

**Political Violence, Literature, and the Latin American Public Intellectual in the Early
Narrative of Horacio Castellanos Moya**

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Abstract

The narrative of Horacio Castellanos Moya constitutes an anomaly in the field of contemporary Latin American literature in the sense that it exceeds the aesthetic parameters of pre-existing genres and resists easy classification according to the categories established by the region's literary criticism and theory. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that Castellanos Moya develops alternate modes of narrating political violence in the region's recent past and, in doing so, inaugurates new subject positions for Latin American public intellectuals and recalibrates the long-standing relationship between literature and politics in the region. These innovations, in turn, have had far-reaching repercussions in the field of contemporary Latin American cultural production and, subsequently, elements of his poetics have been taken up and further developed by an up-and-coming generation of artists and intellectuals. In particular, this dissertation traces the complex set of convergences and divergences between the author's narrative program and the aesthetics of testimonio. While he indeed borrows heavily from the genre, Castellanos Moya articulates a staunch defense of fiction and harsh critiques of the politization of literature that typifies the cultural politics of testimonio. In a similar fashion, this dissertation traces the affinities between the author's narrative program and the first-generation post-dictatorship novel, as well as the ways in which the former consistently undermines the latter's epic, sentimental, and highly idealized rendering of the historical past. Lastly, I gauge the impact of his narrative program on contemporary Latin American literature by analyzing the overlap between the poetics of Castellanos Moya and second-generation post-dictatorship narrative.

Résumé

La prose d'Horacio Castellanos Moya constitue une anomalie dans le domaine de la littérature de l'Amérique Latine contemporaine, étant donné qu'il excède les paramètres esthétiques des genres préexistants et qu'il résiste à être facilement classé selon les catégories conventionnelles de la théorie et la critique littéraire de la région. Dans cette thèse, je postule que Castellanos Moya développe des moyens alternatifs de narrer la violence politique dans le passé récent de la région et, de cette manière, il inaugure de nouvelles subjectivités pour les intellectuels publics de l'Amérique Latine tout en réajustant la relation historique entre littérature et politique dans la région. Ces innovations ont eu des répercussions de grande portée dans le domaine de la production culturelle contemporaine de l'Amérique Latine et, par la suite, des éléments de sa poétique ont été repris et développés par une nouvelle génération d'artistes et d'intellectuels. En particulier, cette recherche vise à identifier l'ensemble complexe de convergences et divergences entre le programme narratif de l'auteur et l'esthétique du testimonio. Quoiqu'il s'approprie de nombreux procédés du genre, Castellanos Moya est un fervent défenseur de la fiction et un sévère critique de la politisation de la littérature qui typifie la politique culturelle testimoniale. En même temps, le présent travail identifie les affinités entre le programme narratif de l'auteur et la production de la première génération de post-dictature, ainsi que les manières dont il ébranle systématiquement la représentation épique, sentimentale et largement idéalisée du passé historique. En dernier lieu, j'évalue l'impact de la prose de Castellanos Moya dans la production actuelle de la littérature de l'Amérique Latine en analysant le rapport entre la poétique de l'auteur et le récit post-dictatorial de la deuxième génération.

Resumen

La narrativa de Horacio Castellanos Moya constituye una anomalía dentro del campo de la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea, ya que excede los parámetros de los géneros literarios pre-existentes y resiste toda clasificación según las categorías convencionales de la crítica y teoría literarias de la región. A lo largo de la tesis, argumento que Castellanos Moya ha desarrollado modos alternativos de narrar la violencia política del pasado reciente y, al hacerlo, inaugura nuevos modos de enunciación para el intelectual público de América Latina y reconfigura la relación entre literatura y política en la región. Estas innovaciones, a su vez, han tenido amplia repercusión dentro del campo de la producción cultural de América Latina y, subsecuentemente, han sido retomadas por una nueva generación de artistas e intelectuales. En particular, la presente investigación pretende identificar el complejo conjunto de rupturas y continuidades entre el programa narrativo del autor y la estética del testimonio. Por más que se apropie de muchos procedimientos del género, Castellanos Moya articula una defensa férrea de la ficción y una crítica acerba de la instrumentalización política de la obra literaria que caracteriza a la política cultural del testimonio. Conjuntamente, la presente investigación rastrea las afinidades entre el programa narrativo del autor y la producción de la primera generación de postdictadura, haciendo hincapié en las maneras en que el autor rompe con una estética de (melo)dramatiza, romantiza, y sacraliza el pasado histórico. Por último, mido el impacto de la poética de Castellanos Moya en la producción actual de la literatura latinoamericana al analizar la relación entre la poética del autor y la producción cultural de la denominada segunda generación.

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Introduction

The publication of *Insensatez* in 2004 was an unprecedented event in the field of contemporary Latin American narrative. The radical skepticism that characterized the previous six novels of Castellanos Moya had found a new outlet. Hitherto, a principal thematic innovation and ideological strategy of the author had been to expose the contradictions in Latin American revolutionary movements, in particular the illegitimacy of their uses of violence. *Insensatez*, however, took a qualitative leap by applying this same approach to human rights militancy, thereby exposing the misappropriations and abuses of memory in post-civil war Guatemala. Although the content of the critique was indeed new, its structure had remained the same. We can observe, then, a pattern emerging: Castellanos Moya challenged that which the Latin American Left held most dear, which in the 1980s corresponded to the possibility of revolutionary political and social transformation and by the mid- and late 1990s and early 2000s expressed itself as a commitment to human rights politics.

In Central America in the 1980s, when Castellanos Moya was coming of age as a writer, the hegemonic literary form was testimonio, and the cultural politics of this genre was unequivocal: literature was conceived as the “cultural component” and a key “ideological weapon” of Latin American revolutions (Beverley & Zimmerman 1; 207).¹ According to Werner Mackenbach, the testimonial literatures were expected to condemn the violence of the State and military while praising the “counterviolence” of revolutionary movements (319). By delegitimizing counterviolence, Castellanos Moya broke with the testimonial consensus. In fact,

¹ Following Beverley & Zimmerman (1999) and Beverley (2004), I use ‘testimonio’ without italics, as an incorporation into English of the term in Spanish term to refer to the specifically Latin American genre of testimonial writing in the second half of the twentieth century.

the rupture between Latin American intellectuals and the Left has a foundational status within the narrative program of the author since it was the central concern of *La diáspora* (1989), his first novel and debut in the field of contemporary Latin American letters.

In the face of the defeat of revolution throughout vast areas of the continent, with the exception of Cuba and pockets of revolutionary activity in Peru and Colombia, the Latin American Left mourned its passing and advocated for the victims of State terror (Avelar 3). Politically, this corresponds to a change in the focus of the Left from Marxist-based revolutionary movements to human rights- based memory politics. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s memory politics became a major political force in Latin America and contested State politics of amnesty, impunity, and silence (Vezzetti, *Presente y pasado* 21-2). During this period, frequently framed as a transition towards democracy, literature became a site to mourn the victims of State terror and preserve the legacy of the vanquished (Amar Sanchez 120). If the literature of the period from the 1960s to the 1980s was conceived as a contribution, on the plane of culture, to the larger project of revolution, the literature of the period from the 1980s to 2000s often reinforced the objectives of memory politics (Avelar 231). In fact, according to some critics, memory discourse was approaching a hegemonic status in Latin American literature and culture by the early 2000s (Garibotto, 173). It was at this moment when memory politics was shifting from a counterhegemonic to a hegemonic position, as evidenced by its assimilation into State apparatuses and mass media, that Castellanos Moya challenged it.

To be sure, he was not the only one to do so. In her 2003 film, *Los rubios*, Albertina Carri articulated a substantial critique of testimonial genres and their capacity to construct reliable knowledge about the historical past. This iconoclastic gesture stirred up so much debate and caused so much ink to spill that the polemics surrounding the film still have not died down

nearly twenty years after its release. The critique of Carri, however, was largely limited to parodying the conventions of testimonial genres and did not encroach upon the theme of the implementation of memory politics, as is the case with *Insensatez*. Despite their similarity in tone and technique, in particular their heavy-handed employment of parody, Castellanos Moya's novel breaks ground that Carri's film leaves untouched.

This lack of regard for convention, together with the unprecedented manner in which Castellanos Moya narrates political violence, seems to have left critics uncertain about what to do with him. To date, he has published thirteen novels, six collections of short stories, three collections of poetry, and three collections non-fiction works. Furthermore, the majority of his novels have been reprinted several times, his most popular works enjoying multiple editions. Yet, despite this prolific output and the broad dissemination of his narrative within Latin America and abroad, there is relatively little literary criticism dedicated to his work. This, in turn, might have to do with his status as a Central American author who writes almost exclusively about Central American themes. Other prominent writers from the region, such as Rodrigo Rey Rosa and Miguel Huezco Mixco, find themselves in a similar predicament. As an object of study, literature from the isthmus has received notably less attention than other cultural areas of Latin America, such as the Southern Cone, the Andean region, or the Caribbean. In reference to this problem, Karl Kohut, in "Una(s) literatura(s) por descubrir," states that, within Latin American studies, Central American literatures "pasan casi desaparcibidas" and figure as an empty space in the conceptual maps of the continent (9). This was not always the case. Central America captured the attention of the North American academia in the 1980s with the ascendance of testimonio. This moment in the spotlight, however, proved relatively short-lived: once the genre began to show signs of exhaustion, interest of the North American academia in

the region also seemed to wane. For a writer like Castellanos Moya, who uncompromisingly addresses concerns of contemporary Central America and, furthermore, who employs an aesthetic idiom that is outside the parameters of dominant literary movements, the likelihood that his literature be misunderstood or simply ignored are doubly compounded. The present investigation is intended, in part, to rectify this blind spot and compensate for this deficit in Latin American literary theory and criticism and, thus, give the narrative of Castellanos Moya and, more broadly, Central American literature the attention they undoubtedly deserve.

It is precisely the unabashedly political nature of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya that makes it so unapproachable. To criticize revolutionary militants at a time when they are being consecrated retrospectively in collective memory is a delicate operation, one that is fraught with difficulties and rife with potential misunderstandings. Yet, this is also why it can be so enriching. Likewise, to criticize the implementation of human rights at the height of its popularity and political currency is, indeed, to walk a fine line. It is very easy for such critiques to be conflated with political ideologies on the Right, as indeed has happened with Castellanos Moya. Yet, there is a crucial difference between criticizing the implementation of memory politics and criticizing memory politics as such, just as there is a difference between exposing the mismanagement of organized attempts at revolutionary political and social transformation and claiming that such attempts are illegitimate. The two terms are not commensurable and, in fact, Castellanos Moya, in his autobiographical writings, maintains that the Latin American revolutionary militancy was legitimate in principle *at the same time* that many of the practices of revolutionary movements were illegitimate (*Roque Dalton* 123). As a person who collaborated with revolutionary causes in his capacity as a writer and intellectual in his early adulthood, his critique of both revolutionary militancy and memory politics come from within the intellectual

traditions of the Latin American Left and are directed at counterproductive practices of those same traditions. As such, the iconoclastic gestures of the author should be understood as an internal critique of the Latin American Left and not in any way be conflated with discourse on the Right. This point cannot be emphasized enough.

Another obstacle to approaching the narrative program of Castellanos Moya is his treatment of violence. The prominence of seemingly gratuitous violence in his narrative would seem to suggest an affinity with the *novela sicaresca* of authors like Fernando Vallejo, Jorge Franco, Arturo Álope, Mario Mendoza, and Orfa Alarcón, especially since some of the characters of the novels of Castellanos Moya are indeed hired assassins, such as Robocop in *El arma en el hombre* (2001) and José Zeledón in *Morongá* (2018). Furthermore, Castellanos Moya shares an important feature with this subgenre of contemporary Latin American literature: the author makes no value judgments on the violent and flagrantly unethical motivations and actions of the characters (Franco 224). The similarities, nonetheless, stop here. The violence of contemporary *sicaresca* novels constitutes what Ariel Dorfman, in *Imaginación y violencia en América*, categorizes as “violencia horizontal e individual,” which he defines in the following manner:

Los llamamos horizontal porque luchan entre sí seres que ocupan un mismo nivel existencial de desamparo y de alienación: máquinas golpeadoras desatándose en contra de hermanos que son tratados como enemigos... Estos personajes agreden a otro ser humano, a veces un amigo, o un miembro de su propia familia, otras veces cualquiera que se le cruce por el camino: su violencia no tiene, para ellos, un claro sentido social. (26)

The crucial difference between the gratuitous violence of the *sicaresca* novel and the narrative project of Castellanos Moya is that the latter’s treatment of violence has a clear social and

political dimension. The violence of the postwar period in El Salvador is presented as an extension and as a transformation, under new and insidious guises, of the political violence of the civil war. The assassins, like Robocop and Zeledón, are ex-combatants who suffer humiliation, disorientation, and a marked loss of meaning in the postwar epoch. Furthermore, criminality is tied to the rampant corruption and hypocrisy of elites in an era of neoliberal triumphalism characterized by privatization (often of security forces), deregulation, and austerity programs. Contextualized in this manner, the violence of the narrative of Castellanos Moya is anything but meaningless. To the contrary, it forms a part of a political and social continuum whose roots go back to the political violence of dictatorship and civil war throughout the region. The problem, reiterated time and again in the novels of Castellanos Moya, is precisely that nothing has changed and that, after all the bloodshed of the revolutionary period, the same people remain in power, which is to say the political right.

A similar observation can be made about the relationship between the literature of Castellanos Moya and *narconarrativa*. While novels such as *El arma en el hombre* and *Moronga* indeed address the question of narcotrafficking, there are important differences between them and the narrative production of authors like Elmer Mendoza, Orfa Alarcón, Yuri Herrera, and Juan Pablo Villalobos. Most notably, the plots of the novels of Castellanos Moya are inextricably political, which is indeed the hallmark of his narrative program. The violence related to narcotrafficking, then, is subordinated to political concerns, which serve to give it context. This safeguards against what Graham Huggan has called “the postcolonial exotic” as a way “to market the margins” (28). Huggan, in *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), argues that cultural difference has become a specialized commodity within an “alterity industry,” understood as a global market of cross-cultural exchange (vii). There are, however, crucial power asymmetries

that characterize these forms of exchange: wealthy sectors of the world population, concentrated in metropolitan centers, consume cultural products from disadvantaged sectors, concentrated in the marginalized zones of the periphery. Furthermore, they do so in a manner that familiarizes otherness since the cultural productions of a peripheral Other comply with the expectations of the metropolitan consumer, as a precondition of accessing the market. Huggan refers to this operation as exoticisation, which is defined as: “a particular mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects, and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (13). Furthermore, this mode of the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural commodities has expanded, in our times, to a mass phenomenon:

The plethora of exotic products currently available in the marketplace suggests, however, a rather different dimension to the global ‘spectacularisation’ of cultural difference. Late-twentieth century exoticisms are the products, less of the expansion of a nation than of a worldwide market – exoticism has shifted, that is, from a more or less privileged mode of aesthetic perception to an increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption. (15)

Narco-narratives, whether film or literature, often run the risk of exoticism since they comply with the expectations of the privileged consumer, which is to say that their mode of representing violence in Latin America conforms to common preconceptions and stereotypes of Latin America in the Global North. Such representations, then, are complicit with the commodification of cultural difference as spectacle and indeed benefit from such complicity. Stated somewhat differently, such representations often mystify and reify complex social realities by sensationalizing and decontextualizing criminal violence, removing it from a historical

continuum. Such decontextualized violence, then, can only be meaningless to uninformed consumers.

This, however, is certainly not the case of the literature of Castellanos Moya. The violence of his novels, including that of narco-trafficking, is grounded in sociohistorical realities. In fact, the complex political intrigues of the plots of the author move in the opposite direction: they supply the reader with key contextual information for situating the violence that is being narrated. The plot of *Desmoronamiento* (2006), for example, revolves around the “Soccer War” between El Salvador and Honduras; in *Tirana Memoria* (2008), for its part, the dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez serves to articulate the relationships between the characters; and *Insensatez* (2004) is structured around the final editing of the truth commissions report of the genocidal practices in the Guatemalan civil war before its posterior publication as *Guatemala: Nunca más*. The omnipresence of the political, the long shadows that it casts over his fiction, make it impossible to subsume the novels of Castellanos Moya to the subgenres of the *narconovela* or the *novela sicareca*, despite occasional similarities.

Perhaps, then, his treatment of violence can be subsumed under the rubric of the post-dictatorship novel, whose focus is also political. According to Avelar Idelbar in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), Latin American post-dictatorship fiction is characterized by a mournful turn. “The imperative to mourn,” he states, “is the postdictatorial imperative par excellence” (3). Avelar conceives this mournfulness as a strategy for confronting the defeat of revolution and an attempt “to overcome the trauma represented by the dictatorships” (3). Without a doubt, the literature of Castellanos Moya engages with the defeat of the revolutionary Left. It is a central theme that cuts across the entirety of his literary production. Nonetheless, to what degree can we say that his novels belong

to the same group as José Donoso's *Casa de campo* (1980), Juan José Saer's *Nadie Nada Nunca* (1980), Daniel Moyano's *El vuelo del tigre* (1981), Silviano Santiago's *Em libertade* (1981), Mario Goloboff's *Criador de palomas* (1984), Tununa Mercado's *En estado de memoria* (1990), Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* (1992), or Diamela Eltit's *Los vigilantes* (1994)?² There are two reasons that would prevent us from including Castellanos Moya within Avelar's category of the (mournful) post-dictatorship novel. Firstly, Castellanos Moya consistently critiques the shortcomings of revolutionary movements, frequently exposing their crimes and illegitimate uses of violence, whereas the postdictatorship novel tends to idealize a lost past, thereby producing epic and sentimental rendering of the defeated (Richard 6). According to Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1994), the process of mourning involves the idealization of the lost object of affection or what he refers to as the "ontologization of the remainder" of the other (9). If post-dictatorship literature does indeed further the work of mourning, as Avelar claims, then it follows that this mournful subgenre of Latin American literature would replicate this process of idealization or ontologization of the remainder of the lost revolutionary militant. Furthermore, if we take into account that, for Freud, loss is often notional, which is to say that we mourn the

² It may be noted that some of these novels were published during the respective dictatorships that they alluded to, which would seem to complicate Avelar's category of the mournful post-dictatorial novel. He is careful, however, to clarify that his category is more qualitative than chronological. The category of "post-dictatorship" for him, then, is defined by its relationship to defeat, that is, the defeat of attempt of revolutionary social and political transformation. As such, the defeat of projects of revolutionary change was often announced well before the formal end of dictatorship:

The leap is not only a temporal but also a qualitative one, insofar as postdictatorship is taken not only to allude to these texts' posteriority in relation to military regimes..., but also and most important their reflexive incorporation of said defeat into their system of determinations. ...postdictatorship comes to signify, in the context of this endeavor, not so much the epoch posterior to the defeat but rather the moment when defeat is unapologetically accepted as the irreducible determination upon literary writing in the subcontinent. (Avelar 16)

passing of cherished ideals just as much as that of our loved ones, then the mourning is question also includes the ideal of a just and emancipated society (*On Murder* 203). The mourning of these losses, then, both material and notional at the same time, would involve the idealization of a lost past, which is indeed the case with the post-dictatorship novel. Castellanos Moya, however, consistently resists the temptation to idealize defeated Latin American revolutionary movements. To the contrary, he insists on exposing, time and again, their less flattering sides. Considerable portions of the plot of both *La diáspora* and *Morongá* are dedicated to the execution of Roque Dalton by his own comrades after falsely being accused of collaborating with the CIA. Likewise, the demise and ultimate of the protagonist of *Donde no estén ustedes* (2003), Alberto Aragón, was the result of being double-crossed by his allies in the revolution, who discarded him once they were through with his valuable services as a high-ranking international diplomat. In fact, in the face of the severity and sheer quantity of the crimes of the State and its proxies, one cannot help but think that the attention given to the crimes of Latin American revolutionary movements in the narrative of Castellanos Moya is disproportionate.

The second obstacle which prevents us from subsuming the narrative of Castellanos Moya under the rubric of the postdictatorship novel is his heavy-handed use of humor. In other words, while Castellanos Moya does indeed engage directly with the defeat of revolution, as does the post-dictatorship novel, he does so in a much different manner. The mournful post-dictatorship novel, as the moniker itself indicates, is characterized by its melancholic and solemn register (Richard 6). Avelar conceives this solemn and sacralising tone a result of the “unrealizable task” of processing trauma and loss, of naming the unnameable, of giving words to the ineffable. For prominent theorists of trauma studies, such as Cathy Caruth, in her widely influential text, *The Unclaimed Experience* (1996), literature is especially suited for this task.

Indeed, for Freud himself, “art and literature constitute, along with dreams and parapraxis, a privileged mode of manifestation of this unresolved trauma and loss” (qtd. in Caruth 8). For this reason, Avelar reaches the conclusion that, in situations of historical trauma, literature can be imbued with a “memory value” (5). The psychological need to confront unresolved traumatic experiences – together with the pragmatic political concern of drawing attention to the experience of victims and advocating for memory, truth, and justice in the face of State policies of amnesty, impunity, and silence within a contentious dispute in the public sphere over the meaning of the collective past – thereby accounts for gravity of Latin American post-dictatorship narrative. The narrative project of Castellanos Moya, however, is incompatible with this aesthetics (and politics) of mourning due to his frequent use of humor, parody, and irony. One of the principal innovations of the author, in fact, is the application of humor to situations of extreme political violence, which could only offend the sensibilities of the producers and consumers of mournful post-dictatorship cultural products.

As it turns out, the usage of humor and jest to narrate situations of political violence is one of the characteristics of second-generation post-dictatorship narrative. In *Playful Memories* (2016), Jordana Blejmar describes a ludic turn in second-generation cultural production that she characterizes as “playful memory:”

Deploying what I call in this book “playful memory,” young contemporary artists and writers, many children of disappeared and persecuted parents, often use humor, popular genres, children’s games and visual techniques commonly taught at school to provocatively represent the dictatorship and toy with trauma. ... This volume addresses precisely the controversial tension between trauma, play and humor, and it accords an unprecedented centrality to contemporary films, photography, literature, plays and blogs

that have changed the whole panorama of mourning, remembering and representing trauma over the past decade or so by offering playful accounts of the past. (2)

This particular mode of approaching the past and narrating the effects of political violence coincide with the narrative project of Castellanos Moya, yet he is clearly not a part of this generation. In fact, his firsthand experience, not as a combatant but as an intellectual working in solidarity with revolutionary causes, would situate him within the first generation, altogether he does not share the aesthetic sensibility of first-generation post-dictatorship cultural production. We might say, then, that his life experiences resemble those of the first generation while his aesthetic approach is more in line with second-generation sensibilities. Perhaps a more accurate manner to express this relationship, though, would be to consider Castellanos Moya a literary and intellectual antecedent of second-generation post-dictatorship cultural production.

Whether it be the *sicaresca* novel, narco-narrative, testimonio, the “mournful” post-dictatorship novel, or the current second-generation post-dictatorship novel, the narrative program of Castellanos Moya, then, cannot be accounted for within the existing traditions and genres of contemporary Latin American literature. This difficulty, together with the explicitly polemical and controversial nature of his literature, may account for the reticence of critics to study his work, despite its undeniable impact within the field of contemporary Latin American letters. Furthermore, there are other challenges to undertaking such an endeavor, such as frequent naturalistic descriptions of violence; the author’s preference for misogynist narrators; and the lack of value judgments to orient and reassure readers. The objective of my research, however, is not to shy away from these difficulties but rather rise to the challenge, thus contributing to discussions around the author’s aesthetic program and its place within the literature not only of Central America but also of Latin America as a whole.

A part of the anomalous and singular character of the narrative of Castellanos Moya stems from its polemical nature, that is, an explicit will to challenge or negate the conventions of inherited literary traditions, most notably in the case of its relationship to the aesthetics and politics of testimonio. There is much more, however, to the idiosyncratic narrative program of the author than mere disruption and discontinuity. Behind the histrionics of his narrators and their provocative tirades, there is an innovative mode of narrating political violence. In contrast to the highly idealized epic and sentimental renderings of political militancy that characterized the mournful post-dictatorship novel, Castellanos Moya offers a fuller picture of revolution, one that does not shy away from its less flattering aspects. Such an approach has the virtue of widening the parameters of collective memory beyond the confines of elegiac and laudatory renditions of revolutionary militancy (Basile 210). Furthermore, this innovative mode of narrating political violence in the recent past of Latin America forges new subject positions and sites of enunciation for Latin American public intellectuals. Throughout the epoch of the Boom, Latin American artists and public intellectuals were expected to put their talents to contribute, on the level of culture, to the all-encompassing project of revolutionary change in the region (Gilman 271). According to Beverley and Zimmerman (1999), the same was true of testimonio, which was conceived as “the cultural component” of Central American armed struggle (172). By insisting upon narrating the shortcomings of revolution, and indeed its crimes, Castellanos Moya violates these norms that dictate the political responsibilities of the Central American public intellectual. Furthermore, this incomppliance with tradition is at the foundation of his narrative project, as the central theme of his first novel is the conflict between intellectuals and Central American revolutionary movements, a recurring preoccupation throughout his posterior narrative production. Through characters like Juan Carlos and el Turco in *La diáspora*; Edgardo Vega in

El asco; Alberto Aragón and Jose Pindonga in *Donde no estén ustedes*; and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*, all the way through the Erasmo Aragón of *Morongá*, Castellanos Moya breathes life into the figure of the disengaged or uncommitted Latin American intellectual. This, on the plane of the enunciated of the literary work. On the plane of the enunciation, Castellanos Moya, through his autobiographical writings, resists the dogmatic and authoritarian aspects of revolutionary politics in Latin America and publicly criticizes such faults, yet without making concessions to the political Right (*Roque Dalton* 123). Both through his literature and his practice as public intellectual, Castellanos Moya breaks inherited molds and explores new subject positions and sites of enunciation for the Latin American public intellectual. This recalibration, in turn, has profound consequences for the overall relationship between literature and politics in Latin America. While the region has a long history of politicizing the literary texts, Castellanos Moya takes a bold step in the opposite direction, thus emancipating cultural production from time-honored constraints.

The starting point of this presentation of the literature of Horacio Castellanos Moya was the innovative character of *Insensatez*, as an unprecedented development both within the narrative project of the author and within the field of contemporary Latin American literature. As the seventh of the thirteen novels that he has published to date, *Insensatez* is situated in the center of the author's narrative production. Likewise, it is the center of the present investigation. Its centrality, however, derives less from its place in the chronological development of the Castellanos Moya's work than the fact that it consummates a series of themes and techniques rehearsed in previous novels. This narrator's irreverence for convention, his inability to regulate his emotions, his vehemence, and his verbosity can all be traced back to *La diáspora*, appearing in one form or another in the novels in between the two. In fact, I argue that there is a strong

connection between *La diáspora* and *Insensatez* since they both pose substantial challenges to dominant modes of politicizing the literary text, which in the former are directed towards testimonio's tendency to praise the counterviolence of the revolution (Mackenbach 319) and in the latter target the mournful post-dictatorship novel's tendency to mobilize the literary text to garner support for human rights causes (Amar Sánchez 121). If Castellanos Moya's first novel explores the possibility of criticizing revolution, then *Insensatez*, for its part, ventures a critique of the abuses of memory politics in Central America. These two moments have been chosen as the outer limits of my corpus not only for the respective ruptures that they represent but also because the period between *La diáspora* and *Insensatez* is when Castellanos Moya defined the central tenets of his narrative program and fixed its formal and thematic parameters. Naturally, there is much more to say about the narrative production of the author during this formative period, but now is not the time for textual analysis, so let us turn our attention instead to what scholars in the field have to say about Castellanos Moya.

State of the Question

One of the principal difficulties of studying the narrative of Horacio Castellanos Moya is the lack of scholarship dedicated to his work. Given his undeniable success within the publishing industry, a wide readership, and the acclaim of his contemporaries, such as Roberto Bolaño, there is relatively little criticism written about his literature, especially his early work. Without a doubt, the majority of scholarly articles address *Insensatez*, due to the polemical nature of its critique of the implementation of memory politics. Most in-depth critical analyses come from specialists in Central American literature, such as Beatriz Cortez, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, and Werner Mackenbach, although some prominent Latin-Americanists have made contributions to the growing body of criticism on Castellanos Moya, such as Alberto Moreiras, Ignacio Sánchez

Prado, and Teresa Basile. Although this lack of antecedents makes it more difficult to defer to specialists in the field throughout my analysis of the texts, it may also be considered an asset in the sense that it represents an opportunity to make an original contribution to both the literary criticism dedicated to the literature of Castellanos Moya and to that of Central America.

In her study of postwar Central American literatures, *Estética del cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra* (2010), Beatriz Cortez undertakes an in-depth analysis of the early novels of Castellanos Moya. She considers the author a major proponent of what she refers to as an “aesthetic of cynicism,” understood as a turn towards disenchantment, cynicism, and nihilism in post-revolutionary Central American culture (23). According to her analysis, this aesthetics forms part of a postrevolutionary sensibility that no longer believes in projects of revolutionary transformation and struggles to come to terms with their failure (25). A crucial component of Cortez’s argument is that this aesthetics of cynicism is self-defeating, or what she refers to as a “proyecto fallido” (26). The reason why this is the case is that this new Central American cynicism is unable to move beyond the instance of negation and, in attempting to assert a postwar subjectivity, ends up destroying the conditions necessary for the subject to assert his or herself. Cortez characterizes this self-cancelling subjectivity in the following terms:

...mi objetivo es mostrar la forma en que esta estética de cinismo dio lugar a la formación de una subjetividad precaria en medio de una sensibilidad de posguerra colmada de desencanto: se trata de una subjetividad construida como subalterna *a priori*, una subjetividad que depende del reconocimiento de otros, una subjetividad que solamente se posibilita por medio de la esclavitud de ese sujeto que *a priori* se ha construido como

subalterno, de su destrucción, de su desmembramiento, de su suicidio, literalmente hablando. (25)

Cortez then proceeds to analyze a plethora of cases of this precarious form of subjectivity within postwar Central American literature. There is certainly no lack of examples in Castellanos Moya's work, which is heavily populated with radically self-destructive characters. In fact, one does not need to look any further than the titles of his novels to detect a tendency towards negation and dissolution: *La diáspora*, *El asco*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, *Insensatez*, *Desmoronamiento*. Cortez is certainly justified in pointing out that Castellanos Moya privileges violent and deeply self-destructive characters. In fact, the majority of Castellanos Moya's narrators tend to fall within two categories: those who direct their destructive impulses against themselves and those who direct them against others. El Turco from *La diáspora*, Edgardo Vega from *El asco*, Alberto Aragón from *Donde no estén ustedes*, and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez* belong to this group. One could even interpret the death of Alberto Aragón in *Donde no estén ustedes* as a suicide since he effectively drinks himself to death in a dingy apartment in Mexico City after being betrayed by his friends on both the Right and the Left. Eduardo Sosa from *Baile con serpientes*, Robocop from *El arma en el hombre*, el Vikingo from *La sirvienta y el luchador*, and José Zeledón from *Morongá* belong to the group who direct their destructive impulses against others. In both cases, there is no possibility of sublimating or overcoming destructive drives.

Cortez may indeed be correct in signaling the predominance of violent and self-destructive characters in the narrative of Castellanos Moya, but she then extrapolates this observation about the state of affairs in literature and applies it to postwar Central American society as a whole by arguing that "una estética de cinismo dio lugar a la formación de una

subjetividad precaria” (25). In a giant leap, then, her claim about literature becomes a claim about society. Furthermore, she seems to be arguing that a literary aesthetics is the *cause* of a precarious mode of subjectivity characterized by disenchantment and cynicism. This hardly seems probable, especially considering that the influence of the authors she analyzes – figures such as Miguel Huevo Mixco, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Tatiano Lobo, Jacinta Escudos, and Horacio Castellanos Moya – wield relatively little influence in a mass-media, spectacle-dominated cultural milieu. In times of rampant anti-intellectualism, such as the ones we are currently living, it seems that Cortez overestimates the power of the public intellectual, which seems to be a thing of the past (Butler, *Precarious Lives* 3). In fact, it seems more likely that the opposite would be true, that is, that contemporary Central American literature registers (rather than causes) broader shifts in political and cultural sensibilities. In other words, in our current cultural context in which writers have lost their moral authority in the public sphere and in which traditional print literature is rapidly losing ground to other forms of cultural production, largely dominated by digital mediums, it certainly does not seem likely that literature would be a driving force in shaping a cynical postwar subjectivity. A much more likely scenario, more in line with the humble place of literature within contemporary society, is that literary works, like those of Castellanos Moya, registers a crisis in the political that expresses itself through a generalized cynicism.

Rather than considering the violent and self-destructive characters in the novels of Castellanos Moya as the cause of a self-defeating postwar sensibility or even the reflection of it, we might ask which functions it fulfills within the narrative program of the author. I argue that the type of narrators that Castellanos Moya privileges serve the function of breaking with the conventions of existing traditions and opening the space to explore new territory, discursive,

aesthetical, and political. If Castellanos Moya proposes to break with the aesthetics and politics of testimonio, for example, as he indeed does, then what better way to break with norms than through characters that consistently disregard conventions, frustrate expectations, and violate norms of acceptability. (*Roque Dalton* 172)

There is, however, a more serious flaw in the argumentation of Cortez. Her conclusion that the subjectivity expressed in contemporary Central American literature constitutes a self-defeating project since the subject self-annihilates does not *necessarily* follow from the premise that contemporary literary works tended to present subjects who are disenchanted. In colloquial terms, there is enough distance between disenchantment with revolutionary projects and self-annihilation to warrant disassociating the two. This disjunction between self-affirmation and self-annihilation excludes the possibility of intermediate terms. In fact, figures like Juan Carlos and Carmen in *La diáspora*, who are disenchanted with the revolutionary left, are by no means incapacitated and their agency is not destroyed by their disenchantment. To the contrary, they struggle to reconcile their political convictions with the existing channels to express those convictions. Furthermore, their disenchantment is more than mere negation and has an affirmative dimension as well. In *La diáspora*, the disenchantment of intellectuals like Juan Carlos and Carmen are based on ethics principles: they defect from the Party because they oppose its authoritarian structure, its intolerance towards difference, and its illegitimate use of violence (33-36, 101-102, 122-123). The execution of Roque Dalton, the assassination of Mélida Anaya Montes, and the subsequent suicide of Salvador Cayetano Carpio was the tipping point at which they realized the practices of the Party no longer lived up its ideals, nor theirs. What they desire, then, is a more ethical and less authoritarian Left, not self-annihilation.

Furthermore, Cortez seems to be conflating the level of the enunciated with the level of the enunciation of the literary text. In other words, what holds true for the characters of Castellanos Moya does not necessarily hold true for the author or his literary project. This is the critique that Alberto Moreiras levels at the interpretation of Cortez in “The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *La diáspora* (1989),” where he points out that there is no need to make a judgment on the cynicism of the author based on that of his characters. “There is a critical difference,” he states, “between depicting cynicism in one novel and assuming it as the novel’s perspective” (54). Whereas Cortez establishes an opposition between the optimistic utopian thinking of the revolutionary period and the disenchanting cynicism of the postwar, Moreiras sees a third term, “neither pessimistic nor nihilistic. It’s tragic” (61). This argument has the virtue of acknowledging a distinction between a tragic perspective and a cynical one:

I would venture the statement that the experience of the political that Castellanos Moya’s literature offers us is also a tragic one, which makes it quite unique in the Central American context, and comparable only to the rendering of some of the most august Latin American writers: José María Arguedas, for instance, or Roberto Bolaño. Cynicism does not quite measure up. (61)

At this point, my own approach to the narrative of Castellanos Moya differs from that of Moreiras on two points, both of which are interrelated. First, there is the problem of humor in Castellanos Moya. His frequent appeal to creating humor out of situations of political violence complicates the category of the tragic. Given Castellanos Moya’s penchant for off-color jokes, “august” seems like an appropriate characterization. Secondly, the analysis of Moreiras is grounded in a commonplace definition of cynicism that I do not share. Following the lead of

Peter Sloterdijk in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987), I bypass commonplace connotations of cynicism and remit back to its origins in Greek philosophy. More specifically, the cynical tradition in Greek antiquity can be traced back to the figure of Diogenes of Sincope. What interests Sloterdijk about this legendary character is his opposition to the status quo, embodied in both the figures of Alexander the Great and Plato. The bodily and world-loving Diogenes rejected Platonic idealism's impossible demand of achieving "purity" and scoffed at the arrogance of the powerful. Sloterdijk, then, interprets the cynicism of Diogenes as a site of resistance against both the moral hypocrisy and abuses of power of the elite. To differentiate this originary form of cynicism from commonplace associations with the term, Sloterdijk proposes to replace it with 'kynicism,' which has the virtue of invoking the etymological origin of the word, which derives from the Greek word for dog (104). Furthermore, he argues that it needs to be carefully differentiated from modern cynicism, which is no longer an oppositional stance but, to the contrary, has become the status quo itself. In our times, that is, after the defeat of the projects of revolutionary change that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, a diffuse form of modern cynicism has permeated vast swathes of the population. It's two most common variants are the cynicism of the ruling elite, who are aware of the destruction that their actions wreak but simply do not care, and the cynicism of much of the population, who knowingly acquiesce to the status quo because they stand to benefit from it to one degree or another, however nominally, and therefore act on bad faith (4). The figure of the "kynic," then, functions to expose the hypocrisy of the latter and denounce the abuses of the former (215). Contrary to Moreiras, I argue that a more nuanced reading of the tradition of cynicism, like that of Sloterdijk, allows room to account for the oppositional dimension of the narrative of Castellanos Moya, without reducing it to mournful and tragic responses to the defeat of revolution.

Rejecting Cortez's characterization of the literature of Castellanos Moya in terms of cynicism, Moreiras proposes to interpret it as tragic. He justifies this interpretation on the grounds that the narrative of Castellanos Moya registers a crisis in the political, which he describes as "the crisis of a past that no longer offers a future, and this is constantly interrogated as to its very silence and opacity" (60). This crisis makes its mark in the discourse of the Central American Left as a shift from the epic renderings of revolutionary activity that characterized the revolutionary period to a tragic register. Cortez frames this same shift in terms of a passage from optimism and faith in revolution to a self-defeating cynicism. While I coincide with Moreiras that the narrative of Castellanos Moya registers a crisis in the political and constitutes a break with epic and laudatory renderings of revolutionary militancy, I differ in characterizing it as tragic because I think that this does not do justice to its oppositional and affirmative dimensions. At the same time, I coincide with Cortez in characterizing the narrative of Castellanos Moya as cynical, but I do not share her definition of cynicism as a self-defeating project that eclipses any possibility of affirmation but rather that of Sloterdijk, who posits "kynicism" as critique of an illegitimate status quo and resistance to the corruption and abuses of power of the elite.

If the narrative of Castellanos Moya registers a crisis in the political, what, then, is the nature of that crisis and how can it best be characterized? Between the moment of optimism and that of cynicism or the moment of epic renderings of revolutionary militancy and tragic ones, there is a third moment that articulates the two and that corresponds to the defeat of revolution. While this defeat was indeed material and involved the loss of life of hundreds of thousands of Latin American activists and militants during the Cold War, in a concerted effort by local elites with the support of the US, it also had a symbolic dimension that included a restructuring of the discourse and practice of the Latin American Left. Throughout the period that corresponds to the

first moment, the moment of optimism, the intellectuals and artists of the Latin American Left formulated their interpretations of the sociohistorical situations of the continent in terms of Marxist philosophy of history and economic theory, that is, according to the historical materialist teleology and structural analyses of the development of capitalism. Debates at the time, therefore, centered on a series of rhetorical crystallizations and motifs, such as whether Latin American countries should await a bourgeois revolution before mobilizing the proletariat, whether the working class were sufficiently prepared for the task of ushering in a new mode of production, whether other revolutionary subjectivities could take its place, which class alliances could overthrow the reigning productive forces, and the most appropriate methods and strategies to address impending class warfare (Löwy, *War of Gods* 75-7). In other words, the limits of the imaginary of the Latin American Left were demarcated by Marxist discourse, which served as an ideological dominant that determined what Raymond Williams would call the “structure of feeling” of the epoch (*Marxism and Literature* 128-35). Although dramatically less familiar to us today, the Marxist idiom of revolutionary militancy had been naturalized by many artists and intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s, which is why Pilar Calveiro in *Política y/o violencia: una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años 70* (2005) considers revolutionary militants a faithful reflection of their times. Speaking of armed groups, she claims that they constitute “un fiel producto de su sociedad y de las polémicas políticas de la época. No se los puedo considerar como un ‘brote’ repentino, sino que constituyeron un fenómeno consistente con su momento” (100). The degree to which this idiom proves foreign to us today attests to the fact that we, too, are products of our own epoch and tend to think within its ideological parameters.

Writing in 1996, in his book, *War of Gods*, Michael Löwy signals an incipient tendency within Latin American intellectual circles to “de-emphasize” Marxism (125). While wholly

dedicated to the central tenets of Latin American Marxism and the theory of *foquismo* in his 1973 book, *The Marxism of Che Guevara*, together with other apologias of revolutionary violence like Régis Debray's *Revolution within the Revolution* (1967) and Ariel Dorfman's *Imaginación y violencia en América* (1970), by the mid-nineties Löwy had adopted a much different tone.³ Writing after the widespread and bloody defeat of Latin American revolutionary movements, not only had the option of revolutionary violence been taken off the proverbial table, but Löwy also doubted the very existence of Marxism as an interpretative framework for the Latin American Left.

This step away from Marxism was at the same time a step in a new direction. If the cultural currency of Marxism was waning, there was no shortage of replacements to follow in its wake. In *Testimonio* (2007) John Beverley argues that throughout the eighties Marxism, as an ideological dominant, was displaced by discourses of gender and ethnicity, nourished by the theoretical frameworks of feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies. “The emerging ‘identity politics’ of the new social movements,” he writes, “came to occupy the place of the revolutionary left in the 1980s” (x-xi). In fact, in the book that he co-authored with Marc Zimmerman in 1990, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, Beverley makes scant references to gender and ethnicity and dedicates the vast majority to his analysis to literature as a cultural component to Marxist revolutionary struggle. Seventeen years later, however, his second book dedicated to testimonio is marked by a similar omission but this time

³ Here and throughout the remainder of the text, I employ the term ‘apologia,’ as an incorporation into English from Greek, used in the contexts of law and philosophy to refer to a statement of defense of one’s beliefs or positions. Used exclusively as a noun, it has the virtue of dispelling the ambiguity of a potential substitute like ‘apologetic,’ which as a noun can refer to a defense of a stance or as an adjective to a person who shows remorse. Furthermore, it bypasses many of the Christian connotations of ‘apologetics’ as a declaration of faith.

the discourse omitted is Marxism. In this new context in which the possibility of revolution has been implicitly discarded, subalternity constitutes the new site of resistance. The passage from the focus of Beverley's earlier to his later book attests to the degree to which emergent discourses displaced Marxism as the dominant discursive paradigm of the humanities.

