the dictatorship possible, but also by showing them how to outwit the dictator and to beat him at his own game. In other words, it becomes the ultimate example of the “room for maneuver” described by Chambers.

Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios chronicles the ascent, rule, and symbolic descent of a modern dictator much like other dictator novels in Latin American literature. Despite the multiple plots that exist within the novel, this one (reader vs. Dominican history) is clearly the principal one. Sención, intuitively conscious of the mechanisms described by Chambers in Room for maneuver, constructs a textual image of the dictatorship in order to fill the historical void surrounding the politics of the Trujillo-Balaguer dictatorship. This gap is the result of the dictators’ affinity for “hiding” behind a veil of mystery. By taking advantage of the public’s natural curiosity to know what “really” happened in the lives of these enigmatic men, Sención creates a possible version of their lives that “demystifies” them. The result is similar to that shown by Asturias in El Señor Presidente when señora Carvajal, witnessing the execution of her husband by the dictator’s agents, suddenly realizes that everyone implicated in the act “son hombres como él, con ojos, con boca, con manos, con pelo en la cabeza, con uñas en los dedos, con dientes en la boca, con

lengua, con galillo...” (227). In writing Los que falsificaron la firma Dios, Sención seeks to humanize the dictator and his victims: “Such a demystifying shattering of illusion, were it to become general, would have devastating effects on the President” (Chambers 201). This is precisely the reaction that Sención hopes to achieve with his book.

In my analysis of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, I have frequently referred to the textual, intratextual, and extratextual narrative domains to describe the relationships between the author, his text, the characters within the text, and the readers. There is one final narrative angle to this work that I mentioned previously but that deserves further attention: it is the one that Julia Kristeva referred to as *intertextuality*:

Intertextual relationships include anagram, allusion, adaptation, translation, parody, pastiche, imitation, and other kinds of transformation. In the theories of structuralism and post-structuralism, texts are seen to refer to other texts (or to themselves as texts) rather than to an external reality. (Baldick 112)

Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios participates in numerous cross-narratives which should be noted. As was noted in my introduction, the novel clearly continues a Latin American literary tradition as an oppositional text decrying dictatorial tyranny in this region. And although Sención’s somewhat unrefined narrative might not compare with Asturias’ remarkable prose, it is difficult to read Los que falsificaron la

firma de Dios without drawing comparisons with El Señor Presidente, with García Márquez's El otoño del patriarca, or with other prominent dictator novels. Because of this, Tirano and Ramos automatically acquire the qualities of characters such as el Señor Presidente, while other similarities can be found between Miguel Cara de Angel and Frank Bolaño.

Another of the novel's subtexts is certainly the collective history of dictatorship, and more specifically, of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic from the final years of Trujillo's dynasty to the new millennium. In this (as well as in its intertextuality with other dictator novels), Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios shares many commonalities with its Dominican predecessor, La muerte de Alfonsina Bairán. But there are also several interesting similarities to another Dominican novel, Los Carpinteros, again written by Balaguer himself and first published in 1984.<sup>14</sup>

In his book, Balaguer fictionalizes the historical processes behind the civil wars that shook the Dominican Republic between 1867 and 1916, using his own intimate comprehension of presidential autocracy to characterize Dominican politics with all of its political drama. The book is a work of historical fiction, based primarily on the turbulent relationship between Juana Ogando and Ulises Heureaux (popularly known as General Lilís), who ruled the Dominican Republic as dictator toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The text emphasizes the important roles played by youths such as Ramón Cáceres, Casimero Cordero, Aquiles Álvarez, and Perico Pepín during the period that culminated in what many mistakenly thought would be a new era of institutional democracy beginning on May 30, 1961.<sup>15</sup>

Los Carpinteros is often focalized through the eyes of Héctor Corporán, a revolutionary who “matures” to become more tolerant of the Dominican Republic’s recurring dictatorships, a change in attitude analogous to that of Frank Bolaño in Sención’s work in that both characters come to be employed by the government and soften their stance against the dictator as they become increasingly dependent on his munificence. Reflecting on the Presidency of Ramón Cáceres, who, according to the text, led a comparatively innocuous regime, Corporán notes:

Por primera vez, tras la caída de Heureaux, se pagaba con puntualidad a los servidores públicos. Se restauró el crédito de la banca dominicana. El país progresaba. Pese a la inconformidad de muchos, insatisfechos con las medidas drásticas de que se valía el Gobierno para sostener la paz, las finanzas de la nación se hallaban prácticamente saneadas. La honradez del Jefe del Estado no era objetada por nadie. Poco a poco la ciudadanía, hastiada de los golpes de cuartel y de los motines callejeros, se inclinaba a favor de un régimen como el que a la sazón reinaba: fuerte, sin excesos innecesarios y de honestidad reconocida...

En su espíritu se empezó a producir una transformación que lo llevó a congraciarse con los métodos dictatoriales, usados con la moderación con que lo hacía el actual gobernante. Aún la crueldad de que se hizo gala para pacificar la Línea Noroeste pareció ante sus ojos como una obra de cirugía social saludable.

— La República, se decía a sí mismo, después de librarse del lastre de un pasado lleno de crímenes y turbulencias, no podrá mantenerse en pie si no se implanta un régimen con capacidad militar suficiente para imponerse a los centenares de hombres de armas que existen en el país con ambiciones de mando. (403-404)

Interestingly enough, Balaguer's own presidency, like Cáceres' was celebrated for having stabilized the Dominican economy.<sup>16</sup> In fact, readers familiar with Balaguer's government who study Cáceres' administration as depicted in Los Carpinteros will detect striking similarities between the two. Throughout the book, Héctor Corporán becomes an obvious bridge between Balaguer's own political philosophies (as evidenced by Dominican history) and his text; hence, in Los Carpinteros, the potential of power to corrupt is both seen and narrated (albeit vicariously) by one who experienced it not only between the years of 1930 and 1961, but also, according to some (including Sención), throughout his own presidencies.

Whether it is because both Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios and Los Carpinteros share a common historical subtext (i.e., dictatorship in the Dominican Republic) or because Balaguer's book is actually a subtext of Sención's, the two novels bear some noteworthy resemblances. For example, when Balaguer's text describes Heaureaux's "pequeña corte de aduladores... entre estos se destacaron algunos que hicieron su carrera política gracias al celestinaje" (154), Sención's reader will instantly recall General Elermoso, who secured power by orchestrating Ramos's



sexual adventures. Similarly, when Balaguer's narrator details the different methods (e.g., firing squad versus exile) used by Pedro Santana, Buenaventura Baéz, and even François Duvalier to eliminate their adversaries (190-192), Sención's readers remember the scene from Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios when Frank Bolaño, accosted from his bedroom early one morning by General Prieto, is saved by an unexpected phone call from the President:

— General Prieto— una voz moribunda y afeminada se arrastraba hasta el auricular— , he sido notificado de que el doctor Bolaño está detenido en la Secretaría de las Fuerzas Armadas; creo que lo más conveniente es que ese pobre loco sea sacado del país. Escojan ustedes el lugar a donde debe ser enviado y la fecha de su salida. (293)

In fact, the two works literally converge upon the character of Trujillo / Tirano when Balaguer's narrator, inescapably linked to the author himself by the intimate nature of his report, recounts one of Trujillo's most notorious atrocities that both resembles a scene in El Señor Presidente and reconfirms the dictator's *modus operandi* as depicted in La balada de Alfonsina Bairán with the disappearances of the local priest and Alfonsina's own husband:

Episodios de esa naturaleza se contaron durante el régimen de Trujillo por docenas. Uno de los más significativos fue el que culminó con la muerte

del Dr. Enrique Lithgow Ceara. El médico personal de Trujillo había recomendado un examen radiográfico de la próstata de su paciente. Luego, dispuso que se le hiciera una biopsia de ese órgano. Cuando el patólogo rindió el informe correspondiente, en presencia del Secretario de Estado de Salud y del Dr. Enrique Lithgow Ceara, adscrito a los servicios de patología del establecimiento hospitalario que se realizó el examen, así como de varios miembros del personal paramédico, los que oyeron el diagnóstico prorrumpieron en manifestaciones de júbilo. Lithgow Ceara, en cambio, se limitó a un comentario mordaz: “Qué lástima que el resultado haya sido negativo. Cuántos crímenes no ahorraría al país un cáncer.” ... Cuando el vehículo fue rescatado de las aguas, tras varios días de búsqueda, se difundió oficialmente la especie de que el Dr. Enrique Lithgow Ceara había perecido víctima de un simple accidente de tránsito. (Mateo 194-95)

But perhaps the most conspicuous convergence of the La balada de Alfonsina Bairán and Los que falsificaron la firma de dios can be found in Balaguer's portrayal of Lilís's skirmishes with the physical decadence that accompanies old age:

Esta ruina física se convirtió para él [Lilís] en una de sus principales preocupaciones. Como sicólogo intuitivo, conocedor más que nadie del alma de su pueblo, se sabía menoscabado en lo que constituía para todo dominicano el signo por excelencia de su hombría. El guerrillero que supo vencer a todos

sus adversarios en el campo de batalla sentía ahora temor cuando tenía que exhibir sus fuerzas en un tálamo de rosas. Le erizaba la idea de que esa merma de su vigor sexual se difundiera y de que se convirtiera en un motivo de sorna amarga en labios de sus enemigos. (233)

Balaguer records the dictator's grotesque attempts to reverse the processes of nature, including one particular act based on "viejas creencias populares":

Durante algún tiempo se hizo traer gallinas escogidas entre las más sanas que podían obtenerse en los campos vecinos. Luego seleccionaba la de mejor aspecto y la hacía echar con veinte huevos. Después de cuarentiocho horas ingería el primero, y los restantes, hasta completar la veintena, en los días sucesivos. (233)

The final incident in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, in which Juanito kills General Elermoso and then attacks President Ramos, seems to be a natural continuation to a scene taken directly from Los Carpinteros— the revenge of the rooster. Observing the advice of Alejo Carpentier — "no... contar las cosas como sucedieron, sino como debieron haber sucedido" (193)— , I can't help but wonder whether Sención has inscribed and rewritten Balaguer's scene, further distorting an event of already dubious historicity that was itself unavoidably altered by the author when inserted into his novel. If this is the case, Sención's attack again targets both the

inter- and extratextual domains, making use of Balaguer's own literary creation to strike out against the dictator and consequently "convirtiéndolo en un motivo de sorna amarga en labios de sus enemigos." The process is one of stripping away levels of metaphor to expose the processes of literary reception while concurrently bridging the gap between "fiction" (e.g., Los Carpintero's "Once upon a time" setting) and "reality" (e.g., right now, as in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios). In other words, if Los Carpinteros was in fact a *conscious* subtext of Sención's Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios (something that the reader must decide for him/herself), it adds another battlefield to the struggle for narrative empowerment, inscribing the dictator's rhetoric within his own as Sención / Ogun symbolically confronts and challenges the dictator to rhetorical battle in hopes of discrediting him (Ramos / Balaguer / Babalu-Aye), of deconstructing his power (through narrative "trickery," as Sención / Elegua), confirming the reader's capacity for action and encouraging that action toward bringing about enduring social change.

Perhaps one of Balaguer's characters best articulated the conundrum that Sención both contends with and exploits via his narrative opposition to the dictator: "El dominicano es arribista y sólo espera una ocasión que le sea propicia para subir al carro de los triunfadores" (292). Obviously, in using the dictator's own methods to break down Balaguer's hegemony and subsequently replace it with his own, Sención's literary opposition to the Dominican dictatorship is at best, problematic. Furthermore, whether Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios actually contributed to Balaguer's political downfall is impossible to prove. This notwithstanding, there is

something admirable in Sención's audaciously direct narrative confrontation of Balaguer — especially given that he is a writer and literary critic, and would certainly understand the text's allusions— and something undeniably clever in the way in which he uses the magic (or voodoo) of narrative to successfully “checkmate” the dictator in a rhetorical battle of wills under the simple rallying cry of, “¡Carajo, pierde si quieres!” Without a doubt, this indomitable spirit has allowed the novel to achieve its prominence within popular Dominican literature. Perhaps the most fitting way to end this chapter, then, is with Balaguer's own observations on being able to turn back the clock and rewrite history— much like Sención's novel has done:

La historia de todo hombre es una suma de aciertos y de errores.

Muchas de las cosas que nos hicieron más infelices en la vida pudieron ser evitadas. Muchas decisiones tomadas en el momento oportuno nos hubieran ahorrado grandes sinsabores. Los propios actos de traición y las ingratitudes de que fuimos víctima en el curso de nuestra existencia, son el producto de nuestra imprevisión y de nuestra fe excesiva en la decencia ajena. Los grandes más grandes han incurrido más de una vez en esa falta. Napoleón no ignoraba que Talleyrand vendía a sus enemigos secretos de Estado y que su ministro de Policía intervenía también en ese juego con las cartas marcadas.