In *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (2016), Enzo Traverso identifies another substitute for Marxism in the humanities: memory. He argues that the eclipse of Marxism, as the dominant culture of the left throughout the twentieth century, by memory became "almost complete by the 1980s" (56). With human rights discourse as its common denominator, the memory paradigm spanned across a range of disciplines, from postcolonialism, subaltern studies to burgeoning fields like trauma studies. The concern with limit situations and their aftereffects also became a central focus of the ethical turn in continental philosophy through the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben. The repercussions of this change in perspective exceeded the confines of academia and, in broader terms, indicate a shift in the strategy of the Left from an offensive to a defensive position, from revolutionary militancy to cultural resistance, from the objective of eradicating exploitation to that of the non-repetition of flagrant human rights violations. In the case of Argentina, for example, the ERP or Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo advocated in 1970 for "un luminoso porvenir socialista, fin de la explotación y de los sufrimientos y comienzo de una era de justicia y felicidad colectiva" (Calveiro 78). Twenty years later, the horizons of expectations of the left had been reduced to the non-repetition of human rights violations, as captured by the slogan of memory politics, "*nunca más*." As a political objective, the non-repetition of past crimes offers no guarantee against the structural inequalities and systemic oppression to which Latin American revolutions were responding in the first place. With the collapse of aspirations of future justice and a subsequent

fixation of the crimes of the past, the present of neoliberal triumphalism remained largely uncontested. This turn from futurity to the preterit was reinforced by a disdain for the universal principles that informed the projects of modernity to the exaltation of the particular and the micropolitical that characterizes postmodern politics and culture.

It is no wonder, then, that by the time that Michael Löwy was writing the preface to his 2007 reissue of *The Marxism of Che Guevara*, thirty-four years after its initial publication, he assumes that Marxist discourse will be largely unintelligible to his readers:

Is it still possible, in 2007, to understand what motivated Ernesto (Che) Guevara? It is difficult to imagine a world more different from ours than that of the 1960s. It was the era of the Cold War, but also of high hopes and radical utopias. Neoliberalism had been forgotten or considered an anachronism of the nineteenth century. The wind of revolt blew throughout the Third World, and Cuba appeared to be a viable alternative to the Soviet model. Nations of the southern hemisphere were not the object of humanitarian pity, but of a liberating solidarity. (xxv)

From 1973, 1996, and 2007, respectively, the three texts of Löwy trace the passage from Marxist discourse to the memory paradigm and identity politics in the humanities. What was self-evident in 1973 and beginning to lose currency in the 1990s was obsolete and largely unintelligible in the first decade of the new century, requiring explanation of outdated cultural codes by the author for his readers. For this reason, Beverley, writing in 2004, argues that “*I, Rigoberta Menchú* is more like to be read today in the light of the concerns of feminism, post-colonialism, and multiculturalism than as a paean for armed struggle,” which constituted the original pragmatic force of the text (*Testimonio* xvii). Likewise, the image of Che Guevara has been conserved but largely drained of its originary content. In an attempt to determine the legacy of Latin American

revolutionary militancy and its impact on the present, Vezzetti writes that “sólo ha quedado la recuperación del mito romántico del coraje y la entrega: es la figura del Che convertido en un ingrediente del imaginario moral de la rebeldía individual en un horizonte cerrado a las esperanzas colectivas” (171). While Latin American memory activists of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s revindicated the passion and optimism of the revolutionary generation, appealing time and again to the trope of youthful idealism, this symbolic affiliation simultaneously jettisoned Marxism as real-world praxis.

The result has been a post-Marxist political, cultural, and intellectual climate in Latin America, in both of the senses signalled by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), often cited as a “manifesto for post-Marxism” (Kouvelakis 341):

At this point we should state quite plainly that we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain. It is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared. But if our intellectual project in this book is *post-Marxist*, it is evidently also *post-Marxist*. (Laclau and Mouffe, xxiv)

In Latin America, memory theory and practice are post-Marxist in this same way, which is to say that they replicate this same ambivalence, with the accent falling alternately on both sides of the hyphen. In other words, memory movements enacted a complex set of continuities and ruptures with respect to earlier Marxist traditions. While it was important for writers and intellectuals in the post-dictatorship epoch to articulate their admiration for the vanquished traditions of revolutionary militancy, this gesture had more to do with political struggle in the present against

amnesty, impunity, and silence in the transitional societies. Political militancy and revolutionary politics were often represented through a set of idealizing tropes, such as the figure of the innocent victim and the youthful and passionate idealist willing to give his or her life for a more just world. These figurations, however, prove highly selective, since many definitive elements of Latin American revolutionary theory and practice are simply omitted, most notably the commonplace exaltation of violence and the internal intolerance and authoritarianism that characterized many revolutionary organizations (Calveiro 103-4). These symbolic inscriptions in Latin American Marxist traditions, cleansed of their undesirable factors, were offset by a series of important differences in terms of political philosophy. Unlike Latin American Marxism of the second half of the twentieth century, memory politics take liberal democracy as their ultimate horizon (Traverso 57). In fact, human rights discourse of the past decades itself emerges from within a solidly liberal humanist philosophical tradition. This philosophical substratum of memory, as theory and practice, would have been anathema to militants of previous generations. Conversely, if in 1965 Régis Debray could emphatically affirm that “life, for the revolutionary, is not the supreme good,” this asseveration would be entirely inappropriate in an epoch dominated by human rights discourse.

The narrative project of Castellanos Moya both embodies and dramatizes this process of negotiation. Founded upon an originary break with the orthodox Latin American Left, which was squarely situated within Marxist traditions, he tackles head-on the question of illegitimate usages of violence and abuses of power within Latin American revolutionary movements. The plots of *La diáspora* (1989) and *Moronga* (2018), as well as several of the essays of *Roque Dalton: Correspondencia clandestina y otros ensayos* (2021), deal directly with the episode of the assassination of the revolutionary poet, Roque Dalton, by his own comrades in arms. Through

the literary production of the author, the episode of the execution of Dalton serves as the proverbial line in the sand, the tipping point, which marks the break of Latin American Left intellectuals with revolutionary Party politics. This rift and the subsequent distance that Castellanos Moya puts between himself and the orthodox Latin American Left, however, should not be interpreted as an about face or a swing to the Right. As Alberto Moreiras points out, “Horacio Castellanos Moya is a man of the left. His literature cannot be confused with any attempt to guarantee or strengthen a status quo favoring corruption, incompetence, gangsterism, violence, and deep social injustice in his country, which indeed his literature has never stopped exposing” (4). While the literature of Castellanos Moya does indeed expose the crimes of the revolution, often omitted within previous literary traditions, he is, at the same time, relentless in his critique of violence from the Right in the form of death squads, the counterinsurgency programs of the armed forces, genocide, and other expressions of State terrorism. Furthermore, his principal critiques of the postwar epoch are that the same people had remained in power in El Salvador after the Peace Accords; that economic and social injustice deepened during the transitional period; and that legacies of violence did not disappear but merely assumed new and insidious forms. The following passage from *Moronga* illustrates the tone of these critiques, although examples can be found across the entirety of the author’s work: “lo de la ‘transición democrática’ fue aún peor, que quienes antes eran enemigos a muerte, entonces hicieron mancuerna para el saqueo y el crimen, de tal manera que el país siguió siendo la misma cloaca emporcada de sangre” (276). In short, the critical distance that Castellanos Moya takes with respect to orthodox Marxist discourse cannot be reduced to the postmodern apolitical. In this sense, he opens a space within Latin American literature to give a voice to properly post-Marxist sensibilities, in 1) the sense of continuing the spirit of critique of the injustices engendered by

(neo)liberal political and economic institutions, and 2) in the sense of moving beyond the limitations of antiquated and crystallized Marxist rhetoric.

Within the diachronic development of contemporary Latin American literature, then, Castellanos Moya is situated in a pivotal position. His literature constitutes an inflexion point since he bequeaths a discourse to posterior generations, who sensibilities he shares, at the same time that he is fluent in the cultural idioms of previous generations, such as Marxism, having participated firsthand in revolutionary political organizations in his youth. Situated between the revolution and an up-and-coming generation of writers who are writing after the bust of the memory boom, his narrative project serves as a nexus between two radically different historical moments and between two radically different aesthetic approaches to narrating political violence. Furthermore, his literature itself narrates the growing unintelligibility of Marxist discourse within Latin American intellectual circles and traces the subsequent ascent of a series of contenders for substitute interpretative frameworks, such as memory or subalternity. By confronting these issues in his work, Castellanos Moya habilitated new modes of representing political violence, modes that broke with the solemn and sacralising tropes of both testimonio and the early post-dictatorship novel. While a new generation of writers shares his critique of counterrevolutionary violence and his suspicion of memory discourse, residual Marxist paradigms for interpreting Latin American realities are largely opaque to them and are treated more as an object of ridicule than a cultural and political idiom which needs to be translated. With one foot in the revolution and the other in neoliberal Latin America, Castellanos Moya has struggled to reconcile the codes of a revolutionary era when Marxism was the dominant interpretive framework with those of a decidedly post-Marxist epoch. Although he has largely forsaken the idiom of Marxism, it is nonetheless his mother tongue so to speak, whereas his contemporary counterparts, who live on

the other side of the fault line of the unattenuated political violence of the limit situations in the recent past of the continent, simply do not speak the language. Nothing could be farther from their sensibilities than the thoughts of Che Guevara, as Löwy pointed out in 2007. The asseveration does not hold true for Castellanos Moya who, familiar with revolution, choose nonetheless to pursue a properly post-Marxist line of inquiry, which has informed his literary project. As such, his literature constitutes as a nexus between two radically convergent aesthetics within contemporary Latin American literature and two radically different conceptions of the roles of intellectuals and the work of art in society.

In “La ficción y el momento de peligro: *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya,” Ignacio Sánchez Prado analyzes the author’s representation of the Latin American public intellectual. According to this interpretation of *Insensatez*, the unnamed narrator is a polemical device that serves as a counterimage and negation of the politically committed public intellectual that was upheld as an ideal within the tradition of testimonio. In addition to his flagrantly offensive histrionics, this cantankerous character displays an incapacity to solidarize with victims of State violence and an unwavering disinterest in any type of solution to social or political problems of any kind. Sánchez Prado interprets this choice of narrator as an allegory for the collapse of the figure of the politically engaged public intellectual: “La narrativa medular de *Insensatez* es el desmoronamiento del intelectual como figura privilegiada de formación de identidad y lo político en el contexto de las posguerras centroamericanas” (248). The all-powerful intellectual/celebrity of the Boom era who rubbed elbows with rulers and the politically committed intellectual in the testimonio period who stood arm in arm with the *pueblo* has given way to the impotent and politically disengaged intellectual of the postwar epoch. The key feature of this novel figure, for Sánchez Prado, is his inability to use his talents as a thinker and as a

writer to resolve social and political conflicts (249-50). Not only is the new version of the Latin American public intellectual unable to help solve the problems of politics or society, but he also proves incapable of taking care of his own basic physical and psychological needs, as evidenced by the progressive disintegration of the protagonist throughout the course of the novel.

The present dissertation takes this critical insight of Sánchez Prado as a starting point. I argue that throughout his early narrative Castellanos Moya does indeed develop novel representations of the Latin American public intellectual that diverge substantially from the social and political functions attributed to them in the traditions of the Boom and testimonio, as well as the first-generation post-dictatorship novel, for that matter. My approach, however, differs in two regards. The first difference is methodological: my research is genealogical in the sense that I aim to historicize the innovations of Castellanos Moya (among them the creation of new sites and modes of enunciation for Latin American public intellectuals) and situate them within the diachronic development of contemporary Latin American literature, in particular with regards to its cultural politics, that is, the development of the relationship between the literary text and politics. The type of intellectual that Sánchez Prado describes in his article is not by any means limited to *Insensatez*. In fact, there is a rich story of the development this figure throughout the seven novels from *La diáspora* to *Insensatez*, and one of the objectives of this dissertation is to tell that story. The innovation of Castellanos Moya, in other words, did not materialize out of thin air, appearing one day on the pages of one of his novels, but, on the contrary, was carefully and deliberately conceived as a basic tenet of the author's literary program. The second point of divergence is that I resist the interpretation that the type of intellectuals privileged in the narration of Castellanos Moya have no social nor political functions. They do not have the same political functions as the model Latin American

intellectual within the cultural politics of the Boom and testimonio. They do, however, have a clear “kynical” dimension, in the sense that they mercilessly critique the postwar status quo of neoliberal triumphalism and consistently express deeply anti-authoritarian sentiments, which apply principally to the Right but also extend to the abuses of power of movements on the Left. More than represent a turn to the postmodern apolitical, as Cortez argues, these narrators register a crisis in the political, as Moreiras argues, as the Left tries to come to terms with its past errors and adapt to a rapidly changing sociohistorical context. The result of this process of negotiation and adaptation is the emergence of new discourses, strategies, and subject positions within Latin American literature.

My strategy for telling the story of the innovations of Castellanos Moya is to identify two poles or moments in the arch of the development of his narrative program. The author’s first novel, *La diáspora*, represents the moment of originary rupture with both the aesthetics and politics of testimonio, as well as with the cultural politics of the Latin American Left at the time. In this sense, I follow the interpretation of Teresa Basile in “Las memorias perturbadores: revision de la izquierda revolucionaria en la narrativa de Horacio Castellanos Moya,” where she argues that the author’s first novel stages a foundational break with the Latin American Left, a point of rupture between intellectuals and revolution. This conflict has a foundational status because it constitutes “el eje y el inicio de gran parte de su narrativa” (209). As such, it informs the rest of Castellanos Moya’s narrative program:

La narrativa de Castellanos Moya parece, incluso, originarse e iniciarse a partir de la escena de ruptura de su propio vínculo con la izquierda salvadoreña, y por ello su literatura se vuelve el espacio de una continua deliberación y exploración de la entraña

misma de la izquierda abordada desde el desencanto, la ira, la burla, el cinicismo o la nostalgia a lo largo de su narrativa posterior. (198)

My analysis of this foundational moment in the narrative program of the author also relies on the scholarship of Alexandra Ortiz Wallner in *El arte de ficcionar: la novela contemporánea en Centroamérica* (2012) and “Literatura y violencia: Para una lectura de Horacio Castellanos Moya.” In her research, she characterizes the aesthetics of Castellanos Moya in terms of a radical break with the aesthetics and politics of testimonio. I also anchor my analysis of the conflicted relationship between the author and testimonio on the study of Megan Thorton’s “A Postwar Perversion of Testimonio in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El asco*.”

The second limit to the corpus of my dissertation is the moment of the definitive consolidation of the central tenets of his narrative program, which culminate in Castellanos Moya’s seventh novel, *Insensatez*. The aesthetics of this novel, which has rightfully monopolized the attention of literary critics, were rehearsed and honed throughout the previous six novels of the author. More than an anomaly within the production of the author, *Insensatez* is part of a larger narrative project that deliberately challenges inherited conceptions of the political and social functions of the public intellectual and of the relationship between the literary text and politics in Latin America. For this reason, I dedicate the first chapter of this dissertation to the analysis of the trajectory of the formal and thematic innovations developed by Castellanos Moya from *La diáspora* to *Insensatez*. The second and third chapters, for their part, focus respectively on *La diáspora* as the moment of the origin and on *Insensatez* as the moment of the fruition and consummation of the innovations of the author.

One of the most notable common threads that runs throughout the narrative of Castellanos Moya is the theme of political violence. The omnipresence of violence in his

literature is one of the aspects of his work which has most piqued the interest of literary critics. In “Literatura y violencia: Para una lectura de Horacio Castellanos Moya,” Ortiz Wallner argues that Castellanos Moya is indicative of a turn towards “narratives of violence” and an “aesthetics of violence” within postwar Central American literature (87):

Se trata de un fenómeno extendido que penetra sin distinción todas las clases sociales, y que sugiere que la violencia también produce crisis en el orden del discurso. Este proceso encuentra expresión en cierta narrativa centroamericana reciente que se caracteriza por mostrar los más diversos registros de la violencia en las sociedades contemporáneas del período posterior a los conflictos armados. (89)

For Werner Mackenbach, in “Representations of Violence and Peace in Contemporary Central American Literature,” new forms of violence in literature are related to the transformation, generalization, and diversification of violence in the society and politics in the region:

The region is facing the challenge of overcoming the violent legacy of its recent past and at the same time experiencing a transformation of violence, as is Latin America in general. These are processes of depoliticization and repoliticization (in the new constellations), of destatization and privatization, of deterritorialization and transnationalization of the most diverse forms of violence. These new presences, forms, perceptions and representations of violence no longer derive mostly from armed conflicts and are not limited to denunciation. (324)

Mackenbach signals the exhaustion of the paradigm, in literature, of denouncing violence from above, or State violence, and praising counterviolence, or violence from below (319). He sees the narrative of Castellanos Moya as a direct challenge to previous modes of treating violence in literature and a pivotal moment in developing new approaches. Castellanos Moya, however,

accomplishes this feat without abandoning the theme of the political violence of armed conflict, which is one of the main features that differentiates his narrative project from other representations of violence in Latin American literature, such as the *narconovela*, the *sicaresca* novel, or the dirty realism of Pedro Juan Gutierrez. The scholarship of Basile coincides with that of Mackenbach in identifying the critique of counterviolence as one of the central tenets of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya. Critiques of violence from below had been uncommon in literature, eclipsed by the need to denounce State violence, recognize victims, and advocate for justice. Basile argues, however, that the narrative of Castellanos Moya signals that the moment has arrived to widen memory towards what she terms “una memoria ampliada” (210). It is important to keep in mind, however, that, like any use of the past, Castellanos Moya’s representation of violence in the recent past of Latin America has just as much to do with the present as it does with the past. Just as much as apprehending a historical past, Castellanos Moya is concerned with disputing inherited uses and meanings of that past, thus the polemical nature of his literary program. As such, Castellanos Moya’s insistence on narrating scenes of counterviolence must be contextualized within traditions of praising counterviolence and suppressing crimes associated with it, such as testimonio and the “mournful” post-dictatorship novel. It is only against this backdrop, as a point of discontinuity within a continuum, that the significance of the innovations of Castellanos Moya can be fully appreciated. Furthermore, this polemical thrust is what separates the narrative of Castellanos Moya from earlier critiques of revolutionary violence, such as those articulated by José Revueltas in *Los errores* (1964), by Marco Antonio Flores in *Los compañeros* (1976), by Martín Caparrós in *No velas tus muertas* (1983), or by Mario Vargas Llosa in *Historia de Mayta* (1984). At the time that these authors were writing, the conventions of the post-dictatorship novel had not yet fully crystallized and,

furthermore, the testimonial tradition did not weigh as heavily on them as it did on Castellanos Moya, as a Central American writer after the climax of the genre. Moreover, while these authors are primarily responding to the immediate circumstances of their respective instances of enunciation and contemporary debates concerning the validity of revolutionary violence as the appropriate strategy for the Latin American Left, Castellanos Moya is primarily responding to the conventions for narrating political violence in literature within pre-existing traditions (Ortiz Wallner *El arte de ficcionar* 85; Sánchez Carbó 63; Thorton 208-9).

Celina Manzoni in “Narrativas de la violencia: hipérbole y exceso en *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya” and María del Pilar Vila in “Las ilusiones perdidas: Narrar la violencia: Acercamientos a la Obra de Horacio Castellanos Moya” take a slightly different approach to the author’s treatment of violence. Manzoni postulates a relationship between violence in history, as the extralinguistic referent of *Insensatez*, and violence within the text, that is, the discursive violence of the narrator. In a similar manner, del Pilar Vila identifies in *El asco* a homology between the violence narrated and that of the narrator himself in his unrelentingly caustic diatribe (563). While I certainly do not doubt the existence of such correlations, my own approach tends more towards the interpretation of Sánchez Prado of the narrator of *Insensatez* as a counterimage of the committed Latin American public intellectual, as canonized within both the Boom and testimonio. This interpretation leaves room to consider the larger function of this type of narrator within the overall narrative program of Castellanos Moya, which is to say as a literary device that permits the author to transgress the aesthetic and ideological boundaries of inherited traditions.

At the beginning of this section, I signaled the problem of the relative lack of scholarship within the field dedicated to the narrative of Castellanos Moya. This insufficiency is evidenced

by the fact that the best characterizations of the aesthetics of the author do not come from the critics of his work but rather from the theorists and critics of second-generation post-dictatorship literatures. In recent years, there has been a notable production of scholarship in this area, as outgrowth of the interest in trauma and memory studies. Many of the conclusions concerning the production of second-generation authors hold true for Castellanos Moya, although he is far from belonging to their generation. Jordana Blejmar, for example, contrasts the solemnity and high seriousness of first-generation post-dictatorship production to the ludic, parodic, and humoristic aesthetics of second-generation artists. The penchant for applying humor to traumatic historical situations that she identifies in the production of second-generation artists from the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century onwards was already a well-established tenet of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya by that time (39). Celina Manzoni, in her scholarship, describes the approach of Castellanos Moya as “cinismo lúdico” and as “humorismo que corroe a la *doxa*” (115). Furthermore, this kynical employment of humor serves the function of challenging the conventions, both social and literary: “Las formas clásicas de la diatriba y de la injuria, propias de una moralidad cínica, se articularían en la prosa de Castellanos Moya como un modo de quebrar automatismos de género (novela, testimonio)” (115). This is precisely the function that Blejmar attributes to second-generation artists in *Playful Memories*, where she argues that humor is used to disrupt the rigid and constraining conventions regarding the representation of political violence in the recent past. In particular, she argues that humor is deployed to “displace, destabilize, and disarticulate epic or overly solemn narratives of the revolution” (69).

In a similar vein, Verónica Garibotto, in *Rethinking Testimonial Cinema in Post-Dictatorship Argentina: Beyond Memory Fatigue* (2019), analyzes how second-generation

artistic production renews representations of political violence by transgressing the conventions of overly codified genres. She argues that, in the decades since the end of dictatorship, discursive strategies for representing a historical past of traumatic political violence gradually developed into a stable set of norms and conventions. Testimonial and post-dictatorship cultural production developed a highly codified way of representing the past that structured the genres and defined their formal and semantic parameters. Furthermore, throughout this process of codification, memory discourse and politics had shifted from a counterhegemonic to a hegemonic position, from a grassroots social movement to its appropriation by the State and mass media (24-5). Speaking of testimonial cinema, which is the focus of her research (although she addresses literature and other forms of cultural production as well), Garibotto states that “testimonial cinema went from being an alternative type of narrative to occupying a hegemonic place in contemporary Argentina” (24). In fact, she suggests that the hegemonization of memory may be a factor in the reticence shown by second-generation artists towards first-generation testimonial and post-dictatorship cultural production: the “disappointment with the genre may be related to the shift from counterhegemony to hegemony” (29). This disappointment expresses itself through the polemical thrust of this type of cultural production, which is precisely the same pattern founded in the narrative project of Castellanos Moya: “the second-generation exposes... the process by which testimonial cinema has fixed previously heterogeneous elements around a rather stable unity, around an empty signifier called ‘military dictatorship’” (128). Just as Castellanos Moya, then, second-generation artists are responding at least as much to established uses and meanings of the past as to the political violence in the past itself:

Second-generation testimonial films thus reveal the existence of two tendencies at odds in contemporary Argentina (and in contemporary representations of Argentina): a

commodification of the recent past, where the 1970s are an invariable and static referent (an empty signifier) that serves as the background of cultural creation, and a politicized reading of that commodification, where the 1970s are still a terrain for examination.

(135)

Both Blejmar and Garibotto interpret this tension between opposing tendencies as a generational conflict between first-generation and second-generation modes of narrating political violence. Yet, this polemical gesture of challenging the conventions of testimonial and post-dictatorship cultural production had already present in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. Nor is there any reason to restrict their conclusions to the Southern Cone since testimonial genres and post-dictatorship artistic production of the first-generation went through a similar process of overdetermination in other parts of Latin America. In fact, Avelar's study of post-dictatorship narrative attests to the many constraints placed upon the genre, despite the fact that the objectives of his scholarship lie elsewhere. In *The Power of Memory and Violence in Central America* (2018), Rachel Hatcher demonstrates the degree to which memory discourse had become a "common discursive framework" which determines the parameters of political discourse for both the Left and the Right in Guatemala (5). This is why *Insensatez* works so well in the setting of Guatemala and would not have been as effective had it been set in El Salvador, where the majority of the novels of the author are set but where memory discourse and practice has not been hegemonized to the same degree.

Other scholars, such as Cecilia Sosa in *Queering Acts of Memory in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship* (2014) and Geoffrey Maguire in *The Politics of Postmemory: Violence and Victimhood in Contemporary Argentine Culture* (2017), examine the ways in which second-generation narratives complicate the paradigms of solidarity that typify first-generation post-

dictatorship cultural production. Sosa argues that second-generation artists stress “non-victimizing accounts of trauma and seek to contributing towards “building a new public culture of mourning” (4). In his study of the cultural politics of second-generation artists, Maguire states that they “distance themselves from the most obvious and conventional ways to talk about dictatorship” by attempting to “move beyond narratives of victimhood through a blend of distinct genres and literary devices” (86). These assessments could be placed side by side with Sánchez Prado’s thesis that Castellanos Moya systemically blocks the principal aesthetics and political premises of testimonio, that is, to solidarize with victims (243). In both cases, the innovation stems from an alternate mode of narrating traumatic historical experiences that frustrates conventional accounts of violence and victimhood. The difference is that Castellanos Moya had been developing the aesthetic and political principles of his narrative program more than fifteen years prior to the time when second-generation were making their appearance in Latin American public sphere around approximately the mid-2000s.

This growing body of research on second-generation cultural production is relevant to this dissertation not only because it provides insight into the tensions between current and anterior modes of narrating political violence but also because it reinforces the genealogical nature of my research. In other words, although this investigation is primarily concerned with the origin and development of the innovations proposed by Castellanos Moya, their afterlife within contemporary Latin American literature is also significant and helps complete the picture of the developmental trajectory of the author’s narrative project.

Theoretical Paradigms

It is important to clarify that, above all, I apply, in this research, a genealogical or diachronic analysis in the following two senses: I track the development of important shifts in

the aesthetics and politics of contemporary Latin American literature and, simultaneously, I analyze the diachronic development of the innovations in the narration of political violence within the early narrative production of the author for the purpose of, then, situating these innovations within the overall development of the region's literature. For as much as my research depends on a close analysis of literary texts using the theoretical tools of structural linguistics, narratology, and discourse analysis, it also depends on reliable assessments of the history of the institution of literature in contemporary Latin American and, in particular, successive formulations of the responsibilities and obligations of the Latin American public intellectual as well as the relationship between the work of literary and the region's politics. As such, my research is necessarily interdisciplinary since it not only analyzes literary texts but also explores the relationship between text and context by carefully situating the early works of Castellanos Moya within their contexts of production, circulation, and reception. Putting the literary text in dialogue with Latin American history and politics in this manner necessarily implies drawing from other humanistic disciplines, such as history, sociology, and cultural studies.

Of special relevance are theories related to the capacities and limitations of the literary text in apprehending social and historical realities. In this sense, this investigation draws from disciplines such as cultural memory studies and narrativist philosophy of history, fields which address the question of the epistemological value of literary and narrative texts. While a principal concern of memory studies is the distinction between history and memory, philosophy of history has struggled, since the collapse of 19th century historicism, with the distinction between history and literature. The issue in both cases is the same: the subjective dimension of historiographical writing is perceived as a threat to the epistemological claims of the discipline of history. The problem of the epistemological value of testimonial texts constitutes a liminal space where the

concerns of memory studies overlap with those of philosophy of history. This is also the point that is most relevant to the narrative of Castellanos Moya, due to his virulent challenges to testimonio.

The concept of mimesis is just as important for testimonio as it was for 19th century realism. If the theorists of realism, such as Georg Lukacs, firmly believed in the capacity of the literary text to re-present social totalities, the virtue of testimonio, according to its advocates from North America academia, rests upon its ability “to represent (both mimetically and politically) a subaltern social subject” (Beverley xiii). In fact, Zimmerman and Beverley (1999) are so confident in the mimetic capacity of testimonio that they do not consider it literature but, rather, “an extraliterary or antiliterary form of discourse” (178). The operation of these theorists consists, then, in positing the transparency of the medium of language and discourse in order to exalt the epistemological value of the testimonial text, which is conceived as unproblematically representing the historical truth of the subaltern subject. As it turns out, they make the same claims about testimonio that positivist philosophers of history, such as Dilthey and Collinwood, make about the historiographical text and, in doing so, they conflate history with testimony, that is, history with memory. Narrativist philosophers of history, such as Reinhart Koselleck, Hans Blumenberg, F.R. Ankersmit, Hayden White, and, more recently, Georges Didi-Huberman, also conflate history and memory but they do so for much different reasons. Instead of trying to exalt the epistemological value of subjective texts, like testimonies, they demonstrate the invalidity of the epistemological claims of history, as a scientific discipline, and expose the narrative substrate of all forms of historiography. In other words, instead of arguing for the objectivity of subjective modes of representing the past, they argue for the subjectivity of what were believed to be objective modes of apprehending historical realities. According to the French philosopher,

Georges Didi-Huberman, the answer is to embrace, not suppress, the narrative dimension of any form of historical writing. In his critique of the methodology of history as a scientific discipline, he establishes an opposition between “euchronic” and “anachronic” approaches to studying the past. Anxious to suppress any traces of the subjectivity of the historian and minimize the narrative dimension of the historiographical text, history, as a scientific discipline, has sought to minimize the impact of the present upon the study of the past. Often this has led to the methodological fantasy of doing away with the values of the historian and any influences that the interests of the present might exert upon an investigation of the past. Didi-Huberman employs the term “euchronia” to characterize this methodological approach:

Partamos, justamente, de lo que parece constituir la evidencia de las evidencias: el rechazo del anacronismo para el historiador. Esta es la regla de oro: sobre todo no ‘proyectar,’ como suele decirse, nuestras propias realidades – nuestros conceptos, nuestros gustos, nuestros valores – sobre las realidades del pasado mismo... Definamos esta actitud canónica del historiador: no es otra cosa que una búsqueda de concordancia de tiempos, una búsqueda de la concordancia eucrónica. (36)

This enterprise is doomed to fail, according to Didi-Huberman since “el anacronismo es inevitable, que nos es particularmente imposible interpretar el pasado sin recurrir a nuestro propio presente” (51). In this context, Didi-Huberman grounds his analysis in Jacques Rancière’s concept of anachronism, defined in “El concepto de anacronismo y la verdad del historiador” as “una secuencia significativa sacada de su tiempo que conecta con otra línea de la temporalidad” or as “la multiplicidad de líneas de temporalidades, de los sentidos mismos de tiempo incluidos en un mismo tiempo, como la condición del hacer histórico” (2-3). Didi-Huberman, for his part, refers to anachronism as a montage of disparate temporalities. Every time we attempt to study

cultural products of the past, he claims, we find ourselves “frente a un objeto de tiempo complejo, de tiempo impuro: un extraordinario *montaje de tiempos heterogéneos que forman anacronismos*” (39). A common error, then, is to suppress the fact that “hacer la historia es hacer – al menos – un anacronismo” (55). By attempting to apprehend the past according to its own categories and thus rid itself of those of the present, history has mistaken its object of study and, consequently, developed a fallacious methodology of investigation:

...no es necesario decir que ‘la historia es la ciencia del pasado,’ primero porque *no es exactamente el pasado* el que constituye el objeto de las disciplinas históricas, luego porque *no es exactamente una ciencia* la que practica el historiador. El primer punto nos ayuda a comprender algo que depende de una *memoria*, es decir, de una organización impura, de un montaje – no ‘histórico – del tiempo. El segundo punto nos ayuda a comprender algo que depende de una *poética*, es decir, de una organización impura, de un montaje – no científico – del saber. (59)

History, then, cannot be defined as the science of the past for the simple reason that “el pasado exacto no existe” (59). Furthermore, its methodology should be adjusted accordingly. The syllogisms at play in the Didi-Huberman’s argumentation could be expressed in the following manner: if history depends upon an “inexact” organization of time, and memory is an inexact mode of organizing time – “Ese tiempo que *no es exactamente el pasado* tiene un nombre: es la *memoria*” (60) – then history depends upon memory. Furthermore, if history depends upon memory and memory depends upon literature (“a poetic organization of knowledge”), then history also depends upon literature. The discipline of history has struggled to rid itself of memory as its subjective and narrative underside, which is not only impossible but, according to Didi-Huberman, undesirable as well.

This contention between narrativists like Didi-Huberman and historians of a more positivist persuasion has bearing on the study of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya since it provides us with the concepts to analyze author's polemic with testimonio and thus allows us to comprehend his aesthetic program more fully. In an attempt to elevate the juridical and epistemological value of testimonio, enthusiasts and theorists of the genre, such as John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman, tended to disattend the medium of language and the necessarily narrative rendering of any account of the past and argue in favor of its capacity to unproblematically apprehend the historical past or "el pasado exacto," as Didi-Huberman would say. In this sense, the epistemological claims of testimonio coincide with those of positivist historiography. Furthermore, Castellanos Moya's defense of fiction as a mode of narrating political violence has several points in common with the narrativist thesis of Didi-Huberman. The principal strategy of Castellanos Moya is not to elevate literature to the level of historiography, as does testimonio, but rather to undermine the epistemological claims of the testimonial text, which is precisely what Didi-Huberman does with historiography. In his parodic appropriation of testimonio, Castellanos Moya exposes the properly rhetorical and textual dimension of testimonio, that is, precisely what theorists of the genre tend to overlook. The unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*, for example, categorically insists on the literary dimension of the testimonies that he corrects for the Archbishop's Office of Human Rights. In an inversion of the structure of testimonio, he suspends the referential capacity of the text and elevates its literary dimension. Expressed in structuralist terminology, he detains his reading at the level of the signifier, unwilling to concede to the signified or referent. Furthermore, because of this incapacity to see beyond language, to see through the text to the extralinguistic world, the narrator proves unable to produce the solidarity response expected of him according to the norms for the reception of testimonial texts.

In addition, Castellanos Moya employs still other techniques for undermining the epistemological claims of testimonio. He foregrounds, for example, the cognitive distortions of the characters. Readers are denied the comfort of a reliable account of events and, in its place, are left with mutually incompatible versions. This feature is reinforced by this preference for unreliable narrators who are as incapable of giving trustworthy accounts of themselves as they are of accounting for their sociohistorical circumstances. The result is a text that resembles testimonio in many ways but blocks its claims to truthfulness. Furthermore, Castellanos Moya frustrates the pedagogical aspirations of testimonio: the reader will find no morale, nothing uplifting. Violence, in particular, is not redeeming, only demeaning and meaningless, more a part of the Lacanian real than the symbolic. Lastly, not all is negation. Castellanos Moya affirms non-mimetic modes of representing political violence and, in doing so, constructs an extensive and varied body of work based on the “arte de ficcionar,” which escapes the logics of both testimonio and the first-generation post-dictatorship novel (qtd. in Ortiz Wallner 85). The conflict between the truth claims of testimonio and the poetics of Castellanos Moya will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

One might think that, since Castellanos Moya undermines the epistemological claims of testimonio, then, his narrative program, in its defense of fiction, would align with the aesthetics and politics of the “mournful” first-generation post-dictatorship novel, as theorized by Avelar, but this is far from the case, as pointed out in the previous section. Theories from the interdisciplinary fields of memory and trauma studies, which in turn rely heavily upon categories from psychoanalysis, are of particular interest when trying to specify the differences between the narrative project of Castellanos Moya and the aesthetics of the first-generation post-dictatorship novel.

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud analyzes the structural differences between each of these approaches to overcoming attachment to a libidinal object. Faced with loss, the subject engages in the “work of mourning” through which the attachment to the lost object is gradually overcome, setting the ego free to attach to a new object (Freud 204). This is largely a conscious process, in which the causes of psychological distress are readily attributed to the experience of loss. In melancholia, however, the subject is unable to renounce its attachment to the object and, furthermore, its mechanisms for coping with the loss are largely unconscious (Freud 205). Freud paints the resulting condition in the following manner:

Melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment. (Freud 204)

All of these symptoms coincide with the work of mourning with the exception of the loss of the sense of self. What, in mourning, was a loss in the world becomes a loss of self for the melancholic: “In mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so” (Freud 205-6). In other words, “the loss of the object has been transformed into a loss of the ego” (Freud 208-9). The unnegotiability of the melancholic subject’s attachment to the lost object causes it to identify with the subject position of the object and to consequently see itself as an object, thus justifying any harm done to it by the lost Other.

Although the subject renounces its own well-being, it is able to conserve its attachment to the object, albeit in a sublimated form: “The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes the substitute for the love-investment” (209). This strategy for dealing with loss, however, comes at a high price, “draining the ego to the point of complete impoverishment” (212).

In his analysis of these strategies of confronting loss, Freud is careful to highlight that this loss can be of a “notional nature,” which is to say that it is not restricted to a lost person but rather often includes abstractions, such as the loss of an ideal or a cause (205): “Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of a person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal, and so on” (203). In the case of Latin America, the mourning and melancholia that afflicted the Left after the defeat of revolutionary movements in vast areas of the continent in the period between the 1960s and 1990s was without a doubt bound to the loss of life, hundreds of thousands of lost lives, whether it be the disappeared of the dictatorship of the Southern Cone or the genocide of indigenous peasants by the State and its proxies in Central America. At the same time, however, loss was more than just material but also involved the dramatic eclipse of the ideal of a more just future, of emancipatory aspirations, of explanatory frameworks of History, and of a general worldview or structure of feeling. Wendy Brown in “Resisting Left Melancholy” characterizes this loss in the following manner: “Thus we suffer with the sense of not only a lost movement but also a lost historical moment, not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence but also a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits” (460). Much along this same line, Bruno Bosteels in *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Time of Terror* notes a “notorious tendency towards melancholy in political thought today” that stems from a difficulty to gauge the dimensions of the loss in question:

For many militants or onlookers, the various defeats of revolutionary fervor, in the final instance would merely confirm, if not the end of all politics, then at least the end of modern politics, understood as being based on a substantial social link as the principle to ground a universally just community. The sovereignty of the social bond – the bond as

necessary support for any subject in politics: this would be the lost object-cause for the New Left. The vanishing of this ideological principle, however, opens up an uncanny process of melancholy, comparable to an “unconscious loss,” or an “unknown loss,” in the words of Freud, because “one feels justified in concluding that a loss of this kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost.” (163)

According to Avelar, Latin American post-dictatorial literature became a site to confront this loss. Referring to the privileged role of literature in the newly emerging memory politics, he argues that post-dictatorship fiction assumed the responsibility of “becom[ing] the reserve of memory” (10). In this context, memory, as the end product of the process of “affirmative mourning,” transforms the neurotic repetition that characterizes loss, especially in the case of melancholia (Avelar 226-7). Post-dictatorship cultural production, for Avelar, displays both a “desire to mourn” and a “mourning of desire:”

In this sense postdictatorship stages both a desire for mourning – the embrace of mourning as the arena where the fate of the postdictatorial affective field will be played out – and mourning for desire – the acceptance of the defeat of all the desires swept away by the dictatorship (229).

The ultimate horizon is to work through mourning and to generate new desires: “...only the resolution of mourning will open up a space for the production of desires that would not be mere symptoms of loss” (229). In *Actos melancólicos: Formas de resistencia en la posdictadura argentina*, Christian Gundermann takes issue with Avelar’s cultural politics of affirmative mourning, which he frames in terms of betrayal: “Insistir en el duelo, es decir, exhortar un

proceso que apunta la aceptación de la pérdida es poco menos que un apoyo directo al olvido y la impunidad” (20). Instead of overcoming attachment to the lost object, he advocates for a melancholic attachment to the revolutionary past as a mode of resistance in the context of triumphal neoliberalism:

A diferencia de otros teóricos que ven en la melancolía puro estancamiento, planteo la noción paradójica de un “trabajo melancólico,” paradójica precisamente porque se niega a la productividad implícita en el concepto de trabajo, propia del duelo. El trabajo melancólico es circular, pareciera no llevar a ninguna parte. A diferencia de cualquier forma de trabajo en el sentido convencional, el trabajo melancólico no produce y no rinde, ya que olvidar y rendir son las dos caras de la misma moneda: la moneda neoliberal, impuesta por los militares y continuada por las democracias posdictatoriales. (61-2)

While Avelar looks forward to the moment of a new affirmation, the combative melancholia of Gunderman, which clings onto the revolutionary past as refusal to accept defeat, stresses to moment of negation: “Es esta negación de la derrota política la que forma la base de toda una cultura melancólica de izquierda en los años ochenta y noventa” (13-4). By insisting on the revolutionary past of the region, the melancholic narratives of the 1980s and 90s become politically operative “como dispositivo en la lucha contra la derrota” (40). The culture politics of Gunderman do not represent an attempt to return to the past but rather a mode of using the past to inform a new Left in its struggles in the present: “La melancolía ha constituido, y sigue constituyendo, la condición que posibilitó no solamente la supervivencia de una cultura crítica al proyecto neoliberal, sino que incluso produjo profundas transformaciones en el imaginario cultural hacia la fundación de una nueva izquierda” (40). Amar Sánchez’s analysis of narratives

of defeat in the 1980s and 90s has more in common with Gundermann's combative melancholy than Avelar's affirmative mourning, since she emphasizes the political value of the refusal to accept defeat and equates mourning with forgetting:

...no se trata aquí exclusivamente de una experiencia de duelo; elaborar el duelo es aceptar la pérdida y resignarse a la ausencia definitiva, reemplazar el objeto, olvidar, es decir, producir una transformación del sentimiento desde la desolación al consuelo. Nada más lejos de la propuesta de estas ficciones; el perdedor en estos relatos va más allá del duelo, no intenta superar una pérdida personal, sino construir un camino en el que la resistencia y la insistencia en la memoria impiden, justamente, el olvido. (77)

Dominick LaCapra in *History and its Limits* (2009) signals the potential of a political instrumentalization of melancholy in contexts which forgetting is actively promoted and the plight of victims is not recognized: "Melancholy may have a critical or at least cautionary dimension, especially when its attachment to lost others places in question a context in which there is a pronounced inclination to forget or objectionably airbrush a disconcerting past and the fate of its victims" (82). In this sense, literature acquired a unique social and political function as a repository of counterhegemonic collective memory in the context of official policies of amnesty, impunity, silence, and erasure of the militant past that characterized the 1980s and 1990s.

At the same time, however, this same mode of remembrance also ran the risk of converting the experience of State violence into what LaCapra terms a "founding trauma." In this case, a traumatic history experiences becomes not only the basis of a political struggle for recognition and reparations but also the basis of a group identity:

Perhaps this is the tangled region of thought and affect where one should situate founding trauma – the trauma that paradoxically becomes the basis for collective or personal identity, or both. The Holocaust, slavery, or apartheid – even suffering the effects of the atom bomb in Hiroshima or Nagasaki – can become a founding trauma. Such a trauma is typical of myths of origin and may perhaps be located in the more or less mythologized history of every people. But one may recognize the need for and question the function of the founding trauma that typically plays a tendentious ideological role, for example, in terms of the concept of a chosen people or a belief in one’s privileged status as victim.

(Writing History 81)

One could argue that the experience of political violence has been foundational for a post-dictatorship identity in many regions of Latin American, especially in places where the memory has become a hegemonic discourse and forms the basis of the political consensus that includes the Right as well as the Left, as is the case in places like Argentina (Garibotto 172-3), Chile (Richard 4) and Guatemala (Hatcher 96). Although LaCapra admits that “this is understandable,” he is quick to add that “it should also be questioned:” “the trauma should be seen as raising the question of identity, rather than simply founding an identity” (162). Ironically, in the case of Latin America, the impulse to use the political violence of the recent past as a “founding trauma” and therefore as the basis of the identity of the regional Left, or even the Nation, can mystify and reify political militancy instead of recognizing the subjectivity of revolutionary militants as political and historical subjects. In *Política y/o Violencia: Una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años setenta* (2013), Pilar Calveiro, herself a revolutionary militant who escaped from a clandestine torture center in Argentina and went into exile in Mexico, describes how the homages to the disappeared, as a type of liturgy in the secular religion of the 2000s, are

incompatible with the sensibilities of the political militants of her generation. Here, she reproduces the reaction of the wife of a fallen combatant, Da Silva Catela, to an homage to her husband:

Ahí descubrían la placa donde estaba mi marido y tantos compañeros. Me pareció espantoso. El problema es que tengo otra escuela política, entonces yo noto que *hay una manera de hacer política con un contenido* y que frente a la orfandad *se borra toda continuidad política*, aparecen todas las organizaciones de Derechos Humanos y entonces no estamos nutriendo la lucha sindical, la lucha estudiantil ... en general es muy pobre ... Gente llorando horas. Yo creo que cualquiera de mis compañeros se levanta de la tumba y se agarra de los pelos, digo, se levanta de la tumba o del Río de la Plata ... *La política es otra cosa.* (15-6)

There is a point, then, when the struggle to recognize victims and to advocate for justice can give way to a fixation on victimhood, the sacralization of a traumatic episode, and the idealization of a lost past. Calveiro argues that “la exaltación de vidas ‘heroicas’ que no están sujetas a crítica, realiza otra sustracción: impide el análisis, la valoración de aciertos, de errores y, con ello, la posibilidad de revisar la práctica y actuar en consecuencia” (16). According to Nelly Richard in *Eruptions of Memory: The Critique of Memory in Chile, 1990-2015* (2019), the mystification of the militant past can have the opposite of its desired effect, which is to say that it can lead to complacency and political inaction:

The destitution of history as volume and event and its anodyne replacement by the flat surface of consensus and its anemic mechanisms of meaning have generated, in some social actors, an intensified nostalgia for the anti-dictatorship movement, retroactively giving it an epic, self-referential meaning. The mythologization of the historical past as a

symbol of the purity and untaintedness of political ideas led to the victims' sanctification... Hence the post-dictatorship subject's melancholic-depressive symptoms, which leaves her sadly submerged in decay, in the silence and inaction of retreat, without the vital stimuli for articulating responses to senseless threats. (7)

Here the weight of defeat is too much to bear, and the corresponding sense of loss is more debilitating than politically operative. In these contexts, the trauma of a collective past can acquire the status of what LaCapra terms "negative sublimity" (*Writing History* 161): "I have intimated that the sacralization of trauma and the traumatic experience may be interwoven with its figuration as sublime, since in both cases trauma becomes unrepresentable, awesome, beyond the ordinary, and somehow elevating – even redemptive – in its very excess" (70). In fact, for Giorgio Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (2002) the traumatic experience is defined precisely by its impossibility to be accounted for in language and thus signified:

This means that testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness. The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language. (39)

It is precisely this difficulty of accounting for traumatic experience in language that gives literature its privileged place within trauma theories. In debilitating the referential dimension of language and folding back upon itself meta-discursively, literature has the power to explore the limits of language, the zone where it "gives way to non-language." In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), a seminal text for trauma studies, Cathy Caruth claims

traumatic experiences must “be spoken in a language that is somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding” (5). In the afterword to the 2016 edition, she reasserts the privileged status of literature in communicating traumatic experience:

...the theory of trauma ... does not, in fact, simply make a claim to knowledge but rather articulates a kind of not-knowing at the heart of catastrophic experience, a resistance to conceptual assimilation, an intimate bond between knowing and not-knowing that, as I argue in the introduction to this book, closely ties the language of trauma ... to the language of literature. (117)

It is not just any type of literature that Caruth has in mind. In “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age,” Stef Craps specifies that literary modernism is often identified as the ideal mode of narrating trauma:

Trauma theorists often justify their focus on anti-narrative, fragmented, modernist forms by pointing to similarities with the psychic experience of trauma. An experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge, so the logic goes, will best be represented by a failure of narrative. Hence, what is called for is the disruption of conventional modes of representation, such as can be found in modernist art. (50)

In the case of Latin America, Avelar makes a similar claim about the capacity of post-dictatorship narrative to work through the traumatic past of State violence. For him, this task cannot be accomplished through mimesis but rather through obliquity, circumvention, allegory, and experimentation.⁴ In his analysis of Argentinian post-dictatorship literature, *Nombrar lo*

⁴ This claim presupposes a previous process of “literary modernization,” understood in the case of Latin America as the transculturated amalgam of the aesthetics of literary modernism and aspects of creole, indigenous and afro-Latin imaginaries. In *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, Ángel Rama argues that the process of literary modernization took place in the

innombrable (1992), Fernando Reati makes a similar appeal to experimental and non-mimetic literary forms:

Se trata entonces de un choque entre los sucesos que se quiere representar y el lenguaje disponible para hacerlo, entre una realidad horrorosa de nuevo cuño y unos recursos literarios que parecen ineficaces para referirse a ella. Por eso, para hablar de la violencia contemporánea, el escritor debe buscar estrategias originales, no miméticas, alusivas, eufemísticas, alegóricas, o desplazadas. (34)

In this sense, his claim mirrors Caruth's privileging of non-mimetic literary discourse to represent the unrepresentable, to narrate the unnarratable.

The problem, however, is that Castellanos Moya eschews the poetics that Caruth, Avelar, and Reati prescribe for confronting trauma. In other words, the theme and central reference point of situations of extreme political violence in Latin America is the same, but that is where the similarities end. The poetics of the author have little in common with the solemnity and mournfulness of the somber first-generation post-dictatorship novel. There is no sacralization of political militants, no idealization of a lost past, and no fixation on the figure of the victim. Instead, Castellanos Moya tends to focus on survivors, to critique rather than praise counterviolence, and to deride the ingenuousness of past ideals. Trauma does not figure as the negative sublime, nor the foundation of a new group identity, nor the basis of a secular religiosity but rather is rigorously historicized and contextualized within concrete situations in which concrete social and political agents took concrete decisions which had concrete consequences.

wake of the telluric novel, or *la novela de la tierra*, with the emergence of the new Latin American novel in the 1940s, culminating in the narrative production of Boom authors in the decades of the 60s (96-100).

Violence cannot be given narrative closure nor accounted for within totalizing discursive frameworks of heroes and villains but is quite simply degrading, even if it is necessary at times (*Roque Dalton* 149). Castellanos Moya consistently resists the temptation to melodramatize loss, idealize the vanquished, or aggrandize victims. Perhaps this is why Robert Bolaño observed that he is “un superviviente, pero no escribe como un superviviente” (133).

This is precisely why the theories of trauma and memory studies are insufficient for accounting for the narrative program of Castellanos Moya, even though they are crucial for understanding the aesthetics and cultural politics of other literary currents, such as testimonio and first-generation post-dictatorship narrative, against which the author defines his own singular poetics. These theories, then, are essential to this investigation since they form the discursive and ideological scaffolding within which the work of Castellanos Moya emerges and from which it departs. Recent theories, like Marianne Hirsch’s category of postmemory as an intergenerational mode of the transmission of trauma, have the same limitations. While Hirsch seeks to widen the definition of the victim to include the indirect trauma suffered by the second generation through its transmission in the family unit, Castellanos Moya moves in an entirely different direction, frustrating the tropes of victimhood that characterize testimonio, first-generation post-dictatorship narrative, and Latin American memory politics. The author’s critique of revolutionary militancy and of memory politics, as well as his playful and kynical approach to narrating political violence, exceed the categories of both trauma theory and (post) memory studies.

For this reason, cultural theorists who broach the topic of memory fatigue are of particular interest to the study of the narrative of Castellanos Moya. One of the first to do so was Tzvetan Todorov in *Les abus de la memoire* (1995) and then later in *Mémoire du mal, Tentation*

du bien: Enquete sur le siècle (2000), where he warns against the dangers of a saturation and overdetermination of memory in the public sphere. There comes a point, he argues, at which memory discourse can, paradoxically, contribute to the erasure rather than the conservation of the historical past to which he so fervently clings (224). Andreas Huyssen makes a similar argument in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003) by claiming that an excess of memory in the public sphere can lead to obfuscation rather than clarification of a historical past. Sententiously, he declared, by the time he was writing his book in 2003, memory fatigue had already set in on a global level (3). In the case of Latin America, Nelly Richard argues that the saturation of memory discourse in the public sphere had the effect of silencing rather than giving voice or recognition to victims:

The Transition-era administrations followed a consensus-oriented script that turned memory into a solemn yet almost painless citation. ... The word 'memory,' thus recited by the mechanized speech of consensus, subjected the memory of victims to yet another outrage, once again making them insignificant by allowing their names to be spoken in a language weakened through official routines that had previously guarded these identities from any investigations into the convulsions and fractures of history. Reduced to the meaningless language of objective certification ... the intolerable aspects of memory are not allowed to disrupt the expressive rules of the language used to refer to it. (3-4)

In her critique of the banalization of memory, Garibotto argues that “we are currently witnessing a backlash against the concepts of trauma and memory in the humanities and social sciences” (*Rethinking Testimonial Cinema* 4). Rather ominously, she announces that the “general disappointment with memory texts seems to announce their universal death” (4). Castellanos Moya is without a doubt a part of this contestation of memory texts, which is why the theories of

trauma and memory studies are insufficient for analyzing his literary program, even if they inescapably form an important part of the discussion.

Furthermore, due to the importance for this investigation of the relationship between the literary text and the sociohistorical context, my research also draws from the scholarship of sociologists, memory studies scholars, and cultural historians. For a comparative analysis of the implementation of transitional justice measures throughout the different regions of Latin America, I rely heavily on the research of scholars in the field. Sonia Cardenas' *Human Rights in Latin America: A Politics of Terror and Hope* (2012), Elin Skaar's *Transitional Justice in Latin America : The Uneven Road from Impunity Towards Accountability* (2016), Rebecca K. Root's *Human Rights in Latin America: A Politics of Transformation* (2022), and Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos' *The Politics of Transitional Justice in Latin America* (2020) have all provided the groundwork for contemplating the development of memory discourses and human rights measures on a continental scale. For an exhaustive analysis of transitional justice movements in Central America, Rachel Hatcher's *The Power of Memory and Violence in Central America* (2018) has been an invaluable resource. Her account of the development of memory politics in the region provides the context necessary for comprehending the ruptures that Castellanos Moya proposes. In other words, Hatcher's research is essential for answering the following questions, central to this investigation: Who is Castellanos Moya addressing? What types of discourse is he trying to distance himself from? Against which interpretations and uses of revolutionary militancy does he define his literary program? Although Elizabeth Jelin's research focuses primarily on the Southern Cone, both *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003) and *La lucha por el pasado: cómo construimos la memoria social* (2017) outline a theoretical model of collective memory that contemplates the political, social, and cultural institutions involved in its

conformation. Furthermore, Jelin emphasizes how the innovative transitional justice programs of the Southern Cone, especially that of Argentina, served as a model of the human rights movements in Central America and the Andes region, a dimension which Hatcher also emphasizes in her work (Gonzalez-Ocantos 11-12).

For a comparative analysis of the respective similarities and differences between revolutionary movements throughout Latin America, I consult the protagonists themselves. Régis Debray's early writing, such as *Revolution within the Revolution* (1967), *Strategy for Revolution: Essays on Latin America* (1973), and *A Critique of Arms* (1978), are key to understanding not only the sensibilities of the era but also the interrelationships between revolutionary movements in different parts of Latin America. Michael Löwy's *The Marxism of Che Guevara* (1973), as well as *The War of the Gods* (1996), are also essential in this regard. Retrospective critiques of revolutionary militancy by ex-combatants, such as Pilar Calveiro's *Política y/o violencia: una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años sesenta* (2005) and Claudia Hilb's *Usos del pasado: Qué hacemos hoy con los setenta* (2014), provide valuable insight into the uneasy passage between Marxism and Memory as the ideological dominants of their respective eras. Lastly, Hugo Vezzetti's *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* (2013) allows me to contemplate the individual and collective psychology of revolutionary militancy and the distinctive features of revolutionary subjectivities.

Taken together, these works permit me to ground my analysis of Castellanos Moya's literature in the various academic domains, such as psychoanalysis, trauma theories, sociology, philosophy of history, cultural history, and literary theory. This broad interdisciplinary approach is the best suited not only for the diachronic nature of an analysis of the genesis and

consolidation of Castellanos Moya's narrative program but also for the analysis of the ways that his texts interact within both literary and sociohistorical contexts.

Before going any further, it is important to dispel a potential misunderstanding. In my research I rely heavily on scholars from throughout Latin America, especially the Southern Cone. Much of my investigation deals with the development of memory discourse and the ways in which it eclipsed prior discursive frameworks, heavily anchored in Marxist traditions. Argentina was a pioneer in transitional justice measures and one of the places where Latin American memory politics, in the forms that we know it today, was first consolidated, so it shouldn't be surprising that I look to the Southern Cone for the conceptual framework necessary to address both issues of political violence and the contentious process of the conformation of cultural memory.

There are, however, a series of further reasons why I consider it beneficial to address both political violence, transitional justice, and memory literatures on a continental scale. Firstly, the aspirations of Latin American revolutionary movements were often continental in scope (Debray, *A Critique of Arms* 13). Although each individual movement took place in a national context, they were understood as part of a larger international struggle against imperialism and global capital. Furthermore, there was a regional articulation between individual national struggles, as is evident from the writings of Guevara and Debray, as theorists and strategists of Latin America revolution. Related to this first point, the imperialism and economic exploitation facing Latin America also had a continental scope, which is precisely why it was considered necessary that resistance movements be articulated and interrelated (Löwy, *The Marxism of Che Guevara* 68).

Secondly, Latin American dictatorships were not an isolated phenomenon but occurred throughout the region. There is a convention of Latin America literary criticism to compartmentalize the region's literature, but such conventions do not necessarily bring us closer to understanding social realities. When we talk about dictatorship and post-dictatorship cultural production, for example, it is tacitly understood that we are referring to the Southern Cone, as if there hadn't been military dictatorships in Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and other Latin American countries. The civil war in El Salvador was the response to forty-eight years of dictatorship, and the Peace Accords brought an end of forty-two years of military rule in Guatemala, yet somehow Central America is left out of discussions of the theme. Of course, it is easier to spot the differences between Operation PBSuccess and Operation Condor, but were both not a part of a concerted global effort of counterrevolution that took place in context of the Cold War for the purpose of suppressing and eradicating Latin America revolutionary movements? Did both not have an analogous function in removing obstacles to the deregulation of international capital?

Furthermore, if military dictatorships took place throughout many areas of Latin America, the transitional justice movements that followed in their wake were a transnational phenomenon as well. Perhaps this is the reason why transitional justice scholars do not shy away from comparative analysis and their scholarship tends to be international in scope, as evidenced by the research of Cardenas, Root, Skaar, and Gonzalez-Ocantos, among others. In this sense, Latin American literary critics stand to learn from transitional justice scholars. If revolutionary movements, military dictatorship, transitional justice movements, and post-dictatorship cultural production are phenomena that occur throughout many regions of Latin America, why would literary scholars and cultural historians not address these issues on a continental level as well? In

my research I contemplate the defeat of revolutionary movements, the experience of dictatorship, the advent of transitional justice movements, the conformation of memory discourse, and the responses to these developments in literature on an international scale *precisely because they were experiences shared throughout vast areas of Latin America*. Although I anchor the textual analysis of the Castellanos Moya's narrative in the literary criticism of Central America, when I open the discussion to include the revisions of the shared experiences of revolutionary militancy, dictatorship, and human rights movement I consciously widened my theoretical framework to include other regions throughout Latin America. Recall that this dissertation aspires to situate Castellanos Moya's literary project both spatially and temporally. Spatially, I situate the author's literature within the context of Central American literature and the hegemonic genre of the region, which is to say *testimonio*, and then I widen my analysis to include broader responses to political violence, dictatorship, and the shift to human rights throughout Latin American politics and culture. Temporally, I situate the author's narrative within the diachronic development of contemporary Latin American literature, contemplating both the literary traditions that came before him and with which his work dialogues as well as the literary production of newer generations whose work his innovations have impacted. This implies a double movement of reading the narrative of the author through the traditions of Latin American literature and reading the traditions of Latin American literature through the narrative of the author.

Given the scope of my project, the individual theoretical frameworks of psychoanalysis, trauma studies, philosophy of history, testimonial literary theory, and transitional justice studies are insufficient, in themselves, for addressing Castellanos Moya's literary program. The reason for this is that his literature cannot be reduced either Latin American testimonial traditions, first-generation post-dictatorship narrative, or the post-memorial aesthetics of second-generation

writers. The singularity of his narrative approach dictates that a comprehensive study of it draw from the theory and criticism specific to all these traditions. It is only in this manner that we can arrive at a coherent account of how his literature enters into dialogue with these traditions at the same time that it exceeds them.

Discussion of the Findings

The starting point of this investigation is the question concerning the origin of the literary program of Castellanos Moya. How did it come into being? How did it develop? What are some of the factors that contributed to its development? The first chapter of the thesis is dedicated to addressing these questions. In order to do so, I situate the innovations of the author within the context of his first seven novels, within the context of the prevailing currents of Latin American literature at the time, and within the broader historical context of the end of the Cold War and the defeat of revolutionary movements through the vast majority of the continent, with the exception of small pockets of resistance. I trace, therefore, the overall development of the poetics of Castellanos Moya, in terms of both form and content, from his first novel, *La diáspora*, to his seventh, *Insensatez*. The former stages a foundational rift between Latin American intellectuals and revolutionary movements, whereas the latter states a definitive break with testimonial traditions and undermines the interpretative framework that displaced the idiom of revolution: memory. There is a clear reasoning behind the selection of this corpus: firstly, this is the period during which Castellanos Moya consolidated his approach to narrating political violence, defined his literary program, and established himself within the field of contemporary Latin American literature; secondly, *La diáspora* and *Insensatez* condense the two most substantial innovations of the author: his challenge to both revolution and memory politics, together with their respective

modes of politicizing the literary work and prescribing a political function to the Latin American public intellectual.

The innovations of Castellanos Moya did not appear from one day to the next, as it were, but have a history. The objective of the first chapter is to uncover that history and tell the origin story of the author's aesthetics. I argue that the author's mode of narrating political violence developed gradually throughout his early narrative. In successive rearticulations, Castellanos Moya experimented with narrative technique and a set of themes and, in doing so, developed his own identity as a writer and Latin American public intellectual. This premise is reinforced by the intertextual character of his early work, in which many characters, family members of characters, and events (such as the execution of Roque Dalton) jump from the pages of one novel to the next, with slight variations in each new reformulation. One of the most distinctive features of Castellanos Moya's narrative style is the type of narrators that he employs in his novels. I argue that his penchant for first-person narrators should be interpreted as a parodic appropriation of the conventions of testimonio. The author appropriates this and other features of the genre, such as the narration of limit situations in the history of Latin America, and re-signifies them. Moreover, the author uses his appropriations to attack what the defining feature of testimonio: its conception of the political mission of literature and public intellectuals. In addition, I argue that Castellanos Moya's highly transgressive, unstable, and caustic narrators serve an important function in his literature by allowing him to not only violate norms of respectability and political correctness but also to transgress the ideological constraints of Latin American literatures about political violence. Lastly, in the search to establish an origin for the aesthetic program of the author, I explore possible external influences, such as Thomas Bernhard on the level of world literature and Fernando Vallejo within contemporary Latin American narrative. Although the

narrative of Castellanos Moya does indeed owe a debt to them, his narrative program cannot be accounted for within the respective aesthetics of these authors. Furthermore, neither of them addresses the theme of political violence, as does Castellanos Moya.

The second chapter analyzes Castellanos Moya's first novel, *La diáspora*, as the staging of a break between Latin American intellectuals and revolutionary movements. This conflict has a foundational status not only within the narrative program of the author but also for his subsequent formulation of the functions of the Latin American public intellectual and the relationship between literature and politics. The novel narrates the story of a group of Latin American intellectuals exiled in Mexico City, united by their disillusionment with revolutionary militancy, particularly its illegitimate uses of violence, such as the execution of Roque Dalton and the assassination of Mélida Anaya Montes, known to her comrades as comandante Ana María. Throughout the novel Castellanos Moya consistently portrays revolutionary militancy as a political religion and, as such, I read the intellectuals' "loss of the faith" in revolution as a deconversion experience. This experience has a profound impact on the sense of identity of intellectuals as they struggle to confront the loss of an ideal and of an interpretive framework without resorting to the religious tropes and political clichés that they had previously naturalized. The tendency to approach revolution as a secular religion has a long history in Latin America, within which the public intellectual figures as a priest of sorts. In this chapter, I trace the development of this tendency in order to characterize Castellanos Moya's break with it. I argue that the novel opens a space for the redefinition of the figure of the Latin American intellectual and the relationship of her work to the realm of politics in an incipient post-revolutionary and post-Marxist sociohistorical context. This issue, as the semantic nucleus *La diáspora*, sets the

stage for the representations of the figure of the intellectual and for the narration of political violence that characterize the subsequent production of the author.

The third chapter, for its part, is dedicated to the detailed analysis of *Insensatez*, the author's most innovative novel and, consequently, the one that has received the most attention from critics. I interpret the novel through its relationship to testimonio, as the hegemonic literary form in Central American literature throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s (Ortiz Wallner 77-8). Castellanos Moya proposes a series of flagrant violations of both the aesthetics and politics of testimonial genres, on the level of the production, reception, and epistemological pretensions of testimonio. Written in a first-person mock-testimonial style, the novel is also about testimonio, since the psychological collapse of the narrator is provoked by his work as the corrector of the thousands of testimonies that comprise the Remhi report, later published as *Guatemala: Nunca más*. As such, *Insensatez* is a metaliterary novel which dramatizes the central dilemmas of testimonio: Can traumatic experiences be adequately accounted for in language and represented in texts? What is the most appropriate way to respond to narrations of trauma? While, on the level of the enunciated, the novel reflects upon the production and reception of testimonio, on the level of the enunciation the text itself performs an alternate mode of narrating political violence, one that defends the specificity of the fictional text and polemicizes with the conventions of memory politics. I argue that by introducing new testimonial subjects and new sites of enunciation for testimonial discourse, incompatible with the conventions of the genre, Castellanos Moya disrupts the political and aesthetic assumptions of testimonio, in particular as they relate to the political obligations of the Latin American public intellectual. In addition, *Insensatez* thematizes a series of misfires and misunderstandings that can take place in the reception of testimonial texts, which lead not to empathy nor solidarity but misappropriation and

second-hand trauma. Lastly, I demonstrate that Castellanos Moya thematizes epistemological doubt, as a central feature of *Insensatez*, to challenge the truth claims of testimonio, which are based on the referential value of the testimonial text. The novel categorically blocks any attempt by the reader to establish the veracity of the events narrated (with the exception of the assassination of monseñor Gerardi) through both the unreliability of the narrator and the calculated indeterminacy of the text. Here, the literary text is less a window onto the world through which to contemplate social and historical realities than a dirty windowpane. Just as the narrator of the novel foregrounds the literary aspect of testimonies he corrects, as opposed to its referential capacity, and is therefore detained on the surface of the text, the reader of *Insensatez* is likewise denied access to the extralinguistic world, caught in the distorted bemusing of an unreliable narrator and a constellation of imprecise and diffuse allusions. Here the strategy of Castellanos Moya is not to attempt to elevate fiction to the level of historiography, as did the naturalists and theorists of realism like Georg Lukacs, but rather to undermine the epistemological claims of testimonio by exposing the rhetorical and ideological underside of the testimonial text.

The fourth chapter picks up where the third left off. If the third chapter focuses more on Castellanos Moya's break with the tradition of testimonio, the fourth chapter explores the affirmative aspects of the narrative program of the author and surveys the new ground covered in his literature. While it is true that the narrative of Castellanos Moya registers "a monumental crisis in the political" in Latin America, it is also a response to this problem (Moreiras 60). To best characterize this response, I appropriate Peter Sloterdijk's concept of kynicism, as an affirmative and productive form of cynicism, to postulate that the kynical project of Castellanos Moya is more than a simple negation of inherited tradition but rather constitutes the affirmation

of a post-testimonial aesthetic program through which the author develops new subject positions for intellectuals and new modes of narrating political violence within contemporary Latin American literature. More than a mere negation of the referential claims of testimonio, for example, Castellanos celebrates the possibilities of fiction; more than deride mournful responses to traumatic historical experiences, he explores the possibility of playfulness and even humor; more than merely lambasting authoritarian tendencies in the dogmatic left, be it Marxist or human rights based, he practices critical thinking, transgression, and non-conformity; more than idealize and sacralise revolutionary militants, he confronts them as humans, as capable as error as anyone else, often rooting his representations in the corporal and even eschatological. What emerges is a provocative and innovative response to the dilemmas facing Latin American literature and culture at a moment when the simplistic and praiseful portrayals of revolutionary militancy, which typified both testimonio and first-generation post-dictatorial narrative, are being challenged and losing their cultural currency.

In addition, the fourth chapter addresses one of the principal (and most polemic) developments within the narrative program of the author: the critique of memory. I demonstrate how Castellanos Moya extends his critique of the authoritarianism, intolerance, and hypocrisy of the Marxist Latin American Left during the epoch of revolution to Latin American memory politics, which replaced it as the ideological dominant of the region's Left. I am careful to clarify that his critiques of the abuses and self-interested misappropriations of memory do not constitute a negation of the need for memory, truth, and justice as such. Therefore, I argue, together with other scholars such as Alberto Moreiras in "The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La diáspora*" (2014) and Teresa Basile in *Literatura y violencia en la narrativa latinoamericana reciente* (2015), that Castellanos Moya's polemic interventions

constitute an imminent critique of the Left and do not indicate concessions to the Right. The audacity to broach the topic of the contradictions of memory politics at the moment when it was struggling for political hegemony breaks taboos within the cultural politics of the Latin American Left, especially those regarding the political obligations of the public intellectual and the mobilization of the literary work within the region's political struggles. At the same time, it is also the reason why the literature of Castellanos Moya is so relevant for second-generation post-dictatorship narrative: he raises the same concerns that have moved to the foreground in their own narrative production as they struggle with the discourses and practices of the Left of their generation, which are rooted in the paradigm of memory and nourished by theories of trauma.

Lastly, the conclusion considers the implications of the innovations of Castellanos Moya for contemporary Latin American literature and culture. If the preceding chapters were primarily concerned with the origins of the narrative program of the author and its consolidation within his early novelistic production, the conclusion, for its part, explores the legacy of his aesthetic program, in particular the convergences and divergences between his literature and second-generation post-dictatorship literary production. Necessarily I establish their respective differences with respect to the discourse of memory studies and trauma theory. Furthermore, I discuss the implications of the findings of the textual analysis and exegesis of the early narrative of Castellanos Moya for the field of contemporary Latin American literature, for the conception of the figure of the Latin American public intellectual, and for the relationship between the literary texts and political struggle in Latin American.

Since the decline of *testimonio* in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Central American literature has received scant attention from literary critics. Furthermore, the relative silence from critics concerning the narrative of Castellanos Moya is puzzling, especially considering its

undeniable commercial success and its impact in contemporary Latin American literature, although I suspect that this will change since his literature ages well, which is to say that it proves to be more intelligible, not less, with time, as attested to by the reprinting of his early works. The present research project was conceived as a small contribution towards the goal of filling the conspicuous gaps in both the literary criticism dedicated to contemporary Central American literature and to the narrative of its author. I contend that these blind spots in the intellectual history of Latin America deserve more attention than they currently receive, and my research is intended as a small step in the direction of rectifying this limitation. Moreover, the attention that has been allotted to the narrative of Castellanos Moya, in both popular media and academic spheres of influence, has tended to focus on the deconstructive dimension of his work, which is understandable given the polemic nature of his literature, in the sense that it explicitly seeks to negate inherited literary conventions. The result has been a considerable amount of bad press, so to speak, such as the position of Beatriz Cortez in her polemic with Alberto Moreiras that the cynicism of Castellanos Moya, as a “proyecto fallido,” leads to political paralysis and ultimately strengthens the Right (Cortez 26). The problem with these types of exchanges is that they simplify the narrative project of Castellanos Moya by reducing it to its iconoclastic dimension without attending its affirmative aspects, thus pigeonholing the author as a rabble rouser (in order to more easily dismiss his aesthetic and political proposals). While it is true that the literature of Castellanos Moya poses a challenge, he is much more than a mere rabble rouser. The overarching objective of this thesis, then, is to rise to this challenge and respond to the literature of Castellanos Moya, not through visceral reaction, but through a careful exegesis of his work.

Chapter 1: The Origin and Originality of the Narrative Program of Horacio Castellanos

Moya

Horacio Castellanos Moya presents something of a problem for literary critics. None of us seem quite sure what to do with him. His extensive body of work constitutes an anomaly that resists easy classification according to existing categories: he initiated his narrative project when testimonio was reaching its zenith and indeed borrows heavily from the genre, yet he is a staunch defender of fiction and a harsh critic of the political and aesthetic limitations of what had come to be viewed as the Central American literary form par excellence (Ortiz Wallner 87-8); he mobilizes all of the humor of the postmodern novel but none of its lightness; and, the centrality of political violence and the weight of the dictatorial past in his work seem to establish an affinity with the Latin American dictatorship novel, yet Castellanos Moya categorically resists the political instrumentalization of the literary work and the political role assigned to the writer by both the Boom (Gilman 58), testimonial (Beverley 36), and post-dictatorial traditions (Gundermann 40). Exceeding categories and frustrating expectations, the narrative project of Castellanos Moya blurs the neatly drawn lines of the historiography of contemporary Latin American literature, which perhaps explains the scant attention dedicated to his work by critics until recently.

Of all the works of the author, *Insensatez* is the one that best captures the anomalous character of the author's literary project. It tells the story of the prepublication correction of the Informe del Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, or Remhi report, as it is known in English, and the assassination of Bishop Gerardi two days after the report was published in book form as *Guatemala Nunca más*. As head of the Human Rights Office of the

Archbishop of Guatemala, Bishop Gerardi oversaw the compilation and correction of the thousands of testimonies that comprise the Remhi report. The narrator of the novel is a Salvadoran journalist who, in trouble in his home country for writing politically incorrect articles, is more than happy to take a job as a corrector of the text of the Remhi report, offered to him by his friend, Erick, a high-level functionary at the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop. What seems to be a worthy cause, however, turns out to be far from ideal from an insider's point of view: his new employers exploit his labor, obliging him to work long hours at a rate much lower than he was originally offered; despite all the outward signs of altruism, his co-workers are categorically motivated by self-interest; furthermore, many of them have long and complicated histories with the Central American Right and with perpetrators of crimes against humanity. In fact, Erick, the narrator's contact in the Human Rights Office and one of the main characters of the novel, is involved in some shady dealings with a military general, Octavio Pérez Mena, a thinly veiled fictionalization of Otto Pérez Molina, the head of intelligence of the Guatemalan military during the Civil War, widely considered to be implicated in war crimes. This tangled web of connections between the human rights community and the political Right leads the narrator to believe that people in the Archbishop's office are involved in the assassination of Bishop Gerardi, although the objectivity of the narrator's observations are compromised or undermined by the progressively acute symptoms of secondary trauma that afflict him, due to the intensity of his work with the testimonies of atrocities.

The unnamed narrator of Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel is ruthless in his critiques of the contradictions of the human rights community in Guatemala, of memory politics on an international level, and of the general culture of the Latin American revolutionary Left. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that he articulates his position without making

any concessions to the political Right. As caustic as they are, his critiques do not stem from an ideological affinity with the Right or an intent to legitimize the actions of the military but rather from bitter disenchantment with the failure of both the revolutionary Left and human rights movements to live up to their lofty ideals. As with the subplot of the character of Erick, a figuration of Edgar Gutiérrez, a human rights activist who was appointed minister of foreign relations under the conservative government of Alfonso Portillo at the time Castellanos Moya was writing the novel and who, within *Insensatez*, is thought to be implicated in the assassination of Bishop Gerardi, the problem lies in the contradictions of the Left and its failure to live up to its ideals and differentiate itself from the Right in the postwar era. As one of the first and most substantial critiques within Latin American literature of the misfires of memory politics, *Insensatez* walks the tight rope of criticizing the Left without legitimizing discourses of the Right.

The narrator's ridicule for human rights activists or the "mal llamados veladores de los derechos humanos," as he calls them, is not the only way that *Insensatez* problematizes memory discourse and practice (45). Throughout the novel there is a concerted assault on the stability of the categories of history, memory, and literature. The conceptual distinctions between these categories break down in the face of the recurring impossibility to anchor truth claims and to establish the credibility of competing versions of violent events. Over and over again, the proverbial ground is pulled out from beneath the narrator's feet, leaving him adrift in his own subjective reveries or reeling in the confusion of uncertainty. The narrator himself reinforces this radical undecidability by undermining the objectivity of testimony: instead of engaging with the truth value of the testimonies that he edits, the narrator judges these accounts of atrocity by strictly literary criteria. Fascinated by the syntactic anomalies of the testimonies and likening

them to avant-garde poetry, he copies passages of testimony of rape, torture, and murder into his notebook based on exclusively aesthetic concerns. To make matters worse, he then reads these passages aloud to friends and acquaintances whom he expects to impress with his aesthetic sensibilities but only manages to bewilder and offend with his political insensitivities. The surface critique of the hypocrisy of human rights activism, then, is coupled with the problematization, on a deeper narrative level, of the theoretical underpinnings of memory discourse, such as the epistemological value of testimony and the conceptual distinction between history, memory, and literature.

Although there are antecedents within Latin American literature of self-criticism within the Left, Horacio Castellanos Moya's targeting of Latin American human rights movements and memory politics is an audacious and innovative development within the continent's literature. The novel, however, did not materialize out of thin air, so to speak, but has a specific history, whose roots reach back to the first works of Castellanos Moya. The objective of the present chapter is to unearth this history and, at the same time, situate it within both the early novelistic production of the author and within the larger context of contemporary Latin American literature. The chapter is divided into two principal sections, according to formal concerns, on one hand, and matters of content, on the other. The first section follows the development of narrative technique within the production of the author from *La diáspora* (1989) to *Insensatez* (2004), establishing a genealogy of the type of narrator that has come to characterize much of the work of the author. Furthermore, the first section traces literary antecedents of this type of narrator, who descends from openly declared influences and models both within Latin American literature and beyond. The second section, for its part, addresses the thematic development of the author's production during the same period. In broad terms, it follows a trajectory of themes that go from

the shortcomings of the revolutionary Left during the civil war to the violence and corruption of the postwar epoch to the implementation of transitional justice measures. Due to the importance of the foundational break with the revolutionary Left narrated in *La diáspora* and the overturning of the aesthetic and political imperatives of testimonio in *Insensatez*, these themes will be given a separate treatment, with all the attention that they deserve, in chapters two and three, respectively.

An overarching argument of this investigation is that the narrative of Castellanos Moya represents a turning point in contemporary Latin American literature. Exceeding available modes for representing political violence, it opened new perspectives and pushed the region's literature in new directions. This chapter narrows its focus to the origin and originality of the narrative project of Castellanos Moya by addressing the following questions: How did this anomalous discourse emerge? Where does it originate? What constitutes its specificity? What are some of the innovations that it proposes? Once properly contextualized in this way within the history of the narrative production of the author and within some of the major currents of Latin American literature, we can then dedicate the following chapters to the analysis of the foundational rift between Latin American public intellectuals in *La diáspora* and the critique of testimonio and memory politics in *Insensatez*.

1.1. The Development of the Narrative Strategies within the Production of Castellanos

Moya from *La diáspora* (1989) to *Insensatez* (2004)

1.1.1. Pure Venom

Of the four sections of the *La diáspora*, the first three are written in third person, while the fourth is written principally from a first-person point of view. The narrator of the last section,

el Turco, appears as a secondary character in the previous sections, but it isn't until the end of the novel that the reader is able to access his private thoughts and the peculiarities of his voice as a narrator. The first section, focalized through Juan Carlos, offers a preliminary sketch of the character of el Turco, before both defected from the Party. When he appears for the first time, at the dive bar where he meets Juan Carlos for drinks, the character is described in the following manner: "...el Turco era veneno puro; siempre buscándole el lado oscuro a las cosas... Era visceral, intransigente, resentido, cruel, obsesivo. Lo simpático era escucharlo" (*La diáspora* 33). To make this preliminary sketch complete, it would be necessary to add 'alcoholic' and 'misogynist' to the list of attributes of this problematic character. In this short scene, el Turco drinks desperately as he vents his frustrations to Juan Carlos, which primarily concern his disappointment with Central American revolutionary politics. As an artist, he feels that "ninguno de esos cerotes que dirigen la revolución tiene la puta idea de lo que es el arte" (*La diáspora* 33). In fact, one of the main problems with the revolutionary movement in El Salvador is the insensibility of its leaders: "para él, Juan Carlos era de los pocos tipos con sensibilidad que habían ido quedando en la revolución. La mayoría era un hatajo de mulas, ambiciosas de poder, corruptas" (*La diáspora* 35). This first interaction between Juan Carlos and el Turco in the first section of *La diáspora* gives the reader a glimpse of what is in store for the last and shortest section of the novel, dedicated exclusively to the caustic yet presumably entertaining voice of this idiosyncratic character. The section of *La diáspora* narrated by el Turco is the briefest of the novel, a mere ten percent of the total text, the first three sections being roughly thirty percent each. Through the first-person point of view, the reader can delve deeper into the troubled subjectivity of this desperate, profoundly bitter, paranoid, self-destructive, misanthropic, and misogynistic character.

As it turns out, the monologue of a marginal voice becomes one of the preferred types of narration in Castellanos Moya's posterior work. In fact, the voice of el Turco bears many similarities to narrators in *El asco*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, and *Insensatez*. In one of the appendixes of the 2007 edition of *El asco*, the author characterized the novel as "an exercise in style" that consists in perfecting the voice of the main character, Edgardo Vega, styled after the narrators of the novels of Thomas Bernhard ("Nota del autor" 136). In the novel, the caustic, embittered monologue of Vega is transcribed by his childhood friend, Moya, after they meet for drinks in a bar in San Salvador. After eighteen years of voluntary exile, Vega has returned to his country for the first time to attend the funeral of his mother and administer her estate. His unmitigated repulsion for all things Salvadoran or what he describes in his own words as a "total desprecio a escuchar cualquier cosa que tenga que ver con este país," however, make Vega anxious to return to what he considers his true patria, Canada, and acutely fearful of any impediment to accomplishing this goal (*El asco* 25). On the first page, when Vega expresses his distaste of Latin American musical genres and his preference for jazz, explaining to Moya how he carefully selected the bar precisely because the owner plays jazz instead of other types of music, the resemblance with the voice of el Turco is already clear. Vega's rant coincides neatly with the abovementioned one of el Turco in the last section of *La diáspora*:

La música folclórica latinoamericana me resulta especialmente detestable, Moya, desde siempre he detestado con especial repugnancia la música folclórica latinoamericana, nada tan detestable como esa música llorona procedente de los Andes interpretada por sujetos vestidos con ponchos andinos, sujetos que se consideran adalides de las causas justas por interpretar esa música llorona disfrazados con sus ponchos andinos, en realidad farsantes que se disfrazan de latinoamericanos para engatusar a imbéciles que se sienten partícipes

de causas justas por escuchar música llorona. Conozco muy bien a esos farsantes dedicado a lucrar con las causas justas a través de la detestable y llorona música folclórica latinoamericana... (82)

The distaste for Latin American folk music is certainly not the only affinity between el Turco and Vega. Both characters also direct their merciless criticism against the Salvadoran national dish, the *pupusas*. Back in his days of political militancy, el Turco had named his first band, Las pupusas, in honor of El Salvador's national dish in an attempt to increase the popular appeal of the group. Yet, as with all things connected to his political past, el Turco displays nothing but disdain for the popular dish. In fact, the mere thought of "esa tortilla rellena de queso y chicharrón" causes him "asco" and "ganas de vomitar" (*La diáspora* 148). For his part, the reaction of Vega to the national dish is equally vehement:

...se las ingenieron para llevarme a comer pupusas al Parque Balboa, ni más ni menos que a comer esas horribles tortillas grasosas rellenas de chicharrón que la gente llaman pupusas, como si esas pupusas me produjeran a mí algo más que diarrea, como si yo pudiera disfrutar, como si a mí me gustara tener en la boca ese sabor verdaderamente asqueroso que tienen las pupusas, Moya, nada más grasoso y dañino que las pupusas, nada más sucio y perjudicial para el estómago que las pupusas, me dijo Vega. Sólo el hambre y la estupidez congénitas pueden explicar que a estos seres humanos les guste comer con semejante fruición algo tan repugnante como las pupusas, sólo el hambre y la ignorancia pueden explicar que estos sujetos consideren a las pupusas como su plato nacional... (*El asco* 66-7)

After comparing the comments of el Turco to those of Vega regarding folk music and las pupusas, it should be clear that what was merely a tentative sketch in *La diáspora*, only a small

portion of the narration, became an autonomous discourse in *El asco*, capable of standing on its own. In other words, the seed of *El asco*, so to speak, had already been planted in *La diáspora*. This is not only a question of similar narrators and shared themes but also a matter of how the discourse of the narrators is organized. In both cases, the respective monologues are organized around a series of formulas that reinforce the spoken register of the narrators' discourse, give cadence to monologue, and orient the reader in the seamless stream of text, which in the case of *El asco* is not divided into sections, chapters, or even paragraphs. El Turco's chapter of *La diáspora*, for example, uses the repetition of the syntagm, ¡qué asco!, to punctuate the monologue. In fact, in the pages dedicated to el Turco's monologue, the shortest section of the novel, the exclamation, qué asco, appears seven times. When speaking about the bar where he works, el Turco describes his boss in the following manner: "...hablaba como contador, caminaba como contador y, ni dudarlo, cogía como Contador. Un verdadero asco" (*La diáspora* 131). Aside from the ample use of repetition in general and the overall tone, Vega uses the same syntagm to organize his spoken discourse: "Nuestros ex compañeros de colegio han de ser de lo peor, un verdadero asco, qué suerte que no me encontré a ninguno, aparte de vos, por supuesto, Moya, no tenemos nada en común, no puede haber una sola cosa que me une a alguno de ellos" (*El asco* 19). In this passage it is evident that not only the general characteristics of the narrators, then, or even the overall features of their discourse, but title itself of *El asco* is taken from el Turco's chapter of *La diáspora*. I argue that narrative experiment of Castellanos Moya in the last section of *La diáspora*, then, developed into its own literary project that eventually took the form of *El asco*. As the author himself states in the epilogue to the 2007 edition, the novel came about as an "ejercicio de estilo" intended to perfect the technique of uninterrupted monologue by a

deeply cynical and resentful character, which is precisely the objective of the last section of *La diáspora*.