Por eso llegamos inevitablemente al final de nuestra existencia con la insatisfacción de que sólo alcancemos a vivir una vez. ¡Qué hermosa sería la

vida si pudiéramos repetirla una segunda vez con la experiencia ganada en la primera! (Balaguer, Memorias 366)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In his presentation of the novel, Diógenes Céspedes describes the region in which Sención's story takes place as "las zonas... donde la hispanidad no es más que una nostalgia ideológica frente a la imponente cultura del *vudú*, los *luases* y el tráfico incesante de los habitantes de la difusa frontera dominico-haitiana" (book jacket).

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882) as cited in Richard Lee Turits' "A World Destroyed, a Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic," Hispanic American Historical Review 82.3 (2002): 589-635.

<sup>3</sup> The mythological elements evident in Los ojos de la montaña, although after-the-fact, help to justify my reading of Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios later in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell's "monomyth" (separation— initiation— return) provides one possible interpretation of dictator novels: "A hero [the author] ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder [literature]: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won [achieving "room for maneuver"]; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons [the "secrets" of dictatorial empowerment] on his fellow man." (30)

<sup>5</sup> "Durante la primera presidencia de Joaquín Balaguer (1966-78), éste atacaba sin tregua a los estudiantes universitarios liberales y a los jóvenes izquierdistas, vindicándose por medio del apoyo de los EE.UU. y por el peligro de la amenaza comunista del país vecino así como de otras partes del hemisferio. El gobierno fue muy injusto con los campesinos que apoyaban el plan de la redistribución de tierras.

Un gran número de personas fueron silenciadas o ultimadas por las fuerzas represivas del gobierno” (L. Howard Quackenbush, Antología del Teatro Dominicano Contemporáneo, Santo Domingo: Brigham Young University/Ediciones Librería La Trinitaria, 2004 v. 1, p. 239). Other than Sención, Haffe Serulle and Reynaldo Disla have probably been the Dominican writers who depicted Balaguer’s presidency most critically in his work—especially in La danza de Mingó (1977) and Bolo Francisco (1983). In this play, Serulle dramatizes the story of Florinda Soriano (Mamá Tingó), one of the leaders of the rural movement to redistribute lands to the Dominican peasantry, who was killed on Balaguer’s orders in 1974 near the small town of Yamasá approximately 30 miles north of Santo Domingo. In the second work, Bolo Francisco, Disla treats the period in Dominican history known as “Los Doce Años” (1966-1978). As Quackenbush has observed: “Bolo Francisco satiriza las condiciones crueles que existen en el país a partir de la primera presidencia de Balaguer. Los varios episodios enmarcan el caos y falta de control que reinaba en todo medio rural durante esa época. Es un mundo de puro vicio producido por el miedo a las fuerzas de seguridad que toman la ley en sus propias manos y abusan de su poder. Las cárceles están llenas de gente inocente que tiene que revolcarse en la inmundicia de su propio excremento y rondan por los caminos del país impunes los maleantes y locos pervertidos. El drama satiriza a las instituciones nacionales y se convierte en un ataque voraz al gobierno que ha controlado a la nación por más de veinte años antes de ser publicada y premiada esta obra en Cuba.” (95)



<sup>6</sup> The theme of cultural identity, particularly for Dominicans living in the United States, has been the subject of much research. Racial and cultural segregation are notable, particularly in cities with large Dominican enclaves (i.e., New York): Dominicans in the United States largely consider themselves to be Dominicans instead of “Americans,” dance merengue, eat Dominican food, shop at Dominican grocery stores, speak Spanish, watch Spanish TV, and generally resist assimilation into U.S. culture (see for example Jorge Duany’s “Reconstructing Racial Identity: Ethnicity, Color, and Class among Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico,” Latin American Perspectives 25.3 (1998): 147-172). For many young Dominicans living in the United States, (re)constructing their Dominicanness becomes an important part of growing up. This process generally includes trips back and forth to the Dominican Republic to visit relatives, and, as it becomes increasingly available, reading Dominican literature. Obviously, one important aspect of Dominicanness is coming to terms with the *trujillato*— and as time passes, more and more of these youth find it necessary to consult secondary sources to learn about Trujillo, including the novels studied here.

<sup>7</sup> The “Los” in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios includes not only Trujillo and his cronies, but also the author of the novel.

<sup>8</sup> In other words, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios becomes an ontogenetic text, as described in Chapter I (page 10) of this work.

<sup>9</sup> “Y diga el autor, escudándose en Aristóteles, que no es oficio del poeta (o digamos del novelista) ‘el contar las cosas como sucedieron, sino como debieron haber sucedido.’ — Alejo Carpentier.

<sup>10</sup> “Whenever uncanny fiction erupts within a chronicle intended to inform us, it should be seen as surrounded by violence” (Benítez-Rojo 94)

<sup>11</sup> The word, “mierda” associated with cockfighting brings to mind Gabriel García Márquez’s short story, “El coronel no tiene quien le escriba,” which ends with the same word. The story is similar to Sención’s in that the rooster is associated with the colonel’s son’s disappearance: like Cástulo in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, the colonel’s son is implicated in subversion against the government, apprehended at a cock fight, and ultimately killed. The similarity between the two texts is significant, since the rooster represents hope, not only for the colonel and his wife, but also for the whole town— just as Juanito in Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios brings about the end of Dr. Ramos, and the possibility of hope in the final pages of Sención’s novel.

<sup>12</sup> While Santería is most often associated with Cuba, it is also practiced widely in Haiti, in parts of the Dominican Republic, and throughout the Caribbean. Hence, it is not out of place to consider its implications when reading a Dominican text. Refer to Soraya Aracena’s Apuntes sobre la negritude (gagá) (1999) for a more developed study of the nuances of the occult in Caribbean religion.

<sup>13</sup> “Both (Hermes and Elegua) appear as naughty, mendacious children, or as tricky and lascivious old men; both are the ‘givers of discourse’ as they preside over

the world, over mysteries, transformations, processes, and changes; they are the alpha and omega of things. For this reason, certain Yoruba ceremonies begin and end with Elegua's dance" (Benítez-Rojo 16). Interestingly enough, the book begins with Antonio Bell's interrogation by Ramos (Balaguer) in the Presidential Palace and ends with the rooster's vicious attack on Ramos—something that could easily be construed as a literary rendition of Elegua's dance.

<sup>14</sup> I have found no documented evidence that Sención actually read Los Carpinteros; however, given the fact that it was one of three novels published in the Dominican Republic during 1984 (the other two were Miguel Aníbal Perdomo's Los pasos en la esfera and Diógenes Valdez's Los tiempos revocables), Sención's parody of Balaguer's Memorias, and considering that Balaguer was serving as the president of the country at the time, the chances are good that Sención was also familiar with Balaguer's novel.

<sup>15</sup> Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. Following his death, the island fell into chaos as several contenders — including Juan Bosch— vied for political power. Balaguer went into exile in the United States for 3 years, returning to the Dominican Republic in 1965. He was elected to the presidency for the first time in 1966, and won subsequent terms in 1970, 1974, 1986 (now elderly and blind), 1990, and 1994. I say "appearances of democracy..." here because, though not as overtly repressive as the dictatorships of Pedro Santana, Buenaventura Baéz, Ulises Heaureaux, Ramón Cáceres, or Rafael Trujillo, Dominican government from Trujillo's death to 1996 was for the most part characterized by authoritarian violence and oppression.

<sup>16</sup> “Balaguer’s” stabilization of the Dominican economy, it should be noted, depended largely upon massive amounts of economic aid from the United States. Between April 1965 and June of 1966, the country received some \$122 million in aid. From 1967-1969, the aid increased to \$133 million per year. From June 1969 to June 1973 the aid fell to about \$78 million a year; indeed, direct foreign aid from the US and income from the sugar quota offered by Washington accounted for nearly 32 percent of the country’s revenues. During the early 1970s, economic growth in the Dominican Republic was nearly the best in Latin America: in 1972, for example, the Dominican GNP grew at almost 12 percent. Besides director foreign aid, companies such as Falcombridge Dominicana (nickel mining), Rosario Dominicana (gold mining), the Dominican Oil Refinery, Gulf & Western, Philip Morris, and Nestlé all benefited from government favoritism which in turn enticed them to invest heavily in the Dominican Republic. (See also Moya Pons, The Dominican Republic: A National History (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1998 pp. 396-404)

## Chapter V

### Fictional History: Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo

“Siempre ha estado muy claro para mí que... la literatura no debía ser un vehículo de propaganda política y que la novela que se proponía a través de la ficción defender consignas, doctrinas, o ilustrar ideologías, estaba condenada al fracaso porque nunca adquiriría el poder de persuasión que necesita una novela para vivir.”

—Mario Vargas Llosa

“No creo que la literatura produzca esos cambios inmediatos en el campo social y político de los que nos hablaba Sartre, pero creo que deja una huella y ayuda a cambiar la realidad a través de las conciencias. Pienso así porque lo he vivido. Sin los libros que amé, que me marcaron, yo no sería quien soy, ni mantendría las convicciones que tengo, ni combatiría aquello que combato. Creo que la literatura sí tiene un efecto y en función de esa convicción un escritor debería participar por lo menos en el debate cívico... La literatura puede cambiar el mundo”

—Mario Vargas Llosa

Mario Vargas Llosa has frequently related how he became fascinated with the story of Rafael Trujillo Molina's reign over the Dominican Republic. What attracted the writer's attention was not necessarily what someone familiar with the *trujillato* might expect—the many accounts of the dictator's brutal persecution of his enemies, of his parties that regularly devolved into sexual free-for-alls, of Trujillo's repeated attempts to kill Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt, or of any number of other colorful stories that chronicled Trujillo's rule over the Dominican Republic. Rather than being interested in the dictator's most notorious atrocities, what attracted the

Peruvian writer's attention was really what did not happen in the hours following the dictator's assassination:

Lo que me fascinó de la historia de Trujillo no fue el fenómeno de la dictadura, una experiencia que hemos compartido durante décadas los países de América Latina, sino las características especiales de ésta. Lo más sorprendente fue la conjura que surgió en el seno de sus más cercanos colaboradores que tras matarlo sufren una especie de parálisis que les impide seguir adelante con el plan político que tenían. Sufrieron una especie de terror sagrado, lo que demuestra hasta qué punto la dictadura colonizó sus espíritus. Lo característico en todas las dictaduras es el control de las conciencias y hasta de los sueños de la gente. Yo he tratado de dar una explicación literaria a esa pregunta. (Gámez, s.p.)

The paralysis experienced by Trujillo's assassins after the dictator's death, their failure to exploit the potential "room for maneuver" created by their "writerly" act of murder—a paralysis somewhat analogous to Paco's inability to overcome the various constraints and conventions that confined him within Veloz Maggiolo's larger discursive system as discussed in Chapter II—becomes the basis for Vargas Llosa's metahistorical critique, not only of the dictatorship's "foundational texts" but also of the Dominican public's (lack of) response to it.<sup>1</sup> Like the other novels studied in my previous chapters, Vargas Llosa's La fiesta del Chivo (Alfaguara, 2000) uses history

as a starting point in constructing a fictionalized account of Trujillo's "spiritual colonization" of the Dominican Republic as experienced by one Dominican family.<sup>2</sup> Along the way, the writer foregrounds the intrinsic tension between the historical and fictional narratives that together helped mythologize Trujillo and (via public reaction to his work) highlights how readers sometimes respond when the distinctions between the two become blurred. Indeed, La fiesta del Chivo has provoked a heated and very public debate on the ethics of art and the boundaries between history and fiction.<sup>3</sup> This debate is especially important in the Dominican Republic because Trujillo's legacy—how he will be remembered by future generations—is, to a large extent, still taking shape. Because of this, even fictional descriptions of Trujillo have the potential to influence how the dictator will be remembered in the future. As Joaquín Balaguer has noted in his memoirs,

La obra y figura de Trujillo, pues, están aún pendientes del fallo de la posteridad. Es probable que el historiador del futuro, obligado a situarse por encima de las pasiones de nuestra época, repita sobre ellas las palabras con que termina Lamartine la historia de los Girondinos: "Quitad la sangre, y debajo quedará la verdad". (Balaguer, Memorias 96)

The question, of course, is whether future historians, will be able to (re)present the *trujillato* after having been exposed to the enormous mélange of historical and fictional accounts describing the dictatorship that can be found in the country's social

and cultural “archives.” In other words, one might ask whether someday it will be impossible for future generations of readers to “move past the blood and get to the truth” as proposed by Lamartine and cited by Balaguer in the quote above. For me, the way that La fiesta del Chivo has participated in this dialogue, which extends beyond the limits of the text, is more interesting than the book itself. Revisiting Neil Larson’s question cited in my Introduction, how might such an attempt to “narrar el *trujillato*” look in the future? Which aspects of the *trujillato* would figure most prominently in that text and which would be left out? Would it include the abundant and enormous public works projects realized during Trujillo’s presidency that earned the dictator the title, “Padre de la Patria?” His nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize? His government’s rampant cronyism and abuses of power that today’s readers have come to associate with the Era? Indeed, one might question whether anyone could ever capture an event as dispassionately as Balaguer seems to suggest.