This argument is consistent with one of the general features of Castellanos Moya's narrative project: the network of intertextual relationships between his novels. Apart from a series of recurring themes, like exile and the disintegration of the Central American revolutionary Left, there is a considerable amount of overlap in the plots and characters of his novels.⁵ The homicide of Olga María, for example, is told from different points of view in *La diabla en el espejo*, *El arma del hombre*, and *Donde no estén ustedes*. In *La diabla en el espejo*, the execution of this upper-class Salvadoran woman in her home in the presence of her children is told by her best friend from a first-person point of view as the principal plotline of the novel. The same incident is told from the point of view of the assassin in chapter sixteen of *El arma en el hombre*, as the climax of a long series of act of gratuitous violence. Yet another detail of the story, albeit tangential, is accounted for in *Donde no estén ustedes*: the ex-wife of the protagonist, Alberto Aragón, is sequestered by the assassin of Olga María and her car was used to perpetrate the crime. The same incident, then, is approached through the series of novels from diverse points of view and through different literary genres.

The lives of the characters of the novels of Castellanos Moya intersect in other ways as well. Just as the main characters of *La diáspora*, Alberto Aragón seeks exile in Mexico City, after being betrayed by the Salvadoran Left in Nicaragua. Despite their marked difference in

⁵ The author is candid about this intertextual relationship between his novels. In "El asesinato político y sus derivaciones" he states that six of his early novels revolve around the same themes and the same group of people, all of them tied in one way or another to the Aragons: "En los años subsiguientes escribí cinco novelas más sobre, relacionadas con, la familia Aragón, novelas que me permitieron enfocar en distintos momentos de la historia salvadoreña" (*Roque Dalton* 174).

temperament, Juan Carlos, the even-keeled intellectual from the first section of *La diáspora*, shares the same aspiration as Edgardo Vega, the narrator of *El asco*: to become a Canadian citizen. There are far too many points of contact to offer an exhaustive list here, but, as the above examples demonstrate, there is an intertextual relationship between the plots, characters, and scenes of the novels of Castellanos Moya.

It is no surprise, then, that narrators with similar features would be used in several different novels across the narrative production of Castellanos Moya or that the technique originally rehearsed in *La diáspora* would be further developed in *El asco* and later employed in subsequent novels. This narrative technique stems from the formula originally associated with el Turco: "...veneno puro, siempre buscándole el lado oscuro a las cosas... visceral, intransigente, resentido, cruel, obsesivo. Lo simpático era escucharlo" (*El asco* 33). In itself, this technique consists in using the narrator to commit an act of the what the author himself describes, in reference to *El asco*, as an act of "demolición cultural" ("Nota del autor" 135). To be sure, the scathing critiques are not limited to cultural issues, like popular dishes or genres of music, but extend well into the area of politics. Narrators like el Turco and Vega are deeply cynical about Central American politics. While Vega migrated to Canada before the war, preferring not to get involved, el Turco threw himself whole-heartedly into the cause of revolution. Somehow, though, they both ended up in a similar place on the spectrum of political ideologies: for as visceral and deeply rooted as their hatred of the Right runs, they are equally hard and unforgiving in their critiques of the Left. Their compulsive criticism leaves nothing standing, except of course their disgust for everything associated with their native countries, their total negation of any foundational discourse. Afloat in their own despair, hopelessness, and cynicism, they spiral downwards towards self-destruction.

It is precisely this approach to storytelling, filtering the events of the plot through the perception of a deeply troubled and embittered narrator, that makes *El asco* Castellanos Moya's "best novel," according to Roberto Bolaño, whose presentation of the novel figures in the appendix of the 2007 edition ("Nota de Roberto Bolaño" 130). This specific type of narrator has become a hallmark of the narrative of Castellanos Moya in his novels since the publication of *El asco*. Similar to the format of *La diáspora*, Castellanos Moya's 2003 novel, *Donde no estén ustedes*, combines both first- and third-person narration. The work is divided into two parts, "El hundimiento" and "La pesquisa," respectively. In the first part, "El hundimiento," a third person narrator tells the story of the exile of Alberto Aragón in Mexico City after he renounced his position as ambassador of El Salvador in Nicaragua to show his support for the guerrilla. Despite his long-standing allegiance to their cause, the guerrilla betrayed Aragón after he publicly renounced his post: "Alberto ya había sido abandonado por todos esos que se decían sus amigos, sus camaradas" (Castellanos Moya, *Donde no estén ustedes* 16). In a fit of desperation, bitterness, and alcoholism, the character dies shortly upon his arrival to Mexico City. In the second part of the novel, "La pesquisa," José Pindonga, a Salvadoran private investigator, tells the story of the investigation into the death of Aragón from a first-person point of view. Despite the difference in their ages, it turns out the investigator has a great deal in common with the investigated. Before accepting the job, Pindonga himself had run into a dead end, both in his personal and professional life. Ending a long-term romantic relationship and renouncing his profession as a journalist, Pindonga took the job in Mexico to escape El Salvador and as a last-ditch attempt to turn his life around. In this regard, Pindonga is much like Juan Carlos, el Turco, Gabriel, Carmen, Alberto Aragón, and many of the other characters of Castellanos Moya's early novels. Furthermore, as a narrator he shares many of the same features as el Turco from *La*

diaspora and Edgardo Vega from *El asco*, which is to say that he is cruel, anxious, misogynist, alcoholic, and deeply cynical. Verbose, these narrators often ruminate upon their own despair and anxiety. José Pindonga, the narrator of *Donde no estén ustedes*, for example, describes himself as a person that has been “derrotada... con el pecho roto, con una rajadura inmensa, herida que trato de sanar bebiendo como desesperado” (131). The syntagm, “beber como desesperado,” also appears several times throughout *La diaspora* in reference to el Turco. In the bar scene of the first section of *La diaspora*, analyzed above, “Juan Carlos no quiso seguir bebiendo cerveza,” while “el Turco bebía como desesperado: se tomó lo que quedaba de tequila y, en seguida, dio un largo trago de cerveza” (32; 36). In the fourth section of *La diaspora*, in fact, el Turco describes himself in these same terms: “Antes de hacer fila, me dije que era pura mierda llegar sobrio. Cruce Insurgentes y me metí al bar de Sanborns: pedí un tequila y una cerveza. Entonces sí bebí como un desesperado” (emphasis added 134). Aside from their self-destructive impulse, often expressed through an addiction to alcohol, what unites this constellation of narrators, which spans across *La diaspora*, *El asco*, and *Donde no estén ustedes*, is precisely the *asco* or revulsion that they feel towards postwar Central American politics, society, and culture. They are afflicted by the same “desosiego,” the same “enfermedad del alma,” as Pindonga describes his condition in *Donde no estén ustedes*. Each from their own particular circumstances, equally desperate, pushed to the limit, these antipathetic narrators unleash their merciless criticisms, a frequent target being the culture and politics of El Salvador. The desired effect is that these rants be “simpático” to the reader, as stated in scene of the first appearance of el Turco as a character at the beginning of *La diáspora*.

Castellanos Moya wrote other novels between *El asco* and *Insensatez*, three of them, two of which are written in first-person, *La diabla en el espejo* and *El arma del hombre*. Although

the narrators of these novels share some of the characteristics of el Turco, Edgardo Vega, and José Pindonga, they are too different to be included in the same general group, which is the reason that they are not included in the analysis of the development of narrative technique in the production of Castellanos Moya leading up to the publication of *Insensatez*. Robocop, the narrator and protagonist of *El arma en el hombre*, for example, is a self-proclaimed man of action who distrusts the spoken word: “soy un hombre de pocas palabras, y no quería que allá supieran mi historia” (41). It is unclear, then, why he would be telling his own story, that is, until the very end of monologue when it becomes clear that Robocop is giving his testimony to the CIA in order to help them in their counterinsurgency operations in Central America in exchange for juridical immunity for the many innumerable crimes he has committed. Furthermore, as a soldier in the specialized Acahuapa battalion of the Salvadoran military who also participates in paramilitary “death squads” and narcotraffic operations, Robocop stands alone in the early novelistic production of Castellanos Moya as the only narrator who fought for the military and death squads. Ultimately, Robocop gets what he wants and manages to improve his situation. In contrast to the other narrators analyzed above, he is able to find a way out of his hopeless condition, albeit through brutal violence and irreflexive self-interest. *El arma en el hombre* cannot be said to have a happy ending except of course for Robocop, who clearly does not deserve it. The narrator for *La diabla en el espejo*, for its part, stands out from the rest in her own way: she is the only female narrator in the novels of Castellanos Moya. Furthermore, her testimony, like that of Robocop, is not an immanent critique of the Left but firmly rooted in discourses on the Right, and for this reason has more in common with the genre of fictionalized perpetrator testimonies, like that of Martín Kohan in *Dos veces junio* (2005). Deeply disturbed over the assassination of her best friend, Olga María, the narrator’s tone of anxiety and

desperation is reminiscent in this respect of the narrators analyzed above. Although the lives of Robocop and the best friend of Olga María are disfigured by violence and marked by desperation, *El arma en el hombre* and *La diabla en el espejo* do not form part of the genealogy of narrators that goes from the last part of *La diáspora*, through *El asco* and the second part of *Donde no estén ustedes*, to *Insensatez*. This is not to say, however, that the use of first-person narratives in these novels does not contribute to the Castellanos Moya's parodic appropriation of testimony, as Ortiz Wallner argues in "Literatura y violencia: Para una lectura de Horacio Castellanos Moya" (91).

Up until this point, we have followed the development of this "venomous" discourse from its inception in the fourth section of *La diáspora* through its autonomous manifestation in *El asco* to the second part of *Donde no estén ustedes*, published in 2003. It is this same style of narration – the first-person point of view of psychologically troubled narrator – that characterizes *Insensatez*. Published in 2003, it is the first novel since *El asco* that employs this narrative voice throughout the entire work. In fact, for someone who has read *El asco*, the register of the narrator of *Insensatez*, without being the same character, is immediately recognizable. If the feature of the extensive rant of a disturbed narrator has been preserved, it is the subject matter of Castellanos Moya's novel that has changed. If *El asco* targets Salvadoran national culture, *Insensatez* shifts the focus to memory politics and human rights movements in postwar Central America.

Within the first pages of *Insensatez*, it immediately becomes clear what type of narrator Castellanos Moya is using, especially since it is plainly enunciated in the text itself. The anonymous narrator describes himself as "al borde del trastorno," and openly admits the fragility and extremity of his psychological state. With this as his starting point, the narrator's mental state progressively worsens throughout the novel on account of his close contact with the

testimonial texts of the Rehmi report. Aside from this generalized anxiety, the narrator of *Insensatez* shares many other characteristics with el Turco, Edgardo Vega, and José Pindonga, such as their cynicism, misogyny, and alcoholism (19; 36; 61; 64; 85; 88; 101). One of the most original developments of *Insensatez* is the narrator's distrust and antipathy for human rights movement which is discussed with due attention in chapters three and four. For the moment, suffice it to say that the cynicism of the character extends into this new territory that was absent from the previous novels of Castellanos Moya.

The narrator of *Insensatez* is clearly a descendant of his literary predecessors in his penchant for alcohol. As with Castellanos Moya's earlier novels, many of the scenes take place in bars, especially dive bars, and involve the consumption of alcohol with the same desperation originally attributed to el Turco. Upon beginning work on the correction of the Rehmi report at the Archbishop's Office of Human Rights, for example, the narrator of *Insensatez* is relieved to find a bar nearby: "el hecho de tener una cantina cerca, a mano ... constituye un motivo de tranquilidad espiritual para mí" (23). He confesses that he frequently drinks during the day "para evitar la ansiedad" since, quite simply, he is a person "quien requiere en los momentos más inusitados una copa que calme los nerviosos" (23).

Aside for the generalized anxiety, compulsiveness, and self-destructive relationship to alcohol, the misogyny of the narrator of *Insensatez* is every bit as explicit as in the cases of his literary antecedents. This quality is in no way understated but rather constitutes a central feature of Castellanos Moya preferred narrators. El Turco explains his attitude towards women in no unclear terms when he says that "[l]as mujeres son una mierda" (*La diáspora* 147). In the case of the narrator of *Insensatez*, he seems incapable to viewing women as anything other than a mere means to his sexual gratifications and consistently undermines their personhood. Upon arriving

to the Archbishop's Office of Human Rights, he is sorely disappointed to not encounter women that he deems worthy:

...yo me decía que en alguna parte tenían que estar escondidas las chicas guapas, porque las que me había presentado el chiquitín no sólo lo estaban incompletas de la mente, sino también del cuerpo, pues carecían de cualquier rastro de belleza, aspecto que por supuesto no le comenté a mi guía y que al paso de los días descubrí que era intrínseco a esa institución, y no sólo a la extrema izquierda, como yo antes pensaba, que las mujeres feas era un atributo exclusivo de las organizaciones de extrema izquierda, no, ahora comprendí que también lo eran de los organismos católicos dedicados a velar por los derechos humanos... (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 21)

You can imagine his relief, then, when he unexpectedly meets Pilar:

Bingo: por fin encontré una chica guapa. No era Demi Moore, debo aclarar, pero lucía entera, proporcionada, con un rostro fino y expresión saludable, sin ese resentimiento propio de las feas adalides de causas mesiánicas que pululaban en el Arzobispado, una chica nacida en Toledo, que había pasado la mayor parte de su vida en Madrid, en el barrio de Salamanca, no en cualquier chifurnia, que su padre era un prestigioso médico militar admirador y al servicio del generalísimo Franco, me contó ella, no al principio de nuestra charla, claro está, que nadie se presenta de esa manera, mucho menos en el patio del palacio arzobispal concurrido por los mal llamados veladores de los derechos humanos. (45)

The narrator's intention in inviting Pilar out for drinks is clear and unambiguous from the start, if not to her, then at least to the reader:

...debía persistir con Pilar porque un buen polvo, de ser posible, relajaría mis nervios y gratificara mis sentidos luego de una semana de permanecer encerrado leyendo sólo sobre cadáveres y torturas. (53)

On their date, Pilar makes it clear, however, that she is sexually unavailable. Distraught over having her heart recently broken, she confesses to not being interested in having sexual relations with anyone except that man that she recently lost to another woman. What Pilar is looking for, then, is not a consort but a friend, somebody to listen to her. Unfortunate for her, nothing could interest the narrator less. His disappointment quickly turns into irritation:

...el peor fastidio es una mujer llorona... la Pilarica volvió a las andadas, con un llanto ya francamente grosero, irrespetuoso hacia mi persona, que sólo quería beber unas cervezas y tantear la posibilidad de seducir a una chica guapa que parecía guapa e inteligente, craso error, que la guapura con mocos no cuaja ni la inteligencia con llanto, por lo que le hice una señal al contrahecho para que trajera otras dos cervezas... (51)

Upon realizing that he has no chance with Pilar, the narrator decides to try to seduce her roommate, Fátima. The first scene of the eighth chapter begins immediately after the narrator achieves his objective: “Estaba yo tirado en la cama, con el cuerpo recién poseído roncando a mi lado...” (93). Once satiated, it is clear that the narrator’s interest in Fátima ended once he reached his orgasm: “ese cuerpo por todos tan deseado había perdido de pronto para mí su encanto” (94). This scene contains what we might consider a trope of misogynist behaviour. Just as in the case of el Turco and his extravagant declaration that “women are pieces of shit,” the character is not simply latently misogynist but ostentatiously so, hyperbolically so, paradigmatically so: these patterns of speech and behaviour are what misogynists paradigmatically say and do. Apart from any ethical considerations, this use of misogyny raises a

formal concern, a question regarding the structure of the work. Why choose this specific type of narration or, more specifically, how does this type of narration function within the general poetics of the work?

A first step to answering this question is to establish a relationship between misogyny and some of the other characteristics of this type of narrator, such as a markedly anxious disposition, psychological imbalance, verbosity, alcoholism, cynicism, etc. These traits do not function in isolation but, rather, are coextensive with each other. There is a feedback loop, for example, between the misogyny of the narrator of *Insensatez* and his unstable mental state. Despite his conviction that using Fátima as a means for sexual release will “calm his nerves,” it produces the opposite effect: “el placer de la carne apenas había sido una coartada para sumirme en el infierno de la mente” (102). Although she is in an open relationship which permits “encuentros paralelos,” Fátima had not told the narrator about her boyfriend, a major in the military. Already convinced that he is being followed by the military for his collaboration with the Remhi report, the narrator figures that his one-night stand will give them another reason to kill him. What had started as a fantasy of sexual conquest quickly transformed into a nervous breakdown:

Ni duda cabe de que fui presa del peor de los terrores, como si la muerte estuviese respirando a mi lado, como si los ronquidos de la bella durmiente fueran el sonar de la trompeta que anuncia la llegada de los heraldos negros, vaya ocurrencia, que el miedo todo lo distorsiona y yo estaba con taquicardia, transpirando, seguramente con la presión arterial por las nubes, con la certeza de que ahora sí corría peligro. No pude más: me puse de pie, con la ansiedad destilando, y fui a la sala a pasearme como preso en capilla, que así me sentía, con la sentencia de muerte roncando en la cama y la perspectiva de una noche siniestra, a menos que me zampara de un trago un whisky triple... (102-3)

In this passage it is also clear that the explicitly misogynist patterns of behaviour of the narrator form a set of interlocking attributes that also include anxiety and alcoholism. Taken together, they are symptoms that point to a single underlying condition. The narrators of the fourth section of *La diáspora*, *El asco*, the second part of *Donde no estén ustedes*, and *Insensatez* are deeply troubled individuals who are unable to contain themselves. These borderline figures, then, have an easier time saying and doing things that break norms and taboos. Spinning out of control, they can cross the proverbial line that other characters, more restrained by convention, are unable to cross. The transgressive character of *El asco* was so pronounced that Castellanos Moya received death threats and was unable to return to El Salvador after its publication.

Hace diez años, en el verano de 1997, estaba yo de visita en la Ciudad de Guatemala, hospedado en la casa de un amigo poeta, cuando el teléfono sonó a altas horas de la noche. Era mi madre, quien llamaba desde San Salvador; aún conmocionada, me dijo que acababa de recibir dos llamadas telefónicas en las que un hombre amenazante le advertía que me matarían a causa de una breve novela que había publicado una semana atrás. Con la boca seca por el súbito miedo y la certeza de que mi presión arterial se había disparado, alcancé a preguntarle si el tipo se había identificado. Me dijo que no, no se había identificado, pero había sido muy serio en sus amenazas; ella me preguntó alarmada si en esas circunstancias yo pensaba regresar al país en los próximos días, tal como tenía planeado.

[...]

Por supuesto no regresé a San Salvador. (135-6)

According to Beatriz Cortez in *Estética del Cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra*, *El asco* set out to attack the pillars of Salvadoran national

identity: “La irreverencia con que Edgardo Vega, el protagonista de la novela, se refiere a esos valores que tradicionalmente se han considerado ‘sagrados’ de la identidad nacional, deja ese ideal de la identidad nacional que el lector pueda tener por los suelos” (252). In *Insensatez*, Castellanos Moya repeats this same approach of attacking what is held sacred but with a twist: this time he introduces a new set of taboos to break. Challenging the limits of what is culturally intelligible and acceptable in Latin America, this polemic novel of Castellanos Moya targets what the region holds dear, what has been lauded as its most significant achievement in recent decades: the struggle for human rights. In the context of a continental consensus concerning the importance of advocating for human rights, one of the ways that Castellanos Moya is able to break with this consensus and ridicule the implementation of memory politics and transitional justice measures advocated by numerous human rights groups is through the type of narrators that he employs. Their psychological and often social marginality allows them to enunciate less acceptable discourses with greater impunity. It is precisely their liminal status, the radical instability and unpredictability, that allows them to produce discourse that is outside the limits of what is socially acceptable or intelligible. The narrators of Castellanos Moya are all outsiders and exiles who have been displaced by violence and war. Not only have they been exposed to the violence that seem to permeate all levels of Central American society, but their own discourse itself is profoundly violent. The violence that they have experienced in their own lives, then, is mirrored by the discursive violence that they produce when attempting to account for themselves. In the novels of Castellanos Moya, this discursive violence, in turn, becomes the means through which these troubled narrators transgress established norms and conventions.

1.1.2. The Reterritorialization of the Poetics of Thomas Bernhard

1.1.2.1. “Exercise of Imitation”

Having identified the origin and the general development of the type of narrator employed in the early narrative of Castellanos Moya, we can now move on to identify some literary antecedents and possible external influences of his narrative project. The author himself makes this task a relatively easy one since he is quite transparent about his literary influences, not only within his nonfiction writings but occasionally within his novels as well. The subtitle of *El asco*, for instance, is “Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador.” Furthermore, in this novel the protagonist, Edgardo Vega, changes his name to Thomas Bernhard upon becoming a Canadian citizen, as a symbolic gesture to distance himself from his country of origin:

no solo cambié de nacionalidad sino también de nombre, me dijo Vega. Allá no me llamo Edgardo Vega, Moya, un nombre por lo demás horrible. ... Mi nombre es Thomas Bernhard, me dijo Vega, un nombre que tomé de un escritor austríaco al que admiro y que seguramente ni vos ni los demás simuladores de esta infame provincia conocen. (*El asco* 125-6)

The subtitle of the novel, then, has both a co-textual and an intertextual dimension, since it refers to elements within the text and without. In other words, it refers to the alter ego of the protagonist and indeed epitomizes his rejection of his national identity, while simultaneously referring to the appropriation of the aesthetic of Bernhard and its application to the national culture of El Salvador. The intertextual relationship between literary antecedent and Castellanos Moya’s appropriation of some of the techniques of the Austrian writer is addressed by the author himself in the “Nota del autor,” published in both the appendix of the 2007 Tusquets edition, as well as in the collection of nonfiction texts, *Roque Dalton: Correspondencia clandestine y otros*

ensayos (2021). Here, the author narrates the origin story of *El asco*: “Yo la había escrito un año y medio atrás, en la Ciudad de México, como un ejercicio de estilo en el que pretendía imitar al escritor austríaco Thomas Bernhard, tanto en su prosa, basada en la cadencia y la repetición, como en su tema, que contiene una crítica acerba a Austria y a su cultura” (“Nota del autor” 136). Apparently, Castellanos Moya does not suffer from the anxiety of influence that Bloom attributes to writers, since the literary model of *El asco* is a part of the work itself, in both the subtitle and the name of the protagonist. As I have been suggesting, this narrative experiment or “novelita de imitación,” which is how Castellanos Moya refers to *El asco*, has repercussions in the poetics of *Insensatez*. In order to specify the nature of this intertextual relationship within the narrative of Castellanos Moya, however, it is first necessary to determine what, precisely, he takes from Bernhard and how it affects his literary project, in *El asco* and beyond.

In the above passage from the “Nota del autor,” Castellanos Moya identifies both formal aspects (cadence, repetition) and thematic aspects (critique of the nation and national culture) of the narrative of Bernhard that directly influenced the poetics of *El asco*, as an openly intertextual “exercise in style.” The following paragraphs address how these aspects of the literature of Bernhard influence both *El asco* and subsequent novels, like *Insensatez*. In *The Novels of Thomas Bernhard: Form and Function* (2001), J.J. Long explores some of the idiosyncrasies of the Austrian authors narrative technique. Supporting his argument in a distinction originally laid out by early structuralists but later revisited by Jonathon Culler is *The Pursuit of Signs*, Long postulates a distinction “between story and discourse, the former being a chronological chain of events, and the latter being the representation of these events in a semiotic system” (Long 20).⁶

⁶ In *Pursuit of Signs*, Culler states that “there is always a basic distinction between a sequence of events and a discourse that orders and presents events... Of course, it is only reasonable to

He then proceeds to argue that Bernhard's prose can have a "disorienting effect" because it forefronts discourse at the expense of story (21). Mark Anderson, in the "Afterword" of *The Loser*, describes Bernhard's characteristic prose style as "a relentless inner monologue unbroken by paragraph markings, objective description, or external narrative events" (181). The verbose narrators of Bernhard produce an abundance of discourse, often repetitive and nonlinear, that doesn't always congeal into a coherent story and systematically "prevents the reader from ascertaining the sequence of events" that compose the plot, as Long argues (21). The principal feature of the novels of Bernhard, in Long's analysis, is that they "thwart the reconstruction of a definitive story from the information provided at the level discourse. This foregrounds the primacy of discourse, and any interpretation of these novels has to account for the functioning of a discourse whose effect is to cast radical doubt on the constitution of the fictional world" (21). Expecting to be able to infer a relatively stable series of events from the discourse, Bernhard's readers find only a smokescreen of discourse so thick that it is impossible to make out the contours of the plot, which recedes at their approach as they attempt to apprehend it.

The principal manner in which Bernhard achieves this grossly lop-sided ratio of story to discourse is through the type of narrators he employs. Categorically eschewing third-person narration as a part of this literary program, Bernhard employs exclusively first-person narrators in his novels (Long 18). The same is largely true of Castellanos Moya as well, whose predilection for first-person narrators is evident in novels like *La diabla en el espejo*, *El asco*, *El*

assume that events do occur in some order and that a description of events presupposes their prior existence, albeit fictive, of those events. In applying these assumptions about the world of texts of narrative we posit a level of structure which, by functioning as a nontextual given, enables us to treat everything in the discourse as a way of interpreting, valuing, and presenting this nontextual substratum" (171-2).

arma en el hombre and *Insensatez*, although he uses the third-person narrators in some sections of *La diáspora*, *Baile con serpientes*, and *Donde no estén ustedes*. It is not, however, the mere option of first-person narrators that foreground discourse but the form in which the narrator's discourse is presented. In many of the novels of Bernhard, the narrator's voice is presented as one continuous discourse, as in the case of *The Loser*, which does not contain one single paragraph break from beginning to end. Even in the case of a longer novel like *Correction*, the work is divided into two parts, each of which consists of an uninterrupted monologue by the same narrator. Given the explicit intertextual intention of Castellanos Moya's novel, it is no coincidence, then, that *El asco*, mirrors this format of one seamless stream of text.

The repetition of syntactic structures, of formulas of locution, and of key phrases and themes help the reader navigate through this vast expanse of discourse, which seems to float freely, without clear anchorage in plot structures. In fact, Long identifies syntactic and semantic repetition as the constructive principle of Bernhard's literary program: "intratextual and intertextual repetition is the essential constitutive feature of Bernhard's prose" (16). In addition, repetition serves to reinforce the conversational tone and oral character of the narrator's monologue.

Yet, it is not only the narrator's voice that finds its way into the uninterrupted stream of discourse: the speech of other characters gets reported through free indirect discourse within the narrator's monologue. In the words, the narrator presents the speech and even thoughts of other characters as he remembers them, reconstructed within a monologue that corresponds to his own voice. An excerpt from *The Loser* suffices to demonstrate how this mechanism functions within the novel:

Fundamentally we are capable of everything, equally fundamentally we fail at everything, he said, I thought. Our great philosophers, our great poets, shrivel down to a single successful sentence, he said, I thought, that's the truth, often we only remember only a so-called philosopher's hue, he said, I thought. (66)

The narrator, recalling conversation and interactions with other characters, incorporates their speech into his own monologue through the repetition of the syntagma, "he said, I thought." This formula introduces the approximated speech of a secondary character, a locution that is, in fact, filtered through the voice of the narrator. Castellanos Moya converts this technique into a central narrative mechanism of *El asco*. According to the paratextual "aviso" that precedes the main text, the novel consists in the approximate and not wholly faithful transcription by Moya, a writer, of a conversation that he had with a friend in a bar in San Salvador:

Edgardo Vega, el personaje central de este relato, existe: reside en Montreal bajo un nombre distinto –un nombre sajón que tampoco es Thomas Bernhard. Me comunicó sus opiniones seguramente con mayor énfasis y descarno del que contienen en este texto. Quise suavizar aquellos puntos de vista que hubieran escandalizado a ciertos lectores. (*El asco* 11)

In the novel that follows this warning to the reader, which can be read as part of the calculation indeterminacy of the novel, typical of the public scandals that characterize Thomas Bernhard, which Castellanos Moya is openly imitating, as he himself says in no unclear terms, the narrator, Moya, presents the discourse of the character of Vega/Bernhard. In much the same way as the novels of Bernhard, as analyzed in the passage from *The Loser* above, Castellanos Moya repeats a formula throughout the text, "me dijo Vega," to indicate that locution being reported by Moya in fact belongs to another character, as is immediately apparent in the opening lines:

Suerte que viniste, Moya, tenía mis dudas que vinieras, porque este lugar no le gusta a mucha gente en esta ciudad, hay gente a la que no le gusta para nada este lugar, Moya, por eso no estaba seguro de si vos ibas a venir, me digo Vega. A mí me encanta venir al final de la tarde, sentarme aquí en el patio, a beber un par de whiskies, tranquilamente, escuchando la música que le pido a Tolín, me dijo Vega, no sentarme en la barra, allá adentro, mucho calor en la barra, mucho calor allá dentro, es mejor aquí en el patio, con un trago y el jazz que pone Tolín. (*El asco* 15)

The repetition of the syntagm “me dijo Vega” serves to situate the locution of Vega within the text enunciated by Moya. Furthermore, the warning to the reader introduces a degree of calculated indeterminacy that functions in the same way as “I think” within the formula “he said, I think” in the novel of Bernhard. Whether it is the narrator of *The Loser* reporting a past conversation with a dead friend or Moya loosely narrating a conversation with Vega, the effect is that same: it is unclear to the reader what the precise relationship is between the reporter and what is being reported. Long analyzes this degree of removal from the represented world in terms of mediation. The narration is detained in an instance of mediation through the discourse of a removed (and often profoundly unstable) narrator, which in turn weakens the connection between the discourse and the events of the story or represented world. According to Long, this accounts for the relative independence of discourse with respect to story, which explains why “Bernhard’s prose is self-referential and has little (if any) connection to extratextual reality” (20). The reader’s attempts to construct a feasible story are frustrated, as this oblique and highly mediated form of narration leaves the reader with little other than the disorganized discourse of the narrator (which cannot be unequivocally attributed to the narrator but absorbs the voices of other characters as well).

It certainly is not difficult to identify this narrative strategy in *El asco*, a novel which offers little to nothing in terms of plot structures. Edgardo Vega has returned to El Salvador after the death of his mother for the purpose of settling her estate and meets in a bar with an old friend, Moya. In their conversation, the Vega's vitriolic diatribe jumps from one topic to another, from one target to another, demolishing them successively in a rapture of discursive violence, without any apparent logical or necessary connection, whether it be chronological, spatial, thematic, or otherwise. The only common thread that connects the apparently arbitrary assortment of topics and targets is the violence with which Vega vents his resentment and the intensity of the disgust that he feels for Salvadoran culture and traditions. Aside from brief, loosely connected episodes, anecdotes in which Vega tells Moya how he lost his passport, experienced acute panic over the thought of not being able to return to Canada, only to find his passport minutes later, or how he entered a local bar for a drink only to turn around and leave minutes in disgust minutes later on account of what he considers the unbearable musical tastes of the owners, aside from these episodes, narrated by Vega in brief bursts, the reader is left with little other than the violent discourse of Vega as mediated by Moya. What Long says about the narrative of Bernhard, then, holds true for Castellanos Moya's *El asco*: the predominance of discourse is achieved at the expense of the story; the plot is whittled down to the minimum scaffolding necessary to sustain a magnified discourse whose anchorage in the world (fictional and extratextual) is therefore debilitated.

A similar narrative technique can be observed in *Insensatez*, although the novel does not have the Bernhardian format of a single uninterrupted monologue. The twelve chapters are organized both chronologically and spatially according to two consecutive exiles of the protagonist, the first corresponding to his arrival in Guatemala City from El Salvador to edit to

the Remhi report, while the second corresponding to his exile in Germany on account of his belief that he is under surveillance and being targeted by the Guatemalan military. Furthermore, the plot has more substance and complexity than *El asco* or the novels of Bernhard since it is structured around two enigmas: whether the protagonists is indeed being targeted by the military and, secondly, whether there is really a conspiracy within The Office of the Archbishop to assassinate bishop Gerardi. Nonetheless, *Insensatez*, in its own way, privileges discourse over story. The events that compose the plot, along with any dialogue, pass entirely through the consciousness of a troubled narrator. There is no direct discourse, for example: the speech of all the other characters of the novel is reported to the reader through the narrator in his own words or thereby incorporated directly into the monologue. In addition, each individual chapter itself constitutes a separate monologue, even though each one corresponds to different chronological and spatial coordinates. Despite this variation, the result of the technique is that same as in *El asco* or the novels of Bernhard: there is an unbridgeable gap between the reporting and the reported. The access of the reader to the events of the represented world is heavily mediated by the narrator's discourse, so much so that the mediation itself to move to the forefront, overshadowing the story.

According to Long's analysis of the narrative of Bernhard, this narrative technique creates a greater degree of indeterminacy and "epistemological doubt" (17). In *Insensatez*, Castellanos Moya mobilizes a set of secondary resources to reinforce this doubt, thus foregrounding the discourse of his narrator. The narrator, for instance, remains anonymous throughout the novel. Furthermore, the name of the country, city, and project that he is editing are not positively identified but only alluded to obliquely, for explicit as these allusions may be. Without directly referring to Guatemala or its capital, the reader knows that the narrator moves

from El Salvador to a neighboring Central American country to work on the final correction of a human rights report before its publication (*Insensatez* 14-5). Without referring to the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala, the narrator refers to the “sede del Arzobispado, ubicada ni más ni menos que en la parte trasera de la Catedral Metropolitana” (15-6), or from that point onward what simply figures as the “palacio arzobispal” (21-2). The allusions are so specific, especially in the case of a character like Octavio Pérez Mena, a deliberately poorly disguised caricature for the real-life Guatemalan military general Otto Pérez Molina, that it wouldn’t be difficult for an informed reader to recuperate the references. Nonetheless, the calculated indeterminacy of proper names and places reinforces the distance between the reporting and the reported, the narrating and what is narrated.

Yet perhaps the biggest factor contributing to this epistemological doubt, that is, the difficulty in moving beyond the instance of mediation to establish a stable knowledge of the events narrated, is the psychological state of the narrator. Throughout the novel the narrator compulsively communicates the minutiae of his mental states, detailing his progressive deterioration. This unstable psychological state, in turn, affects his perception of the events. After his one-night stand with Fátima, for example, the narrator develops the hypothesis that her boyfriend, Jota Ce, an Uruguayan military officer who travels to Guatemala to participate in the Peace Accords, will use his connections in the Guatemalan military to take revenge on him, despite Fátima’s reassurance that she is in an open relationship with Jota Ce and that both she and Jota Ce have frequent “encuentros paralelos” (100). Fátima falls fast asleep beside him as the narrator’s anxiety reels out of control:

...comprendí que yo me había puesto a tiro del tal Jota Ce, que nada le costaría matarme y hacerme pagar a los milicos el costo de mi vida gracias al hecho de que yo era el

corrector de las mil cien cuartillas en las que documentaba el genocidio que éstos habían perpetrado contra sus mal llamados compatriotas, o lo que era aún peor, pensé revolviéndome en la cama, los sabuesos de la inteligencia militar, enterados ya de mi “encuentro paralelo” con la chica de Jota Ce, me liquidarían y convertirían mi muerte en un crimen pasional, un magnífico golpe a tres bandas que les permitiría cimbrar simultáneamente a los curas del Arzobispado, a los observadores militares de las Naciones Unidas y a los cooperantes españoles, todos de una u otra forma empeñados en fastidiar al ejército. (102)

Here, the narrator’s understanding of the situation is based more on suppositions, inferences, and projections than events. Furthermore, this interpretation of his affair with Fátima fuses, in the narrator’s thought, with another episode. In chapter ten, the narrator witnesses a private meeting between Johnny Silverman, Erick, and what appears to be General Octavio Pérez Mena, a well-known “masacrador de indígenas” (128). Although he is unable to hear the conversation, he suspects that it might indicate the presence of infiltrators within the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop and even a possible conspiracy. This interpretation, along with the conviction that he is under close surveillance by the military, ultimately cause the narrator to exile himself to Germany. Shortly after his arrival to Germany and the publication of the Remhi report, bishop Gerardi is assassinated under circumstances that seem to confirm the narrator’s suspicions. Furthermore, while some of the ruminations of the narrator seem improbable, there are nonetheless signs that some of his other interpretations may not be as wild as they appear since there are indeed indications that he is under surveillance and that the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop has been infiltrated by the military (140-5).

It is not possible, then, to determine where the madness of the narrator ends and where the madness of History begins. The reader is denied the comfort of a stable and coherent version of the events narrated and is left with little other than hunches, conjectures, and distorted versions. The categoric inability to verify the claims to truth of the propositions and anchor them in the events of the represented world lead to acute epistemological uncertainty. The effects that compose the plot lose definition and recede into a fog of discourse, so to speak. Neither the enigma of whether the narrator is under surveillance by the military nor the enigma of whether people on the inside of the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop participated in the conspiracy to assassinate bishop Gerardi get resolved. This indeterminacy on the level of the plot of *Insensatez* mirrors the predominance of discourse over story and the foregrounding of the instance of mediation on the level of the form of the work, which, as established, is a central feature of the poetics of Thomas Bernhard. Thus, we can observe how these features, originally rehearsed in *El asco*, as a part of an experiment in style, which was partially influenced by earlier experiments in narrative technique, such as the fourth section of *La diáspora*, and partially influenced by the example of Bernhard, are expanded and applied in a more subtle manner and with a different set of themes in *Insensatez*.

1.1.2.2. Theme and Variation: From Bernhard's Austria to Castellanos Moya's El Salvador

In the previous section, our discussion focused on how the narrative technique of Thomas Bernhard influenced first the poetics of *El asco*, as acknowledged by Castellanos Moya himself in the "Nota del autor," and posteriorly *Insensatez*. This debt to Bernhard manifests itself principally in Castellanos Moya's preferred mode of narration, that is, an extended monologue of an unstable narrator or character. J.J. Long's analysis of the narrative project of Bernhard

provides some insight into the specific mechanisms of this literary technique, appropriated and adapted by Castellanos Moya to fit his own literary and ideological needs. A main feature of this narrative approach consists in foregrounding the discourse of a narrator or character in such a way that discourse takes precedence over concerns of the story. The verbose and vertiginous discourse of the narrator impedes the reader from apprehending, with any degree of certainty, the specific content of the story. The instance of mediation of the narrator and the degree of distortion involved with this mediation blocks access to what is narrated in such a way that discourse, as an end upon itself, becomes the center of the work. The degree of epistemological uncertainty that this narrative technique produces is then reinforced by the distorted perception of an explicitly unreliable and psychologically unstable narrator. In his “Nota del autor,” however, Castellanos Moya acknowledges a second component of his debt to Bernhard, the thematic component, “que contiene una crítica acerba a Austria y su cultura” (136). The following paragraphs of this section shift the attention away from the structural aspects towards the influence of Bernhard on the thematic aspects of *El asco*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, and *Insensatez*.

With the exception of *El arma en el hombre* and *La diabla en el espejo*, all the novels of Castellanos Moya analyzed up to this point, which is to say *La diáspora*, *El asco*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, and *Insensatez*, share a common plot structure: a Salvadoran protagonist struggles to come to terms with the political and cultural situation of his country from the distance of an exile, self-imposed or otherwise. *El asco*, for its part, presents a slight variation on this theme since Edgardo Vega, also known as Thomas Bernhard, has returned to El Salvador after eighteen years of voluntary exile in Canada following the death of his mother. As it turns out, this is the same general structure that Bernhard uses for many of his novels. In *The Loser*, for example, the

narrator returns to Austria from a self-imposed exile in Madrid after the suicide of his close friend, Wertheimer. In *Correction*, for its part, the narrator returns to Austria from England to stay with his friend, Hoeller, after the suicide of their mutual friend, Roithamer. There is a further similarity between *Correction* and *El asco* since both narrators are faced with the task of managing the estate of their deceased loved ones. This general plot structure provides the narrator the opportunity to express his impressions of returning to a country that he had abandoned out of disgust. The monologue of the narrator, then, is organized around these disparate impressions, which only serve to reignite a deep-seated bitterness and hatred towards his native country and its national culture.

Glenn was charmed *by the magic* of this town for three days, then he suddenly saw that its magic, as they call it, was rotten, that basically its beauty is disgusting and that the people living in this disgusting beauty are vulgar. The climate of the lower Alps makes for emotionally disturbed people who fall victim to cretinism at a very early age and who *in time* become *malevolent*, I said. Whoever lives here knows this if he's honest, and whoever comes here realized it after a short while and must get away before it's too late, before he becomes just like these cretinous inhabitants, these emotionally disturbed Salzburger who kill off everything that isn't yet like them with their cretinism.

(Bernhard, *Correction* 11-2)

Placed next to a passage from *El asco*, the influence of Bernhard on Castellanos Moya's "experiment in style" is at once apparent. Vega's interlocutor, Moya, left El Salvador during the war but decided to return after the Peace Accords were signed between the military and the guerrilla. It is not difficult to recognize echoes of Bernhard's narrative style in Edgardo Vega's

incapacity to understand why anyone would voluntarily live in El Salvador, as well as his vitriol against the inhabitants of his hometown:

Yo no entiendo qué hacés vos aquí, Moya, ésa es una de las cosas que te quería preguntar, ésa es una de las curiosidades que más me inquietan, cómo alguien que no ha nacido aquí, como alguien que puede irse a vivir a otro país, a un lugar mínimamente decente, prefiere quedarse en esta asquerosidad, explícame, me dijo Vega. Vos naciste en Tegucigalpa, Moya, y te pasaste los diez años de la guerra en México, por eso no entiendo que hacés aquí, como se te pudo ocurrir regresar a vivir, a radicarte en esta ciudad, qué te trajo una vez más a esta mugre. San Salvador es horrible, y la gente que la habita es peor, es una raza podrida, la guerra trastornó todo, y si ya era espantosa antes de que yo me largara, si ya era insoportable hace dieciocho años, ahora es vomitiva, Moya, una ciudad vomitiva, donde sólo pueden vivir personas realmente siniestras, o estúpidas, por eso no me explico qué hacés vos aquí, como podés estar entre gente tan repulsiva...