The novel itself is unremarkable within the wider context of Vargas Llosa’s writing and relatively straightforward as a literary work. It resorts to a framing device used in numerous other novels dealing with the Dominican Republic after Trujillo’s death. Urania Cabral, a highly Americanized, middle-aged lawyer living in New York City, returns to the Dominican Republic to visit her family and confront childhood memories of life under Trujillo. Single, smart and successful, fluent in English, a graduate of Harvard Law and addicted to jogging and watching CNN, Urania has, in many ways, turned her back on her native country—and apparently without regrets. She has, however, remained interested in the Dominican Republic and has studied the



Era of Trujillo, collecting and reading books on the dictatorship and, like many other “Dominican Yorks,” becoming exceptionally knowledgeable about it: “Me he convertido en una experta en Trujillo. En lugar de jugar bridge, golf, montar caballo o ir a la ópera, mi hobby ha sido enterarme de lo que pasó en esos años” (66). Despite her studies, though, Urania admits that she still doesn’t really *understand* many aspects of the *trujillato*:

No lo entiendes, Urania. Hay muchas cosas de la Era que has llegado a entender; algunas, al principio, te parecían inextricables, pero, a fuerza de leer, escuchar, cotejar y pensar, has llegado a comprender que tantos millones de personas, machacadas por la propaganda, por la falta de información, embrutecidas por el adoctrinamiento, el aislamiento, despojadas de libre albedrío, de voluntad y hasta de curiosidad por el miedo y la práctica del servilismo y la obsecuencia, llegaron a divinizar a Trujillo. No sólo a temerlo, sino a quererlo, como llegan a querer los hijos a los padres autoritarios, a convencerse de que azotes y castigos son por su bien. Lo que nunca has llegado a entender es que los dominicanos más preparados, las cabezas del país, abogados, médicos, ingenieros, salidos a veces de muy buenas universidades de Estados Unidos o de Europa, sensibles, cultos, con experiencia, lecturas, ideas, presumiblemente un desarrollado sentido de ridículo, sentimientos, pruritos, aceptaran ser vejados de manera tan salvaje [por Trujillo]. (75)

Notwithstanding her obsession with her country's history, and despite her wanting to understand why the Dominican intelligentsia allowed the *trujillato* to continue for more than thirty years, the overriding question for Urania throughout the novel remains, “¿Has hecho bien en volver?” (12). Still struggling internally with her decision to return to the island that she has not seen since leaving it in 1961 (“No sé por qué he venido, qué hago aquí”—65), Urania wrestles constantly with an almost-overpowering urge to run away from the Dominican Republic a second time, this time forever.

While in Santo Domingo Urania visits her father—once a member of Trujillo's inner circle, now bedridden, decrepit, and unable to talk. Sitting at his bedside, and over a period of several days as she visits with her aunt and cousins who now take care of him, Urania returns to the Era of Trujillo. Through a combination of her memories and her studies of the dictatorship, she chronicles the experiences of a person who experienced the dictator's abuses first hand and, by extension, of a nation victimized by its leader. The story is careful to point out, though, that not all Dominicans share Urania's disdain for the *trujillato*. For example, at one point in the novel Urania quizzes her father's nurse on Dominican history. The woman is too young to remember Trujillo and, in fact, seems to question what she's heard about the dictatorship: “Bueno, sería un dictador y lo que digan, pero parece que entonces se vivía mejor. Todos tenían trabajo y no cometían tantos crímenes...” (128). The nurse's

response causes Urania to reflect upon the shortcomings of collective memory, a theme we've encountered in each of the other novels studied in previous chapters:

Tal vez era verdad que, debido a los desastrosos gobiernos posteriores, muchos dominicanos añoraban ahora a Trujillo. Habían olvidado los abusos, los asesinatos, la corrupción, el espionaje, al aislamiento, el miedo: vuelto mito el horror. «Todos tenían trabajo y no se cometían tantos crímenes.» (128)

More explicitly here than in the other works, Urania makes it clear that, for her, forgetting the dictator's atrocities is unacceptable. During one of her visits with her father, she comes to understand that one of the reasons she has returned to the island is to recriminate those who would forget the abuses committed by Trujillo, including her own father:

Sí, papá, a eso debo haber venido. A hacerte pasar mal rato. Aunque, con el ataque cerebral, tomaste tus precauciones. Arrancaste de tu memoria las cosas desagradables. ¿También lo mío, lo nuestro, lo borraste? Yo, no. Ni un día. Ni uno solo de estos treinta y cinco años, papá. Nunca olvidé ni te perdoné. Por eso, cuando me llamabas a la Siena Heights University, o a Harvard, oía tu voz y colgaba, sin dejarte terminar [...]. Hablabas dando rodeos, con alusiones, no fueran a caer bajo ojos ajenos, no fueran otros a enterarse de esa historia. ¿Sabes por qué nunca pude perdonarte? Porque nunca

lo lamentaste de verdad. Luego de tantos años de servir al Jefe, habías perdido los escrúpulos, la sensibilidad, el menor asomo de la rectitud. Igual que tus colegas. Igual que el país entero, tal vez. ¿Es ése el requisito para mantenerse en el poder sin morir de asco? Volverse un desalmado, un monstruo como tu Jefe. (137)

While her father's stroke is responsible for "ripping the disagreeable things" from his memory, Urania makes it clear that his failure to acknowledge and oppose them while he was still healthy is unforgivable—just as it is for other survivors of the Era.

Urania's quest to understand and confront her past becomes the narrative vehicle that carries the novel's other two subplots. In the first of these, the reader becomes privy to Trujillo's thoughts during the final days of the dictator's life. While this part of the narrative is based largely upon historical accounts (Vargas Llosa cites Robert Crassweller's writings directly, and his familiarity with other reporters and historians, including *Time* correspondent Bernard Diederich, is also imminently evident),<sup>4</sup> it has also been supplemented heavily by both fiction (for example, Lipe Collado claims that Vargas Llosa has copied his lawyer-protagonist from *Después del Viento*, published in 1997<sup>5</sup>) and popular conjecture. This narrative is told from the dictator's point of view and focuses chiefly on Trujillo's thoughts and feelings during several of his most notorious transgressions (his long-running feud with Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt, his struggles with Fathers Reilly and Panal, his

murdering of José Almoina, Jesús de Galíndez, Ramón Marrero Aristy, and the Mirabal sisters recounted in Chapter V), his interactions with and his opinions of several prominent members of his cabinet (Johnny Abbés and Joaquín Balaguer, among others), and his struggles with his wife and sons who greedily exploited their second-hand power over the Caribbean nation. History and fiction become hopelessly intertwined throughout the novel until they become indistinguishable—despite the fact that within the text Trujillo self-consciously corrects many of the myths that were once popular within Dominican circles. Because of this, and by focalizing these events through the dictator’s highly “personalized” point of view, Vargas Llosa presents the reader with a more intimate representation of the dictatorship than many of the novel’s predecessors. At the same time, he effectively demonstrates how fact and fiction contributed to the mythology of Trujillo during his life and even afterwards while still depicting the dictator in a way that remains plausible to the novel’s readers.<sup>6</sup> The “filter” of the dictator’s fictionalized conscience helps to create emotional proximity between the *trujillato* and the book’s readers, making it easier for them to experience the dictatorship, or at least a literary representation of it, vicariously. This intimacy, however, is not an objective one. Instead, it eventually helps to amplify the revulsion readers feel toward Trujillo. From the novel’s opening pages, it becomes clear that the goal of the text, in this case, is not veracity but rather verisimilitude.

As alluded to above, one of the most interesting aspects of this part of the novel is Trujillo’s self-consciousness of the processes of mythologization employed by him and his collaborators throughout his presidency. One example of this can be

seen when the dictator is remembering how his wife had become one of the “preeminent” Dominican writers of the Era:

La Prestante Dama... se había tomado en serio lo de escritora y moralista. Por qué no. ¿No lo decían los periódicos, las radios, la televisión? ¿No era libro de lectura obligatoria en las escuelas, esas *Meditaciones morales*, prologadas por el mexicano José Vasconcelos, que se reimprimían cada dos meses? ¿No había sido *Falsa amistad* el más grande éxito teatral de los treinta y un años de la Era de Trujillo? ¿No la habían puesto por las nubes los críticos, los periodistas, los profesores universitarios, los curas, los intelectuales? ¿No le dedicaron un seminario en el Instituto Trujilloniano? ¿No habían elogiado sus conceptos los ensotanados, los obispos, esos cuervos traidores, esos judas, que después de vivir de sus bolsillos, ahora también, igual que los yanquis, se pusieron a hablar de derechos humanos? La Prestante Dama era escritora y moralista. No gracias a ella, sino a él, como todo lo que ocurría en este país hacía tres décadas. (27-28)

Other instances, both big and small, are interspersed throughout the text. In one part of the novel, for example, as the dictator is exercising he begins to sweat: “Ya sudaba. ¡Si lo vieran! Otro mito que repetían sobre él era: «Trujillo nunca suda [...]»” (29). Another part of the text tells about how Trujillo and his team of spin doctors converted the Haitian Massacre of 1939 into a national triumph, culminating in

Trujillo's self-righteous claim, made while dramatically holding up his hands for his guests to see that: "Nunca temblaron. Porque sólo di orden de matar cuando era absolutamente indispensable para el bien del país" (220). Following this boast, one of Trujillo's guests asks him about another popular myth related to the same episode from Dominican history: "—¿Es verdad lo del perejil, Su Excelencia? ¿Que para distinguir a dominicanos de haitianos se hacía decir a los negros *perejil*? ¿Y que a los que no la pronunciaban bien les cortaban la cabeza?" (221). Shrugging his shoulders, Trujillo responds nonchalantly, "—He oído esa anéctodota. Habladurías que corren por ahí" (221). The dictator then turns his attention to the number of Haitians killed, the uproar caused by the incident, the reparations ordered by the international community, and the amount actually paid by the Dominican Republic:

Se pactó 750.000 pesos, pero sólo 275.000 al contado [repuso el doctor Balaguer]. El medio millón restante se iba a entregar en pagos anuales de cien mil pesos, por cinco años consecutivos. Sin embargo, lo recuerdo muy bien, era ministro de Relaciones Exteriores interino en ese momento, con don Anselmo Paulino que me asesoró en la negociación, impusimos una cláusula según la cual las entregas estaban supeditadas a la presentación, ante un tribunal internacional, de los certificados de defunción, durante las dos primeras semanas de octubre de 1937, de las 2.750 víctimas reconocidas. Haití nunca cumplimentó este requisito. Por lo tanto, la República Dominicana quedó exonerada de pagar la suma restante. Las reparaciones sólo ascendieron

a la entrega inicial. El pago lo hizo Su Excelencia, de su patrimonio, así que no costó un centavo al Estado dominicano.

—Poco dinero, para acabar con un problema que hubiera podido desaparecernos—concluyó Trujillo, ahora serio—. Es cierto, murieron algunos inocentes. Pero, los dominicanos recuperamos nuestra soberanía. Desde entonces, nuestras relaciones con Haití son excelentes, a Dios gracias. (223)

The government's narrative reconstruction of this and other historical events effectively whitewashes the bloodstained truth of the dictatorship's actions. The text calls attention to this idea of the false purification of Trujillo's abuses especially well in Chapter II. Here, Trujillo has just finished taking a bath, during which he has been reflecting heavily on many of the same incidents during his presidency that are cited by the conspirators later on in the novel as their reasons for having turned against the dictator. After toweling himself off and spritzing himself with cologne, the dictator symbolically powders himself:

Cuando estuvo peinado y hubo retocado los extremos del bigotillo semimosca que llevaba hacía veinte años, se talqueó la cara con prolijidad, hasta disimular bajo una delicadísima nube blanquecina aquella morenez de sus maternos ascendientes, los negros haitianos, que siempre había despreciado en las pieles ajenas y en la suya propia. (37-38)



The word “disimular” (*dissemble* in English), used to describe the way in which the dictator has powdered and perfumed over his Haitian ancestry foreshadows the rhetorical processes used by the dictator and his band as they painstakingly re-write Dominican history over more than three decades, but especially in how they “powdered over” one of the bloodiest atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Obviously, by repeatedly laying bare the processes of mythologization in this way, the text also endeavors to uncover the true nature of the Trujillato while unavoidably falling victim to it. Vargas Llosa has openly acknowledged this fact in several interviews. He has also made it clear that he understood the risks of mixing history and fiction in presenting Trujillo—that aside from adding to the accretive corpus that helps to form the legend of Trujillo, that he might over- or under-characterize him, particularly given the dictatorship’s well-known penchant for dramatics and hyperbole. In one interview in particular, Vargas Llosa describes the difficulties of making the literary rendition of Trujillo believable:

Al describir a Trujillo es irremediable caer en la farsa, en la mojiganga, en la payasada, ya que su ‘era’ estuvo llena de eso. Por una parte fue algo sangriento y cruel, y por la otra un circo. Quería que la novela diera cuenta de ese aspecto teatral sin caer en la farsa, lo cual me costó un enorme esfuerzo por la misma pasión que tenía Trujillo por la teatralidad. (Rosales y Zamora, s.p.)