(Castellanos Moya *El asco* 25-6)

In addition to shared formal features, such as the use of repetition and the tendency towards lengthy sentences in an oral register, both monologues share a common theme: hatred towards the Nation. The antifoundational discourse that underpins the monologues attributes an ontological evilness to the place of birth of these deeply resentful characters. It is worth pointing out, however, that the potential meaning of this antifoundational gesture is subject to modification when it is appropriated by Castellanos Moya and reterritorialized in the context of Central America. What can be interpreted as a critique of the hypocrisy of the Austrian bourgeoisie in the period after the Second World War, in particular of its unacknowledged antisemitism and complicity with the Nazis, does not necessarily translate unproblematically to

the context of postwar El Salvador (Anderson 177). For that matter, the nationalism being questioned is certainly not the same in the case of a European state after the period of nationalisms that culminated in the Second World War as in the case El Salvador in the nineties, recovering from a civil war and besieged by a wave of austerity measures, deregulation, and privatization (van der Borgh 36). Despite its elitism and hostility towards popular culture and customs, the caustic anti-foundationalism and antiauthoritarianism of Bernhard's characters might even be considered progressive within his specific sociohistorical context. As a caricature of the self-hating Latin American middle class, the anti-foundationalism of Castellanos Moya's Edgardo Vega appears to represent an internalization of the values of the center over those of the periphery. According to Beatriz Cortez's analysis of the character:

En la relación binaria centro / periferia Vega se autoconcibe como parte del centro. Una de las estrategias que Vega utiliza para posicionarse en el Centro es recalcar su nivel educativo. Vemos que Vega sigue siendo víctima de su rígido concepto de la identidad salvadoreña, pues hace un esfuerzo por definir sus intereses y sus gustos artísticos y culturales con base en su diferencia ante esa identidad estereotípica de lo salvadoreño que él mantiene fija en su mente. ... La principal estrategia que Vega utiliza para negar su salvadoreñidad es colocar al resto de salvadoreños en la periferia y diferenciarse de ellos con base en cualquier detalle posible, y de la manera más frecuente posible. Los elementos que justifican su posición como parte de ese centro son tan frágiles que Vega se ve obligado a agredir a aquellos que le rodean. (252-3)

The discourse of Edgardo Vega allows no middle terms. His values are absolute, unequivocal: whatever is associated with Canada and the First World is valued positively, while that which is

associated with El Salvador is valued negatively. This use of hyperbole lends an interpretation of *El asco* as satire, which is precisely the conclusion of Cortez:

Finalmente cabe mencionar que la novela *El asco* fue recibida por numerosos lectores como una ofensa, como un insulto a la identidad nacional e incluso como una falta de patriotismo del autor. Desafortunadamente, estos lectores han aceptado el discurso de Vega y se sienten ofendidos por la visión del mundo que este personaje propone. La novela permite formas alternativas de comprender su mensaje, pues podría decirse que su más fuerte crítica se dirige a quienes se reconocen en Vega, es decir, aquellos salvadoreños que se definen con base en su diferencia ante el resto de los salvadoreños que ellos consideran incultos. En otras palabras, su crítica más dura es hacia aquellos salvadoreños que niegan el carácter diverso de la identidad. (Cortez 258-9)

The polemic surrounding the novel, then, stems from a simple incapacity to distinguish between the enunciated and enunciation. In other words, the discourse of Vega is attributed to Castellanos Moya, the author, and considered to express his points of view. Yet, the work itself resists this interpretation since there is a character in the novel, Moya, whose name and background coincide with the biographical information of the author. Furthermore, in the novel Moya serves as a counterpoint to Vega and is often subject to his criticism (Castellanos Moya *El asco* 25; 85; 87). If nothing else, the problems that the publication of the novel caused the author, from death threats to cancelled publicity events (*Roque Dalton* 139-40), attest to the efficacy of the Castellanos Moya's use of hyperbole and discursive violence. Remember that the discourse of el Turco, the antecedent of Vega, was admittedly characterized as venomous, unrelenting, resentful, cruel, and obsessive (*La diáspora* 33). *Insensatez* replicates this same use of hyperbole and discursive violence, with the difference that the cynicism and irritability of the character is not

directed against cultural nationalism in El Salvador but the Guatemalan military and hypocrisy of human rights activism, both in Central American and beyond. Although Castellanos Moya dispenses with the format of a single uninterrupted monologue, breaking the narrator's discourse into twelve discrete chapters, the influence of Bernhard is nonetheless evident in the hyperbolic vehemence and verbosity of the discourse that constitutes the center of the work. Furthermore, *Insensatez* shares a set of secondary themes with the narrative of Bernhard, such as exile, violence, solitude, and death.

1.1.3. “Corrosive” Literature: The Antecedent of Fernando Vallejo

For as illuminating it may be to explore the intertextual relationship between Thomas Bernhard and Horacio Castellanos Moya, it is not necessary to go all the way to Austria to identify literary antecedents and models when, as it turns out, there is one close at hand, right here within the realm of contemporary Latin American letters. I am referring to the Colombian novelist Fernando Vallejo, whose narrative sets a precedent that influenced the aesthetics of Castellanos Moya and, in particular, *Insensatez*.

By the time that *La diáspora* was published in 1989, Vallejo had already published four novels with a narrative technique that bears much resemblance to the poetics of Bernhard outlined in the previous section, ten by the time that *Insensatez* was published. In “Orfandad y herencia literarias”, in *Roque Dalton: Correspondia clandestina y otros ensayos*, Castellanos Moya addresses the challenges facing writers in the post-Boom period of Latin American literature. He describes the difficulty of discovering his identity as a writer and of developing his own literary project, a process that took place within the tension between “literary orphanhood” and “literary inheritance” (*Roque Dalton* 127). While Thomas Bernhard figures as one of his

influences within world literature, within the narrower context of Latin America Castellanos Moya expresses his admiration for the narrative of Fernando Vallejo and identifies with this author's response to writing literature in a post-Boom epoch. If Boom writers sought to consolidate a regional and continental identity through totalizing works, a writer like Vallejo positions himself within the tradition of Latin American literature precisely by challenging these aesthetic and ideological precepts: "Ante la creación de un universo redondo y cerrado como lo fue el Macondo de García Márquez, la reacción de Fernando Vallejo es escribir cortas novelas provocadores y corrosivas, en las que impugna y se hace mofa de 'lo colombiano'" (*Roque Dalton* 185). Not only does Castellanos Moya share Vallejo's predilection for short novels – "yo soy escritor de novelas cortas," he states in the abovementioned "Nota del autor" (138) – but his use of "corrosive" narrators tends to be as scandalous and provocative as those his Colombian counterpart, judging from the reception of *El asco*. Just as the narrators of both Bernhard and Castellanos Moya, those of Fernando Vallejo tend to be exiles who exhibit an unmitigated hatred for their home countries. In the following passage of *La Virgen de los sicarios* (1994), representative of the discourse of Vallejo's first-person narrators, we find the same antifoundational discursive violence presented in the passages of Bernhard and Castellanos Moya analyzed above:

Mis conciudadanos padecen de una vileza congénita, crónica. Ésta es una raza ventajosa, envidiosa, rencorosa, embustera, traicionera, ladrona: la peste humana en su más extrema ruindad. ¿La solución para acabar con la juventud delincuente? Exterminen la niñez. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 31)

This “corrosive” tone, which I am characterizing as discursive violence, is not the exception but the rule. It remains consistent throughout the novel (and indeed runs through the entirety of the narrative of Vallejo):

Íbamos mi niño y yo abriéndonos paso a empellones por entre esa gentuza agresiva, fea, abyecta, esa raza depravada y subhumana, la monstruoteca. Esto que veis aquí marcianos es el presente de Colombia y lo que les espera a todos si no para la avalancha. Jirones de frases hablando de robos, de atracos, de muertos, de asaltos (aquí a todo el mundo lo han atracado o matado una vez por lo menos) me llegaban a los oídos pautadas por las infaltables delicadezas de ‘malparido’ e ‘hijueputa’ sin las cuales esta raza fina y sutil no puede abrir la boca. Y ese olor a manteca rancia y a fritangas y a gases de cloaca... ¡Qué es! ¡Qué es! ¡Qué es! Se ve. Se siente. El pueblo está presente. (71)

Placed aside Edgardo Vega’s description of the inhabitants of San Salvador as a “raza podrida” composed of “gente repulsiva” (*El asco* 25), analyzed above, it is clear how the vitriolic discourse of both narrators is framed in racial terms that animalize the “pueblo.” The hatred of the Nation is unmitigated and accepts no middle ground, and the critique is articulated in ontological and even biological terms:

De mala sangre, de mala raza, de mala índole, de mala ley; no hay mezcla más mala que la del español con el indio y el negro: producen saltapatrasas o sea changos, simios, monos, micos con cola para que con ella se vuelven a subir el árbol. (Vallejo, *La virgen de los sicarios* 97-98)

It is important to point out that, for as cruel as they are, Bernhard’s narrators do not frame their critiques of national culture in racial terms but rather in terms of class, which is to say that, more than racism, they exhibit a pronounced elitism. In Thomas Bernhard’s *Comic Materialism*:

Class, Art, Socialism in Post-War Austria, Russell Harrison argues that Bernhard's narrators are marked by a "reactionary ideology" that expressed a pronounced "anti-proletarian" sentiment, which only began to subside near the end of his career (8). The narrators of Vallejo and Castellanos Moya's Edgardo Vega share this elitism, which is grounded in their artificial separation from the rest of their societies based on education and taste, whether it be musical, culinary, or otherwise (Cortez 253). Whether it is Vega's tirade against *pupusas* in *El asco* (Castellanos Moya 66-7), the narrator of *La Virgen de los sicarios* venting his disgust for cumbia (Vallejo 20), or the narrator of Bernhard's *The Loser* virulently attacking Austrians' taste for sausage (59), their elitism is based upon their condition as self-proclaimed outsiders and voluntary exiles.

Ideologically, of course, this anti-popular sentiment is an inversion of the politics of the Boom. The obligation, explicit or implicit, of writers and intellectuals to side with the *pueblo* and represent the experiences and tribulations of Latin America's popular classes, an obligation which characterized the Boom era, has ceded ground, in the case of Vallejo, to a consistently and openly antipopular sentiment (Gliman 29-33). The extenuation and ostentation of elitism in Vallejo, as in Castellanos Moya's *El asco*, is a sharp departure from the intentional erasure of elitism of writers in the sixties and seventies (Gilman 384). If they differ on the social and political responsibilities of the public intellectual, the gender politics of Castellanos Moya and Vallejo are more in line with those of their Boom predecessors, at least according to Claudia Gilman, who describes the Boom as "una 'fratría,' 'hermandad,' o 'cofradía...,' sin duda, una familia patriarcal" (387). While adhering to precepts of the sexual revolution, admitting sexual agency to women, the Boom 'brotherhood' still did not acknowledge the social agency of women, especially with the patriarchal Republic of Letters:

Si bien hubo muchas escritoras e intelectuales, los grandes nombres de las primeras filas conservaron a sus mujeres en el interior de la familia patriarcales, y si los nombres de algunas se hicieron conocidas fue en calidad de esposas solícitas. ... En la época, otra de las 'revoluciones' pronosticadas fue la sexual: surgían las condiciones por las cuales las mujeres podían controlar su propio cuerpo y su agenda reproductiva, participar de la formación de opinión y militar activamente. El futuro anunciaba el nacimiento de un hombre nuevo en un presente en el que una mujer nueva se encontraba disponible y nacida. No se la convocó. (Gilman 386-7)

In the decades that passed since the Boom tapered out in the late sixties and early seventies, feminist movements throughout the world continued to make significant advances in challenging the patriarchal aspects of both literature as an institution and in the representation of women in literary works (Culler 140). You would not know it, however, by reading the narrative of Vallejo and Castellanos Moya. As mentioned in the preceding section, the narrators that Castellanos Moya employs in *La diáspora*, *El asco*, *El arma en el hombre*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, y *Insensatez* are ostentatiously misogynist. The cast of characters of these novels are almost exclusively male, and the few female characters that do appear are often reduced to their capacity to gratify the sexual desires of the male characters, as previously exemplified in the discussion about Pilar and Fátima in *Insensatez*. The literary project of Fernando Vallejo, characterized as it is by a poetics of misogyny, is an antecedent within contemporary Latin American literature of the narrators and protagonists of Castellanos Moya. The homosociability between the male characters in the novels of Vallejo often goes hand in hand with a flagrant contempt towards women. The narrator of *El desbarrancadero*, for example, expresses outrage over having to do chores that he does not deem appropriate for a man:

Yo lavaba, planchaba, barría, trapeaba, ordenaba, como si tuviera vagina y no un pene, y lo que yo lavaba, planchaba, barría, trapeaba y ordenaba, la Loca lo ensuciaba, arrugaba, empolvaba, empuercaba, desordenaba. (Vallejo, *El desbarrancadero* 54)

This rage against the character's mother, or "La Loca," stems from her inability to behave according to prescribed gender norms, which coincide with the expectations of the narrator:

La Loca era más dañina que un sida, ...era el filo del cuchillo, el negror de lo negro, el ojo del huracán, la encarnación de Dios-Diablo... Sus infinitas manos de caos se entendían hasta los más perdidos rincones de la casa... Todo intento de orden de parte nuestra, de comida, de limpieza, de mediana civilidad es esa casa que no era suya sino de todos, con sus manos de caos, con su espíritu anárquico, con su genio endemoniado la Loca nos boicoteaba. ¿Ordenamos? Desordeneaba. ¿Limpiábamos? Ensuciaba. ¿Cocinábamos? Comía. (65)

The excess of discursive violence is concentrated in the epithet of the narrator's mother, who once introduced is thereafter known only as "la Loca." It goes without saying that the attribute of irrationality to women is a hallmark of misogynist ideologies. For as intelligent that the narrator purports to be, it is puzzling that he cannot figure out why a woman who gave birth and raised twenty-three children might need a little help with the housework, even if he is unwilling to concede that it is the responsibility of women, for having vaginas, to cook and clean. Although concentrated in the figure of the mother, the narrator's visceral hatred applies to all women, especially as regards their reproductive capacity:

Empanturradas de animalidad bruta, de lascivia ciega, se van inflando durante nueve meses como globos deformes que no logran despegar y alzar vuelo. Y así, retenidas por la fuerza de gravedad, preñadas, grávidas, salen a la calle y a plena luz del sol a caminar

como barriles de dos patas. Ante un seto florecido se detienen. Canta un mirlo, vuela un sinsonte, zumba un moscardón. Ésa dizque es la vida, la felicidad, la dicha, que un pájaro se coma a un gusano. Entones, si el crimen máximo fuera la máxima virtud, mirando en el vacío con una sonrisita enigmática ponen las condenadas cara de Gioconda. ¡Vacas cónicas, vacas puercas! ¡Barrigonas! ¡Degeneradas! ¡Cabronas! Saco un revólver de la cabeza y a tiros les desinflo la panza. (168)

While the list of insults directed at women would be too long to enumerate here, the sympathy and compassion that the narrator denies the female characters is squandered lavishly on the male ones, as in the following characterization of the father figure:

Hasta el final conservó el optimismo, su fe en la vida, su buen humor. Fue un santo. Veintitrés hijos engendró en una sola mujer, alegremente, sin pensarlo mucho, y se murió dejándonos una casa en el barrio de Laureles, tres vaquitas en un pegujal, y en el alma un recuerdo desolado. (79)

While the mother is the default target of the narrator's rage, the father is above all criticism. The same goes for the narrator's brother, Darío, whose anarchic spirit, so harshly condemned in the mother, is consistently praised. The disorganization, laziness, lethargy, impulsiveness, and crudeness that caused so much anger in his mother only serve to endear him to Darío, who he describes endearingly as a "verdadera furia de destrucción" (18). In fact, the narrator often justifies and enables the excesses of his brother, as in the following scene:

-Viví, Daría, Fumá, tomá, pichá, que la vida es corta. La vida es para gastársela uno en el aquí y ahora, dijo Horacio, digo yo.

Así transcurrió el segundo año, según mis consejos, según mis designios: desafortadamente. ¡Pero qué desafuero! Con decirles que yo mismo me asusté y le dije:

-Hermanito, basta, que ya estás más papista que el Papa.

¿Basta? ¿Decirle ‘basta’ a un huracán? El huracán para cuando se acaba. (46)

Whether it is el Turco commiserating with Juan Carlos in *La diáspora*, Vega conversing with Moya in a bar in *El asco*, or José Pindonga identifying with Alberto Aragón in *Donde no estén ustedes*, the novels of Castellanos Moya are filled with similar examples of a sociability between men that is based on the exclusion of women and a considerable dose of anger and resentment directed towards them. Having said this, it is important to insist on the distinction between enunciation and enunciated and thus avoid attributing the discourse of a character of a work of fiction to the figure of the author, especially considering that the flagrancy of the misogyny of the characters of both Vallejo and Castellanos Moya is situated within a poetics of excess, hyperbole, and even the grotesque. The literary projects of these authors betray a will to polemize, transgress, provoke, and challenge the discursive limits of the aesthetics and politics of both the Boom and testimonial Latin American literature (Castellano Moya, *Roque Dalton* 170). The elitism and misogyny of narrators like el Turco and Vega, then, can be interpreted as symptomatic of a conscious break with both the politics of the Boom and the poetics of testimony. In *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, Jean Franco signals the possibility of interpreting *La virgen de los sicarios* in precisely this manner. In this seminal study of Latin American post-Boom literatures, Franco argues that Vallejo’s narrator postulates a “lettered” reader who is closer to the narrator than to the *sicarios* and who is implicitly invited to identify with the ideas and values of the narrator (224-5). Identifying on at least some level with the narrator, the reader witnesses a discourse that she partly shares taken to such a hyperbolic extreme that it becomes unacceptable, thus exposing the hypocrisy of the reader’s own sentiments and positions. Conversely, the reader may reject the narrator, differentiating herself

from a discourse to which she is made complicit due to the narrator's mode of address. In the absence of any judgment or condemnation of the discursive violence of these characters, the reader must choose whether or not to interpret the text as irony:

...we can read the denunciations ironically as a reflection on the narrator; but, by doing so, he becomes the most obscene character of the novel, the 'invisible man,' the one who gets an erotic charge and vicarious pleasure out of his killers-lovers, whilst absolving himself and those readers who fall into the same position of irresponsibility. As a letrado, he is 'our ally,' 'mon semblante, mon frere.' The question is whether he is deliberately forcing us to face the 'fascist within' or whether he expects our complicity. (Franco 225)

This is the same technique that Castellanos Moya uses in several of the novels, most notably in *El asco*, *El arma en el hombre*, and *Insensatez*. In this sense, the poetics of Vallejo, serves as an antecedent for these works.

Despite these affinities, however, it is of crucial importance to make a distinction between the manner in which each author narrates violence. What is at stake in this distinction is the signification of the violence that is being narrated or represented. Franco includes the novels of Vallejo in the group of "contemporary texts that are postapocalyptic, reflecting the horror of the middle classes as their whole cultural world implodes" (222). The representation of violence is a central feature of this group of texts, which are "removed from any loyalty to a national or family structure, or from any system of ethics, individualism is turned into indiscriminate violence and, in the case of the *sicarios*, into self-destruction" (224). In *Contra la violencia: El realismo brutal de la nueva narrativa latinoamericana* (2019), María Alonso Alonso, for her part, includes Vallejo in the subgenre of "la novela sicaresca latinoamericana," which she describes as a "grupo de novelas que surge de la realidad social y de la situación de emergencia que se vive en distintos

países” (244; 247).⁷ Literature like that of Vallejo, then, narrates the social violence that characterizes the moment of triumphal neoliberalism in Latin American after the defeat the revolutionary movements of the sixties, seventies, and eighties. The novels of Castellanos Moya, in contrast, narrate explicitly political expressions of violence, such as political assassinations, dictatorship, civil war, crimes against humanity, ethnocide, and the crimes of Latin American revolutionary movements. The violence in the novels of Castellanos Moya has an explicitly political dimension, and his narrative production itself is an attempt of decipher the signification of that violence and its effect on the present.⁸ This relationship to the violence being narrated is much different from other expressions of violence in contemporary Latin American literature, such as the *narconovela* and the *novela sicaresca*, which is often gratuitous and only loosely associated to the collapse of social and civil institutions (Franco 224).

⁷ Alonso Alonso defines this subgenre in the following manner:

Como aquellos pícaros [de las novelas picaresca del Siglo de Oro], el sicario es un personaje casi anónimo sin un pasado claramente definido y que aspira a mejorar su condición a través del dinero fácil, pero que fracasa en el intento. Como la picaresca y la narcoliteratura, la sicaresca también es literatura social ya que el devenir de la acción ilustra la injusticia de la que son víctimas unos personajes que se ven excluidos de la sociedad en la que viven. Sin embargo, al contrario que la narcoliteratura en la que la figura del narco es omnipresente y protagonista indiscutible de la trama, en la novela sicaresca el capo pasa casi desapercibido ya que la narración se centra en los personajes subalternos. (*Contra la violencia...* 245)

⁸ In “La identidad trágica,” published in *Roque Dalton: Correspondia clandestine y otros ensayos*, Castellanos recognizes this distinction when he refers to “dos violencias” (120). In this text, he recognizes “two different periods of collective violence,” which corresponds to the civil war and the postwar period respectively: “Dos periodos muy distintos de violencia colectiva, pero similares en el sentido de que los miles de asesinatos y desapariciones forzadas, y también la migración masiva, han destruido la familia, la comunidad, el tejido de la sociedad” (120). While the first period of collective violence is explicitly political in nature, the second has to do with the disintegration of social institutions in the postwar epoch and the emergence of widespread corruption and criminal violence. The novel of Castellanos Moya, then, corresponds to this first type of violence and its persistent effects on the present, while the *novela sicaresca* and the *narconovela* corresponds to the second type of collective violence.

Having established this important distinction between the Vallejo's *novela sicaresca* and Castellanos Moya's approach to narrating violence that is explicitly political in nature, there is nonetheless a strong affinity between their respective narrative projects. Whether it be the predilection for verbose and vitriolic first-person monologues that provoke the reader or the pronounced misogyny, profound cynicism, and uncompromised atheism of the narrators, the narrative of Castellanos Moya meanders down some of the same paths previously opened by Vallejo. Recognizing this contribution as part of a "la inherencia literaria" that "cada autor elige," Castellanos Moya appropriates some of the narrative techniques of Vallejo and repurposes them within his own narrative program (Castellanos Moya, *Roque Dalton* 184).

1.2. Thematic Development within the Production of Castellanos Moya from *La diáspora* to *Insensatez*

1.2.1. Disbelief and Corruption in Post-Civil War Central America

The previous sections of this chapter trace the development of narrative technique of Castellanos Moya from *La diáspora* to *Insensatez*, and recuperate some of the literary antecedents of his poetics, both within Latin America and abroad, for the purpose of identifying the origin of the formal innovations of the early narrative of the author. The objective of the present section, in a similar manner, is to trace the development of the thematic aspects of Castellanos Moya's early narrative to its culmination in *Insensatez*. Due to their importance to the present investigation, however, two thematic developments will be given a separate treatment, with the attention that they deserve, in chapters two and three respectively: 1) the foundational break between Latin American intellectuals and revolution dramatized in *La diáspora*, and 2) the flagrant violations of the aesthetic and political norms of testimonio and

memory politics in *Insensatez*. What begins as disenchantment with Latin American revolutionary politics develops into scepticism regarding the postwar human rights movement and an iconoclastic ridicule of memory discourse. In the thematic development of the novels of Castellanos Moya leading up to and including *Insensatez*, it is possible to identify a series of different operations in his treatment of the politics and culture of the Latin American revolutionary Left: the framing of a political ideology of revolution in religious terms; disenchantment with revolutionary politics expressed as a loss of faith; the exposure of the crimes of the Left; critique of the cultural politics of the Latin American Left; and scepticism towards human rights and memory movements, which purport to establish continuity, in an epoch of democracy, with the general values of the ‘revolutionary generation.’

In his essay, “El asesinato político y sus derivaciones,” published in 2021, Castellanos Moya, while commenting on feeling pressured to put his narrative project to the service of radical political causes, signals an underlying affinity between religious and political ideologies:

Hubo al menos dos demandas ideológicas que crearon moda en aquellos años: la primera consistía en poner la obra literaria al servicio de la revolución, a que su contenido expresara la polarización típica a la que conducen las ideologías políticas y religiosas: de este lado, nosotros, los buenos, los revolucionarios, los campesinos, los obreros, los intelectuales, que estamos al lado de la historia; del otro lado, los malos, los reaccionarios, los burgueses y sus milicos, los que serían borrados de la historia. (170)

One of the manners in which Castellanos Moya expresses his resistance to this pressure and his incomppliance with this exigence is precisely by framing the values and worldviews of the activists and (ex) militants of *La diaspora* in religious terms. As the name of the novel suggests, it stages a conflict between Central American intellectuals and revolutionary politics in which

many of the former end up abandoning the latter on account of its intransigence, irrational adherence to dogma, intolerance towards critical thinking, and illegitimate uses of violence. The consequences of this originary break between Latin American public intellectuals and revolution is so important for both the literary project of the author and for the representation of political violence in Latin American literature in general that it merits a separate analysis. The following chapter of this investigation, then, is dedicated to this foundational break with the revolutionary Left and its subsequent consequences for both the public functions of the Latin American intellectual and the relationship between the work of literature and politics in the region. If *La diáspora* exposes the moral disintegration of the Left during the Salvadoran civil war and narrates the subsequent crisis of “faith” in revolution of many Central American intellectuals on the political Left, *El asco* continues some of these themes, elaborating and adapting them to emerging postwar perspectives and sensibilities. While *La diáspora* is primarily concerned with the failure of the revolutionary Left to live up to its lofty ideals, *El asco* extends this critique into postwar politics. Without losing sight of the crimes of the revolutionary politics groups during the war, *El asco* exposes how the inability to live up to its ideals and values takes on new forms in democratic postwar El Salvador, namely, corruption. The critique of revolution articulated in *La diáspora* is compounded by this critique of corruption in the postwar epoch since there are many ex-revolutionaries in the ranks of the corrupt:

[L]o peor son esos miserables políticos de izquierda, Moya, esos que antes fueron guerrilleros, esos que antes se hacían llamar comandantes, éstos son los que más asco me producen, nunca creí que hubiera tipos tan farsantes, tan rastrosos, tan viles, una verdadera asquerosidad de sujetos, luego que mandaron a la muerte a tanta gente, luego que mandaron al sacrificio a tanto ingenuo, luego que se cansaron de repetir esas

estupideces que llamaban sus ideales, ahora se comportan como las ratas más voraces, una ratas que cambiaron el uniforme militar del guerrillero por un saco y la corbata, unas ratas que cambiaron sus arengas de justicia por cualquier migaja que cae de la mesa de los ricos, unas ratas que lo único que siempre quisieron fue apoderarse del Estado para saquearlo, unas ratas realmente asquerosas, Moya, me da lástima pensar en todos esos imbéciles que murieron a causa de estas ratas, me produce una tremenda lástima pensar en esos miles de imbéciles que se hicieron matar por seguir las órdenes de estas ratas, en esas docenas de miles de imbéciles, que fueron a la muerte entusiasmados por seguir las órdenes de estas ratas que ahora sólo piensan en conseguir la mayor cantidad de dinerito posible para parecerse a los ricos que antes combatían, me dijo Vega. (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 33-4)

It is clear in this passage that there are two separate critiques, albeit related. Vega holds the politicians on the political Left, formerly part of the guerrilla, accountable for crimes committed and lives lost during the war. This critique corresponds to their past conduct. At the same time, there is another critique, that of their current conduct, which corresponds to the present of enunciation, that is, the early postwar years. In this new context, according to Vega, the guerrilleros-turned-politicians are indistinguishable from the ones who formerly had been their enemies in their thirst for power and privilege. The charge is the same as the one articulated in *La diáspora* (107) with the difference that in this new context it undergoes a change of sign: it now longer signifies only war crimes but corruption as well.

Another theme that is first articulated in *La diáspora* and later developed in *El asco* is the homology between religion and revolution. In his long monologue, in his encounter with Moya

in a bar in downtown San Salvador, Edgardo Vega touches upon the topic of tragic death of a childhood friend of theirs, Olmedo:

¿Te acordás de Olmedo, Moya, aquel compañero del Liceo, un estúpido que siempre sacaba excelentes notas y trataba de quedar bien con los hermanos maristas, uno que parecía cura, un tipo realmente aburrido e indeseable por su exacerbado deseo de quedar bien con los curas? Fue el único de nuestra clase que se fue con la guerrilla... (34)

This passage could have easily been taken out of one of the rants of el Turco in *La diáspora*. As with Juan Carlos, Gabriel, Quique, and el Negro in Castellanos Moya's first novel, the figure of the priest mixes with that of the guerrillero in the character of Olmedo. Furthermore, as with his counterparts in *La diáspora*, it is his excess of faith that puts Olmedo in danger:

...el único de la clase que murió en las filas de la guerrilla, el cretino de Olmedo. ¿Y sabés por lo peor? Lo mataron sus propios camaradas, lo fusilaron en San Vicente, estas ratas que ahora se han convertido en políticos lo mandaron a matar, lo fusilaron por traidor, al cretino de Olmedo, el único de nuestra clase que murió en la guerrilla, por imbécil, ya se le miraba desde el colegio, ¿te acordás?, un tipo que por su ingenuidad acabó fusilado por órdenes de estas ratas, me dijo Vega. Me lo contaron recientemente: Olmedo fue uno de los centenares de ingenuos asesinados por estas ratas bajo la acusación de ser infiltrados del enemigo, centenares asesinados por sus propios jefes bajo el cargo de traición ... Es horrible pensar la alegría con que la gente se hizo matar en este país, la facilidad con que miles fueron al sacrificio como borregos enarbolando sus causas vomitivas, dispuestos a morir por sus causas vomitivas, me dijo Vega. (34-5)

It is not difficult to see in the character of Olmedo a figuration of the Salvadoran poet, Roque Dalton. According to Castellanos Moya himself in *Roque Dalton: Correspondencia clandestina*

y otros ensayos, the poet's flaw, the one that resulted in his death, was the same as Olmedo's: an excess of faith:

Decía Dalton en una estrofa de *Taberna*: “Tener fe es la mejor audacia y la audacia es bellísima.” Desde el otro lado, el comisario Medina, en las primeras páginas de *Dejemos hablar al viento*, la magnífica novela de Onetti, sentenciaba: “Un hombre con fe es más peligroso que una bestia con hambre.” En algún espacio entre estas dos citas, entre estos dos extremos, he seguido mi ruta. (137)

In the same text, Castellanos Moya expresses his relationship to the literature of Dalton in terms of both “orfandad y herencia” (137). The assassination of Dalton robbed the author of a potential mentor and truncated the work of what could have been a very powerful antecedent in Salvadoran letters. At the same time, Castellanos Moya is clear about his differences with Dalton and about one difference in particular: “Dalton tenía todos los componentes de temperamento que podían encantarme: sentido de provocación, humor, desenfado, sarcasmo, irreverencia, valentía. De uno solo de sus rasgos de carácter me sospeché desde el principio: la fe” (136). The references to faith in these passages are unqualified, that is, it is open to interpretation whether he is referring to faith in revolution, religion, or both. This critique of the unfounded faith of Dalton is replicated in the story of Olmedo in *El asco*. There is, however, one important difference. The reaction of the characters of *La diáspora* to the assassination of Roque Dalton, which coincide with those of Castellanos Moya, are radically different than the reaction of Edgardo Vega to Olmedo's tragic death. In “Orfandad y herencia literarias” Castellanos Moya refers to the impact of the senseless death of Dalton on both himself and the characters of *La diáspora*:

[C]uando escribí mi primera novela, *La diáspora*, incluí un personaje que padece con toda la contundencia la sensación de orfandad que el asesinato de Dalton representó para la literatura salvadoreña, en general, y para mí, en lo personal. (137)

In this passage, Castellanos Moya is referring to the reaction of Gabriel, a young writer, to one of his idols and literary models:

...el asesinato de hombres de la naturaleza de Dalton termina por afectar íntimamente no sólo aquellos que pertenecen al círculo cercano de la víctima, sino a terceras personas, tipos para quienes la muerte de un mito se convierte en algo que incide para siempre en el curso de sus vidas. A estos últimos pertenecía Gabriel. ... Dalton era su paradigma nacional, el hombre que encarnaba la síntesis de la creación literaria y el ensayo político, de la práctica y la teoría revolucionaria, de la búsqueda de la identidad nacional y el cosmopolitismo. (*La diáspora* 124-125)

Without this literary and political reference point, Gabriel feels disoriented. Unanchored and giving free rein to his doubts, “lo asaltaba la idea de que todo era una broma macabra, el colmo de lo grotesco, una tragedia de trascendencia universal” (126). After trying in vain to repair his damaged faith in revolutionary politics for some time after the death of Dalton, the rift proves too deep, and his resentment proves insurmountable. Try as he might, he is unable to answer the following question, which he circles around in his thoughts obsessively without ever arriving at an adequate solution: “[Q]ué hacer ahora con el arquetipo del poeta guerrillero (como Otto René Castillo y Javier Heraud) que cae en combate con las fuerzas represivas, cuando a Dalton lo habían asesinado sus propios compañeros?” (124-6). This dilemma, which is the crux of *La diáspora* and the starting point of the narrative project of Castellanos Moya, registers a slippage

from sacralization towards profanation.⁹ If the first case, that of the self-sacrifice of the fallen guerrillero, merits admiration and the idealization that, according to Freud, are a necessary part of the work of mourning, the second case, that of another fallen guerrillero, assassinated by his own comrades, potentially impedes and even annuls the first response. In the case of the author, together with the characters of *La diáspora* (with the exception of el Turco), the assassination of Roque Dalton, compounded by the Events of April, not only exposes pettiness, intolerance, hypocrisy, and criminality within the revolution, but also produces personal responses of rejection, hurt, disgust, condemnation, and ridicule. Yet, while the characters of Castellanos Moya's first novel struggle to reconcile their political convictions, as activists and intellectuals on the Left, with the disappointing practices of the leadership of revolutionary parties, the reaction of Edgardo Vega to the assassination of Olmedo in *El asco*, which conspicuously parallels the case of Dalton, is profoundly cynical and betrays disdain of the theories and practices of the Left. Vega makes no attempt to reconcile the tragic event with the ideals of the political Left because, quite simply, he does not share these convictions. As with el Turco, his literary predecessor, whose unapologetic abandonment and, indeed, unattenuated repudiation of his former beliefs leave no room for vacillation, Edgardo Vega sees the death of Olmedo without any attempt to make sense of it. If anything, he blames Olmedo and ridicules him for his naivety, as he does with Dalton:

Roque Dalton ... parece un fanático comunista cuyo mayor atributo fue haber sido
asesinado por sus propios camaradas, un fanático comunista que escribió poesía decente

⁹ In "El asesinato político y sus derivaciones," Castellanos Moya states that "los hechos reales que sucedieron en abril de 1983 y que ocupan pocas páginas de la novela constituyen la semilla generatriz de la misma" (*Roque Dalton* 173).

pero que en su obcecación ideológica redactó los más vergonzosos y horripilantes poemas filo-comunistas, un fanático y un cruzado del comunismo cuya vida y obra estuvieron postradas con el mayor entusiasmo a los pies del castrismo, un poeta para quien la sociedad ideal era la dictadura castrista, un zoquete que murió en su lucha por establecer el castrismo en estas tierras asesinado por sus propios camaradas hasta entonces castristas, me digo Vega. (*El asco* 86-7)

There are many parallels between Vega's diatribe about Olmedo and the rant about Dalton. Aside from the insults ("zoquete" for Dalton and "cretino" and "imbécil" for Olmedo), Vega blames the victims for the injustice suffered. If Olmedo ended up dead "por su ingenuidad" (35) and an excess of faith, in both religion and revolution, in the case of Dalton it is another expression of irrationality that put him in harm's way: his "fanaticism" (86). While *La diaspora* narrates a reckoning, the moment when the Left confronts its own contradiction, when the revolution confronts its own shortcomings, *El asco* provides a view of the revolution from the outside looking in. Of course, this implies a shift in the subject position and subsequent political coordinates of the narrator. This sharp shift to the political Right is evident in Vega's wholesale dismissal of the political militancy of Dalton, which, for the main character of *El asco*, is illegitimate in and of itself. In his analysis of the legacy of the communist party in Mexico, Bruno Bosteels, in *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (2012), identifies two dominant positions, two conflicting interpretations, revision and rejection, one immanent and the other extrinsic. Bosteels characterizes the former, which coincides with the interpretation of the characters of *La diaspora*, in the following terms:

for some the task consists in thinking the crimes from within the politics of communism, and not the other way around –not so as to ratify the facts with the stamp of historical

inevitability, but so as to formulate an immanent critique that at the same time would avoid the simple abandonment of communism as such. (67)

The critiques of el Turco and Edgardo Vega, situated from without, consider militancy itself erroneous, that is, they consider error “to be the profound truth of all militancy,” which is the surest way to refute beforehand any future for the communist party (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 67). The dismissal of revolution by el Turco and Vega includes the foreclosure of any projects of future political or social transformation. What is left is the present of cynicism.

What underpins, then, this unmitigated dismissal of radical politics? Edgardo Vega’s criticisms of Olmedo and Dalton are based on a criterion of rationality and objectivity. Believing that he sees things as they are, that he himself is not misled, he criticizes what he views as the fanaticism and irrationality of those who adhere to revolutionary principles. Yet, Vega’s own discourse is characterized by hyperbole, excess, and discursive violence, as discussed in the previous section. In other words, he proves himself incapable of containing his own utterances and often engages in considerable distortion, embellishment, and exaggeration. In the account of the assassination of Olmedo, for example, Vega claims that there were “centenares” of guerrilleros, if not “miles de personas,” who were assassinated by revolutionary Party leaders. For as terrible as these crimes are, evidence seems to indicate that there were indeed very rare. According to the Salvadoran Truth Commission’s findings, “the military and paramilitary organizations were overwhelmingly responsible for human rights violations... as part of the military’s larger and well-planned counterinsurgency campaign” (Hatcher 14). In “El asesinato político y sus derivaciones,” Castellanos Moya himself confirms this evidence: “Ciertamente no hubo un asesinato sistemático de intelectuales y escritores por parte de las fuerzas revolucionarias” (*Roque Dalton* 170). The author of novels about the crimes of Left is

unequivocal about the fact that he focuses on the exceptions to the rule and not the rule itself: “fueron los militares fascistas latinoamericanos los victimarios. Con una excepción notable: el poeta salvadoreño Roque Dalton, cuyo crimen a manos del Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) aún está ensartado como una estaca en el corazón de la literatura salvadoreña y quizá latinoamericana” (170). Then, in his analysis of the assassination of Dalton and his doppelgänger, Olmedo, Edgardo Vega distorts the violence in the recent past of the Nation in such a way that he turns the exception into the rule. His resentment and cynicism express themselves through a vitriolic verbal excess that makes it seem as if there were hundreds or even thousands of cases like those Olmedo and Dalton, which there were not. In other words, while *La diáspora* exposes the crimes of the Revolution, *El asco* distorts and exaggerates them. The change in perspective, of course, is coextensive with the respective narrators that Castellanos Moya employs in each novel. With the exception of el Turco, the characters of *La diáspora* represent the figure of the disenchanting intellectual struggling to reconcile the theoretical principles of revolutionary political and social transformation with the ugly everyday realities of revolution attempting to be put into practice. More closely aligned with the narrators of Bernhard or Vallejo, as I have already argued, Vega represents the ideology of the end of ideologies and embodies the figure of the cynic whose inability to overcome the moment of negation, whose insistence on the instance of destruction, perhaps necessary for a time but not sustainable over time, leaves him without any options in the present, let alone a plan for the future.¹⁰

¹⁰ This loss of the past and consequent foreclosure of a viable future is poignantly dramatized in the closing lines of Fernando Vallejo’s *El Desbarrancadero*:

El taxi se iba alejando, alejando, alejando, dejándolo atrás todo, un pasado perdido, una vida gastada, un país en pedazos, un mundo loco, sin que se pudiera ver adelante nada, ni a los lados nada, ni atrás nada y yendo hacia nada, hacia el sin sentido, y sobre un paisaje

1.2.2. The Uninhabitable In-between: *Donde no estén ustedes* as a Transitional Novel

Alberto Aragón, the protagonist of *Donde no estén ustedes*, finds himself in a similar predicament as the characters of *La diáspora*: the novel opens with a scene of exile. After a harrowing journey of three thousand miles in an old Rambler across three countries without stopping or resting except to fill the truck up with gasoline, Alberto Aragón arrives to Mexico City, where he has chosen to exile himself, after the election of a right-wing government in El Salvador following the Peace Accords that brought an end to ten years of civil war. As with Juan Carlos, Gabriel, Antonio, and Carmen, the protagonist of Castellanos Moya's 2003 novel also broke with the leadership of the Left. Unlike them, however, he had never given himself wholeheartedly to the struggle, and his relationship to the revolution was much less defined. By upbringing, family ties, and cultural milieu, Aragón comes from the Right; his political sympathies, however, lie with the Left. Without ever becoming a militant, he repudiates the actions of the military and solidarizes with the revolutionary struggle. Months after the assassination of his son and his son's fiancé, both committed revolutionaries, by the military at the height of State violence, Alberto accepts a post as the Salvadoran ambassador to Nicaragua in Managua. Many of his friends and associates interpret this decision as opportunistic and as a betrayal of his values, despite his intention to act as a liaison between the Salvadoran Right and the guerrilla, which he believes to be in their best interests. State violence, however, only increases in El Salvador, and by 1981, after a year in office, Aragón realizes his mistake. In a high-profile gesture, he renounces his post at the embassy and publicly declares his support for

invisible y lo que se llama el alma, el corazón, llorando: llorando gruesas lágrimas de lluvia. (177)

the guerrilla, going so far as to express his intention to join their ranks. The scene, relived by Aragón repeatedly throughout the course of the novel, consists in:

Un acto público en el que Alberto denunciaría la política represiva del gobierno que hasta ese instante había representado y anunciaba su decisión de pasar a las filas del frente guerrillero, un acto que serviría como parte de la ofensiva diplomática del frente, cubierto por la prensa internacional. (Castellanos Moya, *Donde no estén ustedes* 117)

From Managua, Aragón went into the first of his two exiles in Mexico City, where he continued to act as a liaison between his revolutionary friends and high-level contacts that he conserved on the Right. Towards the end of the war his services became particularly important to both the guerrilla and the Salvadoran government, and he was instrumental in brokering the Peace Accords. After the end of the war, however, he was betrayed by his long-standing allies on the Left. The Right, for their part, would have nothing to do with him either, having labelled him as a communist sympathizer after the debacle at the Nicaraguan embassy and his public support of the guerrilla. Unemployed and indignant over both the brutality of the Right and the hypocrisy of the ex-guerrilleros-turned-politicians, he embarks on the second of his exiles to Mexico City. Abandoned by his friends, hated by his enemies, unemployed, and without any money, Alberto Aragón lives out his last days in a fit of alcoholism, disappointment, and indignation.

From this perfunctory sketch of the plot structure of *Donde no estén ustedes*, it is clear that the novel, published one year before *Insensatez*, contains some of the elements of *La diáspora* and *El asco* that have been a part of our discussion thus far. Just as Juan Carlos, el Turco, Carmen, Antonio, and Gabriel in Castellanos Moya's first novel, Alberto Aragón has broken with the Salvadoran Left. Unlike them, however, he experienced the revolution from without, from the safe distance of his diplomatic career. This would move him closer to the pole

of Edgardo Vega, yet unlike the protagonist of *El asco* Aragón's public support of the guerrilla, together with the fact that his son was assassinated by the military, bring him much closer to the revolution. In his self-destructiveness, vitriolic fits, and deep-seated bitterness Aragón reiterates many of the character traits of el Turco and Vega, with the important difference that his political stances are more attenuated. In this sense, *Donde no estén ustedes* can be read as a synthesis of the subject positions rehearsed Castellanos Moya's earlier novels.