As difficult as it might have been for the writer to paint a credible picture of the dictator without overdoing it, and despite the irony inherent in the fact that Vargas Llosa often found himself stripping away some of Trujillo's legendary excesses in order to make his story more convincing for his readers, La fiesta del Chivo and the controversy it has sparked stand, to a large extent, as a testament to the author's creative achievements. I will discuss later in this chapter, Vargas Llosa has been so successful in the way he has reconstructed the dictator that he has actually been accused by some Dominicans of replacing the historical "truth" about Trujillo with his fiction. Not surprisingly, many of these allegations are directed at the portions of the novel where Vargas Llosa dramatizes the dictator's thoughts and in particular, his reflections on the most inhumane acts that took place during his Presidency.

The novel's third storyline provides another perspective on the final months of the *trujillato* as experienced by the dictator's killers. The narration is comprised largely of the reflections of each of Trujillo's assassins as they wait to ambush the dictator's car along the road to San Cristóbal. Vargas Llosa systematically links each conspirator with a specific historical event that typified the violence of the dictatorship. Antonio de la Maza turns against Trujillo after the dictator has his brother, Octavio (Tavito), killed in the aftermath of the Galíndez kidnapping and murder in 1956; Tony Imbert is linked to the assassination of the Mirabal sisters in 1960;<sup>7</sup> and Salvador Estrella Sadhalá is connected with Trujillo's dispute over Fathers Reilly and Panal in 1961.<sup>8</sup> The characters' internal monologues help to show the other side of some of the dictator's most notorious acts from the perspective of his indirect

victims (not the victims themselves, but their friends and families who are one step removed from them and presumably more objective) and situate the story's action within a specific historical context. The empathetic feeling of "understanding" produced in readers as they witness the evolution of these characters' attitudes toward Trujillo, together with the stark contrast between the conspirators' "human" recollections of the dictator's atrocities and Trujillo's own cold and calculating memories of the same acts, helps to strengthen the sympathy between Vargas Llosa's readers (also several steps removed from the violence) and the dictator's victims. Furthermore, in part due to the alternating voices of the text (Urania, Trujillo, the Conspirators), it allows readers to "experience" (by means of reading) the same processes of alienation that the conspirators experienced as they became more intimately familiar with the dictator's abuses and came to hate Trujillo enough to kill him.

Adding to this effect, the conspirators' stories are presented in a way that makes them more easily generalizable for other Dominican readers. In Chapter IX, which details Antonio Imbert's path to the conspiracy, the text makes three key assertions: 1) that all Dominicans were implicated in the dictatorship; 2) that freedom of choice was what had been lost under Trujillo; and (3) that it was worth recovering again whatever the cost. To the first point, Antonio asserts:

Con los ojos semicerrados, arrullado por el rumor quedo del mar, pensó en lo endiablado del sistema que Trujillo había sido capaz de crear, en lo que

todos los dominicanos tarde o temprano participaban como cómplices, un sistema del que sólo podían ponerse a salvo los exiliados (no siempre) y los muertos. En el país, de una manera u otra, todos habían sido, eran o serían parte del régimen. «Lo peor que puede pasarle a un dominicano es ser inteligente o capaz», había oído decir una vez a Álvaro Cabral («un dominicano muy inteligente y capaz», se dijo) y la frase se le grabó: «Porque entonces, tarde o temprano, Trujillo lo llamará a servir al régimen, o a su persona, y cuando llama, no está permitido decir no». Él era una prueba de esa verdad. Nunca se le pasó por la cabeza poner la menos resistencia a esos nombramientos. Como decía Estrella Sadhalá, el Chivo había quitado a los hombres el atributo sagrado que les concedió Dios: el libre albedrío. (189-90)

This loss of agency, which Antonio presents as an inalienable right, and more importantly, being able to break free from a seemingly unavoidable complicity with Trujillo and recuperate this agency, becomes a call to action not only for Antonio but also for his co-conspirators:

Aquello de libre albedrío lo afectó. Tal vez por eso decidió que Trujillo debía morir. Para recuperar él y los dominicanos, la facultad de aceptar o rechazar por lo menos el trabajo con que uno se ganaba la vida. Tony no sabía lo que era eso. De niño tal vez lo supo, pero lo había olvidado. Debía ser una cosa linda. La taza de café o el trago de ron debían saber mejor, el humo del

tabaco, el baño de mar un día caluroso, la película de los sábados o el merengue de la radio, debían dejar en el cuerpo y el espíritu una sensación más grata, cuando se disponía de eso que Trujillo les arrebató a los dominicanos hacía ya treinta y un años: el libre albedrío. (190-191)

The text establishes a clear dichotomy between action and inaction or, in other words, paralysis. This point is made most effectively in Chapter VI which recounts Antonio de la Maza's story. Having sworn to avenge his brother Tavito's death in the presence of many who knew that his murder was ordered by Trujillo ("¡Por Dios santo que mataré con mis manos al hijo de puta que hizo esto!"—116), Antonio unexpectedly finds himself in the dictator's presence and listening to Trujillo's version of why Octavio had been murdered. After leaving Trujillo, Antonio asks himself:

¿Por qué no saltó sobre él cuando lo tuvo tan cerca? Se lo preguntaba todavía, cuatro años y medio después. No porque creyera una palabra de lo que decía. Aquello era parte de la farsa a la que Trujillo era tan propenso y que la dictadura superponía a sus crímenes, como un suplementario sarcasmo a los hechos luctuosos sobre los que se levantaba. ¿Por qué, entonces? No por miedo a morir, porque, entre todos los defectos que se reconocía, nunca figuró el miedo a la muerte. Desde que era un alzado y con una pequeña tropa de horacistas combatió a tiros al dictador, se había jugado la vida muchas veces. Era algo más sutil e indefinible que el miedo: esa parálisis, el adormecimiento

de la voluntad, del raciocinio y del libre albedrío que aquel personajillo acicalado hasta el ridículo, de vocecilla aflautada, ojos de hipnotizador, ejercía sobre los dominicanos pobres o ricos, cultos o incultos, amigos o enemigos, lo que lo tuvo allí, mudo, pasivo, escuchando aquellos embustes, espectador solitario de esa patraña, incapaz de convertir en acción su voluntad de saltar sobre él y acabar con el aquelarre en que se había convertido la historia del país. (119-120)

Given the binary pair of action/paralysis mentioned above, it is important to remember that Antonio's paralysis is only temporary, that this particular group of Dominicans did in fact *act*, and that these actions are recorded in Chapter XII (pp. 245-251) when the dictator is killed. This said, perhaps the most conspicuous contrast between action and paralysis, and perhaps the most nefarious example of the dictator's "spiritual colonization" of the Dominican people can be found by juxtaposing Urania's father, Senator Agustín "Cerebritito" Cabral, with Amadito García Guerrero who clearly serves as the Senator's foil. Both men were members of Trujillo's inner circle and both had been subjected to tests of loyalty (specifically, the sacrifice of a loved one) by the dictator: Amadito is asked to forego his marriage to the woman he loves because of her brother's involvement with the opposition and Cerebritito to offer his daughter, Urania, as a sacrifice to the dictator. While both men initially participate willingly in the test, the way they respond later (Amadito joining the assassins and Cerebritito doing nothing) is what sets them apart from each other.

As I mentioned previously, Urania contemptuously attacks her father for his reaction (or lack thereof) to Trujillo's abuses:

¿Sabes por qué nunca pude perdonarte? Porque nunca lo lamentaste de verdad. Luego de tantos años de servir al Jefe, habías perdido los escrúpulos, la sensibilidad, el menor asomo de rectitud. Igual que tus colegas. Igual que el país entero, tal vez. ¿Era ése el requisito para mantenerse en el poder sin morir de asco? Volverse un desalmado, un monstruo como tu Jefe. Quedarse frescos y contentos como el bello Ramfis después de violar y dejar desangrándose en el Hospital Marión a Rosalía. (137)

Having fallen out of favor with the Trujillo for no apparent reason (something that happened frequently during the Era), Cerebritto grows increasingly desperate in his attempts to regain the dictator's favor. As Urania's story slowly unfolds (a process that evolves throughout the entire novel), the reader learns about a plan proposed by Manuel Alfonso (who plays the role of "Celestino" for the dictator) and ultimately accepted by Senator Cabral. It is significant that Manuel Alfonso first deifies Trujillo as he prepares Cerebritto for his indecent proposal. This is literally a process of psychological grooming, reminiscent of Balaguer's apology for Trujillo cited in my Introduction and the mirror image of what the text is doing with the reader's attitudes toward Trujillo:<sup>9</sup>

Tú y yo sabemos lo que ha sido su vida. Trabajar desde el alba hasta la medianoche, siete días por semana, doce meses al año. Sin descansar jamás. Ocupándose de lo importante y de lo mínimo. Tomando cada momento decisiones de las que dependen la vida y la muerte de tres millones de dominicanos. Para meternos en el siglo XX. Teniendo que cuidarse de los resentidos, de los mediocres, de la ingratitud de tanto pobre diablo. ¿No merece, un hombre así, distraerse de cuando en cuando? (346)

Manuel Alfonso eventually convinces Urania's father that his sacrificing Urania for the dictator's sexual gratification will help Cerebritito regain Trujillo's favor:

Se arreglará, Cerebritito. Hablaré con él. Yo sé cómo decirle las cosas. Le explicaré. No le diré que es idea mía, sino tuya. Una iniciativa de Agustín Cabral. Un leal a toda prueba, incluso desde la desgracia, desde la humillación. Tú ya conoces al Jefe. Le gustan los gestos. Puede tener sus años, su salud resentida. Pero, nunca rechazó los desafíos del amor. Lo organizaré todo, con la más absoluta discreción. No te preocupes. Recuperarás tu posición, los que te dieron la espalda hará cola en esta puerta muy pronto. (346)

Ultimately, the act of offering his own daughter to Trujillo (literally a virgin sacrifice) represents the nadir of spiritual degeneration for the once honorable Senator Cabral. The decision to trade his daughter and his personal honor to regain the



dictator's favor represents the turning point for the Senator, who thenceforth continues spiraling toward political, spiritual, and physical ruin. The figure of Manuel, who is rotting away with cancer and who helps to catalyze Cerebrito's ruin, represents the dictator's corrupting power over the Dominican people. At this point in the novel, the deterioration of Trujillo literally occurs before the reader's eyes during the dictator's assault on Urania. The brutality and vulgarity of the rape scene is excessive, kitschy, and is described as such. Vargas Llosa repeats the word "kitsch" four times in the various paragraphs describing the dictator's lair at la Hacienda Fundación. For example,

Ella era parte del *kitsch*, por lo demás, aquella noche cálida de mayo, con su vestido de organdí rosado para fiestas de presentación en sociedad, el collarcito de plata con una esmeralda y los aretes bañados en oro, que habían sido de mamá y que, excepcionalmente, papá le permitió ponerse para la fiesta de Trujillo. Su incredulidad irrealizaba lo que le estaba ocurriendo. Le parecía no ser ella misma esa chiquilla parada sobre un asta del escudo patrio, en ese extravagante recinto. ¿El senador Agustín Cabral la enviaba, ofrenda viva, al Benefactor y Padre de la Patria Nueva? Sí, no le cabía la menor duda, su padre había preparado esto con Manuel Alfonso. Y, sin embargo, todavía quería dudar. (500-501)

The depiction of Urania is an obvious perversion of a *quinceañera* celebration, the traditional “coming out” party for young Latin American socialites (pink organdy dress, her mother’s emerald necklace and golden earrings, Lucho Gatica’s “Bésame mucho” playing in the background).<sup>10</sup> The contrasts between Urania’s innocence and the dictator’s licentiousness is replayed several times during the encounter and as she retells the story, Urania repeatedly refers to this age difference as a way of reemphasizing the offensiveness of the scene (“Él tenía setenta y yo catorce... Lucíamos una pareja muy dispar”—505)—so much so that this refrain becomes a counterpoint to the scene’s building rhythm that includes music being played in the background (first by Gatica, then Toña la Negra), the dictator’s recitation of Neruda’s “Poema XV” to Urania, and the girl’s dance with the dictator. The rhythmic scene continues to build toward a crescendo of sexual violence and vulgarity, with Trujillo eventually muttering, “Romper el coñito de una virgen siempre excita a los hombres” (507)—cited by Urania as “la primera palabrota, la primera vulgaridad de la noche” (507). As the dictator continues regressing into an animalistic amalgamation of body parts (“ojos” –502, “el vientre algo abultado” –503, “el bigotito mosca”—504, and finally, an “erección”—505), he simultaneously reduces Urania to the female sexual organ—“coñito”—a word which is repeated numerous times throughout Chapter XXIV. The dictator’s thoughts, as revealed by the omniscient narrator, further incriminate the Dominican President as he forces himself upon Urania:

No era amor, ni si quiera placer lo que [Trujillo] esperaba de Urania. Había aceptado que la hija del senador Agustín Cabral viniera a la Casa de Caoba sólo para comprobar que Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina era todavía, pese a sus setenta años, pese a sus problemas de próstata, pese a los dolores de cabeza que le daban los curas, los yanquis, los venezolanos, los conspiradores, un macho cabal, un chivo con un güevo todavía capaz de ponerse tieso y de romper los coñitos vírgenes que le pusieran delante. (508)

The reference to *chivo* or “goat” in the quote above evokes only a portion of the word’s constantly shifting referent throughout the novel—a referent that is deliberately ambiguous beginning with its use in the book’s title. According to Nadia Julien’s, The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols (1996), the goat generally symbolizes “lasciviousness, the ambivalent power of the libido, and fertility” (179). For the Egyptians, the goat was “an uncertain god, the vehicle through which he communicated his creative spirit to man.” (180). For the Greeks, the goat is linked with Pan, god of fertility and universal order. In Vedic India, the goat is the god of fire, vitality, sacrificial fire, “from which a new and holy life is engendered” (180). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Billy goat is “a symbol of lust, of exacerbated sexual desire, lubricity, and the personification of the devil” (181). Besides the obvious link to “chivo” which is Latin American slang for “old man,” the mythological context of the word adds to its significance in the novel. The combination of deity, of lust, and of universal order implicit in the goat is all important in making it a metaphor for

Trujillo. The comparison being made is an appropriate one. The once-common signs reading “Dios y Trujillo” which hung in thousands of Dominican households, the power of Trujillo’s dominance over the Dominican Republic for more than three decades, and the dictator’s infamous abuses of that power including his sexual exploitation of Dominican women as depicted in this part of the novel all help to “charge” the metaphor and lessen the conceptual distance between Trujillo and a goat. The text then continues dismantling Trujillo’s character, reducing him to an amalgamation of his body parts but eventually, through his own “voice” (though narrated by Urania), actually transforming him *into* a goat—a powerfully effective trick of narration enabled by the interplay of narrative elements including free indirect discourse, focalization, and the constant thematic and historical convergence of the story’s various narrative streams (Rimmon-Kenan 109-116).

The scene depicting Urania’s encounter with Trujillo continues to increase in its vulgarity and to progress toward a climax: “Basta de jugar a la muertita, belleza. De rodillas. Entre mis piernas. Así. Lo coges con tus manitas y a la boca. Y lo chupas, como te chupé el coñito. Hasta que despierte. Ay de ti si no se despierta, belleza” (508). When the dictator is unable to achieve an erection, the scene becomes even more violent: “Te equivocas si crees que vas a salir de aquí virgen, a burlarte de mí con tu padre” (508):

Cogiéndola de un brazo, la tumbó a su lado. Ayudándose con movimientos de las piernas y la cintura, se montó sobre ella. Esa masa de carne

la aplastaba, la hundía en el colchón; el aliento a coñac y a rabia la mareaba. Sentía sus músculos y huesos triturados, pulverizados. Pero la asfixia no evitó que advirtiera la rudeza de esa mano, de esos dedos que exploraban, escarbaban y entraban en ella a la fuerza. Se sintió rajada, acuchillada; un relámpago corrió de su cerebro a los pies. Gimió, sintiendo que se moría. (509)

The anti-climax is painful for Urania and frustrating for the dictator, who is subjected to public humiliation (not only witnessed by Urania, but also through her retelling of the story to her family, not to mention the reader) because of his inability to realize his role as supreme *macho*:

–Y entonces, Su excelencia volvió a tenderse de espaldas, a cubrirse los ojos. Se quedó quieto, quitecito. No estaba dormido. Se le escapó un sollozo. Empezó a llorar... No por mí. Por su próstata hinchada, por su güevo muerto, por tener que tirarse a las doncellitas con los dedos, como le gustaba a Petán. (509)

Amadito's remorse for having played along with Trujillo sparks action and ultimately leads to the dictator's "ajusticiamiento," an outward and unmistakable act of defiance: "Muy despacio señaló el revólver de su cartuchera. –La próxima vez que dispare, será para matar a Trujillo" (61). Cerebritito's remorse, on the other hand, is suffered internally and it is never clear to the reader whether he is sorry for having

sacrificed his daughter to the dictator or whether his remorse stems from having fallen out of Trujillo's favor. The second seems more likely, since the implicit author is unmistakably more sympathetic toward Amadito (portrayed in the text as a hero) and more recriminatory toward Cerebritto (characterized as a pathetic adulator wasting away as he pines for the dictator's attention). It could be that this juxtaposition between Cerebritto and Amadito is one of the reasons for the initial public outrage against La fiesta del Chivo. The text's recrimination of Cerebritto pricked the consciences of many of the island's elite families who felt that Vargas Llosa had accused them unfairly, whether intentionally or not, of having been complicit with the dictatorship—for having been, to some extent, exactly like Cerebritto. The complaints against the text seem to support this hypothesis. For example, General Félix Hermida claims that those familiar with Dominican history will read his father into the novel during the episode in which Pedro Livio Cedeño, who has been gravely injured during the shootout with Trujillo, is taken to the International Clinic. Feeling that the depiction is inaccurate, Hermida has called the book “una falacia” and says he regards it as “una falta de respeto que soslaya nuestra historia, nuestra sociedad... una falta de respeto a la memoria de mi padre y al mío propio” (“Militar...”). Less vehement in his criticism than Hermida, another commentator has observed that while many have found fault with Vargas Llosa's book, “primero por la crudeza y segundo por las omisiones en que supuestamente incurre... Nadie, en cambio, lo acusa de farsante ni malediciente” (Comarazamy, s.p.). The assassins' families haven't been happy with the novel, either. Antonio De La Maza's relatives took out a full-page add in the

Dominican Newspaper Hoy complaining that the book might confuse younger generations who did not live through “the system that asphyxiated us” (Nesmith, 4/30/2000, “Trujillo Return...”). Additionally, Bernardo Vega, a Dominican historian and former U.S. ambassador, has observed that none of the assassin’s families attended any of the events in the Dominican Republic where Vargas Llosa spoke about La fiesta del Chivo: “The families are not happy with the book because he [Vargas Llosa] treats them [the assassins] as humans who get drunk and cheat on their wives and have human weaknesses, rather than the heroes we read about in history books” (Nesmith 4/28/2000, “Vargas Llosa defends book...”). Andrés Mateo has written that the novel “is an extremely severe portrait of a very difficult time” and observed that, “There was no cranny of social existence where the oppressive symbols of (Trujillo’s) power were not present, and the novel reflects that with much rawness.” Mateo also notes that many elements of the novel should be thought of as symbolic, not factual (Almánzar, “Vargas Llosa causes stir...”).<sup>11</sup>

The controversy surrounding the novel is important in part because it serves as evidence that the book is being read by Dominicans and, to some extent, has been accepted into the ongoing social dialog being played out in the Dominican dictator novel. It also demonstrates a certain naïveté in its readers and a willingness to regard the book, if not as historical fact, as a candidate that could be perceived as such.<sup>12</sup>

Chapter XXIV, where Urania’s rape is detailed and which is probably the target of the quote above regarding the novel’s crudeness, is clearly meant to be offensive. It also helps to establish that while the word “fiesta” in the novel’s title could have several

referents (the dictator's rule over the Dominican Republic, the conspirators' ambush of Trujillo, Urania's recounting the story of her rape to her family or confronting her father, the reader's interaction with the text), the word's meaning has been altered and distorted toward the grotesque. This is consistent with some of the author's commentary on the art of narrative in recent years. According to Vargas Llosa, the coarseness of the work is one of the most salient factors that ultimately distinguish La fiesta del Chivo as art and helps it to posit a "truth" of its own:

En la literatura es bello no sólo lo bello sino también lo feo, lo asqueroso, lo monstruoso, y si no lo es, no hay literatura ni obra de arte, eso es lo que caracteriza a la literatura como algo distinto de las ciencias sociales. Un libro de historia o un reportaje sobre una dictadura muestra lo feo como feo, una obra de arte no puede hacerlo porque dejaría de ser tal, ya que carecería de ese poder de hechizar que debe tener la obra de arte para que le demos a la ficción una autenticidad y una verdad. (Rosales y Zamora, s.p.)

The "authenticity" referred to by Vargas Llosa is driven not by its historical accuracy but by its verisimilitude (the novel takes great pains to be believable, if not completely accurate historically). One might ask, then, what is this "truth" being suggested by the novel? For me, unraveling the "truth" of the novel requires an analysis of how the novel's major plots are finally resolved. In two of the story's plots, the dénouement comes with the dictator's death: Trujillo's narrative ends and the



conspirators' story reaches its climax in the assassination scene, leaving only the fate of each individual assassin to be resolved. Yet in spite of the fact that the book's three narratives converge in the character of Trujillo, Urania's story doesn't end with the dictator's death. Instead, resolution begins as she mentally relives (i.e., confronts) and then finds the courage to retell her story to her audience, both within the text (to her family), and outside of it (to the reader via the narrative process). In other words, resolution comes in Urania's story when she breaks the silence which has been regarded more and more frequently as a mark of "complicity" between the dictator and his victims, and what enabled the dictator to dominate Dominican life for more than 30 years. It is also important to note that Urania's action is an active or "writerly" one—she has broken her silence and therein overcome her paralysis.

It is also important to note that while Urania's plot is resolved, the metonym that makes her an extension of the Dominican people unravels when the dictator is killed. At this point in the work, Joaquín Balaguer shifts from a secondary character to a primary one and a new plot materializes. By the time Trujillo rapes Urania, the dictator's baseness has been "revealed" through the criminal brutality with which the "Padre de la Patria" has molested a 14-year old virgin who is an evident symbol of the country's future. By the time that Urania is raped, readers are sympathetic to Urania and the Conspirators who have been portrayed as Trujillo's victims. When the dictator is "brought to justice" (and the text is very careful to use this word), the country's uncertain future, absent any organized coup, begins to be "written" by the *presidente fantoche*, Balaguer, who quickly discerns and then takes advantage of the "room for

maneuver” created by Trujillo’s assassins. Chapter XXII is an especially interesting part of the book, for here all three narrative streams now seem to converge in the figure of Joaquín Balaguer, structurally signaling his complete replacement of Trujillo. Indeed, of the most important novels studied here (De abril en adelante, La balada del Alfonsina Bairán, Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios, and La fiesta del Chivo), Chapters XIV and XXII of Vargas Llosa’s book goes the farthest in symbolically “unmasking” President Balaguer’s ambition, diplomacy, and political astuteness—a stark contrast to Trujillo’s characterization of Balaguer in Chapter XIV and perhaps the reason why Balaguer has called the book, “a good novel... [delivered] with great ease of style and a lot of imagination” (Nesmith, “Vargas Llosa defends book...” )—after all, the book portrays political machinations as being masterful and politically ingenious:

Como su tono era tan suave y cordial, y la música de sus palabras tan agradable, parecía que las cosas que el doctor Joaquín Balaguer decía no tuvieran la firmeza de justicio y la severidad que, a veces, como ahora, el minúsculo hombrecillo se permitía con el Jefe. ¿Se estaba excediendo? ¿Había sucumbido, como Cerebritito, a la idiotez de creerse seguro y necesitaba también un baño de la realidad? Curioso personaje, Joaquín Balaguer. Estaba a su lado desde que, en 1930, lo mandó llamar con dos guardias al hotelito Santo Domingo donde estaba alojado y se lo llevó a casa por un mes, para que lo ayudara en la campaña electoral en la que tuvo como efímero aliado al líder

cibaeño Estrella Ureña, de quien el joven Balaguer era ardiente partidario. Una invitación y una charla de media hora bastaron para que el poeta, profesor y abogado de veinticuatro años, nacido en el desairado pueblecito de Navarrete, se convirtiera en trujillista incondicional, en competente y discreto servidor en todos los cargos diplomáticos, administrativos, y políticos que le confió. Pese a estar treinta años a su lado, la verdad, el inconspicuo personaje a quien Trujillo bautizó por eso en una época la Sombra, era todavía algo hermético para él, que se jactaba de tener un olfato de gran sabueso para los hombres. Una de las pocas certezas que abrigaba respecto a él era su falta de ambiciones. A diferencia de los otros del grupo en sus conductas, iniciativas y lisonjas, Joaquín Balaguer siempre le dio la impresión de aspirar sólo a lo que a él se le antojaba darle... gracias a esa humildad, el pequeño vate y jurisconsulto había estado siempre en la cumbre, sin que, debido a su insignificancia, nunca pasara por periodos de desgracia, como los demás. Por eso era Presidente fantoche.