At bottom, Aragón's problems derive from the fact that his subject position is too liminal for the Manichaeic divisions of the revolution and its immediate aftermath. Within the sociohistorical context of the transition from the civil war to postwar society, the actions of Alberto Aragón are as unintelligible to the Right as they are to the Left. We might him, then, consider what Michael Rothberg has termed an "implicated subject:"

An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the "passive" bystander, either. (1)

Aragón is an interstitial figure who tried to use an intentional indeterminacy for the benefit of his country. He represents the Salvadoran government in Nicaragua but collaborates with the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran guerrilla; he intentionally conserves his ties with the Right but uses them for the benefit of the revolution; he solidarizes with the revolutionaries but ultimately decides against joining their ranks. Aragón sees this indeterminacy as an asset and puts it to use in the negotiations of the Peace Accords, always with the intention of benefitting the revolution and weakening the military and Salvadoran Right. It is precisely his liminality that makes him

suspect. His enemies on the Right do everything in their power to tarnish his name: “el ejército y el gobierno salvadoreños detestaban sus despachos y lo acusaban de ser agente de la guerrilla, le enviaban anónimos con amenazas, intrigaban en su contra cada vez que tenía oportunidad” (*Donde no estén ustedes* 98). This, however, is not enough for him to gain the trust of the guerrilla. By the time the Peace Accords were finalized, “Alberto ya había sido abandonado por todos esos que se decían sus amigos, sus comaradas” (16). It was immediately clear that in the postwar era “ni los comunistas ni los derechistas de su país estaban dispuestos a ofrecerle un empleo, ahora podían prescindir de sus servicios, ya no necesitaban mediadores ni enlaces” (25).

Yet, despite his indeterminacy and the unintelligibility of his actions for those around him, Aragón proves more consistent with his beliefs than less politically equivocal characters. In the end, he is the one who is unwilling to make concession to the Right, which is the motive behind his decision to exile himself once again to Mexico:

No fue una coincidencia, pues, el hecho de que Alberó Aragón saliera de El Salvador la madrugada después de la toma de posesión del primer gobierno de posguerra ... no fue una coincidencia que escogiera la madrugada del día 2 de junio de 1994 para luego decir que por nada del mundo hubiera quedado ni veinticuatro horas en un país que regresaba a las pezuñas de la derecha troglodita santificada en elecciones y con la bendición de sus examigos comunistas. (26)

After being accused by them of opportunism in his diplomatic career, the guerrilla-turned-politicians proved to be more opportunistic than Aragón.

This critique, that of the hypocrisy of the leaders of the revolution, is familiar by now: it is the same one articulated in *La diáspora* and *El asco*, as analyzed above. Similarly, *Donde no estén ustedes* exposes the crimes of the Central American revolutionary Left. Like the cast of *La*

diaspora, Aragón struggles unsuccessfully to make sense of the assassination of comandante Ana María and the subsequent suicide of comandante Marcial (*Donde no estén ustedes* 103-4). The mention of the Events of April of 1983 does not only remit to the origin of the literary project of Castellanos Moya, the initiation of his production as a novelist, but also to a decisive blow for Central American revolutionary politics. The inner contradictions of the revolution are also channeled through a secondary character, Calamandraca. As with the ex-guerrilla community that receives Robocop, a former enemy, in *El arma del hombre*, in times of peace this ex-guerrillero turns to drug trafficking, “lo que confirma la sospecha de Alberto en el sentido de que sus compatriotas se dedican al tráfico ilegal, ya sea de armas o de estupefacientes” (123). Another secondary character, el Flaco Pérez, serves as a counterpoint to Calamandraca. El Flaco Pérez represents the figure of the revolutionary who is unwilling to compromise his principles. As a part of the “guerrilla más radical,” he is unwilling to accept the terms of rendition of the Peace Accords because he sees more continuity than a rupture between the civil war and postwar El Salvador:

...el Flaco Pérez dejó en claro que él ni loco regresaría a El Salvador, un sitio en el que permanecía el mismo ejército corrupto con los mismos criminales que le habían metido noventa tiros entre pecho y espalda a su amigo del alma, el coronel Reyes, quien regresó de su exilio con la idea de que las cosas habían cambiado. (40)

How can the Peace Accords inaugurate a new era if the same group remains in power? More than the end of a period of violence, the Peace Accords inaugurated a different type of violence; more than bring justice, they ensured continued injustice: “Pinche Flaco –piensa Alberto mientras se empina su vaso de vodka–, tenía toda la razón, lo esencial no cambió en el paisito: la impunidad, la prepotencia, la miseria, la ingratitud” (40). In a polemic inversion of terms,

Castellanos Moya frames as defeat what was heralded as a diplomatic victory by both the Salvadoran Right and Left. This also marks a widening of the thematic scope and a shift in the narrative of Castellanos Moya from preoccupation with the contradictions of the revolution and the crimes of its leaders towards the thematization of (the lack of) justice, (the equivocality of) memory, and (the inefficacy of) public policy in postwar Central America. These issues move to the forefront in *Insensatez* and, in this sense too, *Donde no estén ustedes*, can be read as a transitional work within the narrative of Castellanos Moya. It synthesizes aspects of his earlier novels with the polemical themes that find a space of their own in the author's next novel, *Insensatez*.

1.3. Conclusion

From an intradiegetic point of view, the narrator of *Insensatez* is indeed idiosyncratic. It would be a mistake, however, to consider him singular. As it turns out, he is part of a genealogy of narrators that reaches back to the first novel of Castellanos Moya and, as such, he has undergone numerous transformations and iterations throughout the years. Furthermore, this type of narrator is not exclusive to the author but has antecedents in literary traditions both within Latin American literature and beyond. On the international level, Castellanos Moya draws from the precedent set by the narrative of Thomas Bernhard. Yet, despite the comments of the author in the "Nota del autor" of *El asco*, his appropriation of some of the techniques of Bernhard is not simply a matter of "imitación" (129-30). Rather, Castellanos Moya reterritorializes this narrative style within the space of contemporary Latin American literature and repurposes it within his own aesthetic program. On a regional level, Fernando Vallejo serves as an antecedent of a similar type of narrator, verbose and vitriolic, crass and cantankerous, resentful and relentless,

misogynist and misanthropic. Although Castellanos Moya replicates the technique of a first-person monologue of a profoundly cynical narrator, the violence narrated in his novels has little in common with the *novela sicaresca* of Vallejo and, for that matter, has little to do with other modes of narrating violence in contemporary Latin American literature, like the *narconovela*, for example. The decision to root his narrative project in the political violence of the recent past of the region would seem to create an affinity between the production of Castellanos Moya and testimonio and the first-generation post-dictatorship novel, yet this is not the case since his literature does not share the concomitant value system. In fact, part of the difficulty of situating the author within the history of contemporary Latin American literature lies in the fact that he narrates many of the same episodes of political violence as testimonio or the post-dictatorship novel, appropriating some of the techniques of these traditions, yet he does so in a radically different manner. Castellanos Moya, then, broaches familiar topics, visited time and again in the region's literature, but his approach exceeds the aesthetics of the available traditions.

The objective of this chapter has been to trace the origins and originality of this anomalous literary project. Crucial to this task has been telling the story of the genesis of a type of narrator, which is at the same time that genesis of a literary program. As much as this story is about the development of narrative technique and the influence of a set of literary antecedents, it is also a story that has its roots in the failure and defeat of revolution. Thematically, the events of April of 1983, and the deep betrayal and bitter loss that they represent, constitute the starting point that set the whole narrative project of the author in motion. The conflict between Central American intellectuals and revolutionary movements is the fault line upon which the literature of Castellanos Moya is built. *La diáspora* stages this conflict in the lives of group of intellectuals who can no longer give their support to revolutionary causes on good conscience. The following

chapter analyzes this foundational moment in the narrative program of the author and explores its implications for both the public intellectual and the work of literature in Latin America.

Chapter 2: The Experience of Deconversion and the Birth of the Non-Committed Latin American Public Intellectual in *La diáspora*

La diaspora is more intelligible today than when it was first published in 1989.¹¹ To borrow from the terminology of reception theory, we might say that it is closer to our current horizons of expectations than those of its context of production. More than three decades after its release, the mode in which Castellanos Moya narrates political violence has gained ascendancy, gradually moving towards a dominant position and displacing residual discourses about Latin America's recent past (Reati, "Culpables e incoentes" 102). The horizon of expectations for the reception of a work of literature at the time of the publication of *La diáspora* was heavily influenced by testimonial genres, especially in the case of Central America. Literature was perceived as "an adjunct to armed struggle in Latin America" (Beverley 2004, 77), "a cultural aspect of the overall struggle for hegemony" (Beverley & Zimmeramn 1990, 172), and "one of the most important ideological weapons of Central American revolutions" (Beverley & Zimmerman 1990, 207). According to Werner Mackenbach in "Representations of Violence and Peace in Contemporary Central American Literature," this political mobilization of the literary work expressed itself as an injunction to praise revolutionary violence and denounce counterrevolutionary violence (Mackenbach 2022, 319). "Counterviolence," or violence from below, was upheld as a legitimate and necessary response to the violence from above of the State and military (Mackenbach 2022, 319-20). Within this framework and as a part of any

¹¹ The fact that the novel was republished in 2018 without having been reprinted since its first pressing in 1989 attests to the existence of a market receptive to this type of discourse or at least to the editorial decision that this may indeed be the case.

revolution's need for myths, heroes, and martyrs, revolution tended to be portrayed in a sacralised manner, with a clear axiological opposition between saints and sinners, heroes and villains (Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción* 184). This sacralization was compounded by the widespread influence of a Christian imaginary within Latin American revolutions, expressed either through participation of Christians in the revolutionary struggle, with Camilo Torres as the paradigmatic example, or through the presence of a Christian eschatological and soteriological dimension within Latin American revolutionary ideologies. Against this backdrop, Castellanos Moya unleashes a vehement critique of both religion and the shortcomings of Salvadoran revolutionary militancy. Furthermore, these two critiques fuse together to form one iconoclastic thrust since revolution is portrayed in the novel as a political religion. *La diáspora* depicts the degradation of the Salvadoran revolution as a descent from the political towards increasingly irrational modes of thought and experience, which are expressed in the novel through the dogmatic intolerance of dissidence, the paranoid persecution of opponents, and an abandonment to illegitimate uses of violence. It is important to keep in mind, as Alberto Moreiras notes in "The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La diáspora* (1989)," that there is no need to assume that the author's critique of the crimes of the revolution necessarily align him or his work with ideologies of the Right (Moreiras 49). If the "total war" mentality of the revolutionary generation of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America would not have admitted the possibility, we are currently in the position to admit a revision of revolution without conflating it with an apologia of violence from above¹². This, I argue, is the fine line that Castellanos Moya walks in *La diáspora*.

¹² Here I am referring to the theories of Régis Debray and Ernesto Guevara, which I analyze in greater detail below.

Although other writers had articulated similar critiques of revolutionary militancy, such as José Revueltas in (1964) in *Los errores*, Marco Antonio Flores in *Los compañeros* (1976), Mario Vargas Llosa in *Historia de Mayta* (1984), and Martín Caparrós in *No velas a tus muertos* (1986), none of them had based a literary program on it. In the light of posterior narrative production of Castellanos Moya, which returns time and again to the forms and themes set out in his first novel, *La diáspora* can properly be recognized as a programmatic work, in which several of the main tenets of the poetics of the author are already established, such as the use of humor in conjunction with tragic historical events, a pronounced irreverence for convention, an insistent treatment of historical situations of extreme violence, a defense of the art of fiction, and a rejection of the aesthetic principles and cultural politics of testimonio. Taken together, these tenets condense a will to transgress the norms and conventions of existing traditions of narrating political violence and a search for alternate modes of doing so. *La diáspora* can be considered a turning point in contemporary Latin American literature to the degree that the author has been successful in forging alternate modes of narrating political violence in the region's recent past and to the degree that these modes have gained ascendancy among a new generation of authors struggling to come to terms with the pasts of their families, communities, and respective nations.

This chapter focuses on this innovative approach to narrating violence through Castellanos Moya's critique of revolution as a secular religion in *La diáspora*. At the same time, it explores the consequences of this critique for the conception of political functions of both the public intellectual and the work of literature in Latin America. In the first section, I argue that Castellanos Moya constructs a figure of revolution as a political religion in order to formulate a critique of the irrational aspects of Salvadoran revolutionary movements. In the novel, abuses of power, illegitimate uses of violence, and widespread intolerance towards dissent are at the root of

a crisis of legitimacy within the Salvadoran revolution which provokes a rift between the revolutionary parties and their intellectuals which leads to the defection of the latter and a subsequent “diaspora” from Salvador to Mexico. The second section analyzes the development of the relationship between Christianity and Marxism in Latin America, as both a specific feature of Latin American modernity and as complementary interpretive frameworks that render the sociohistorical realities of the region more intelligible. If the second section focuses on the heteronomous relationship between religion and politics in Latin American society, the third section, for its part, analyzes the equally heteronomous relationship between literature and politics. In particular, I focus on the role of literature in the idealization, romanticization, and sacralization of vanquished revolutions in order to then demonstrate the manner in which Castellanos Moya breaks with the mythologizing modes of narrating revolutionary militancy that characterize both testimonio and first-generation post-dictatorship narrative. I argue that, in doing so, he forges new subject positions of Latin American public intellectuals and new sites of enunciation for the work of literature.

At the same time, this chapter, taken as a whole, constitutes an indispensable step in the argumentative structure of this dissertation since *La diáspora* stages a break that is foundational for the narrative program of the author. On both the level of enunciation and the enunciated, Castellanos Moya’s first novel enacts an originary rupture between revolutionary politics and Latin American intellectuals that results in the emergence of new subject positions, like that of the non-committed Latin American public intellectual, and a reconfiguration of the relationship between politics and literature, in such a way that the work of literature is freed from prior injunctions governing its political instrumentalization. Although first articulated in *La diáspora*,

these developments are further elaborated throughout the early narrative of the author and, taken together, open new channels for narrating political violence in Latin America literature.

2.1. The Experience of Deconversion

La diáspora tells the story of a crisis of legitimacy within the Salvadoran revolution and its subsequent deterioration from the perspective of a group of political exiles living in Mexico City. Beyond the experience of a shared exile, what unites the group is that each of their lives are profoundly affected by the execution of the poet Roque Dalton and what are known as the “sucesos de abril” of 1983. The “Events of April” of 1983, of course, refer to the assassination of comandante Ana María, second in charge of the Salvadoran guerrilla group, the FPL, one of the five guerrilla groups that formed the FMLN, and the subsequent suicide of Salvador Cayetano Carpio, better known as comandante Marcial, head of the same party and one of the most influential figures of the Salvadoran revolution. After a brief attempt to attribute the assassination of comandante Ana María, Mélida Anaya Montes, to the CIA, it was soon discovered that comandante Marcial was directly implicated in the crime. With his widespread credibility within the Latin American revolutionary Left decimated, comandante Marcial took his own life. As for the case of Roque Dalton García, the poet took the decision to take up arms in the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) after many years of political activity in the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS), which included being imprisoned for his political militancy. In May of 1975, however, he was accused by his own comrades in arms of being an informant for the CIA and executed for treason by the ERP. The assassination of Dalton unleashed protests and deepened internal divisions within the Left on a national, regional, and international scale. In one way or another, the Events of April and the assassination of Dalton inform the experience of

each of the main characters of *La diáspora*. Insisting on the analogy with religion, we could say that these events constitute the original sin or fall from grace of the Salvadoran revolution, and once this innocence had been lost the characters find themselves unable to hold on to their faith.

The novel is divided into four sections, each of which tells the story of one of the main characters, whose paths intersect as they struggle to pick up the pieces of their lives and establish themselves in Mexico City. The first section is dedicated to Juan Carlos, a Salvadoran writer and intellectual who, while studying philosophy at the Jesuit university in San Salvador, was politically active in student organizations and later in the Salvadoran Communist Party. Upon discovering that he is under surveillance by the military at the height of political violence and disappearances, he goes into exile in Nicaragua, where he continues to work for the Party, garnering support for revolution in Central America from sympathizers in Europe and North America. After the Events of April of 1983, though, his political convictions are shaken to the core and he experiences a crisis of faith in the revolution that culminates in his decision to officially leave the Party and seek exile once again, this time in Mexico. The second section depicts the life of Quique López, an ex-combatant for the Salvadoran guerrilla forces, from the time of his initiation into revolutionary politics in a small town in rural El Salvador in 1979, when the political context was much more favorable for the guerrilla, until his exile in Mexico after almost being captured by enemy forces in a botched military expedition. The following section tells the story of an Argentinian journalist, Jorge Kraus, who was exiled from his homeland for his political activities at the height of State terror of the country's most recent military dictatorship. Through his contacts in the Salvadoran exile community in Mexico City, he receives inside information about the Events of April of 1983. On the cusp of making what he feels to be a major break-through in his career, Kraus develops a plan to write an exposé of the

internal rivalries of Salvadoran revolutionary Left and to be the first to tell the story of the deaths of Mélida Anaya Montes and Salvador Cayetano Carpio. Despite his commitments with Latin American revolutionary politics on a continental scale, the Argentine journalist is, above all, concerned with exploiting his Central American contacts so that he can “escribir un verdadero bestseller, que le produciría fama y dinero” (118). The fourth and last section of the novel is dedicated to “El Turco,” a talented musician who worked together with Juan Carlos organizing cultural events to attract international support for the cause of the Salvadoran revolution. His undisciplined and free-spirited nature, however, was always at odds with the austere ethics of revolutionary self-abnegation that characterize Latin American revolutionary political parties. An unshakable sense of disappointment, disenchantment, and frustration cause him to defect from the Party, renounce revolutionary politics, take up residence in Mexico, and resume his studies of music. Of all the characters, his resentment of his revolutionary past is the most intense. Consumed by bitterness, he has become misanthropic, alcoholic, misogynist, and ruthless in his critiques of Latin American radical politics. As the title of the book suggests, *La diáspora* delves into the lives of exiles who, for one reason or another, chose to defect from armed groups, distance themselves from political militancy, and seek exile outside of their countries of origin. Moreover, the religious connotation of the title reinforces the overarching homology of religion and revolution.

La diáspora opens with the arrival of Juan Carlos in Mexico after he “tronó del Partido,” that is, after he defected from the Party, having dedicated the previous eight years of his life to advancing the cause of the Salvadoran revolution (15). The involvement of comandante Marcial in the assassination of comandante Ana María was decisive in his disillusionment with revolutionary militancy:

Como cuadro partidario, entrenado en la fe y la disciplina, estaba dispuesto a creer la versión oficial de los hechos, la cual le parecía lógica, coherente; pero sentía que, si en abril algo había muerto en su interior, ahora la acababan de pegar el tiro de gracia ... toda la situación le había afectado profundamente y le resultaba imposible seguir militando en tales circunstancias. (116)

In this passage, the revolutionary militancy of Juan Carlos is explained in terms of religious devotion, the result of a process of formation or indoctrination. Trained to be obedient, Juan Carlos wants to keep believing but reaches the point at which he is no longer able to do so in good conscience.

Juan Carlos is not alone in reaching this threshold. Upon arriving to Mexico City, he is received by some old friends from El Salvador, Carmen and Antonio, political activists, albeit from their condition as exiles. If Carmen does not need to ask Juan Carlos the reasons behind his decision to “tronar” when she picks him up from the airport, it is because something similar happened to her:

La última vez que Juan Carlos había estado en México, en agosto de 1983, Carmen la había asegurado que estaba al punto de salirse del Comité de Solidaridad y también del Partido. Los sucesos que, a principios de abril, habían culminado con la muerte de los dos máximos comandantes revolucionarios, le había quebrado su fe militante. (16)

In this passage, revolution is presented as a political religion, and the disenchantment of Carmen is framed in religious terms as a loss of faith.

The deconversion experiences of characters like Juan Carlos and Carmen is not an all-or-nothing affair but a process that the characters struggle with throughout their respective exiles in Mexico. What binds Juan Carlos, Carmen, Gabriel, and el Turco is a shared experience of

deconversion, and this is also what differentiates them from the believers, like El Negro, Quique, and Antonio. The characters of *La diáspora*, in fact, can be easily situated within a typology of doubters and believers. If the believers constitute one pole and the non-believers constitute another, between the two poles there is a spectrum of the intermediate positions of the doubters, who have broken ties with the Party but are still holding on to the political ideals to one degree or another. The thesis of revolutionary militancy meets its negation in the antithesis of renunciation, and the resulting tension is resolved in a series of syntheses of commitment and skepticism, of resolution and indecision. El Negro, as a believer in both Christianity and revolution, embodies the pole of the believers, while el Turco represents an embittered and unequivocal rejection of revolutionary thought and practices. Characters like Juan Carlos and Carman, for their part, are situated between these two poles, having decided to leave the Party on account of its internal contradictions but struggling to hang on to the ideals that it once embodied.

The believers can be subdivided into two groups, which correspond to two different configurations between religion and revolution. The first configuration corresponds to what Michael Löwy terms “liberationist Christianity” in *The War of the Gods* (1996):

Usually this broad social/religious movement is referred to as ‘liberation theology,’ but this is inadequate, in so far as the movement appeared many years before the new theology and most of its activists are hardly theologians at all; sometimes it is also referred to as the ‘Church of the Poor,’ but this social network goes well beyond the limits of the Church as an institution, however broadly defined. I propose to call it liberationist Christianity, this being a wider concept than either ‘theology’ or ‘Church,’ including both the religious culture and the social network, faith and praxis. (33)

Löwy identifies the amalgamation of the religion and revolution, of sacred temporality and profane history, as a central feature of liberationist Christianity: “There is only one history, and it is in this human and temporal history that Redemption and the Kingdom of God must be realized” (46). In *La diáspora*, el Negro embodies this type of believer, the liberationist Christian who embraces both Christianity and Marxism. For a cynical non-believer like el Turco, the willingness to believe in either could only be ingenuous. Over drinks in a bar with Juan Carlos, he refers to this personality trait of el Negro with disdain: “El Turco afirmó que el Negro era un pinche creyente, que nunca dejaría de ser militante, el típico burguesito que pasaba de la orden jesuita al Partido” (36). If Juan Carlos and Carmen left the revolution because of a loss of faith, el Negro, for his part, remains in the Party because of an excess of faith. El Turco offers the fact that el Negro is a believer in Christianity as an explanation of his revolutionary militancy and suggests that the latter is merely an extension or a displacement of the former. This conflation of revolution and religion is not exactly what thinkers like Michael Löwy or Alasdair MacIntyre, in *Marxism and Christianity* (1968), had in mind. While both signal the structural affinities between Christianity and Marxism, neither is willing to go so far as to erase their differences between them as modes of thought and practice. For Löwy, they exist side by side and share important social functions; for MacIntyre, Marxism followed in the wake of Christianity and absorbed many of its social functions, having first been subject to the criterion of reason that characterizes secularized societies; in neither case, however, do they become interchangeable or indistinguishable. Whether it achieves its objective or not, Marxism aspires to the status of objective, scientific inquiry concerning history, society, and political economy. As an interpretive framework, it can offer insights into historical modes of exploitation and oppression, but it is not a question of faith but of reason, that is, it lacks the subjective experience of faith

that informs a Christian's adherence to a belief system. The critical edge of el Turco's comment consists precisely in erasing this distinction.

While el Negro represents the type of believer who adheres to both Christianity and Marxist revolution, Quique corresponds to the second type of believer and a second configuration between Christianity and Marxism, that of revolution as a political religion. In this case, Quique is not a believer in Christianity but rather adheres to revolution as if it were a religion, with the same subjective abandonment and suspension of reason. If for el Negro there is an overlap between Christianity and Marxism, as two separate but related interpretive frameworks, Quique applies religious modes of thought and experience to revolution. Within the spectrum of characters of *La diáspora*, there is a tension between Quique, as a believer, and the doubters and skeptics like Juan Carlos, Carmen, and Gabriel, which is intensified further in contrast to a non-believer like el Turco. This is not the only trait, however, which separates him from these other characters: he is the only main character who is not an artist or an intellectual. The other characters contribute to revolution through their intellectual and artistic abilities, Juan Carlos as a journalist, el Turco as a musician, Gabriel as a researcher, Carmen as a social worker, el Negro through his work at the press agency. Most of their work centers on garnering international support for Central American revolutions. Quique stands alone in having participated in armed conflict, which forms the basis of his sense of superiority: "Él está seguro de que una cosa es echarse el rollo sobre la situación de la guerra, como hacen Fausto and el Negro, y otra poder conducir media docena de hombres en medio de cachimbazos. Lo principal es esto, sin duda" (77-8). He is clearly not the only one who feels this way since his co-workers and comrades show deference to him as a combatant: "La verdad es que todos en la agencia le profesan un cierto respeto porque es el único del grupo que ha tenido experiencia militar, que se

ha agarrado a putazos en el monte con el ejército” (68). According to Hugo Vezzetti, this privileging of the guerrillero underpins revolutionary movements throughout Latin America: “La exaltación de la figura del guerrillero... va ser el núcleo de sentido prevaleciente en la expansión del guevarismo latinoamericano” (*Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* 182-3). For Vezzetti, this type of valorization depends on an ideological and mythical element that exceeds the realm of mere politics: “Para que esto suceda es preciso que implante un complejo de valores y actitudes en torno de la figura del guerrero, el culto de la acción, la prepotencia del coraje, la fascinación por las armas, los mitos de la guerra que aplastan la lógica política” (202). There is a dimension to Quique’s vocation for armed struggle that exceeds the strategic calculating that characterizes military thought, and that Vezzetti describes as a “theological component:”

En la disposición a matar o morir hay algo que trasciende la dimensión militar de la empresa guerrillera, un fondo religioso de la política, una escatología que, en el límite, sitúa sus objetivos fuera de la historia y los encarna en figuras de héroes inalcanzables para los seres humanos de carne y hueso. Hay un componente teológico... (201)

There is an element in Latin American revolutions, then, that escapes the theoretical traditions of Marxism and can be explained by the infusion of religious modes of thought and experience into a postsecular political movement:

La muerte es consustancial a esa imaginación revolucionaria en la exacta medida en que la política quedaba reemplazada por la religión, incluso capturada por el imaginario cristiano que condensaba en el martirio la ofrenda máxima y la entrada en la inmortalidad. Esa celebración de la muerte en la religión revolucionaria, la exaltación de la sangre, la pasión por el combate, no encontraba sus raíces en la tradición de la izquierda marxista. (141)

Nowhere is the presence of postsecular religiosity clearer than in the revolution's apologia of violence. For Quique, the exaltation of violence, as a heightened subjective experience, forms the basis of his passion for combat. This excess is apparent in the descriptions of the character in action:

En la persecución a Quique no le importó que se le zafara el pañuelo que lo embozaba. Al tercer disparo el tipo cayó de boca sobre un gallinero; en la nuca le puso el remate.

Pero el ajusticiamiento que más recordaba, aquel que le había producido algunos segundos de duda, fue el de un zapatero, un delator por culpa de quien habían asesinado a un compañero del grupo miliciano. Cuando penetraron en su casa, el hombre trató de escudarse en sus dos pequeños hijos y en su mujer, luego se arrodilló suplicando que no lo mataran, mientras la esposa y los niños lloraban. Le pegó dos tiros: uno en la frente y otro en el pecho. A pocos días lo ascendieron a segundo responsable del grupo. (71)

The first two sentences of this passage, heavy with subordination and coordination, create a tension which is dramatically broken with the simple syntax of the last sentence: a subject, verb, and complement without any subordinate clauses. Regarding the content of the passage, violence, for Quique, appears more as an end unto itself than a means to a noble end, or in any case as a means to further his own interests, that is, ascending in the ranks of the revolutionary forces. In this exercise of violence, Quique crosses the line between violence and what Werner Mackenbach, in "Representations of Violence and Peace in Contemporary Central American Narrative," terms counterviolence. Here he argues that in the context of Central American literature in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, where literary production was seen as the cultural component of a struggle against dictatorship and other forms of State terrorism, "representations of violence occupy a central place as a denunciation of the violence of those who govern / have

power (violence from above) and as justification and praise of the violence of the oppressed against dictatorships (violence from below)” (319). Framed as counterviolence, then, armed struggle against the tyranny of the State, the military, and its proxies can be justified. This, in fact, turns out to be the position of Castellanos Moya, at least according to an essay, “Palabras en la Moneda,” published in 2021:

A los sacerdotes jesuitas que dirigían esa universidad los asesinó cobardemente el ejército seis meses después de mi visita, en los estertores de la guerra civil. Enseguida vinieron las negociaciones de paz, la firma de los acuerdos y la construcción de la democracia. Pero no se incomodan, no hablaré de política. Sólo afirmaré que esa fue una guerra inevitable, justa, si se ve desde un pueblo que fue reprimido y excluido hasta los peores extremos, al que no se le dejó salida política. Sin esa guerra no existiría la democracia que ahora existe. (123)

The fact that a revolutionary movement can be justified in principle, however, does not exonerate it from responsibility for its crimes. The executions perpetrated by Quique should be read side by side with the assassination of comandante Ana María and the execution of Roque Dalton, as crimes of the revolution and signs of its moral disintegration. They constitute the point at which the distinction between violence and counterviolence breaks down, which consequently puts the legitimacy of armed struggle in question.

This same problem can be framed as an opposition between the political and what Hannah Arendt terms the “antipolitical:”

A theory of war or a theory of revolution, therefore, can only deal with the justification of violence because this justification constitutes its political limitation; if, instead, it arrives

at a glorification or justification of violence as such, it is no longer political but antipolitical. (9)

There is a point, then, at which the glorification and legitimization of violence as such occludes the possibility of political solutions, thereby crossing a line from the political to the antipolitical. This conclusion depends on how Arendt conceives politics. Remitting back to Greek antiquity, she establishes an opposition between the values of force and persuasion:

[P]olitical relations in their normal course do not fall under the sway of violence, and this conviction we find for the first time in Greek antiquity, in so far as the Greek *polis*, the city-state, defined itself explicitly as a way of life that was based exclusively upon persuasion and not upon violence... Outside the walls of the *polis*, that is, outside of the realm of politics in the Greek sense of the word, ‘the strong did what they could, and the weak suffered what they must’ (Thucydides). (2)

The privileging of force over persuasion, of the military over the political can cause revolutionary movements to backslide towards the antipolitical. Claudia Hilb, in *Usos del pasado: qué hacemos hoy con los setenta* (2014), applies the categories of Hannah Arendt to the context of revolutionary movements in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. She makes a distinction between reactive violence and rationalized violence yet maintains that both are equally antipolitical:

En síntesis, la acción violenta se nos muestra, desde esta óptica, siempre *anti o extrapolítica*. La violencia inmediata, señalábamos, es, en su advenimiento, la reacción muda y pasional frente a lo inaceptable. Esa reacción desconoce la escena política como el ámbito en que se ha de exigir reparación ante la injusticia y hace justicia por mano propia...

Advertíamos también que la violencia racionalizada, cuando pretende constituirse en sustituto de la política, se nos aparece doblemente destructiva de la esfera de la acción pública: en primer lugar, la acción violenta que se propone como *sustituto* de la política irrumpe en la escena pública, en que las fuerzas se miden – en acciones y palabras – de manera regulada y siempre provisoria, para transformarla *deliberadamente* en un campo de batalla, donde las fuerzas se miden según la superioridad material en vistas del triunfo definitivo y total. En segundo lugar, se propone moldear lo común operando de manera instrumental: asesinatos, atentados, secuestros responden a una lógica de la producción de efectos y reacciones previstas. Y si bien las consecuencias de la acción se mostrarán reacias a la previsibilidad que reclama el actor violento, su proliferación tendrá por efecto probable la destrucción de la escena de lo común, y la generalización de la lógica instrumental y guerrera. (25)

Hilb is not merely inferring a theory that underlies the praxis of revolution in Latin America, since this theory is spelled out in no unclear terms by Ernesto Guevara in *La guerra de guerrillas* (1960) and Régis Debray in *Revolution within the Revolution* (1967). In the latter, Debray makes no effort to disguise his distaste for the political: “Revolutionary politics, if they are not to be blocked, must be diverted from politics as such” (124). Claiming that the “new political organizations that have been formed since the Cuban Revolution have not achieved their objective,” he argues for abandoning them and embracing the military option. Revolutionary politics will be defined by its adoption of violence, or it will cease to be revolutionary: “In Latin America today a political line which, in terms of its consequences, is not susceptible to expression as a precise and consistent military line, cannot be considered revolutionary” (24-5). Debray, then, takes the political option off the table and pushes Latin American Left politics

towards militarization. The privileging of the military over the political in Debray's theory of *foquismo* stems from his application of inductive reasoning to sociohistorical phenomena, as if human history were subject to the same mechanical laws as the natural sciences: from his analysis of the Cuban revolution, he extrapolates a theory of guerrilla warfare which he then assumes must hold true for the rest of Latin America. He heralds the birth of a new approach to revolution: "a new conception of guerrilla warfare has come to light" (19). This approach is characterized by a Manichaean structure that refuses to acknowledge any middle terms: "In the new context of struggle to the death there is no place for spurious solutions, no place for the pursuit of an equilibrium between oligarchic and popular forces through tacit non-aggression pacts... there is no middle way" (26). Within the (anti)political theory of Debray, the public sphere is reduced to the confrontation between two irreconcilable forces that mutually cancel one another: "This is the beginning of an epoch, that of total class warfare, excluding compromising solutions and shared power" (26). In *Política y/o violencia: Una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años setenta* (2013), Pilar Calveiro points out that, despite the polarization described by Debray, he is more like his enemies than he thinks, bound to them by a shared authoritarian concept of politics:

No se trató de un fenómeno marginal, sino que el foquismo y, en términos más generales, el uso de la violencia pasaron a ser casi condición *sine non qua* de los movimientos radicales de la época... La concepción foquista adoptada por las organizaciones armadas, al suponer que del accionar militar nacería la conciencia necesaria para desatar la revolución social, las llevaba a dar prioridad a lo militar sobre lo político. Esta preeminencia contribuyó, con manifestaciones diferentes pero bajo un mismo signo, a desarrollar una práctica y una concepción militarista y autoritario en el seno de las

organizaciones. Su expresión más clara consistía en considerar básicamente la política como una cuestión de fuerza y de confrontación entre dos campos: amigos y enemigos. Dicha concepción se asentó sobre un sólido basamento preexistente que no ofrecían contradicciones, sino que, por el contrario, sustentaba el sentido autoritario de lo político. (96)

As Calveiro signals, there is a small step from this Manichaeian outlook to the glorification of violence, a step that Debray does not hesitate to take: “To risk all means that, having risen in the mountains, the fighter must wage a war to the death, a war that does not admit truces, retreats, or compromises. To conquer is to accept as a matter of principle that life, for the revolutionary, is not the supreme good” (58).

In her book, Calveiro concludes that this line of reasoning was a factor that contributed to the horrific defeat of Latin American revolutionary movements from the 1960s to the 1990s: “El desastre político y militar que sufrió fue fruto de una organización atrapada en las concepciones y las prácticas militarizadas, burocráticas, pragmáticas, y autoritarias” (109). Hilb, for her part, reaches a similar conclusion. She argues that the question of the responsibility of the guerrilla was suppressed in a first instance due to the incommensurability between the crimes of the State, on one hand, and those of the revolution, on the other, and due to the necessity to establish the dimensions of the violence committed and to identify victims. She deems, however, that the time has come to determine “la responsabilidad política de quienes hicieron explícitamente de la violencia armada el medio idóneo para la prosecución de un ideal político, así como también de la violencia, el modo habitual de incidencia en los asuntos comunes” (20). The critique of Calveiro and Hilb coincide with those of Castellanos Moya in *La diáspora* in one important point: they are self-critiques of people who were committed, on one level or another, to Latin

American revolutionary movements. As such, they speak as participants in history and not from the sidelines. The difference is one of timing. Calveiro and Hilb are enunciating their imminent critique of the violence of revolutionary movements more than a decade into the twenty-first century, whereas Castellanos Moya articulates his critique of the illegitimate uses of violence and authoritarianism in revolutionary movements in 1989. In *La diáspora*, Castellanos Moya dramatizes this point of inflexion, described by Calveiro and Hilb, at which the revolution becomes definitively antipolitical and subsequently begins to unravel.

This reading of *La diáspora* in its political context can be complemented by situating it within its literary context, that is, at a moment when the work of literature “was overdetermined by its symbiotic relationship with the anti-dictatorial struggle and revolutionary projects” (Mackenbach 330). Castellanos Moya, then, breaks with this tradition and differentiates himself as a writer by exposing the crimes of the revolution. In doing so, he showed himself to be ahead of his time, as a forerunner of emergent modes of narrating the region’s past, which Mackenbach characterizes in the following manner:

...in the recent past, several literary texts begin to question and subvert the denunciation of violence from above and praise of violence from below: the representations of violence distance themselves from the political-ideological (over)determination and the mythical-revolutionary imaginary. The dark sides of the armed struggle are shown, and the multiple violence exercised by the actors of counterviolence against members of civil society, as well as the crimes committed within the revolutionary movements themselves against their own militants, are denounced. (329)

Situated in this context, both the aesthetics and politics of *La diáspora* become intelligible and it is possible to dispense with reductionist accusation that Castellanos Moya has passed over to the

enemy's camp. As is clear from his autobiographical writings, such as his essay "Crónica de éxodos y retornos," where he traces his relationship with the revolutionary Left of Central America, the author comes from the Left and conserves many ties with its intellectual and cultural traditions. The critiques like those of *La diáspora*, then, are better understood as imminent critiques of the Left from within its own ranks at a crucial moment of the crystallization of its tropes in debates about revolution, literature, and the relationship between the two.

Apart from exposing the crimes of the revolution, such as the assassination of Ana María or the execution of Roque Dalton, *La diáspora* also addresses the intolerance and anti-intellectualism of the revolutionary politics and culture. Furthermore, this critique is consistently framed in terms of a critique of revolution as a political religion. In the context of an absolutization of value and the loss of middle terms, detractors like Juan Carlos and el Turco are treated like heretics: they do not merely distance themselves from political militancy but are "excommunicated" from the Party (Castellanos Moya *La diáspora* 116; 123). The political dogma of the Party does not allow room for the doubts of characters like Carmen and Juan Carlos, whose transgressions are met with intolerance. Juan Carlos explains the atmosphere of intolerance and paranoia that reigned in the Party after the Events of April of 1983, which further weakened his resolve and ultimately led to his decision to defect:

Les explicó que para él ya resultaba imposible seguir trabajando con el Partido, que la muerte de los dos comandantes había llevado a una situación de desconfianza que, desgraciadamente, condujo a una vigilancia policíaca...

La consigna en este momento es la condicionalidad absoluta, cualquier crítica resulta sospechosa. Cerrar filas significa someterse. (22)

Although it is reasonable to think that there was heightened surveillance and censorship within the Salvadoran revolution after the Events of April, Vezzetti insists that intolerance was an intrinsic feature of Latin American revolutionary movements: “la lucha más permanente terminó dirigida contra las desviaciones y las disidencias en la propia organización” (*Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* 202). In fact, well before the Events of April el Turco met with similar expressions of intolerance on account of his incomppliance with the austere ethics of the revolutionary, as the ideal of the “new man:”

Quiso seguir bebiendo y fumando mota como siempre, a lo descosido. Una afrenta para los curas del Partido... El problema es que en un aparato, en una maquinaria, aunque un tornillo funcione bien, si el todo no está diseñado para eso, de nada sirve.

Pues ése era el problema, que ese todo estaba diseñado sólo para tirar tiros y cumplir órdenes. (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 34)

The “machinery” of the Party, designed to produce a desired result, does not tolerate individuals who do not follow orders and do not conform to the strict codes of conduct for militants. The self-abnegation of a Christian like el Negro is much more in line with the standards of the Party. On the night of the party at el Negro’s apartment, el Turco decides to smoke his marijuana alone beforehand to avoid the disapproval of his militant friends: “el Negro no dejaba de ser ex-jesuita, miraba la yerba con mala cara y mejor no quemarlo ante sus compañeritos del Partido” (134). According to Vezzetti’s study of the psychology of political militancy, this is not merely a question of being judged by others but also of internalizing the injunctions of a system of beliefs: “el contenido de la revolución se subjetiviza en una suerte de ascesis o conversión que retoma algunos de los motivos de la edificación cristiana del hombre nuevo renacido en la fe” (*Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* 180). As a result of this edification, understood as a process of

introjecting external injunctions, the political militant and aspiring guerrillero is always comparing him or herself to an unattainable ideal and, consequently, reproaching him or herself for failing to measure up: the need to monitor the behaviour of others “también actuaba como un mandato despótico sobre el propio sujeto. El cumplimiento más cercano al ideal anunciado era la ofrenda de la propia vida y, en ese punto, el mito del hombre nuevo se tocaba con una religión de la muerte” (202). The other side of the coin of monitoring others and holding them accountable to high standards of conduct was subjecting oneself to those same standards. During his time in the Party, el Turco imposed this code of conduct upon himself, although it clearly went against his transgressive and free-thinking nature. Attracted to Carmen and convinced that the feeling was mutual, he nonetheless suppressed this attraction: “Siempre le había traído ganas, pero su compañero, la moral revolucionaria y las sandeces de ese entonces me habían detenido” (140). After breaking with the Party, however, both characters no longer abide by the norms of revolutionary asceticism and allow themselves licenses that they previously denied themselves, as evidenced by their sexual encounter at the party at el Negro’s apartment.

Since el Turco is the most openly transgressive, his conduct is the most heavily criticized by the militant community. Atheist in both senses, in the theistic sense as well as in the sense of revolution as a political religion, he represents the archetypal unbeliever, the critical thinker, the man of thought, antithesis of an archetypal man of action like Quique, rifle in hand, “un animal en el monte” (Castellanos Moya *La diáspora* 71). Anxious to return to the battlefield and condescending toward his office-working comrades, Quique represents those who, disparaging the quill, opt for the sword. According to Basile, this opposition remits to a deeper rift in Central American revolutions:

Asimismo se exponen las tensiones entre el ala política que reclama la necesidad de debatir, de mediar en las relaciones entre los diversos sectores, más atenta a los conflictos políticos, y el ala guerrera que exige dureza y tiende a resolver los conflictos sin discusión y por medio de las armas, que emplea un verticalismo cuya lógica es el mandato y la obediencia. (207)

Claudia Gilman in *Entre la pluma y el fusil: Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina* (2003) summarizes this anti-intellectual sentiment of Latin American revolutionary movements in the following terms:

[S]e produjo la abolición de una definición del intelectual como conciencia crítica de la sociedad. Una identidad sobre esas bases era posible en sociedades cuya naturaleza requería la crítica, no en una realidad inmersa en la revolución, donde cualquier producción, pensamiento, política o intervención se convertía, por su mero lugar de enunciación, en “revolucionaria.” O, en su variante opuesta, “contrarrevolucionaria...” La sociedad revolucionaria era por definición no criticable; entonces también era lógica que las ansias críticas de su intelectualidad se volvieran contra ella misma. (225-6)

This suspicion of the figure of the intellectual and the subsequent self-directed violence of the revolution finds its maximum expression in the execution of Roque Dalton, which constituted both a warning sign and an unsurmountable trauma for the revolutionary intellectuals of *La diáspora*. Even a less confrontational character like Juan Carlos cannot escape these same mechanisms of suspicion and surveillance:

Cuando se disponía a cruzar la calle, Juan Carlos tuvo el pensamiento que alguien lo seguía. Fue algo inexplicable, súbito, instintivo. Escudriño entre los transeúntes, pero no detectó a nadie sospechoso.