(286-87)

In Chapter XXII, however, readers witness a rapid transformation of the man frequently described as “Trujillo’s shadow” as he quickly but methodically transforms himself from a *presidente fantoche* into the unmistakable President of the Republic:

Salió y pidió al retén de guardia que despertara a su chofer. Mientras éste lo llevaba al Palacio Nacional por una avenida Máximo Gómez desierta y

a oscuras, anticipó las horas siguientes: enfrentamientos entre guarniciones, rebeldes y leales y posible intervención militar norteamericana. Washington requeriría algún simulacro constitucional para esta acción, y, en estos momentos, el Presidente de la República representaba la legalidad. Su cargo era decorativo, cierto. Pero, muerto Trujillo, se cargaba de realidad. Dependía de su conducta que pasara, de mero embeleco, a auténtico Jefe de Estado de la República Dominicana. Tal vez, sin saberlo, desde que nació, en 1906, esperaba este momento. Una vez más se repitió la divisa de su vida: ni un instante, por ninguna razón, perder la calma. (446)

In making this transformation, Balaguer immediately begins lining up political support with external (the United States and the Church) and internal (Trujillo's family and various leading generals) allies. He works swiftly to isolate, pursue, confront, and punish Trujillo's assassins according to the law (although he is portrayed as having known about the plot, there is never any evidence in the novel incriminating him in it). Perhaps the best example of Balaguer's political shrewdness and the completeness of his transformation is evident in his first encounter with Johnny Abbes after Trujillo's death. In the novel, this confrontation helps to assert that Balaguer, a writer, is now working as deliberately as he did when he created the persona that Trujillo presented to the public:<sup>13</sup>

—Usted cree que ha triunfado, doctor Balaguer—dijo [Johnny Abbes], injurioso—. Se equivoca. Está tan identificado como yo con este régimen. Tan manchado como yo. Nadie se tragará el jueguito maquiavélico de que usted va a encabezar la transición hacia la democracia.

—Es posible que fracase —admitió Balaguer, sin hostilidad—. Pero, debo intentarlo. Para ello, algunos deben ser sacrificados. Siento que sea usted el primero, pero no hay remedio: representa la peor cara del régimen. Una cara necesaria, heroica, trágica, lo sé. Me lo recordó, sentado en la silla que usted ocupa, el propio Generalísimo. Pero, eso mismo lo vuelve insalvable en estos momentos. (461)

In short, Balaguer “writes” his own presidency by distancing himself from the “darker” characters in the *trujillato*, condemning Trujillo’s dictatorship in a speech to the United Nations, proclaiming the birth of a democracy in the Dominican Republic (see page 469), persuading Trujillo’s family to leave the island (471), changing the name of Ciudad Trujillo back to Santo Domingo (467—Balaguer eventually renamed a major avenue after Kennedy, an important and politically symbolic gesture to the United States), and finally by pardoning the few conspirators who had avoided falling into Ramfis’ hands. In fact, La fiesta del Chivo literally shows Balaguer using narrative to begin shaping his presidential persona, working backwards from a famous photograph of the new president shaking hands with Antonio Imbert and Luis Amiama—who Balaguer made three-star Generals “por servicios extraordinarios

prestados a la Nación” (492)—shortly after the men emerged from hiding: “Sonriente y con una expresión de honda alegría, el doctor Joaquín Balaguer avanzó hacia ellos, bajo los *flashes* de los fotógrafos, con los brazos abiertos” (493).

The figure of Balaguer is important not only in Urania’s story but also in its subtext, or in other words, Dominican history. Urania’s story becomes complicit with Balaguer, standing as a witness against the *trujillato* in hopes of influencing others away from the attitudes and behaviors that might facilitate the rise of another Dominican dictator. Balaguer is the first step in that evolution away from Trujillo, an outward manifestation of a change in the attitudes of the Dominican people. For several chapters he replaces Urania as the symbol that represents the Dominican people. His persona and his presidency are deliberately and strategically constructed in support of his agenda, using the same rhetorical tools employed by Trujillo. His actions show that he appreciates the significance of the opportunity afforded him by the assassins and that he plans to take advantage of it. Like the other writers in Vargas Llosa’s novels, Balaguer is able to understand and manipulate the larger discursive system and to use that ability to reveal new truth which can subsequently spark predictable actions. The “truth” posited by the novel, then, is that Dominicans can in fact write their own future. The question that remains, however, is whether they will—and even here the text suggests that they will. It is no coincidence that Urania (symbol of the Dominican Republic’s future who has, over the course of the text, overcome the “spiritual colonization” of the *trujillato*) ends the novel with a final act of independence and self-determination when she rejects the advances of a slightly-

inebriated tourist. For me, Urania is simply the text's first example of how the future generation will be able to overcome the Era. In much the same way that Doris Sommer suggests that De abril en adelante completes Pedro Mir's Cuando amaban a las tierras comuneras to become a "foundational fiction" of the Dominican Republic (see my Chapter II), Urania's story completes the text begun by Joaquín Balaguer.

The irony here, of course, is that Vargas Llosa, a Peruvian writer of international renown, has parachuted into this narrative space and inserted himself into the conversation between Dominican writers and the specter of the dictator, taking it upon himself to appropriate this story and offer up this narrative "truth." It is also ironic that La fiesta del Chivo, like the other novels here, actually adds to the accretive process of de- and re-mythologization of Trujillo and also helps to mythologize President Balaguer. While the novel's "success" or "failure"—whether narrative or political—is dependent upon readers (and in this case, not just *Dominican* readers, and how these plots will end is, in many ways, still to be written La fiesta del Chivo exhibits many aspects of the same colonization that it protests against. My suspicion that this is the root cause of the controversy surrounding the novel is supported by at least one quote I've found in the Dominican press. Miguel Aquino García, who has written several novels on Trujillo including Los amores de Dios (1997), reacted to La fiesta del Chivo by saying: "Nosotros no necesitamos que 'vengan de fuera' a enseñarnos nuestra historia en novelas, aunque la incontinencia de nuestros críticos en apoyo de la obra extranjera, desmerite por ignorancia la labor del escritor nativo" (Comarazamy, s.p.).

Before moving on to my concluding chapter, I would like to explore a final idea related to this novel and the interplay between the deification of Trujillo and his demythologization/deconstruction in the novel. I have cited Rene Girard's works frequently in previous chapters, and I believe that his Violence and the Sacred (1977) can provide additional insight into what seems to be occurring in this novel, particularly during the highly ritualistic scenes where Trujillo rapes Urania. In order to read this scene with the perspective added by Girard, however, it is necessary to understand some of links that he makes between society, violence, and religion and how they might be applied in assertions in the present work. Gerard's premise is that violence is endemic to humanity, and that social institutions such as government and religion are necessary to contain the unchecked spread of violence that might otherwise undermine the social contract:

There is in fact no object or endeavor in whose name a sacrifice cannot be made, especially when the social basis of the act has begun to blur. Nevertheless, there is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices and that becomes increasingly apparent as the institution [of religion] grows in vigor. This common denominator is internal violence—all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric. Everything else derives from that. (8)



Girard proposes that what differentiates “primitive” and “civilized” societies is essentially a common judicial system: “If primitive societies have no tried and true remedies for dealing with an outbreak of violence, no certain cure once the social equilibrium has been upset, we can assume that *preventive* measures will play an essential role” (17). Sacrifice is “an instrument of prevention in the struggle against violence” (17), and, according to Girard, “ritual in general, and sacrificial rights in particular, assume essential roles in societies that lack a firm judicial system” (18). In civilized societies, group safety is safeguarded by the imposition of some transcendental power (violence)—“As long as there exists no sovereign and independent body capable of taking the place of the injured party [a judicial system] and taking upon itself the responsibility for revenge [the natural result when there is no judicial system], the danger of interminable escalation remains” (17).

Applied to La fiesta del Chivo, the Conspirators’ stories support the novel’s basic proposition that the Dominican judicial system has collapsed under Trujillo—as evidenced by the murder of Tavito and the Mirabal’s, the Church’s rejection of the dictatorship, and the flagrant suppression of individual rights—resulting in an environment that naturally provokes violence and, even more significantly, *revenge*. Since society naturally works to avoid cycles of violence and revenge, something will be done to remedy this situation. According to Girard:

There may be a certain connection between all the various methods employed by man since the beginning of time to avoid being caught up in an interminable round of revenge. They can be grouped into three general categories [in ascending order of effectiveness]: (1) preventable measures in which sacrificial rites divert the spirit of revenge into other channels; (2) the harnessing or hobbling of vengeance by means of compensatory measures, trials by combat, etc., whose curative effects remain precarious; (3) the establishment of a judicial system—the most efficient of all curative procedures... The initial curative procedures mark an intermediary stage between a purely religious orientation and the recognition of a judicial system's superior efficiency. These methods are inherently ritualistic in character, and are often associated with sacrificial practices" (20-21).

Lacking an established judicial system capable of dealing with Trujillo's abuses of power, and given the failure of social systems that should have activated to constrain the government's actions, that the conspirators should revert towards engaging in the "primitive" cycle of vengeance is, according to Girard, to be expected; therefore, a sacrifice would be both necessary and inevitable to preserve society. In this context, the reversion of Trujillo into a "goat" during the rape scene acquires added significance—the text has symbolically unraveled the processes that previously united to deify the dictator (the god who receives sacrifices from his devotees, including Cerebritto's sacrifice of his daughter, Urania) and turned them against the

dictator eventually converting him into the object of sacrifice. The novel's "ungodly" description of Urania's rape, including the dictator's self-characterization as a "chivo" and combined with his inability to consummate the sacrifice (Urania) exposes Trujillo as a false god. Suddenly, whereas Urania once seemed fated to be sacrificed to Trujillo, she instead finds herself in the role of *scapegoat*—the animal set free on the Day of the Atonement representing the expulsion of evil from the community (see Leviticus 16).<sup>14</sup>

Urania's return to the island represents the return of the scapegoat—a catastrophe for those Dominicans who had not yet truly repented of their complicity with the dictatorship (her father, her aunt), but a sanctifying act for those who had. Like Girard's version of the scapegoat, which differs from Hebrew tradition, Urania redeems the Dominican people by testifying of Trujillo's ungodliness in hopes of educating the masses and minimizing the chances that the phenomenon will be repeated. Since Trujillo was not a true god as evidenced by his many abuses described in the text, and since Urania is proven innocent (like Christ, returning after her "resurrection"), her return represents the return of justice, a catalyst that provides her narratees with an opportunity to recognize their own violent tendencies and use that recognition to break the cycle of violence. In other words, Urania symbolizes both the normalization of Dominican society and the victim's opportunity to confront and accuse the guilty. This reading also fits well with the symbolism, albeit pagan in nature, inherent in Urania's name. Urania was the Greek muse of heaven, governing both astrology and astronomy. She is the muse who elevates man's thoughts from

terrestrial to celestial objects, and inspires heavenly (i.e., chaste) love (*ref.* Plato's Symposium 187d)—the kind of love that creates harmony between the gods and men. Urania is often depicted holding a globe and a staff or compass (linking her to the principles of rational measure and proportion) and with her foot on a turtle (symbol of silence and retreat). Applied to La fiesta del Chivo, while breaking her long-held silence makes her uncomfortable (“¿Has hecho bien en volver?—12) and while she repeatedly considers returning to New York instead of confronting the past, Urania's narrative helps remind her family, and her readers, of the dark realities of the dictatorship. It also helps Urania (and by extension, her readers) begin looking toward the future and begin moving toward a reconciliation analogous to the one proposed by Girard.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As noted in my Introduction, in Foundational Fictions Doris Sommer emphasizes the inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation building, particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, the Dominican concept of “nation,” to large extent, has emerged from a variety of sources (history, fiction, news reports, pamphlets, music, etc.) commenting on the *trujillato*. Like Vargas Llosa’s text, which contributes to its readers’ construct of “Dominican history,” several news reports immediately following Trujillo’s assassination also mentioned the apparent “lack” of organization cited by Vargas Llosa. For example, Sam Pope Brewer’s report in the New York Times (6/5/1961, “General is slain...”) records Ramfís’s dismissal of “the idea that any political plot was involved” and states that it was impossible that “General Díaz had hoped to overthrow the government, because he had no following in the armed forces.” Similarly, Peter Kihss’s article in the New York Times (6/6/1961, “Bodies of Two...”) points out that “the failure of [...] Brig. Gen. Juan Tomás Díaz and Antonio de la Maza Vásquez to escape from the capital corroborated the theory that they had no strong movement behind them.” An unsigned report to the Times published on June 3, 1961 (“One of Trujillo’s...”) does speak of the Dominican public’s first reactions to the dictator’s death (largely supporting Mateo’s descriptions in La balada de Alfonsina Bairán), first reaffirming the relative calm immediately after the assassination (“I guarantee you there is no fighting whatsoever in the Dominican Republic and you are absolutely free to travel

anywhere you wish”) and later describing the crowd walking past the dictator’s body as it lay in state: “At the burial of Generalissimo Trujillo, many spectators were grief-stricken and some became hysterical. As the Generalissimo lay in state in the National Palace, as the cortege traveled from Ciudad Trujillo to San Cristóbal, and during the church service, women screamed shrilly with grief. As the procession passed, some women hurled themselves down at the roadside, shrieking and beating their heads on the ground. Many men wept also. An estimated total of 18,000 of the humbler people of Ciudad Trujillo crowded past the coffin from 6 to 8 A.M. in the entrance hall of the grandiose National Palace. Many thousands were turned away because the emotions of the crowd were getting out of hand.”

<sup>2</sup>Also like the other novels studied here, La fiesta del Chivo has been relatively popular with Dominican readers and has been reprinted numerous times since its initial publication. It has also been made into a play and performed in New York City (directed by Columbian Jorge Triana and presented by the Repertorio Español) and other major cities throughout Latin America and released as a movie (directed by Luis Llosa and produced by Lola Films and released on March 3, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the tension between history and fiction, Antonio Benítez-Rojo has written: “Historical discourse, subliminally, would like to occupy the place of novelistic discourse; it would like to abandon the normative canon that constructs its “true” account, to wander through the chance infinity of fictional worlds and imaginary eras, the poetic open spaces where everything can happen and come

together. So we may speak of history's and the novel's secret wish to exchange places, which brings us to an unforeseen kind of coexistence of the two discourses. Notice that we're talking about a relationship that is nonmetaphorical (nonexcluding); rather it is metonymic, with history and the novel traveling separately but crossing each other at their respective nodes of desire." (Benítez-Rojo 261)

Historical fiction is the union of the poetic with the "normative" (in other words, "authorized") "truth" in the same work—another example of Chambers' "room for maneuver" described in my opening chapter. It is important to note that with La fiesta del Chivo, Vargas Llosa did not set out to write a history book. Instead, he has been quoted as saying that his goal in writing the novel was to "tell well-founded lies" (Almánzar), and he has repeatedly emphasized that everything in the novel either "happened or could have happened" (Nesmith, "Dominicans uneasy"). When asked whether he had lied in the novel (an accusation made by several Dominicans), Vargas Llosa openly responded, "Pues claro que mentí e inventé sucesos y personajes, pues se trata de una novela, no de una historia donde hay que sostener todo con documentos y testimonios" (CNNenEspañol, "Vargas Llosa defiende el derecho del novelista..."). Vargas Llosa has defended his actions repeatedly by saying that he isn't *obligated* to tell the truth with his fiction. While La fiesta del Chivo is a book that uses historic materials, that doesn't write history but instead *rewrites* it. As Pablo Gámez has observed, "Y es que Vargas Llosa considera, con Balzac, que la literatura es la historia privada de las naciones. Ella nos muestra lo que la historia no puede contar: los

deseos, los temores, las pasiones, el mundo íntimo y secreto que forma parte de la historia” (s.p.). Vargas Llosa concurs: “Las novelas no tienen la obligación de decir la verdad, sino de decir la verdad a través de las mentiras. La única obligación que he asumido fue la de no atribuir a los personajes algo que no hubiera sido posible en esa época, por razones éticas y literarias. He omitido anécdotas que eran tan excesivas que no se las creería el lector.” (Gámez, s.p.)

La fiesta del Chivo is far from the first of Vargas Llosa’s literary endeavors to be criticized for “saqueo intelectual.” In fact, this most recent controversy is reminiscent of that which followed shortly after the publication of La guerra del fin del mundo (1981), when many Latin American writers voiced similar concerns comparing that novel with da Cunha’s Os sertões. For a more academic response to the intertextuality of these two works, see, for example, Renata Wasserman’s “Mario Vargas Llosa, Euclides da Cunha, and the Strategy of Intertextuality” in PMLA 108:3 (May 1993), pp. 460-73 and Vargas Llosa’s “Mi deuda con Euclides” in Antipodas, July 1991, pp. 15-18.

<sup>4</sup> While addressing an audience at a book fair held in Miami in September 2000, Vargas Llosa described the process of fictionalizing history, saying that a good novelist does his research and takes the facts that others have gathered into account as he writes; however, he emphasized that through the creative process facts become wedded with fiction (see Ramírez, 15A). In Chapter IV (p. 76) Vargas Llosa acknowledges Robert Crassweller as one of his historical sources, and in Chapter V (p.



87) he also cites Tad Szulc of The New York Times. Even so, much of the public stir about the novel, beyond what was described above, has been generated by others, who claim that La fiesta del Chivo plagiarizes their work as historical, and even fictional, sources. The loudest, by far, has been a Miami-based foreign correspondent, best known for his articles in Time magazine. Bernard Diederich, who has openly accused Vargas Llosa of plagiarizing his book, Trujillo: The Death of the Goat (1978)—the first comprehensive account of the conspiracy that ended in Trujillo’s assassination on May 30, 1961. In writing his history of Trujillo’s assassination, Diederich spends numerous hours interviewing primary sources including the assassins’ widows to obtain previously unknown details around Trujillo’s death: “Definitely, he has lifted from my book without giving me credit” (Chardy). In fact, Diederich claims that Vargas Llosa not only copied some details from his book, but also included elements that could have come *only* from his book, including a factual error. So far, Diederich has opted not to reveal this mistake, saying that he prefers to reveal it in court. Diederich has also admitted, “If he had at least given me credit, this would not be happening” (Chardy).

In a book review published in the September 2, 2000 edition of Santo Domingo’s Listín Diario, Conde Sturla notes that in many places (especially in the names and descriptions of characters and in Chapter XXII when the conspirators ambush Trujillo’s car), Vargas Llosa’s narrative seem to be lifted directly out of The Death of the Goat. In response, Vargas Llosa has reiterated that both his and

Diederich's works are based on a historical event, and has vocally affirmed that The Death of the Goat was indeed one of his source texts: "Mi libro es una novela, no un libro histórico y he utilizado los datos históricos que están en los archivos de la República Dominicana para ambientarla. Es completamente absurdo que un dato histórico se convierta en derecho de propiedad de un autor... Que este señor diga ahora que no le he dado crédito realmente me entristece, porque no es verdad. Lo he elogiado públicamente en todas partes. Si uno escribe una novela basada en hechos históricos, no hay manera de evitar utilizar los mismos datos, como los nombres de los conspiradores y el auto que utilizaron." ("Vargas Llosa califica de 'Absurdas'...")

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, "Desmiente acusación de plagio" in the newspaper Reforma, 19 September 2000, page 4.

<sup>6</sup>"Focalization" is described in detail in Chapter 6 of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Routledge, 1983 pp. 71-85). Here "focalization" (seeing) is contrasted with "narration" (speaking). In the case of La fiesta del Chivo, however, "seeing" Dominican history through the dictator's eyes helps to personalize that which is "focalized" in the story and makes it seem more intimate to the reader than it might otherwise be if described in a more objective way. The way Vargas Llosa uses narrative convention to minimize the distance between readers and the novel's action is an important characteristic of the text and one that I will comment upon later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Please see Note 7 in my Introduction, which provides historical information on the Galíndez incident and the assassination of the Mirabal sisters.

<sup>8</sup> In January of 1960 after a wave of politically-motivated arrests in the Dominican Republic, the Catholic Church's policy toward the dictatorship underwent a significant change under the auspices of Archbishop Lino Zanini. On January 31, 1960 a letter known as the Carta Pastoral was read in the country's churches, condemning the government's oppressive practices, calling for the reinstatement of certain democratic practices and "natural rights," and adding an extra line to the Church-mandated prayer, asking the Dominican people to pray not only for the health of Trujillo, but also for all those who were suffering in the prisons of the country and their afflicted families. Trujillo countered by accusing the priesthood of being revolutionary and communist, especially targeting Bishops Thomas Reilly and Francisco Panal who were among the most outspoken clergy remaining in the country and who were heavily persecuted by the government.

<sup>9</sup> Quoting from Balaguer in my Introduction: "El genocidio de 1937 no fue la obra de un loco ni la de un sátrapa empedernido en la abyección y en el crimen. Fue sencillamente el acto de un hombre, o de un ególatra si se quiere, que no sólo obedece a la brutalidad de sus instintos, sino también a una concepción bárbara de su destino como patriota y como gobernante. Los seres así se hallan fuera de serie y no pueden medirse con la misma vara con que se mide a la mayoría de los mortales. Si se hubiera tratado de un acto de locura momentánea, propio de un esquizofrénico poseído por el

ímpetu demoníaco del fanatismo, el crimen su hubiera detenido al cabo de algunas horas. Pero lejos de esto, continuó durante más de una semana y se llevó a cabo hasta el fin, sin que las escenas dramáticas a que dio lugar perturbaran en lo más mínimo al ánimo del hombre que ordenó esa matanza y que jamás se arrepintió de ella.” (64)

Note that Urania experiences a similar “grooming” process en route to the Casa de Caoba with Manuel Alfonso and, after she arrives, in the hands of Benita Sepúlveda. By “grooming” I mean the psychological process used to systematically break down a person’s resistance to some action, usually sexual in nature, in anticipation of his/her participation in that act.

<sup>10</sup> Popular music was frequently used by the trujillato as part of its propaganda campaign. For an interesting study on this topic, refer to Deborah Pacini Hernández’s “Dominican Popular Music Under the Trujillo,” Studies in Latin American Popular Culture 12 (1993), 127-140.

<sup>11</sup> Vargas Llosa has said publicly that he is saddened by reports that Antonio de la Maza’s family was unhappy with La fiesta del Chivo: “If I have any admiration for any of the characters that figure in the novel, it is for the seven men who waited for Trujillo on the highway of San Cristóbal and killed him there” (Nesmith 4/29, “Author finds himself defending...”).

<sup>12</sup> Again, Benítez-Rojo notes: “It’s true that history’s legitimating narratives, like those of any learned profession, are laborious, arbitrary, and paradoxical. But we must agree that they are institutionalized, a fact that gives them prestige and, above all,

power. Besides, we must also agree that it is more predictable and bearable to live by the historiographic world's norms than by those of fiction, where everything can be imagined and has license to exist and to be at hand." (Benítez-Rojo 256)

That Dominican readers acknowledge and actively debate this novel is a first sign of legitimization: with La fiesta del Chivo, Vargas Llosa has inserted himself into what was primarily a national dialogue and his contribution as been recognized and disputed. Given that what is written in the novel is already very similar to what has been about Trujillo and the Era elsewhere, the question that remains is whether it will become institutionalized to the point that it becomes authorized as part of "what really happened."

<sup>13</sup> Many have commented on the character of the writer in Vargas Llosa's literary works including La tía Julia y el escribidor, La guerra del fin del mundo, La señorita de Tacna and many others. See, for example, Carlos Alonso's "La tía Julia y el escribidor: The Writing Subject's Fantasy of Empowerment" in PMLA 106:1 (January 1991), pp. 46-59 and Isabel Gallego's "Mario Vargas Llosa: El oficio de escribir" in Pluma y el Tiempo, 1:2 (Dec 2000), pp. 105-114.

<sup>14</sup> OED: 1. In the Mosaic ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi), that one of two goats that was chosen by lot to be sent alive into the wilderness, the sins of the people having been symbolically laid upon it, while the other was appointed to be sacrificed. 2. One who is blamed or punished for the sins of others. (So F. *bouc émissaire*.)

It should be remembered that on the Day of Atonement, another goat was sacrificed to Jehovah for the sins of the people whereas the scapegoat suffered the ordeal of banishment, separation, and rejection symbolizing the condemnation and rejection of sin and its permanent removal (see “scapegoat” in Chevalier and Gheerbrant’s A Dictionary of Symbols, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994 p. 832).

## Conclusion

### Trujillo is Dead... and We have Killed Him!

Literary representations will always suggest a fresh range of historical investigation. But like other forms of historical evidence, literature has to be treated with caution, its language fully comprehended and analysed as a social and ideological structure and its biases taken into account, for often 'how it really was' can get translated into 'how it should be remembered'.

—Rumina Sethi, The Myths of the Nation p. 36

In the preceding chapters, I have explained the significance of how the *trujillato* will be remembered by future generations and have examined literature's influences upon the resulting "text." I have demonstrated how the gap between historical actions and their reporting has produced a certain "room for maneuver" for novelists in the Dominican Republic since 1960. The Dominican dictator novel has come to represent an opportunity for a generation of writers who were silenced by the government during the Era to help shape the cultural archive that will eventually "become" the legacy of Trujillo through the magic of the creative process. The dictator's influence on Dominican literature will be indelible: according to Frank Moya Pons'

Bibliografía de la Literatura Dominicana 1820-1990, while there was nearly a 250% increase in the average number of literary works published each year in the Dominican Republic during the Era (most of them *trujillista*), there was an additional 140% increase in the 30 years following the *trujillato* (v. 2, p. 14), most of which is as obviously slanted against the dictator as the rhetoric used by the government to "create" Trujillo was skewed toward him. Beyond the realms of fiction, informed

readers quickly see that even other, supposedly more “objective” information sources including news magazines and newspapers are clearly as biased as the fictional rhetoric for and against Trujillo. Indeed, it is questionable whether any approximation to Dominican history since the 1930s could be considered even vaguely objective. Because of this, it is extremely probable that the influence of Dominican literature will be just as enduring on the way Trujillo is remembered in the future, particularly given the enormous readership enjoyed by writers such as Senci3n and Vargas Llosa whose works recreate life under Trujillo. The dictator, to use a well worn clich3, must be turning over in his grave. And just as “blowing [Somoza] to bits with a rocket is an act that goes beyond political pragmatism” and is, at best, an “excessive” and highly “symbolic” act (Gonz3lez-Echevarr3a 5), it could easily be argued that so is rewriting Trujillo after his death—though doing so may prove more subversive than actually killing the dictator. Reconstructing Trujillo ultimately robs the dictator of his ability to monopolize discourse (a defining characteristic of any dictatorship) by reframing how his government will be perceived by others despite his best efforts to impose a singular interpretation while still in power. The damage inflicted upon the rhetoric of the dictatorship via the narrative process is questionable at best and there is some reason to believe that the text’s power to deflect readers’ desires away from the dictatorship is an ephemeral one—an idea I will explore further below. Whatever the effect and whether that effect is a real or a symbolic one, one must ask if Dominican literature will one day move beyond Trujillo. I have several reasons for believing that it will.