...

Ya sentado en el trolebús descubrió un rostro familiar. Salvadoreño, sin dudar. ¿Dónde lo había visto? No logró recordarlo.

Subía en el ascensor del edificio cuando se le vino la imagen del tipo: era del aparato de seguridad del Partido. (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 26)

This confirmation that he is under surveillance by the Party is compounded by his suspicion that he is also being monitored by agents of the Salvadoran military because of his history of political militancy:

Al medio-día bajó a comprar el periódico y una Coca-Cola.

En la esquina, sentado en la cuenta, respaldado en un poste, leyendo una fotonovela, estaba un sujeto sospechoso. Alzó la vista cuando Juan Carlos pasaba. A éste no le cupo duda de que era un oreja.

[...]

Trató de convencerse de que no tenía por qué alarmarse, que él estaba legal en México, fuera del Partido y de la guerra. Como si el enemigo de pronto desapareciera. Regresaba a observar cada ciertos minutos: el sujeto leía inmutable. (38)

Notice the parallelism between the two passages: the sensation of being followed or watched, the presence of someone suspicious, the certainty that the suspicious has been confirmed. Although the behavior of the character could be attributed to paranoia, a hypothesis which would be disproved later in the novel, it also establishes a homology between revolution and reaction. In other words, the Party is portrayed as engaging in the same extralegal activities as the Salvadoran military that it purports to be denouncing. It is in the exercise of violence where this homology between revolution and its enemies is clearest. When the distinction between counterviolence

and violence breaks down, the Left and the Right touch and overlap in the interface in the unlawful exercise of force and repression. In the novel, the assassination of comandante Ana María and the execution of Roque Dalton represent the interstice where counterviolence, losing its prefix, transforms into bare violence and the revolution becomes indistinguishable from its enemies. In *La diáspora* these events underlie the deconversion experience of the characters, such as the realization of Juan Carlos that the “ángeles revolucionarios” are “tan crueles como sus adversarios:”

[C]uando comprendió que Marcial y Ana María estaban irreversiblemente muertos, Juan Carlos experimentó una desoladora sensación de orfandad, de desamparo. También fue víctima de un sentimiento de culpa, de pecado (porque los caínes estaban en sus propias filas). Se trataba de una enorme conspiración metafísica, que había movido fuerzas incontrolables, insospechadas, y de pronto los había transformado de immaculados ángeles revolucionarios en vulgares seres humanos, tan criminales como sus adversarios. (107)

The disillusionment experienced by Juan Carlos is ostentatiously adorned in religious terminology: “culpa,” “pecado,” “caínes,” “metafísica,” “inmaculados ángeles” (107). In other words, Castellanos Moya frames revolution as a political religion. Against the backdrop of a prior sacralization and mythologizations of revolutionary militancy, dissidence and rupture with the revolution is consequently portrayed in terms of deconversion. According to Beatriz Sarlo, revolutions, especially those of Latin America, thrive off precisely this type of mythologization:

La revolución que alienta en estas configuraciones míticas tiene un potencial infinitamente más fuerte que el de las ideas políticas que peticionan una racionalidad intelectual y un conocimiento basado en la empiria [sic] de la sociedad y la economía.

Más que una teoría, la pasión produce lo que sus argumentos sólo pueden explicar: la identificación de las masas. (*La pasión y la excepción* 178)

The mobilization of the mythical may indeed solve the problem of generating support for a revolution and loyalty to the cause, but it engenders another serious problem in its place: if death can strengthen a political myth, the death of the myth itself is unsurmountable for those who experience revolution as religion. When the rational underpinnings of revolution as a political project are suppressed, there is nothing to stand on when the myth has been debunked. This crisis of legitimacy is the semantic core of *La diáspora* as characters like Juan Carlos, Carmen, and Gabriel struggle to reconcile the loss of an ideal with their former political convictions. Between the pole of the irreflexive believers like Quique and the iconoclasts like el Turco, these characters, having formerly believed in revolution, find themselves at varying stage of attachment to their former political convictions within an on-going process of deconversion.

Furthermore, *La diáspora* can be read as a programmatic text since many of the recurring techniques and themes of the novel are further developed in his later works. For this reason, Teresa Basile identifies the central theme of *La diáspora* – the loss of faith in revolution – as cornerstone of the literary project of the author: “En Castellanos Moya este proceso de quiebre de la fe revolucionaria..., de pérdida de una causa sagrada, de una política de emancipación y salvación es el centro, es el eje y es el inicio de gran parte de su narrativa” (209). At a time of axiological oversimplification, of irreflexively sacralising revolutionary counterviolence and demonizing counterrevolutionary violence, Castellanos Moya opens a space in Central and Latin American literature to contemplate revolution in a more nuanced manner, one that does not shy away from the complexities and paradoxes of the interstices.

2.2. Religion and Marxism in Latin American Modernity

One could argue that, strictly speaking, secular religions do not exist. This is precisely what Stanley G. Payne does in “On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and Its Application.” Here he claims that we are warranted in making use of categories like secular or political religions as heuristic devices insofar as they bring us closer to our objects of study: “The concept of political religion, like generic fascism, does not refer to an absolutely existing entity but is simply an analytical concept and heuristic device” (22). In this case, the term ‘secular religiosity’ would perhaps be more accurate precisely because it renounces the pretension to substitute religion for secular belief systems and instead foregrounds the resemblance of secular phenomena to religious modes of thought and experience. Another way around this problem would be to adopt a broad, non-theistic definition of religion. In *Faith of the Faithless* (2012) Simon Critchley does this by peremptorily stating that “[f]aith is not, then, necessarily theistic” (18). Here he is following a Durkheim definition of religion as an “organization of rites and rituals formed around a belief system aimed at buttressing social solidarity and morality” (Payne 21). While the “belief system” definition is broad enough to admit secular phenomena and contemplate the possibilities of political religions, its breadth also debilitates the term’s explanatory potential since any number of political, social, cultural, and properly religious expressions fall within its scope, from Greenpeace to the Tea Party, punks to alcoholics anonymous, evangelicals to hipsters.

In *Politics as Religion* (2006) Emilio Gentile introduces greater rigor into his definition by incorporating a distinction between secular, civil, and political religions. He subsumes civil and political religions beneath the broader rubric of secular religions:

Civil and political religions belong to a more general phenomenon, secular religion. This term is used to describe a more or less developed system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and symbols that create an aura of sacredness around an entity belonging to this world and turn it into a cult and object of worship and devotion. (1)

As for civil religions, Gentile names Rousseau's method of forming citizens and Auguste Comte's positivist Religion of Humanity as examples. While civil religions stress rationality and tolerance, accepting restraints to their sphere of influence, political religions provide totalizing explanations that tend to bypass reason (Stanley 24). For Gentile, the emergence of political religions is closely tied to the key moments of the process of secularization, such as the advent of the secular State with the revolutions of the late 18th century: "The first real religion of politics appeared during the American and French revolutions as a set of beliefs, values, myths, symbols, and rituals that conferred a sacred quality and meaning on the new political institution of popular sovereignty" (xvi). With the nationalisms of the 19th century as the paradigmatic example, Gentile defines political religions in the following manner:

a religion of politics is created every time a political entity such as a nation, a state, race, class, party, or movement is transformed into a sacred entity, which means it becomes transcendent, unchallengeable, and intangible. As such, it becomes the core of an elaborate system of beliefs, myths, values, commandments, rituals, and symbols, and consequently an object of faith, reverence, veneration, loyalty, and devotion, for which, if necessary, people are willing to sacrifice their lives. (xiv)

Within this scheme, the revolutions of Central America would fall under the rubric of a political religion, and this is indeed how Castellanos Moya treats them in *La diáspora*. Yet, as soon as we try to extrapolate the category from its original context and apply it to the sociohistorical realities

of Latin America, problems arise. Gentile's concepts of civil and political religions are rooted in Max Weber's theory of modernization as a process of secularization in which religion, art, science, and politics progressively gain autonomy from one another and form separate spheres of knowledge. In the case of Latin American modernity, however, it is questionable how much autonomy the spheres of religion or art have gained from politics. For this reason, a discussion of Latin American political religions would require further qualifications that contemplate the specificities of a peripheral modernity, such as the multiple imbrications of politics and religion, as well as those of politics and art.

Payne's account of the relationship between religion and politics in modernity is framed in terms of displacement and substitution: "What is generally understood as modern secularism introduced varying alternatives, substitutes and supplements for theistic religions" (23). According to Gentile, civil and political religions stem from a process of secularization that characterizes European modernity in which parts of the function and content of traditional religion are displaced and channeled into secular expressions (12-3). In reference to the theories of Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx, Alasdair MacIntyre claims, in *Marxism and Christianity* (1968), that "one cannot understand these adequately unless one understands them as at least partial secular versions, or attempted secular versions, of the Christian religion" (6). He goes on to consider the relationship between Christianity and Marxism in terms of succession: "Thus Marxism shares in good measure both the content and the functions of Christianity as an interpretation of human existence, and it does so because it is the historical successor of Christianity" (6). What these theories of the secular surrogates for religion have in common is a teleological conception of modernization as a process of rationalization and secularization through which anachronistic modes of religious thought and experience are progressively shed and

replaced by secular placeholders, which subsume the functions and content of religion in a sublimated form. Within this conceptual framework, the relationship between religion and politics is situated on a vertical axis and articulated as a diachronic succession in which an anterior phase is replaced by a posterior one. The relationship between successive formulations of the relationship between religion and politics, then, is based on difference, that is, change throughout time, in the teleological march towards greater modernization and rationalization.

What happens, though, when we uproot this conceptual framework from its European soils, so to speak, and attempt to replant it in the periphery of the Western sphere of influence? As mentioned above, modernity and secularity are not homologous in the case of Latin America. In other words, the scheme in which politics, science, art, and religion conform autonomous spheres does not hold true for the process of modernization in Latin America. For this reason, it would be more accurate to formulate the relationship between religion and politics in Latin American modernity in terms of a horizontal continuum that highlights their structural similarities in both function and content at any given moment. This allows for a model of dynamic interaction between religion and politics that has more explanatory value than a model of the vertical and seemingly mechanistic substitution of historical phases.

It is not that Latin America is at an earlier stage of development in a uniform process of modernization (diachronic explanation) but rather a question of the place the region occupies within what Immanuel Wallerstein has called a world system (synchronic explanation). There is more than one modernity, and nations on the periphery of an international capitalist economic and political system have a different experience of modernization than those of the center. Economic factors like the exportation of raw materials interacted with social factors like a class structure whose principal opposition is between an oligarchy and peasants and cultural factors

like the subsistence of indigenous imaginaries to produce an alternate experience of modernity. Here we might think of Ángel Rama's concept of transculturation as an active process in which some elements of autochthonous culture are conserved and put into dialogue with the culture and institutions inherited from the colonizer (*Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* 38-39). Within this theory, modernization implies a process of negotiation between indigenous, African, and European cultural traditions. A Latin American modernity, therefore, would have to accommodate the subsistence of imaginaries and practices that predated European modernity. This necessarily implies a different configuration between religion and politics than in the context of European modernization, often framed in terms of secularization. In the context of Latin American modernization, then, secular religions do not replace or substitute religion but, rather, politics and religion coexist side by side or in varying degrees of interpenetration, as do politics and art. This would help explain the multiple amalgams of religions and politics in Latin American from the role Afro-Caribbean religious practice in the Haitian revolution of 1798 to the Cangaceiros in the Northeast of Brazil a century later to the various articulations of Marxism and Christianity in the revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century. What concerns us here is the latter, that is, the different interfaces of Christianity and Marxism in Latin American revolutions, expressed as either politicized religious movements such as Liberation Theology or what Michael Löwy terms "liberationist Christianity" or as Latin American revolutions as political religions (*War of Gods* 33).

In the *War of the Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (1996) Löwy analyzes Liberationist Christianity as an example of the negotiation between premodern traditions and European modernity:

Liberationist Christianity, the social movement that has its intellectual expression in liberation theology, criticizes ‘really existing’ modernity in Latin America (dependent capitalism) in the name of both pre-modern values and a utopian modernity (the classless society), through the socio-analytical mediation of Marxist theory, which unites the critique of the first with the promise of the second. ... We have here a socio-cultural form that escapes the classic dichotomies between modernity and tradition, ethics and science, religion and the secular world. (64)

Here Marx’s critique of capitalist modernity is infused with a similar critique made from the point of view of “premodern values.” Furthermore, Löwy detects what he calls a “common matrix” and “structural affinity” between Christianity and Marxism which makes them privileged modes of addressing to problems specific to Latin America (36; 69). Instead of attributing the confluence of religion and politics, of Christianity and Marxism, in Latin America to the displacement of the former by the latter or to the absorption of the former into the latter, there is a simpler and more coherent explanation at hand: they both address the same issue, perhaps the central dilemma of Latin America society: poverty. The gospel preference for the poor was reaffirmed by the second Vatican Council (1962-65) and by the Latin American Episcopal conference in Medellín conference in 1968, as the Church struggled to open itself up to the world. Moreover, in Latin America, popular Christianity had long since been open to the world, without the blessing of the institutions of the Church. And, in the engagement with the social realities of the continent, Latin American Christians often looked to Marxism as a tool for understanding their sociohistorical situation:

The discovery of Marxism by progressive Christians and liberation theology was not a purely intellectual or academic process. The starting point for it was an unavoidable fact,

a brutal mass reality in Latin America: poverty. For many socially concerned believers, Marxism was chosen because it appeared to be the most systematic, coherent, and global explanation of the causes of this poverty, and the only sufficiently radical proposal for abolishing it. (Löwy, *The War of Gods* 73)

Löwy argues that Latin America revolutions solved the problem of the revolutionary subject. While Western Marxism was agonizing over the lack of the revolutionary subject and the failure of the proletariat to play the role assigned it within historical materialism, the revolutions of Latin America had no shortage of potential candidates for the job. The category of the Latin American poor or what Löwy refers to as the *pobretariado* includes not one but various of such revolutionary subjects, from indigenous peasants to urban workers to the vast swathes of the excluded and marginalized sectors of Latin American society:

Some Marxists will no doubt criticize this replacement of the ‘materialist’ concept of the proletariat by such a vague, emotional and imprecise category (‘the poor’). In reality, this term corresponds to the Latin American situation, where one finds, in both the towns and the countryside, an enormous mass of poor people, including workers, but also unemployed, semi-employed, seasonal workers, street vendors, marginal people, prostitutes, and so on, who are excluded from the ‘formal’ productive system. (73)

Within this framework, the *pobretariado*, as the negated element of an uneven capitalist modernity of structural iniquity, could form the basis of an alternate path to modernization. The various amalgams of Christianity and Marxism in the context of Latin American revolutionary politics and culture, then, are not accidental but stem for an overlap in both theory and practice. As the term *pobretariado* exemplifies, both Christian and Marxist discourses underpin the conception of history that informed both the theory and practice of Latin American revolution.

In *La pasión y la excepción: Eva, Borges y el asesinato de Aramburu* (2003) Beatriz Sarlo interprets the articulation of religion and revolution as anachronic: “Varios siglos le había tomado a la Iglesia aceptar los procesos de secularización que limitaron su influencia en el reino de este mundo y separaron la esfera religiosa de la política... El integrismo invierte la marcha de la secularización” (168). Her definition of *integrismo* reinforces her argument that any interface between religion and politics, not just by the State, is anachronic in a secularized society: “la afirmación de la integridad de la doctrina cristiana en todas las esferas de la vida, en oposición a la discontinuidad de los lenguajes y la diferencia de los dominios que acompañan a la secularización de la sociedad moderna” (259). Sarlo’s asseveration rests upon the assumption that in Latin America modernity should resemble European modernity. However, given the particular history of the continent, such as the influence of indigenous and African traditions, and the peripheral place that Latin America occupies within an international capitalist system, with all the disadvantages that this implies, the expectation of Sarlo hardly seems fair, or even possible. The configurations between religion and politics, like those between art and politics, are different in Latin America than in Europe. This does not imply a wholesale rejection of modernity nor an attempt to return to a lost past but rather an alternate mode of modernization that contemplates the realities of transculturation.

2.3. Taking Sides: The Latin American Public Intellectual and Revolution as Secular Religiosity

Thus far, we have established the existence of a dynamic interaction between revolution and religion, between Marxism and Christianity, as a feature of Latin American modernity, but we still have not specified the nature of this confluence, that is, their shared functions and

contents. Nor have we established the role that literature plays in the formulation of revolution as a form of secular religiosity. The objective of this section is to address these tasks so as to be able to then determine how Castellanos Moya breaks with existing conceptions of the political obligations of the Latin American public intellectual and concomitant modes of politicizing the work of literature.

Without singling out Christianity, Payne, in his general analysis of secular religions, claims that all revolutionary movements display some of the characteristics of religion:

The ways in which all revolutionary movements, left or right, as well as some of the extremist nationalisms, adopted the characteristics of religion are clear. These include development of a salvation myth, expressed in holistic socio-political and cultural terms; creation of elaborate ceremonies and liturgies; canonisation of saints and martyrs; the development of a cultural and spiritual revolution to resocialise human beings and create a new man; accompanied by public modes of contrition, repentance and expiation; and the projection of messianic and universalist goals. The revolutionary movements projected new cosmologies, demonologies and versions of the apocalypse. (25-6)

Many theorists have analyzed the presence of these features in Marxist revolutionary movements. In his celebrated study *The Meaning of History* (1949) Karl Löwith argues that Marxism, as a substantive philosophy of history, is informed by the eschatological and soteriological dimension of Judeo-Christian theology. Despite its staunch privileging of the secular and the material, Marxism's underlying concept of history "corresponds to the general scheme of the Jewish-Christian interpretation of history as a providential advance toward a final goal which is meaningful" (45). With the thesis of Löwith as his starting point, Anatoly M.

Khazanov in “Marxism-Leninism as a Secular Religion” offers a more thorough enumeration of the shared features between Marxism and Judeo-Christian theologies:

The Marxist theology further developed by Soviet Marxism-Leninism was based on the Judeo-Christian eschatological model: The Garden of Eden – Original Sin and the Fall – Redemption – and the Second Coming. The alleged primitive communism was substituted for Eden, private property and the division of labor for the Fall, the proletarian revolution for the Redemption, and the future communist society for the Second Coming and return to Paradise. Salvation would be only collective, not individual, but the proletariat was perceived as the Chosen People and simultaneously acquired a soteriological function. It played the role of Saviour or Messiah. (123)

While Khazanov finds this interface suspicious, dangerous even, a sign of irrational thinking overtaking the political (Khazanov 119-20), Terry Eagleton has a much more positive outlook on the phenomenon, which is based on a mutual concern for justice:

In a broader sense, however, there are clear affinities between religious thought and Marx’s vision of history. Justice, emancipation, the day of reckoning, the struggle against oppression, the coming to power of the dispossessed, the future reign of peace and plenty: Marx shares these motifs with the Judeo-Christian heritage, however coy come of his epigones may be about confessing the fact. There are votaries of Marx who will readily confess his debt to the most arcane Hegelian ideas, yet who jib at the proposition that he might also have paid his dues to religious thought. Marxism should feel enriched by this legacy, not embarrassed by it. (90)

For Eagleton, the permanence of religious elements does not delegitimize Marxism but increases its potential. As signaled above, Löwy argues that this is especially the case in Latin America

where Christianity and Marxism joined forces in the 1960s to address the region's chronic poverty and systemic inequalities. Although he was not contemplating the social realities of Latin American per se, MacIntyre claims that Marxism, like Christianity, constitutes an interpretative framework, a key to understanding one's place in society and history, whose implications are both theoretical and practical (4). The dynamic interaction between religion and revolution in the second half of the twentieth century can be attributed to their efficacy as interpretative frameworks for assessing social realities specific to the Latin American experience. As complementary interpretive frameworks, Christianity and Marxism render intelligible the realities of poverty and structural injustice, for example. While Christianity identifies the need for the epistemic privileging of the poor, marginalized, and excluded, Marxism for its part provides a course of action for the vindication of the poor and for the realization of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Within this amalgam of religion and revolution, the Latin American public intellectual was considered a priest of sorts, not relegated to her armchair or ivory tower but, to the contrary, expected to take sides and get her hands dirty, so to speak. In her study of the relationship between Latin American intellectuals and revolution, Claudia Gilman claims that there was an expectation that writers and intellectuals use their public platforms to garner support for revolutionary causes:

En un principio, los escritores de la época procuraron combinar una práctica específica – la literatura – con una labor de esclarecimiento y propaganda que buscaba convencer a la sociedad (o a quienes fueran sus interlocutores, reales o imaginarios) de la necesidad de la revolución. ... La Cuba revolucionaria fue considerada el modelo de la nueva sociedad

imaginada para el resto de los países latinoamericanos. Críticos y escritores se transformaron en “cancilleres” de esa revolución. (370-1)

Within the context of armed struggle, both the Latin American public intellectual and the work of literature were invested with an explicitly political mission. What happens, though, when this historical context changes?

Up to this point in my analysis, I have not addressed the proverbial elephant in the room: the fact of the sanguine defeat of revolutionary movements throughout the continent, with the exception of Cuba and, for brief parentheses, Chile and Nicaragua. The revolutionary hopes of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s proved baseless: local militaries, with the support of the US, systematically eradicated revolutionary militancy through dictatorship, warfare, and genocide in a bacchanal of violence, effectively removing potential obstacles to the implementation of neoliberal policy (Avelar 58-9).¹³ In the wake of this limit situation, Latin America entered a post-revolutionary and post-dictatorial epoch that was decidedly post-Marxist, in both of the connotations delineated by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), that is, either as a revision of twentieth century Marxism that stresses adaption to new sociohistorical realities or as a disavowal of this legacy (xxiv). In 1996, Löwy observed a tendency within Latin American intellectual production to “de-emphasize Marxism” (*The War of Gods* 125). Recall Löwy’s concession, in the prologue to his

¹³ In *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* Idelbar Avelar argues that, although the term ‘transition’ is often invoked to characterize the return to civil rule, “the real transitions are the dictatorships themselves... In other words, the return of democracy does not imply a *transit* to any place other than the one where the dictatorship left off. ‘Transition to democracy’ meant nothing but the juridical-electoral legitimation of the successful transition carried out under the military, that is, the ultimate equation between political freedom for people and economic freedom for capital, as if the former depended on the latter” (58-9).

2007 reissue of the *The Marxism of Che Guevara*, that the motives of Guevara, together with the underlying rationale that informed them, would no longer be intelligible to his readers (xxv). What, then, happens to the political function of the Latin American public intellectual and the work of literature in this new context of the defeat of the revolutionary Left? With Marxist discourse on the wane and the proverbial door to revolutionary armed struggle forcefully and definitively shut in most parts of Latin America, with the exception of small pockets of resistance in Peru and Colombia, one might think that the Latin American public intellectual would shed its political functions and the work of literature might achieved a belated autonomy from the sphere of politics. This, however, was not the case.

One mode of the politicization of the work of literature quickly gave rise to another. The growing unintelligibility of Marxism, with its concern for the future, and its gradual decline as an interpretive framework in Latin America coincided with the rise of memory and its concern for the horrors of the past. In *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* Enzo Traverso claims that, throughout the West, Marxism, as a theoretical paradigm that underpinned the political programs of the Left, was displaced by memory:

Meaningfully, the emergence of memory in the public sphere has coincided with the intellectual turn known as “the crisis in Marxism.” Such a synchronism between the rise of memory and the decline of Marxism is highly emblematic. Marxism played a major role in the humanities when *society* was their dominant paradigm; its eclipse became almost complete in the 1980s, when scholarly research shifted toward the paradigm of *memory*. (55-6)

In “Present Pasts: Memory(ies) of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone of Latin America,” Emilio Creznal observes how a similar process was taking place in Latin America in the 1980s

and 1990s: “The revolutionary tone that prevailed in the reports of government repression prior to the coups was replaced by a humanitarian narrative that called for the safeguarding of the rights of individuals on the ground that everyone is entitled to the enjoyment of human rights” (2-3). Due to the degree of violence in its recent past, Latin America became a hotbed for the proliferation of memory discourses and practices in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. In the face of State policies of amnesty, impunity, silence, and forgetting that characterized early transitional Latin American societies, the paradigm of memory in Latin America was framed as a struggle for memory, truth, and justice (Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente* 21-2). Although this operation implied symbolic inscription and a gesture of continuation with vanquished revolutionary movements, here Marxism served less as a political praxis than as a signifier for the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s. The uses of revolution within Latin American memory politics naturally had more to do with addressing the needs of the post-revolutionary present, such as breaking the silence from above and advocating for victims, than it did with understanding the past in itself.

This conservation of Marxism within memory movements is not without its ironies. Latin American revolutionary movements, inspired by the example of Cuba and Guevara’s theory of the *foco*, assumed an offensive position that implied, in the words of Regis Debray, “to pass over to the attack on imperialism and its local agents” (126). The position of memory movements, in contrast, could only be described as defensive, consisting in the much humbler objective of trying to contain the Right and limit its excesses. This corresponds to a shift in the content of their respective political theories from a vision of a just and an egalitarian society, expressed in positive terms, to the mere absence of horrendous crimes, expressed negatively. As a political objective, the non-repetition of past crimes offers no guarantee against the structural inequalities

and systemic oppression to which the Latin American revolutions were responding in the first place. If memory politics aspires to prevent the dictatorships from resurfacing, its pact with the past comes at the price of the future. As the horizon of the future closes, then, what is left is a choice between the dictatorial past and the neoliberal present.

In this new post-revolutionary context, often referred to as a transition, literature was invested with a new set of political functions. In *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), Idelber Avelar claims that Latin American post-revolutionary literatures have privileged access to what he terms “memory value,” understood in the following terms:

Unlike the replacement of old by new commodities, the substitution proper to the work of mourning always includes the persistence of an unmourned, unresolved remainder, which is the very index of the interminability of mourning... If the mourner does not achieve true introjection of the lost object, no healing of the loss will ever take effect without leaving behind an unassimilable residue, and mourning work will always preserve a dimension irreducible to the metaphorical operation proper to the market. What cannot be replaced, what lingers on as a residue of memory, is precisely the allegorically charged ruin – hence the contention that mourning suspends exchange value to posit a third dimension, irreducible to use and exchange, and not contemplated by Marx’s opposition: that of *memory value*, a paradoxical kind of value, to be sure, because what is most proper to it is to resist any exchange. It is due to that insistence of memory, of the survival of the past as a ruin in the present, that mourning displays a necessarily allegorical structure. (5)

Furthermore, as the persistence of the past within the present, which cannot be properly represented but only referred to obliquely through allegory, this residue is the remnant of a traumatic loss. Since trauma, by definition, as a breakdown in the chain of signification, cannot be positively represented in language, it can only be accessed in a displaced form, through operations like what Avelar refers to as allegory. This, then, is where literature comes into the picture. Following Freud and trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, Avelar claims that literature constitutes a privileged mode of representing the unrepresentable, of narrating the unnarratable (8). Through indirection and figuration or what Avelar refers to as “speaking otherwise,” as opposed to mimesis and (re)presentation (in the sense of making present again), it can access the unresolved remainder of a traumatic loss:

Allegory is the trope of the impossible; by necessity it responds to a fundamental impossibility, an essential breakdown in representation. It builds that impossibility, in fact, into its emergence as a trope. If the historical defeat to the dictatorships also implied a defeat for literary writing, the task of *allos-agoreuein*, speaking otherwise, imposes itself. ... Postdictatorial literature speaks (the) other(wise). Allegorization takes place when that which is most familiar reveals itself as (an)other, when the most customary is interpreted as a ruin, and the pile of catastrophes hitherto concealed under that storm called “progress” at last begins to be unearthed. The most familiar cultural documents become allegorical once they refer back to the barbarism that lies at their origin. (232-3)

Fernando Reati makes a similar claim in his study of early Argentinian post-dictatorship literature, *Nombrar lo innombrable* (1992), as the title of his book suggests. He argues that unprecedented sociohistorical realities of a traumatic nature require new forms of expression that

exceed mimetic approaches and commonplace notions of the representative capabilities of language:

Lo que se observa es que, junto al reacomodamiento de toda una sociedad obligada a reimaginar un universo y enfrentada a nuevas maneras de pensarse a sí misma y de pensar al otro, se produce un cuestionamiento desde la literatura de lo que significa representar una realidad inestable como arena movediza ... se replantea el ideal de arte mimético, ante la conciencia de que los viejos modos de representación ya no bastan ...
Ante una violencia de tipo distinto, se hace necesaria una reacción distinta. (32-3)

For Reati as well, literature constitutes a privileged sites for confronting experiences that exceed our capacities to signify them (34). In *Instrucciones Para La Derrota: Narrativas Éticas y Política de Perdedores* (2010), Ana Maria Amar Sánchez argues that literature not only became a space to confront defeat but also a form of cultural resistance in a post-revolutionary epoch (121). In the case of the cultural politics of the Argentinian post-revolutionary Left, Christian Gundermann in *Actos melancólicos: formas de resistencia en la posdictadura Argentina* (2007) cites literature and cinema as cultural forms that are capable of mobilizing the melancholia produced by the defeat of Latin American revolutionary politics to dispute the hegemony of neoliberal discourse in the post-dictatorship era (40).

Within all these accounts of Latin American post-revolutionary narrative, the work of literature is mobilized within human rights struggles on account of its memory value. In addition, this new politicization of Latin American literature also included testimonial genres due to their ability to record human rights violations and thereby advocate for victims of human rights abuses. The political function of the Latin American public intellectual and the work of literature, then, did not come to an end with the defeat of revolutionary movements but merely

adopted new forms. What during the period of revolutionary struggle was framed as a commitment to the *pueblo* and an obligation to garner support for revolutionary causes became, in a post-revolutionary epoch of neoliberal triumphalism, an obligation to address the violence of the recent past and a commitment to human rights politics. The transition from dictatorship to post-dictatorship, from revolutionary struggle to post-revolutionary society, was accompanied by a paradigm shift from Marxist to memory discourses and from a political and cultural idiom of revolution to one of human rights. Throughout this transition, one of the few things that remained the same, however, was the structure of the political functions of the Latin American public intellectual and the work of literature, albeit with a change in content.

In this new sociohistorical context, the politicization of the work of literature within a paradigm of human rights and memory discourse involved a mythologization and romanticization of revolutionary militancy, as well as the idealization and sacralization of political militants (Richard 6). In the early post-revolutionary period, accounts of political violence in the recent past tended to emphasize victimhood and depoliticize militants, an operation that Vezzetti refers to as “reducción culturalista” (*Pasado y presente* 198). Many of the nuances and complexities of revolutionary militancy, together with the question of the responsibility of militants for crimes committed in the name of revolution, were lost in oversimplified accounts, which Vezzetti refers to in terms of “fetichismo narrativo:”

Existe una nutrida producción de relatos surgidas de los restos de una tradición revolucionaria ... que recuerda ese pasado bajo la forma de un relato de heroísmo, más aún, de una competencia de victimización. ... En ese relato autoexaltante no hay lugar para ninguna pregunta que retorne sobre las responsabilidades propias o admita verdaderamente los fracasos y los duelos por el pasado. (204)

What Vezzetti frames as a discourse based upon an opposition between “los héroes y los mártires,” (*Pasado y presente* 205), Claudia Hilb, for her part, articulates in terms of a confrontation between the innocent and the guilty: “[e]n un primer momento, la salida a la luz de los detalles escalofriantes de la represión, impulsadas por las denuncias de las víctimas y acompañados por toda la prensa, incluida la más sensacionalista, favoreció una cristalización en términos de ‘inocentes’ y ‘culpables’” (18). Vezzetti argues that the figure of the victim should be considered pre-political, since a victim is defined, precisely, by a lack of agency, that is, not by acting in the world but by merely being acted upon:

Comencemos por la naturaleza y la representación de las víctimas. Ya se vio el modo en que el primer relato ... contribuyó a la construcción de las víctimas en un sentido pleno, definidas a partir de un destino sufrido pasivamente. Era la representación misma de una inocencia esencial, prepolítica, si se quiere, en la que la sociedad depositaba la autorrepresentación de su propia ajenidad frente a la tragedia. En ese primer ciclo, fundacional podría decirse, de una memoria ejemplar, política y jurídica, se resaltaban los derechos avasallados y la degradación del Estado, de modo que las circunstancias, las motivaciones, la historia personal y política que estaban detrás cada una de las víctimas eran superfluas (206-7).

Over time, the depoliticized figure of the innocent victim gave way to a recuperation of the political subjectivity of the vanquished:

Es posible pensar que, después de un primer momento de una memoria volcada hacia las víctimas y los crímenes, era esperable y aun deseable un trabajo que retornara sobre la experiencia para rescatar, debatir incluso, los programas, las acciones y las figuras del agregado político de la radicalización revolucionaria. Si hasta entonces casi únicamente

se había relatado el horror de la masacre, con un centro puesto en los testimonios sobre los campos de concentración y exterminio, en la nueva producción, necesariamente sesgada, se trataría de recordar a las víctimas como militantes, luchadores activos por una causa. (Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente* 30)

This concession, however, did not change the fact the narratives of the recent past tended, in general terms, to idealize revolutionary militancy:

Por fin, desde hace algún tiempo, ...se ha instalado en numerosos sectores, sobre toda la juventud, una reinterpretación favorable de los ideales y el compromiso de los militantes pertenecientes a movimientos populares de aquella década, que tiende a cristalizar en una lectura en términos de valores que identifica a ‘los buenos’ y a ‘los malos’ de nuestra historia. (Hilb 18)

The human rights movements that followed in the wake of the defeat of revolutionary struggles remit back to a past of Marxist revolutionary praxis, yet they appropriate this past in an idealized and simplified form, heavily adorned with tropes, such as the lost revolution or revolutionary militancy as an expression of the passion and idealism of youth. Thus, Vezzetti signals “la persistencia de un sentido común izquierdista en el discurso de la memoria social y los derechos humanos, que se expresa en esa épica del combate permanente contra los poderes de siempre” (204). The appropriation of human rights movements and memory activists of the imaginary of the revolutionary generation is not free of a mythologization of Marxism, like the one described by Alasdair MacIntyre in *Marxism and Christianity*:

But this is what Marxism has become: a set of ‘views’ which stand in no kind of organic relationship to an individual’s social role or identity, let alone his real position in the class structure. And in becoming like this, Marxism has been ‘practiced’ in precisely the same

way as that in which religious beliefs have been practiced in modern secularized societies. (122-3)

In the case of Latin American memory and human rights politics, then, what we really have is sacralization to the second degree. Originally, which is to say during the period of revolutionary struggles, revolutionary practice was expressed as a secular religiosity within a heteronomous, not autonomous, conception of the relationship between religion and politics in Latin American modernity, as analyzed above. In a second moment, which is to say in a decidedly post-revolutionary context, Latin American human rights movements appropriated and, more specifically, sacralised the sensibilities of the vanquished revolutionary generation, which included, among other thing, the sacralization of revolution.

The memory boom, however, did not last forever. By the early 2000s, Latin American memory discourses were beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Verónica Garibotto suggests that the general disappointment with memory discourse and trauma theory may be associated with their shift from a counterhegemonic to a hegemonic position: “memory fatigue is by no means exclusive to the Argentine context. There certainly is – as Huyseen, Todorov, and Tal suggest – a global disappointment with the genre that may be related to the shift from counterhegemony to hegemony” (*Rethinking Testimonial Cinema* 29). While testimonial genres and post-dictatorship narrative began as oppositional modes of cultural production, in the sense that they entered into conflict with the State politics of erasure of human rights abuses that characterized the early transitional period, over the course of the last two decades of the twentieth century they gradually began to make inroads into both State institutions and mass media. To varying degrees, Latin American States began to adopt some of the transitional justice measures of memory politics, such as the opening of trials for perpetrators of human rights

violations; the creation of truth commissions, like those of Argentina and Guatemala, to investigate human rights abuses; the opening of governmental offices to redress victims; the implementation of public school curricula to address political violence in the recent past; the creation of public holidays; and the construction of public monuments and museums. It did not take long for mass media and the culture industry to capitalize on this trend through an outpouring of memory commodities, such as television programs, documentaries, movies, novels, and even soap operas upon themes related to political violence in the recent past. According to Garibotto, this led to a high degree of codification in the field of cultural production, which in turn led to overdetermination and the exhaustion of memory narratives through the repetition of formulas that became increasingly predictable to consumers (134-135). In this context, “the 1970s are the nodal point articulating universal signification,” which “seems to be directly linked to the... passage from counterhegemony to hegemony as well as to the universalization and erasure that this passage entails” (134). Through this overdetermination of memory in political discourse and the media, dictatorship and revolution were reduced to an “invariable and stable referent (an empty signifier) that serves as a background to cultural creation” (135). It is this receptivity of the State, media, and the culture industry to memory discourse that Garibotto refers as hegemonization.

Yet, according to Garibotto, “[i]t was precisely as the genre reached the center of public discourse that reluctance arose” (3). By reticence to memory discourse, she is referring to the production of second-generation post-dictatorship narrative with its penchant for dark humor, parody, irreverence, and the transgression of the conventions of first-generation cultural production. In *Playful Memories* (2016), her study of second-generation cultural production, Jordana Blejmar argues that “as human rights became more explicitly integrated into state

policies..., literature and art were freed from certain constraints and allowed these discourses to talk about the past without always falling into an homage to the victims” (39). In his periodization of Argentine literature from the end of the dictatorship to the present, in “Culpables e inocentes, héroes y traidores, cómplices y espectadores: representaciones de la violencia política en Argentina desde 1980 hasta el presente,” Fernando Reati also observes how many of the constraints and taboos of first-generation post-dictatorship narrative have been lifted in recent years:

En el caso argentino, en pocas décadas se ha producido una fructífera reelaboración de los significados originales y una búsqueda de nuevos sentidos al ritmo de los cambios en el país. Para usar la imagen de una paleta de colores, en la primera década predominaron las visiones en blanco y negro con el énfasis puesto en las divisiones tajantes entre culpables e inocentes; en la siguiente se comenzó a reconocer la existencia de una enorme zona gris donde predominaron las ambigüedades y donde las responsabilidades se reparten de manera más esquemática; en la última se apela a todos los colores y se incluyen recursos como el humor, la parodia y la crítica burlona a las certezas de la militancia setentista. (102)

Here I argue that the last stage, that of irreverence, de-mythologization, and de-sacralization, can be generalized to include many other regions of Latin America. This emergent mode of narrating political violence can be found in the literary production of Félix Bruzzone (Argentina), Mariana Eva Pérez (Argentina), Alans Pauls (Argentina), Gustavo Nielsson (Argentina), Álvaro Bisama (Chile), José Manuel Robles (Peru), Francisco Ángeles (Peru), Rodrigo Hasbún (Bolivia), Julian Fuks (Brazil), and Juan Pablo Villalobos (Mexico). While Argentina has been an epicenter of this emergent aesthetics, similar approaches can be found in other regions of the continent, from

the Southern Cone to Central America, passing through the region of the Andes. Although residual modes of narrating political violence subsist, the meanings and uses of revolutionary militancy have undergone considerable change over the past two decades. I argue that the narrative of Castellanos Moya has been instrumental in developing and furthering these new modes of treating political militancy in Latin American literature. The defining features of his narrative project – humor, irreverence, transgression, de-sacralization – can be traced back to his first novel, *La diáspora*. His revision of revolutionary militancy in this work not only forms the foundation for his narrative program, culminating in *Insensatez* (2004), but also constitutes a turning point in contemporary Latin American literature and, in broader terms, represents a shift in the conception of the public functions of the Latin American intellectual and the work of literature.

2.4. Conclusion: Writing from the Sidelines. Belated Autonomy and the Birth of the Uncommitted Intellectual

In this chapter I have suggested that the multiples imbrications of religion and politics are specific to Latin American modernity. In Latin America, modernity was not homologous with secularization given that religion and politics did not form autonomous spheres but were locked in a heteronomous relationship. Within the public sphere, religious discourse was not merely replaced by secular variants but existed side by side and in tension with the discourses of the European Enlightenment to produce a transculturated experience of a peripheral modernity. This is not to deny the existence of Latin American political religions but rather, to the contrary, to explain the affinities between a religious ideology, like (liberationist) Christianity, and a political ideology, like Marxism, as complementary frameworks for interpreting the social

realities of Latin America throughout the twentieth century. Although Castellanos Moya's treatment of revolution is ambiguous, displaying both nostalgic attachment to its ideals and an embittered repudiation of its errors, his critique of revolutionary militancy as a political religion is unequivocal. Yet, the objective of this chapter is not merely to establish that *La diáspora* articulates a critique of revolution by framing its contradictions in terms of secular religiosity, but rather to argue that, through this type of critique, the narrative of Castellanos Moya registers an important shift in conception of the political functions of both the Latin American public intellectual and the work of literature.

If religion and politics did not constitute autonomous spheres of knowledge in Latin American modernity, neither did the realms of art and politics. According to Avelar, it wasn't until the 1960s that Latin American literature achieved autonomy from patronage through the market:

The notion of the book as a marketable object did not become unavoidable in Latin America until the transmutation of the 1960s... it is certain that by becoming autonomous, the Latin American fictionist underwent a fundamental displacement: he was no longer primarily a state functionary, a career which countless Latin American male writers had found their means of survival beginning long before the national independences. Their recent professionalization indicated an accomplished, if problematic and uneven, separation of social spheres. The aesthetic was now a sphere in itself, subject to market laws and pressures. (29)

Yet, the professionalization of the writer and the autonomy of literature from the State through the emergence of a specialized market, with all its dependent institutions, was principally an economic affair and did not imply a correlative autonomy from politics. As Claudia Gilman has

demonstrated in *Entre la pluma y el fusil* (2003), there was widespread pressure for Latin American writers and public intellectuals to adhere to the norm of using their public platforms to advocate in favor of revolution (32). In the post-Boom period, testimonio replicated a similar injunction to politicize the work of literature and intellectual labor, conceived as the cultural components of revolutionary struggle (Beverley and Zimmerman 1). After the definitive defeat of revolution throughout vast areas of Latin America and after the ideological dominant of the Latin American Left subsequently shifted from Marxism to human rights, first-generation post-dictatorship narrative mobilized literature within the framework of memory politics as a struggle for memory, truth, and justice. Within this new aesthetic and political paradigm, proper to the context of early transitional society, literature was conceived as a privileged site of resistance due to its memory value, that is, its ability to access an unprecedented experience of collective trauma, as well as its ability to represent the unrepresentable experience of victims and thereby advocate for justice (Reati *Nombrar lo innombrable* 34; Avelar 3; Amar Sánchez 124). In the emerging post-revolutionary and post-dictatorial context, then, literature was once again conceived as the cultural arena for a political struggle. Post-dictatorship narratives tended to idealize the figure of the youthful, passionate, and idealistic militant, and the lost revolution became a powerful trope in disputes, in the public sphere, over the meaning of the past in the present. The autonomy from economic dependence on patronage from the wealthy, then, did not translate into an autonomy for the sphere of politics as well. To the contrary, throughout the period of the Boom and post-Boom, the work of literature was just as entrenched in political contentions as ever.