My first reason for thinking this is linked to Nietzsche and Girard and is an extension of my assertions in Chapter V—that the Dominican dictator novel provides a way for writers to “normalize” life in the wake of Trujillo by offering readers an opportunity to recognize their own violent tendencies and use that recognition to break the (natural) cycle of violence. In Nietzsche’s The Gay Science #125, we encounter the celebrated fable of the madman who announces that “God is dead!”

“Where is God?” he cried; “I’ll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as through the infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals

of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed—and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now! (Williams 119-120)

For me, it is difficult *not* to think of this parable when considering the Dominican dictator novel. For more than three decades Trujillo was systematically mythologized, deified, and, in many ways, actually *became* the God and Savior of the Dominican Republic. Complete submission to the dictator's will was expected and self-sacrifice became the rule. Trujillo's death surprised many—and, as it did for the townspeople in Nietzsche's parable, it took a while for its significance to sink in. More than a simple calm, the paralysis experienced by Trujillo's assassins—in my opinion, the result of their astonishment at having killed their “god”—impeded them from exploiting the “room for maneuver” they had injected into the island's political system. This vacillation cost them not only their opportunity to participate in the nation's new government but also, for many in the group, their lives. And, as I mentioned in Chapter V, it is not surprising that Balaguer, a writer who was instrumental in transforming Trujillo into “god,” would recognize this “room for maneuver” and, before the system could recuperate from the disturbance caused by Trujillo's murder, systematically begin rewriting the text of Dominican history. For me, contemporary Dominican narrative's constant return to the *trujillato* has been, to

a large extent, part of the natural cycle of denial followed by acceptance of a fundamental rupture in the existential foundations that governed the country for a generation of Dominicans. In Nietzschean terms, the assassins' murdering of Trujillo represents their "will to power" (i.e., their innate desire to improve their lives by asserting themselves). Furthermore, in recognizing the patterns of dictatorial cyclicity in Dominican history (cyclical time is also basic to Nietzsche's philosophies), the present moment acquires additional significance, "for it is the only moment of our personal trajectories in which we can assert our aliveness, take action, engage in our projects or change our direction (Solomon and Higgins 100). A single-minded focus on the present moment helps to explain the paralysis following Trujillo's murder, the assassins' inability to move past their astonishment at having acted despite years of passivity. Pairing Nietzsche with Girard, Trujillo's death moved the Dominican social system back towards "normalcy" or stasis, helping to head off an inevitable cycle of revenge. This said, normalcy wasn't achieved immediately. The political turmoil that followed Trujillo's death described in my Introduction signaled the possibility that Trujillo, like Christ, might resurrect, whether personally or in effigy. The "war" against the dictator's memory seems like a preemptive strike against this possibility. Its effectiveness, of course, remains to be seen.

In Nietzsche's parable, the madman's audience doesn't respond immediately, leading him to conclude that his announcement might be premature: "This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of

men... This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars—*and yet they have done it themselves!*” (Williams 120). Perhaps the prominence of Trujillo in Dominican literature since 1960 signals the difficulty that a generation of Dominicans have had believing that the “god” of the Dominican Republic is really dead, killed by Dominicans like themselves, and that his resurrection wasn’t imminent—either personally or via one of the numerous “avatars” who ruled in his stead as *presidentes fantoches*. As time passes, and as Trujillo or Trujillo-like governments fail to reappear in the Dominican Republic, one might expect that the specter of Trujillo will continue to fade—that the recognition that he *is* really gone and that all that *can* be said *has* been said will erode the relevance of the Era as a literary theme.

It should also be pointed out here that, along with organized religion, Nietzsche sees the emerging dominance of scientific thought as a substitution of one self-denigrating myth for another. As Solomon and Higgins have observed:

If anything, the scientific myth is worse. Faith in God eroded confidence in our own human powers, but at least encouraged belief that we had dignity as creations of God whom God took seriously. The myth of science, by contrast, posits that our existence is an accident and that we are organisms on an obscure planet on the periphery of a universe of mostly dead matter. This vision builds on and reinforces the sense of worthlessness that grew from our projection of our powers onto God. Worse yet, in the light of a religions worldview that sees the goal of life as a blissful afterlife, the absence of any “beyond” in the

scientific account is bound to frustrate our inherited expectations about what would make life meaningful. Unless we seek meaning from a different source, science is only going to promote nihilism, the sense that our world lacks value.

(97)

For me, the Dominican dictator novel appears to be an attempt at “seek[ing] meaning from a different source”—the source, of course, being the narrative process. Perhaps this explains why Dominican writers continued “killing” (unveiling, revealing, demythologizing, decentralizing, rewriting) Trujillo after his death, asserting their individuality, becoming, through narrative, “gods merely to appear worthy” of the deed, participating in a “higher history than all history up to now” (Williams 120). It would be easy to point out that the battle between history and fiction seems analogous to the one between religion and science, with the potential to promote nihilism. Perhaps the self-consciousness of these texts, the way they recognize their own artificiality and inability to translate the sign is an attempt at rising above the naïveté of religious, scientific, or, for that matter, historical discourse. Similarly, the potential to influence readers to act independently, to focus on their own artifice and individual value and to capitalize on the “room for maneuver” that comes from understanding the systems, processes, and rhetorical frameworks of the dictatorship and to use that understanding to determine their own futures may be what prevents the Dominican dictator novel from falling into the trap of nihilism explained by Nietzsche. In this way, the Dominican dictator novel has

reexamined and rewritten the most revered institutions of the Era singing his *requiem aeternam deo* and, like Nietzsche's madman, when called to account for their behavior, these texts seem to reply, "What are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" (120). If this is the case, the Dominican dictator novel, and especially the metafictional aspects of these novels, suggests a substitution, not of science or another "false god," but of a reflective, introspective way of examining life as it is lived—of blending the idea of maximizing life in the moment at hand (according to Nietzsche's conceptualization of cyclical time) while at the same time taking a step back and looking at specific "snapshots" (provided by the novels) which demonstrate the potential consequences of "in the moment decisions." Again, the relevance of this practice fades with the dictator's memory: at some point, it just won't matter any more.

Furthermore, the re-mythologization of Trujillo has a potentially paradoxical result—which is my second reason for believing that Dominican narrative will eventually leave Trujillo behind. Stories about life under Trujillo, whether conveyed orally or in writing, are told with careful artifice. They are polished over the years as they are told again and again and are passed down to successive generations of tellers, who continue to mould and shape a subject that, over time, becomes more fictional than historical. Little by little, the resulting texts seem to lose the trace of the reality of the dictatorship, not unlike the image infinitely re-reflected in the facing mirrors that figured prominently in my explication of La balada of Alfonsina Bairán. The transformation of these stories over time—and their reception by younger generations

of readers who are increasingly distrustful toward the notion that history is the objective reporting of events that happened in the real world—highlights the difficult problem of the accretive nature of cultural archives. With time, these stories sound increasingly far-fetched to new generations of readers who weren't alive during the Era of Trujillo—despite the pains writers went to to keep them believable. More and more youth of Dominican heritage, like the nurse in La fiesta del Chivo, are willing to question what have become the country's "foundational fictions" and accept that the truth could lay anywhere along a continuum between what the history books written by Trujillo's employees say happened between 1930 and 1961 and what their parents and grandparents have told them about what it was like to live during the Era. Given this phenomenon, one must ask whether the processes of parody and substitution inherent in these works will ultimately backfire—whether the re-mythologization of the dictator make it more difficult for future generations to believe in the atrocities described in texts like the ones studied here? In other words, will the story of Trujillo eventually carry the historical weight of a fairytale, thanks, in part, to the way it has been portrayed in narrative fiction?

This is an especially interesting question for me given that, in recent years and in many countries throughout Latin America, there has been a movement toward the extreme political left beginning with the ascension of Lula in Brazil followed by Chávez in Venezuela and various others in many Central and South American countries. A future study might examine other dictator narratives in light of this study, looking for parallels in the way literature attempts to de/re-mythologize the

dictatorship, its effects on how the dictators were perceived by subsequent generations, and whether the passing of time, combined with the evident intersects of history and fiction in the cultural archive, actually *diminished* the weight of the dictatorship's abuses of power to the point that, instead of influencing people away from authoritarianism, it actually did the opposite. In other words, is it possible that the processes carried out in other dictator narratives not only mirror what happens in the Dominican tradition, but also foreshadow events to come?

My final reason for believing that Dominican narrative will eventually overcome Trujillo has to do with “the anxiety of influence” described by Harold Bloom in 1973. In brief, Bloom proposes that a writer's creative predecessors can hinder the creative process and that this anxiety of influence must be overcome if the artistic endeavor is to continue. Paradoxically, originality is achieved only through the misinterpretation and subsequent “completion” of one's predecessors—to subconsciously take credit for and complete their precursors' failed intentions with their own work. Even before the publication of La fiesta del Chivo in 2000, many students of Dominican literature wondered whether writers had exhausted Trujillo as a literary theme. With the insertion of Vargas Llosa, whose international renown is second only to Gabriel García Márquez among Latin American novelists alive today, into the tradition of the Dominican dictator novel, one might suspect that narrating Trujillo—and convincing readers to read that narration—is becoming increasingly difficult. Is there really much more to be said about the *trujillato*? And, if there is, can



it be said better, or differently, than it's been said by the likes of Veloz Maggiolo, Mateo, Sención, or Vargas Llosa?

Despite my conviction that Dominican literature will eventually move past Trujillo, many indicators suggest that it won't happen any day soon. This is due largely to the fact that today's most prominent and prolific Dominican writers still remember Trujillo first-hand. For example, Diógenes Valdez (b. 1941), winner of the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 2005, has published several novels in which the *trujillato* figures prominently. Similarly, Jacinto Gimbernard (b. 1931), one of the country's rising stars, published Los Grau in 2005, which tells the story of a middle-class Dominican family during the Era of Trujillo. This said, while Julia Alvarez's (b. 1950) En el tiempo de las mariposas (1994) recounts the story of the Mirabal sisters, Trujillo figures less prominently in many of her other novels than the quest for identity for a new generation of Dominicans growing up in the United States. This is not to say that the *trujillato* is not evident in novels such as How the García Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) and ¡Yo! (1997)—only that they don't necessarily take front stage. In the end, just as time will tell whether these novels are successful at influencing readers away from the rhetoric of dictatorship, it remains to be seen how the next generation of writers in the Dominican Republic will approach the narrative endeavor.

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## **Vita, Andrew B. Wolff**

### **Education**

Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 2006. Spanish (Caribbean Literature).

- Jesús Díaz Outstanding Graduate Student award
- Edwin Erle Sparks Fellowship in the Humanities

M.A., Brigham Young University, 1996. Spanish (Latin American Literature).

- Outstanding Graduate Student award
- Sigma Delta Pi National Spanish Honor Society

B.A., Brigham Young University, 1994. English and Spanish.

### **Employment**

June 2004-Present	National Director, Learning Technologies Curriculum Director, Transaction Services Practice PricewaterhouseCoopers Learning and Education
June, 2000-June 2004	National Program Director, New Hire Orientation Programs Curriculum Director, Transaction Services Practice PricewaterhouseCoopers Learning and Education
June, 1999-June, 2000	Manager and Senior Instructional Design Consultant Instructional Design and Development Team PricewaterhouseCoopers Learning and Education
July, 1996-June, 1999	Graduate Instructor, The Pennsylvania State University Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese
January, 1994-July, 1996	Graduate Instructor, Research Assistant, Teaching Assistant Brigham Young University Department of Spanish and Portuguese; Honors Program

### **Publications**

Hertel, Tammy Jandrey, Jennifer Zachman, and Andrew Wolff. Spanish for Life Worktext. Heinle and Heinle/Thompson Learning, 2000.

Rogers, Donna and Andrew Wolff. "Español—¡a distancia!" Journal of General Education 49.1: 44-52, 2000.

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