The narrative of Horacio Castellanos Moya is built upon the rejection of the injunction to politicize the work of literature and a correlative affirmation of the autonomy of the Latin

American public intellectual from the sphere of politics. In *La diáspora*, the author breaks with the figure of the committed intellectual who instrumentalizes her literature as a cultural component of political struggle on two levels: that of the enunciated and that of the enunciation. On the level of the enunciated, the first novel of Castellanos Moya tells the story of a foundational rupture between Latin American artists and intellectuals, on the one hand, and revolutionary ideology and practice, on the other. The novel presents its readers with “a collection of characters who are struggling with the ongoing betrayal of the goals of justice and truth, of freedom and respect, that has left their lives voids of meanings and orientation” (Moreiras 54). Throughout the novel, this crisis is framed in terms of a loss of faith in revolution as a political religion. The deconversion experience undergone by the characters involves the loss of an ideal, an explanatory framework, and a belief system. Although I have emphasized the dissolution of revolution as the loss of a belief system in this chapter, the novel also highlights the affective dimension of this loss by portraying the group of Salvadoran exiles in Mexico City as a community of orphans (107). Without systems of support nor frameworks for the interpretation of their sociohistorical predicament, characters like Juan Carlos and Carmen struggle to come to terms with their past, which is also the region’s past, with dignity and honesty while avoiding the pitfalls of sentimentalization and romanticization. As it turns out, this mode of apprehending the past coincides with the author’s own approach to narrating political violence, which brings us to the second level on which Castellanos Moya breaks with the figure of the politically committed Latin American public intellectual.

On the level of the enunciation, in both *La diáspora* and his later novels, Castellanos Moya consistently shuns the injunction to glorify, idealize, mythologize, or sacralise revolutionary militancy. In a flagrant transgression of the norms of both testimonio and first-

generation post-dictatorship narrative, he programmatically insists on exposing the shortcomings and even the crimes of Latin American revolutionary movements. By refusing to use his literature to sacralise victims or romanticize revolutionary militancy, he embodies the figure of the uncommitted artist that he so frequently portrays in his fiction.

The singularity of Castellanos Moya resides in the fact that he makes the break between Latin American intellectuals and revolution the foundation of his literary program. The totality of his fiction after *La diáspora* returns, obsessively, to the question of the crimes of the revolution and develops, in multiple iterations, the figure of the non-committed Latin American public intellectual, from el Turco to Edgardo Vega to Alberto Aragón and José Pindonga. Rather than interpret this feature of the narrative of the author as proof that he crossed over to the political Right, I interpret it, in general terms, as an affirmation of the autonomy of Latin American literature and, more specifically, as the assertion of a novel subject position and site of enunciation for Latin American public intellectuals. As such, the narrative of Castellanos Moya announces the advent of a phase in Latin American literature in which the artist is freed from a set of constraints that govern the representation of political violence in the region's recent past. By taking this step and disregarding pre-existing norms, Castellanos Moya was able to forge an alternative mode of narrating political violence, one that is capable of criticizing revolution without disparaging it, that allows for sadness without sentimentalization, and that moves beyond axiologically simplistic epic, mythologizing, and sacralising modes of representing the vanquished and their political struggle. This operation constitutes more an affirmation of artistic autonomy than a disavowal of radical politics. In fact, there is no reason why Castellanos Moya's critiques of the less flattering aspects of revolutionary militancy cannot be considered an imminent critique of the Left from within its own ranks.

At the same time, these innovations have broader consequences within the field of Latin American literature. The decisive step that Castellanos Moya took in *La diáspora* not only marked the path that his posterior literary program was to follow but also anticipated second-generation post-dictatorship modes of narrating political violence. In this sense, his narrative constitutes a turning point or at least the opening of a new trajectory within Latin American literature, one that exceeds both the poetics and cultural politics of testimonio and first-generation dictatorship narrative. In recent years, a number of contemporary writers have adopted a similarly critical, desacralizing, parodic, and ludic approach to narrating revolution and counterrevolution in Latin America's recent past, such as Félix Bruzzone and Mariana Eva Pérez in Argentina; Francisco Ángeles and Juan Manuel Robles in Peru; Álvaro Bisama and Nona Fernández in Chile; Rodrigo Hasbrún in Bolivia; and Julian Fuks in Brazil.

After *La diáspora*, many of the posterior novels of Castellanos Moya explore themes related to the shortcomings of revolution and the conflict between Latin American intellectuals and radical political movements. Furthermore, throughout his narrative production Castellanos Moya continues to develop the figure of the uncommitted Latin American public intellectual. This tendency within his literature culminated in *Insensatez*, whose narrator constitutes the antithesis of the committed intellectual, unable to solidarize with victims of human rights abuses and unwilling to participate in the human rights struggle in postwar Central America. With this novel, Castellanos Moya not only sets off into uncharted territory for his personal literary project but also pushes contemporary Latin American literature in new directions. Due to the singularity of this work and the depth of its treatment of the figure of the uncommitted Latin American public intellectual, it merits a separate analysis, which brings us to the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Impossible Novel of Horacio Castellanos Moya

3.1. Introduction: The Violation of the Testimonial Pact

At the high-water mark of narratology, Phillippe Lejeune published, in 1975, his landmark work, *Le pacte autobiographique*. The primary objective of this work consists in accounting for the structural difference between autobiographical genres and the novel (Catelli 295). In an unexpected break with structuralist dogma, however, he finds his answer in something outside the text, thus the anomaly of Lejeune's study. According to Nora Catelli's study of Lejeune in *El espacio autobiográfico* (1999): "En el caso de la autobiografía, tal es su conclusión, el género no será definible por valores formales, sino por algo que reside, en parte, fuera del texto: un contrato de lectura" (273). Lejeune conceptualizes this reading pact as a contract that implies a set of parameters and conditions to both the production and reception of the autobiographical text:

La problématique de l'autobiographie ici proposée: ... Elle n'est pas fondée sur une analyse interne du fonctionnement du texte, de la structure ou des aspects du texte publié; mais sur une analyse, au niveau global de la *publication*, du contrat implicite ou explicite proposé par *l'auteur* au *lecteur*, contrat qui détermine le mode de lecture du texte et engendre les effets qui, attribués au texte, nous semblent le définir comme autobiographique. (*Le pacte autobiographique* 44)

Within the overall framework of the publication of the work, the defining feature of the genre, then, resides in a contract, designed to produce a specific effect, in which the author and the reader each occupy specific positions and have a specific set of roles to play. There are, in other words, clear rules to writing and reading autobiography.

One of the most important elements of the reading pact, then, has to do with the status of the autobiographical subject which, according to the theory of Lejeune, is based on “la postulación de la identidad entre el autor, el narrador y el personaje” (Catelli 279). According to Lejeune’s scheme, the author, situated outside of the text, corresponds to what structural linguistics calls the “subject of enunciation,” and the discourse, as a whole, can be attributed to this figure. Within the text, though, the narrator and protagonist are subjects at both the level of the enunciation and the level of the enunciated or utterance. In the relationship between the narrator and protagonist, a chain is established in which the narrator simultaneously emits utterances about the protagonist and is herself a part of the enunciation of the author; in a similar manner, the protagonist can emit utterances within the text but, at the same time, constitutes a part of the enunciation of the narrator (Lejeune 38-9; Catelli 292). The autobiographical pact rests on the presupposition that these three figures correspond to the same empirical person, situated outside the text. Together with the signature, the attribution of first-person pronouns serves as the guarantee of this identity (Lejeune 39). These cues, then, allow the reader to safely presuppose the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist, despite their separate discursive functions.

The autobiographical contract, however, does not end here but relies on another important factor: “le pacte référentiel.” In addition to the respective subject positions of autobiographical subject(s) and reader, the pact between both parties depends on a principle of authenticity and referentiality, “according to which the writer ‘promises’ to tell the truth of their life to the reader” (Blejmar 28). Due to the importance of this passage, I reproduce Lejeune’s definition of the referential pact in its entirety:

Par opposition á toutes les formes de fiction, la biographie et l'autobiographie sont des textes référentiels : exactement comme le discours scientifique ou historique, ils prétendent apporter une information sur une 'réalité' extérieure au texte, et donc se soumettre á une épreuve de vérification. ... Tous les textes référentiels comportent donc ce que j'appellerai un 'pacte référentiel,' implicite ou explicite, dans lequel sont inclus une définition de champ du réel visé et énoncé des modalités et du degré de ressemblance auxquels le texte prétend. (36)

Together with the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist, this referential dimension of the autobiographical text forms the basis of Lejeune's reading pact.

What, then, are we to do with testimonio?¹⁴ What are the "rules" for writing and reading testimonio? Obviously, testimonio is related to autobiographical genres in the general sense of a "narrative told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the actual protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts" (Zimmerman & Beverley 173). Yet, Lejeune does not include testimonial texts among the genres that can be subsumed under the rubric of autobiography. There is good reason for this, since testimonial texts (such as testimonio, which is what concerns us in this chapter)¹⁵ does not meet an important criterion of autobiography: the principle of identity between the figures of the author, narrator, and protagonist. While Lejeune's theory

¹⁴ As stated in the second footnote, I use 'testimonio' without italics, as an incorporation into English of the term in Spanish term to refer to the specifically Latin American genre of testimonial writing in the second half of the twentieth century, as established by specialists in the field., such as Beverley and Zimmerman.

¹⁵ While testimony has a long legal and religious history in Western culture, the scope of the term 'testimonio' is more limited, localized spatially within Latin American and temporally in the period from the 1960s to early 2000s. (Beverley 31; 77)

holds true for the relationship between narrator and protagonists, it cannot be applied to the relationship between narrator and author since, in testimonio, the narrator often does not write his or her own story but has a third party take responsibility for this “instance of enunciation.” Furthermore, there is an asymmetrical relationship between author and narrator:

Since in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer or intellectual, the production of a testimonio generally involves the recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist. (Zimmerman & Beverley 173)

This variation, however, does not constitute grounds to dismiss Lejeune’s concept of a pact but, rather, suggests that testimonio postulates a different contractual relationship between author, narrator, and reader. According to the analysis of Marc Zimmerman and John Beverley in *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, the testimonial pact between narrator and reader excludes the figure of the author. These theorists of the genre consider the erasure of the figure of the author a central feature of testimonio: “The erasure of authorial presence in testimonio allows a kind of complicity between narrator and reader ... testimonio implies a kind of relation between narrator and reader” (176).¹⁶ This relationship of complicity can be further specified: it is based on solidarity. The reader, presuming the truth of the events recounted, solidarizes with the narrator. To a minor degree, the relationship of solidarity is

¹⁶ Within this theoretical account of testimonio, Zimmerman and Beverley display a tendency to downplay the role of the author and to grant more authority/authorship to the narrator: “In the creation of the testimonial text, control of representation does not just flow one way: someone like Rigoberta Menchú is also in a sense manipulating and exploiting her interlocutor” (177). Here, the power of the narrator of testimonio overshadows that of the author. While this gesture is clearly designed to empower a subaltern subject, it does not change the fact that the author is in charge of the instance of enunciation.

replicated in the complicity between author and narrator, which Zimmerman and Beverley frame as an alliance between classes:

The relation of narrator and compiler in the production of a testimonio... can serve as a powerful ideological figure or symbol of the union of a radicalized intelligentsia with the poor and working masses of a country. ... Politically, the question in testimonio is not so much the difference of the social situations of the direct narrator and the interlocutor as the possibility of their articulation together in a common front. (176-7)

In testimonio, then, Lejeune's reading contract is split into two correlative pacts, both of which presume the truthfulness of the narrator and seek to produce a response of solidarity: author and narrator are united in a writing pact, framed as an alliance according class lines and social groups, while narrator and reader are united in a reading pact, based on solidarity with the political cause of the subaltern (Beverley 37). Given this amendment to the subject positions between author, narrator, and protagonist, as well as to contractual understanding between author, narrator, and reader, the referential dimension of Lejeune's analysis of autobiography holds true for testimonio. In other words, both the writing and the reading pacts are firmly rooted in testimonio's claim to truth: "We are meant to experience both the speaker and situations recounted as real. The 'legal' connotation is implicit in its convention implies a pledge of honesty on the part of the narrator that the listener/reader is bound to respect" (33).

Horacio Castellanos Moya's relationship to testimonio is ambivalent. In both the form and content of his novels, he borrows heavily from the genre, as attested to by his employment of first-person accounts of political violence (albeit fictional) in *La diáspora*, *Baile con serpientes*, *El asco*, *La diabla en el espejo*, *El arma en el hombre*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, *Insensatez*, and many of his posterior works. Furthermore, Castellanos Moya writes with the weight of history on

his shoulders, which is to say that his literature shares many of the same points of anchorage in the violent sociohistorical realities of the region's past. On the other hand, however, he writes against testimonio, his initiation in literature having been a rejection of some of the aesthetic and political principles of the genre (174). This ambivalence should come as no surprise if we keep in mind that all parody involves a degree of homage.¹⁷ Of all the novels of Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* condenses the ambivalence of the author's relationship to testimonio. There is a straightforward reason for this: in addition to appropriating many of the narrative techniques of the genre, the novel itself is about testimonio since it tells the story of the uses and abuses of testimonio, both personal and political.

The present chapter explores the complex series of convergences and divergences, continuities and discontinuities, between the poetics of Castellanos Moya in *Insensatez* and the tradition of testimonio. I argue that by appropriating techniques of testimonio and repurposing them within his own aesthetic program, deeply invested in the art of fiction, Castellanos Moya opens up new horizons for literature about political violence and pushes Latin American literature into uncharted territory. The chapter is structured according to three sites where Castellanos Moya qualitatively alters the aesthetic and political precepts of testimonio, without abandoning all its formal technique nor its subject matter. These three sites of intervention correspond to the three pacts of the testimonial contract: the writing pact, which corresponds to the production of testimonio; the reading pact, which corresponds to the reception of testimonio;

¹⁷ In *A Theory of Parody* Linda Hutcheon signals that parodic and ironic inversion “can be playful as well as belittling, critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody’s irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual ‘bouncing’ (to use E.M. Forster’s famous term) between complicity and distance. ... It is this combination of respectful homage and ironically thumbed nose that often characterizes parody” (32-3).

and the referential pact which serves as the foundation of the relationships between author, narrator, protagonist, and reader. The first section of this chapter addresses Castellanos Moya transgressions of the “rules” for the production of testimonial texts and the new subject positions of the type of narrator he employs in *Insensatez* and many of his other novels. The second section, for its part, addresses the reception of testimonio and Castellanos Moya’s interference with the processes of identification and solidarization. The third and last section, then, explores the author’s treatment of the epistemological claims of testimonio against the backdrop of his own post-testimonial agenda.

3.2. The Production of Testimonio

The narrator of *Insensatez* is not only a reader of testimonio as the corrector of the Remhi report, but also produces it himself: the novel is the account of his experience with residual violence of the Guatemalan military after the signing of the Peace Accords. There are, however, radical differences between the production of the texts that he corrects and the narrator’s own mode of producing testimonio. This section addresses a series of points of contention that emerge between these two incompatible models of the production of testimonial texts. Many of the discrepancies revolve around the status of the subject and its capacity to communicate her experiences. The first part of this section addresses the transgression of the norm of representativity, that is, that expectation that the experiences recounted be representative of the experience of a community or social group. The narrator’s unwavering resistance to form part of any collectivity make his violation of this principle even more flagrant. The criterion of representativity is closely related to other constraints on the subject position of the testifier, such as the presumption that the group that she represents be subaltern, underprivileged, and

underrepresented. The narrator's status as a public intellectual with considerable symbolic capital is incompatible with this constraint. The second part, for its part, examines the conflict between two radically different manners of conceiving the testimonial subject: the theory of subjectivity espoused in the theories of the production of testimonio and the representation of testimonial subjectivity in the narrative of Castellanos Moya.

3.2.1. From Representation to the Singular Subject

The following is a list of some of the salient attributes of the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*: we know that he is a writer and public intellectual since he previously worked writing journalism in a neighboring Central American country, where his interventions in public debates caused him to have to seek exile (for a second time); we also know that he is well-educated since his contact from the Archbishop's Human Rights Office, Erick, was a friend from when they attended graduate school together in Mexico during the narrator's first exile from El Salvador; in addition, we know the he is at odds with the orthodox Left and mercilessly critical of the Central American human rights scene; lastly, it is also apparent that he is an alcoholic, a womanizer with little respect for women, and suffers from acute anxiety and other psychological distresses. This profile, as it turns out, could not be further from the narrator of testimonial literature, according to norms and conventions of the genre.

In *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, Beverley prescribes (using deontic modalization) that "the situation of the narrator in testimonio is one that must be representative of a social group or class" (33). While it could be argued that the narrator of *Insensatez* is representative of a group of Central American intellectuals, his idiosyncrasies seem to prevent this from being the case. In other words, the narrator's unorthodox stances cannot be subsumed beneath any clear

intellectual currents of the Central American Left, such as Marxism, liberal multiculturalism, or human rights discourses. Isolated by his profound skepticism and withdrawn in his own bitterness, the cynicism of the narrator makes it impossible for him to adhere to the emergent ideologies that displaced the dominant discourse of Marxism, which was on the wane in the wake of the defeat of Central American revolutions (Beverley x-xi). Although undoubtedly an intellectual, the narrator's views are too eclectic to fit neatly within available categories of existing social groups. Furthermore, his principal intellectual operation seems to be that of negation, his Nietzschean vitality expended primarily on destructive acts, whether ruthlessly attacking the ideas of those around him or consuming himself in a self-destructive rapture. In other words, his oppositional, antisocial, antipathetical nature tends more towards extreme individualism than collective pursuits. Unattached from the support of any given community and adrift amid the literal and figurative rubble of postwar El Salvador and Guatemala, he is largely alone throughout the novel. His attempts to establish bonds with his workmates and integrate himself into the community of human rights activists in Guatemala City categorically fail.

In the second chapter, for example, the narrator meets a workmate, Toto, in a nearby bar from lunch and drinks. Feeling affinity with Toto as a fellow writer, the narrator initially feels comfortable in his presence and begins to open up: “con mi compadre Toto yo sentía particularmente seguro, no solo porque estábamos en su ciudad y él se movía con soltura en ella, sino también porque ... Toto se definía en su curriculum como agricultor y poeta” (*Insensatez* 26). The enthusiasm of the narrator, however, proves unfounded when what he perceived to be an opening for communication or connection quickly leads to misunderstanding. When the narrator confides his fascination with the syntax of the testimonios that he has been correcting, Toto immediately mistakes him for one of the typical human rights activists of the office. The

narrator expresses consternation and indignation over being treated “como si yo hubiera leído las frases de mi libreta de apuntes para convencerlo de la bondad de la causa justa” (32). The narrator’s clarification that his interest in the testimonios is indeed literary in nature only makes things worse. Toto reacts with incomprehension and even “cierta alarma, como si yo me estuviese yendo de la boca” (32). These communicative misfires characterize a pattern of behaviour that occludes the possibility of interpersonal bonds, which is especially the case with the narrator’s interaction with women. Even the person closest to him, Erick, his friend from graduate school, is not exempt from these fallouts in communication and the narrator’s radical distrust of others. At a birthday party at the apartment of Johnny Silverman, “un antropólogo forense que trabajaba con el Arzobispado, excavando en los diferentes sitios donde se habían registrado masacres para recuperar osamentas de las víctimas con el propósito de reconfirmar los testimonios,” the narrator witnesses what he perceives to be a highly suspicious conversation:

...hasta el más sordo de los sordos se hubiera enterado de que esos tres hombres hablaban secretos, información confidencial, palabras prohibidas a los profanos, lo que no me extrañaba tratándose de mi amigo Erick, pero luego me condujo a preguntarme qué hacía un rico judío neoyorquino desenterrando huesos de indígenas masacrados por el ejército en un país en que por menos que eso podían freírlo vivo, y sobre todo qué carajos hacía conspirando con un representante de la Iglesia católica, como mi amigo Erick, y con ese sujeto que desde todo punto de vista parecía un militar. ... Fue entonces cuando se produjo el circuito en mi mente: ese oficial de inteligencia no podía ser otro que el general Octavio Pérez Mena [Octavio Pérez Molina], el torturador de la chica del Arzobispado y masacrador de indígenas. ... Horrorizado quise largarme de ahí para no ser testigo de una conspiración que podía costarme la vida. (128)

This is not the moment to address whether the fears and perceptions of the narrator are founded or not. For now it suffices to simply point out that, far from representing a social group, the narrator is, on the contrary, a solitary figure who distrusts even his closest friend, Erick. Throughout the novel, he proves unable to form social bonds, much less represent a community, and time and again his experience proves uncommunicable and unrepresentative of anything other than his own idiosyncratic predicament.

The issue of exile deserves comment before bringing this section to a close. An argument could be made that the experience of exile makes the narrator representative of Central American intellectuals at a time of State terrorism, dictatorship, and civil war. There are, however, a series of problems with this interpretation. In the context of the revolutionary struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala, the narrator's decision to seek exile in Mexico, where he pursued his graduate studies, was more personal than political and could be interpreted as reluctance to commit to the cause. In his nonfictional texts, Castellanos Moya recalls that there was an expectation at the time, which carried the force of an obligation, for intellectuals and writers to commit to the cause of revolution. This personal impression of Castellanos Moya is confirmed by the research of Beverley and Zimmerman in *Literature and Politics* (172-3), by Claudia Gilman in *Entre la pluma y el fúsil* (29), and Jean Franco in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City* (88). In "Rodolfo Walsh and Cuba: Commitment and Militancy in the Shared Origins of Latin American *Testimonio* and Third Cinema," Alejandro Pedregal argues that the figure of Rodolfo Walsh condenses an ideal for the revolutionary intellectual, willing to compromise his intellectual pursuits to contribute to the struggle (291). In reference to this same subordination of the arts to politics, Jean Franco recalls having attended a speech given by Mario Vargas Llosa: "I remember Mario Vargas Llosa addressing a meeting in Cuzco in 1968 and being asked why he didn't take

to the hills, rifle in hand, as if this were the only possible role for him” (88). The figure of the revolutionary intellectual who sets down the quill and takes up the sword was a longstanding ideal of Latin American Left. Yet, given the oppositional character of the narrator of *Insensatez* and his aversity towards orthodox political stances, it is not surprising that he would upset this expectation. Instead joining the revolutionary struggle, he turns his back on the *pueblo* and moves to Mexico to escape the situation in El Salvador. In this sense, his first exile represents a denial of his public responsibility as an intellectual and could hardly be considered representative of public intellectuals of as social group.

Furthermore, the second exile of the narrator, corresponding to his arrival in the capital of Guatemala to work on the correction of the testimonios, does not match the prevailing figure of the intellectual either. In this case, his exile was not related to any opposition to the military but rather because he had offended the liberal Left, not the political Right: “un mes atrás me había visto obligado a abandonar mi país, por culpa de un artículo en el que sostuve que el Salvador era el primer país latinoamericano con un presidente africano, comentario calificado de ‘racista’ que me granjeó la animadversión de medio país” (49). Antipathetic and incomprehensible to both the Left and the Right, the narrator of *Insensatez* is a far cry from the Boom image of the Latin American intellectual as an *engagé* cultural hero and from the ideal of the revolutionary intellectual a la Rodolfo Walsh which characterized the rise of testimonio (Pedregal 292-3).

3.2.2. From the Voice of the Subaltern to the Death of the Subject

If the narrator of *Insensatez* is not representative of a coherent social group, there is another way in which he clashes with the testimonial subject, according to the theoretical accounts of the production of testimonio. Founded on the oppositions popular/elite,

margin/center, subaltern/hegemonic, rural/urban, orality/literacy, the position of the testifier tends to correspond to the first term of these dichotomies, while the compiler/transcriber and the reading public tend to correspond to the second term. Within this context of a structural imbalance of power, testimonio takes the form of an interpellation by a marginalized subaltern subject who addresses representatives of the privileged, lettered elite of the center. In *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, Beverley and Zimmerman write that

the form's dominant characteristic is that of a voice which speaks to the reader in the form of an "I" that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention. This presence of the voice ... is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, to impose oneself on an institution of power like literature from the point of view of the marginal or excluded. (175)

Elaborating on this point in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, John Beverley appeals to the trope of testimonio as the recuperation of the "voice of the voiceless:" "Testimonio lies outside the institutions of both literature and the 'reading public,' but it is necessarily directed to them in what seems like a remedial or restitutive act (hence, the trope that usually accompanies testimonio: the voice of the voiceless)" (19). According to this account of testimonio, the genre represents the moment when the Latin American subaltern speaks (Beverley 92). It is not only the subject but also the predicate of this proposition that comes into play. In other words, it is not only a question of the subalternity of the subject but also of the capacity for this subject to affirm itself successfully through speech. The voice-of-the-voiceless trope presupposes a theory of communication that rests upon the ability of the speaker to competently control her enunciation, as well as a linguistic medium which can unproblematically transmit her message. For the moment let's set aside the epistemological question of the capacities of languages and texts to

unproblematically communicate extralinguistic phenomena, since we address it with due attention in the following section. The present section focuses instead on the status of the subject and the limits of its capacity to communicate its experience with competence and clarity. I argue that *Insensatez* employs a radically divergent conception of the testimonial subject, characterized by a radical ability to successfully communicate its experience to an interlocutor. This recasting of the testimonial subject is flatly incompatible with the canonical accounts of the production, distribution, and reception of testimonio.

The starting point of this inquiry is a set of simple questions. What is the concept of the subject, of subjectivity, that underlies *Insensatez*? How much control does the subject have over her enunciation? What is the subject capable of communicating? How does the conception of the testifying subject differ from that postulated by testimonio? According to Zimmerman and Beverley in *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, the central feature of testimonio is the “presence of a voice” that constitutes a “powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject” (175). This affirmation, as already mentioned, takes the form of an interpellation through which the speaking subject addresses the reader of the text. The position of the subject implies “an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival” (Beverley 32). Not only is the primary testimonial subject of *Insensatez* not subaltern, but he is also unable to successfully affirm himself through speech and competently communicate his experiences to others.

The structure of the narrator’s interpersonal relationships is fixed from the beginning of the novel. In the abovementioned scene from the second chapter when the narrator meets Toto at a local cantina after his first day on the job, the pattern of communication that dominates *Insensatez* is already announced: the narrator’s attempt to communicate his experience is met

with bewilderment and incomprehension by Toto, who misrecognizes his intention, which in turn give rise to feelings of rage, isolation, and anxiety in the narrator (31-2). With minimal variations, the same scene repeats itself when the narrator and Pilar meet for lunch at a vegetarian restaurant. Once again his attempt to communicate his experience with the testimonios is met with stupefaction: “Pilar no estaba disfrutando de mis frases, la expresión estupefacta de su rostro lo decía, y su inmovilidad también, por lo que decidí cerrar mi libreta, no sin antes leer, para mí mismo tan sólo, la última frase que hubiera gustado compartir con ella” (48). Throughout *Insensatez*, the majority of the narrator’s speech acts are what J.L. Austin would classify as “misfires.” According to *How to Do Things with Words*, this may occur when speakers disattend the pragmatic dimension of the communicative act, for example by misjudging what is appropriate to do with words in a given context (18). This is precisely what characterizes the narrator’s communication style, which perhaps explains why his attempts to establish interpersonal communication categorically fail. In chapter seven, the narrator meets Joseba, a clinical psychiatrist “muy querido y admirado por todos los que trabajaban en ese palacio arzobispal” who has a meeting with the bishop about how best to manage some very sensitive information in the testimonios that exposes the intelligence apparatus of the military (81). The narrator seems to abuse the goodwill of Joseba by sharing off-colored comments that are clearly in excess of the limits of the communicative context, which would be considered a misfire if we remember that, for Austin, a speech act should appropriately contemplate the conditions of the pragmatic context in order to be felicitous:

...Josefa, quien a todas luces mostraba no sólo salud, sino un temple rozagante, el porte alto, recio, de pecho enhiesto, tal como imaginaba a esos caballeros andantes que vinieron a conquistar a los indígenas de estas tierras, una idea simpática que no pude

evitar mencionar, como al paso, mientras él me preguntaba mis impresiones sobre su trabajo y yo lo repetía que se trataba de una labor espléndida, impecable, después de la cual la historia de este país no sería la misma, de ninguna manera, y aprovechando un intersticio le dije: vaya paradoja, que un sujeto con la más arquetípica pinta de conquistador español se haya dedicado con tanta devoción a rescatar la memoria masacrada de los indígenas, sin ánimo de ofender, aclaré, porque Josefa se movió incómodo en la silla frente a mi escritorio, el muy modesto, inquieto por la adulación, acariciándose la barbilla sombreada. (82)

While Joseba restricts his inquiries to professional matters, that is, the correction of the testimonios, the narrator responds with jokes about the doctor's appearance, in flagrant dissonance with the solemnity of his visit to the Archbishopal Office of Human Rights, given the potential dangers of exposing the intelligence mechanisms of the military. Furthermore, the narrator's comments put the intentions of Joseba into question and suggest that he may have ulterior motives for collaborating with the Remhi project: to assuage any guilt or sense of historical accountability that he may feel as a Spaniard for the Conquest of the Americas. The reaction of the psychiatrist is the same as that of the narrator's other interlocutors, even though the narrator interprets the discomfort of Joseba as modesty. It is clear in this passage that the narrator disattends the context of enunciation and misjudges the effects of speech, which consistently leads to communication failures and breakdowns in his interpersonal relationships.

This pattern of communication failures, however, is by no means restricted to the narrator's attempts to articulate his obsession with the testimonios but extends into most of his other interpersonal interactions. Even the narrator's relationships with Toto and Quique, the characters with whom he displays the most affinity, are fraught with misunderstandings. The

reactions of Quique to the narrator's attempts to communicate his experience in Guatemala are familiar by now: "por supuesto lo desconcertó, ... y luego le producía fastidio, ...el primo Quique me preguntó a qué me refería, realmente preocupado, como si temiera una reacción impredecible y violenta" (151). Aside from the communicative misfire by which the speech act fails to produce the intended effect, Quique's response also signals the discursive violence of the narrator, that is, his inability to regulate his discourse and abide by the conventions of conversation. In particular, the narrator violates the maxim of economy, as his communication style overshoots its target. This logic of the *exabrupto*, which is always in excess of the context of enunciation, leads to communication breakdown. This pattern of outburst is condensed with particular clarity in the scene of the central misunderstanding of the novel, which triggers the events that lead to the narrator's third and final exile. In chapter ten, at the party at Johnny Silverman's house, the narrator mistakenly believes that he is talking with an Argentinian, when he is really speaking with Charlie, the best friend of Jota Ce, the major in the Uruguayan military whom he believes may have reason to turn him in to the Guatemalan military:

...como si el tipo hubiese conocido de antemano la enfermedad psíquica que me aquejaba y que consistía en que una vez que me estimulaban para comenzar a hablar quería contarle todo, con pelos y olores, vaciarme hasta la saciedad, compulsivamente, en una especie de espasmo verbal, como si fuese una carrera orgásmica que culminaría hasta entregarme totalmente, hasta quedar sin secretos, hasta que mi interlocutor supiera todo lo que quería saber, en una confesión exhaustiva, después de la cual padecía la peor de las resacas. Y así sucedió. (124)

This scene, from which the title of the novel is derived, narrates the logic of *exabrupto* that underlies the narrator's failure to establish meaningful interpersonal communication, as evidenced by the reaction of Charlie:

Como si la mención de mi padecimiento hubiera sido repugnante para el rapado argentino, quien de pronto tuvo en su jeta una expresión indescifrable, ausente ... él estaría encendiéndose más y más por las palabras que habían salido insensatamente de mi boca. (125)

Here the "imprudence" of the title clearly refers to the inability of the narrator to control and adequately regulate his discourse.¹⁸

If we return for a moment to the starting point of this chapter, that is, Beverley's formulation of testimonio as the powerful textual affirmation of a speaking subject, of a subject that is transparent to herself and able to communicate her experiences to others, it is immediately evident that *Insensatez* postulates a much different kind of testimonial subject. In the novel of Castellanos Moya, the narrator is unable to regulate his discourse so as to establish effective communication with his interlocutors. Effectively cut off from others and unable to securely apprehend the external world, *Insensatez* mobilizes a solipsistic concept of the subject, marked by radical incommunicability and epistemological doubt. Furthermore, there is no affirmation of

¹⁸ It is worth pointing out that what the rest of the characters interpret as the narrator's *insensatez* proves to be good judgment. At the end of the novel, Toto acknowledges this in a letter that he sends to the narrator after the assassination of Bishop Gerardi: "Ayer a mediodía monseñor presentó el informe en la catedral con bombo y platillo; en la noche lo asesinaron en la casa parroquial, le destruyeron la cabeza con un ladrillo. Todo el mundo está cagado. Da gracias que te fuiste" (155). This final twist implies that the infiltration of the Human Rights Office was not merely an illusion of the narrator and that the narrator's distorted perceptions, so many times referred to throughout the novel, turned out to be accurate. In any case, this does not change that fact that the narrator is unable to communicate this experience competently and "felicitously," as Austin says of speech acts which produce the intended effect.

a speaking subject; to the contrary, the novel attests to the disintegration of the subject. In other words, what the narrator, as the primary testimonial subject, affirms is nothing other than his own incapacity to control his discourse and communicate effectively, as the title itself suggests.

In this regard, *Insensatez* is more in line with poststructuralist, deconstructionist, and new historicist theories of the subject, characterized as they are by radical skepticism concerning the subject's capacity to move beyond language, apprehend an extra-discursive reality, and objectively communicate experience (Culler 32-3). In *Tiempo pasado: Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo, una discusión* (2005), Beatriz Sarlo signals an underlying incompatibility between post-structuralist theories and the concept of the subject postulated by testimonio. In the face of the much-heralded death of the subject in philosophy and critical theory, Sarlo notes what she terms the "resuscitation" of the subject:

La crisis de la idea de subjetividad proviene de otros procesos y posiciones, de gran expansividad más allá del campo filosófico a partir de los años setenta. El estructuralismo triunfante conquistó territorios desde la antropología hasta la lingüística, la teoría literaria y las ciencias sociales. Ese capítulo está escrito y lleva por título 'la muerte del sujeto.' Cuando ese giro del pensamiento contemporáneo parecía completamente establecido, hace dos décadas, se produjo en el campo de los estudios de memoria y de memoria colectiva un movimiento de restauración de la primacía de esos sujetos expulsados durante los años anteriores. Se abrió un nuevo capítulo, que podría llamarse 'el sujeto resucitado.' (37)

This account squares with the Enzo Traverso's periodization in *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* whereby, in the early 1980s, memory politics and liberal multiculturalism displaced the previous paradigms that were rooted, to some degree or another,

in Marxist traditions (55-6). The rise of testimonial literature within Latin America, for its part, coincided with this shift from Marxist-inflected theoretical paradigms to those of multiculturalism and memory studies within metropolitan academies (Beverley x). As with early movements in Latin American letters, such as the Boom, literature continued to be instrumentalized for political purposes, but there was a shift from the expectation to represent a regional class experience, the *pueblo*, for example, towards the textual affirmation of the subaltern subject, as has already been discussed. But as Beatriz Sarlo states in “Crítica del testimonio: sujeto y experiencia,” the second chapter of *Tiempo pasado*, “[a]cá hay un problema” (49). The problem consists in the fact that, within the history of ideas, the “speaking subject” of testimonio is anachronistic in the sense that it corresponds to an “optimism” concerning the communicative and epistemological capabilities of the subject that predates the critiques of subjectivity that dominated the previous three decades of theory (Sarlo 49-51). Testimonio, then, would appear to be turning its back on the tradition from which it stems:

En efecto, la confianza en un healing identitario producido por la palabra se sustrae de la dimensión problemática en que la subjetividad fue focalizada desde finales del siglo XIX y abandona... todas las epistemologías de la sospecha, de Nietzsche a Freud. El sujeto no sólo tiene experiencias sino que puede comunicarlas, construir un sentido y, al hacerlo, afirmarse como sujeto. (51)

In her conclusion, Sarlo’s critique is unequivocal:

Sobre la memoria no hay que fundar una epistemología ingenua cuyas pretensiones serían rechazadas en cualquier otro caso. No hay equivalencia entre el derecho a recordar y la afirmación de una verdad del recuerdo; tampoco el deber de la memoria obliga a aceptar esa equivalencia. Más bien, grandes líneas del pensamiento del siglo XX se han

permitido desconfiar frente a un discurso de la memoria ejercido como construcción de la verdad del sujeto. (57-8)

If there is a contradiction between the critiques of subjectivity from the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and critical theory and the speaking subject of testimonio, Sarlo signals a way out of the impasse through the possible reconciliation between skepticism, on one hand, and the duty of memory, on the other. I argue that the narrative of Castellanos Moya achieves this synthesis. He accomplishes this feat by addressing political violence in the region's recent past and its effects on the present, including problems related to its representation in literature and its appropriation in politics, without abandoning skepticism or mobilizing what Sarlo refers to as a "naïve epistemology." *Insensatez*, as the story of the psychological disintegration of a testimonial subject, reintroduces skepticism concerning the subject and its ability to communicate its experience and construct secure knowledge of the world within a tradition of narrating political violence in Latin American literature. Appropriating many of the techniques of testimonio, it simultaneously turns the genre on its head.

3.3. The Reception of Testimonio

There is more to testimonio than just the affirmation of a speaking subject. As mentioned in the previous section, testimonio takes the form of an address, which necessarily implies another actor, the addressee. Zimmerman and Beverley argue that the form itself emphasizes the bond between the *testimoniante* and the reader, as addressee: "it allows for a kind of complicity between narrator and reader different from what is possible in the novel or story" (176). Furthermore, according to the Beverley in *Testimonio: The Politics of Truth*, this complicity, as the desired effect of a testimonial text, has an explicitly political dimension:

The complicity a testimonio establishes with its readers involves their identification -by engaging their sense of ethics and justice- with a popular cause normally distant, not to say alien, from their immediate experience. Testimonio in this sense has been important in maintaining and developing the practice of human rights solidarity movements (37).

In other words, the identification of the reader with the narrator is encoded in the form of the testimonio.¹⁹ Furthermore, the poetics of the testimonio are inextricably linked to the politization of literature, as part of the pragmatics of the genre within concrete political contexts. As a part of the structure of the genre, then, the conditions of production differ qualitatively from those of reception. This, in turn, implies a power differential or asymmetry in the subject positions of testimonial subject and reader. In the following passage, Beverley formulates this difference in terms of class:

To put it in another way, testimonio gives voice in literature to a previously ‘voiceless,’ anonymous, collective-popular-democratic subject, the pueblo or ‘people,’ but in such a way that the intellectual or professional, usually of bourgeois or petit bourgeois background, is interpellated as being a part of, and dependent on, the ‘people’ without at the same time losing his or her identity as an intellectual. In other words, testimonio is not a form of liberal guilt. It suggests an appropriate ethical and political response more the possibility of solidarity than of charity. (36)

According to the prescription of Beverley, then, the proper way to bridge this gap and to address the asymmetrical power relationship is through solidarity. Perhaps this is why Beverley states

¹⁹ Recall the discussion about the overidentification of the narrator with the testimonial subject, which hastened the psychological disintegration of the character. In this regard, the plotline of *Insensatez* can be read as a critique of an abuse of the mechanisms of identification, as outlined here by Beverley.

that the testimonial voice ultimately offers reassurance, despite the demand that it places on the reader: “Is this voice reassuring or unsettling? On the whole, we would have to say reassuring, even in its expression of states of extreme desperation, suffering, and abjection. Reassuring because it has been produced *for us*, like a movie” (1). If we were to apply the same question to the narrative of Castellanos Moya, the answer would have to be unsettling. Why is this the case? In “A Postwar Perversion of ‘Testimonio’ in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El Asco*,” Megan Thornton argues that Castellanos Moya “does not explicitly call for solidarity,” even though he appropriates many formal features of testimonio, such as an oral register, conversational tone, and the first-person narration of political violence. The refusal to base the relationship between the testimonial narrator and reader on identification, complicity, and solidarity constitutes a flagrant transgression of the norms of the genre and functions as one of the pillars of the literary program of the author. By explicitly refusing to solidarize, by disrupting the testimonial pact, Castellanos Moya unsettles rather than reassures. If the previous section focused on the production of testimonio, on the status of the testimonial subject, the present section, for its part, addresses how and why *Insensatez* unsettles the poetics and politics of its reception. The first part of this section focuses on how Castellanos Moya’s novel frustrates the relationship of solidarity that informs the reception of the testimonial texts, while the second part addresses the dangers of the overidentification of the reader with the testimonial subject.

3.3.1. From Solidarity to Scandal

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between two levels of reception of testimonio in *Insensatez*. On one level, the novel’s reader constitutes the interlocutor of the narrator’s testimonio of his experience with political violence, more specifically with the infiltration of the

Archbishop's Office of Human Rights by the military and the subsequent assassination of bishop Gerardi. At the same time, the novel also stages another level of the reception of testimonio in the sense that the narrator is also a reader of the testimonial texts that comprise the Remhi report, a particularly intense mode of reading that exceeding his job as corrector. In what way, then, does this mode of reception of testimonio deviate from the conventions of the genre, that is, from the expectation that the reader solidarize with the enunciator?

If we take the narrator as reader, it is possible to identify both continuity and discontinuity with the testimonial tradition in contemporary Latin American literature. Despite the indisputable force of Castellanos Moya's ruptures, it is worth pointing out that the narrator's mode of reception of the testimonio coincides in one very crucial way with that of the genre: for as ruthless as the narrator's critiques of the human rights community may be and for as vitriolic as his discourse may be, *Insensatez* does not challenge that status of the indigenous as victims of genocidal State violence nor the status of the military and its proxies as perpetrators. This axiological foundation of the text coincides with the assessment of the reports of the Truth Commission, the position of the Human Rights community, and the discourse of testimonios (Hatcher 12-3). *Insensatez* articulates a number of critiques of the misappropriations and the abuses of testimonio and human rights discourse, which is a much different matter than critiquing human rights in and of itself. In other words, *Insensatez* does not question the need for justice but rather how it is produced. While this may include a challenge to the efficacy and legitimacy of some of the motives and practices of the human rights community and the emerging Central American postwar Left, it should not be conflated with the critique of human rights that originate on the political Right, such as negationism and the demand for juridical impunity for perpetrators of crimes against humanity (Hatcher 6). This distinction is crucial for

identifying the place of *Insensatez* within the development of the narrative of Castellanos Moya and for comprehending his critique of the intellectual and cultural traditions of the Latin American Left. While in much of his literature, Castellanos Moya goes to lengths to expose the crimes of the revolutionary Left in Central America, *Insensatez* is silent on this topic and focuses instead on the limits of the emerging postwar Left, more influenced by memory, human rights and multicultural discourses than by Marxism.

With this interface between *Insensatez* and testimonio as a limit, we can now proceed to explore the ways in which the novel announces alternative modes of reception of testimonial texts. Castellanos Moya's novel not only fictionalizes the reception of testimony but rather presents a mode of reception that is not based on identification or solidarity. *Insensatez*, then, walks a thin line between recognizing the status of the indigenous as victims of genocide at the hands of the State, on one hand, and blocking the mechanisms of identification and complicity that characterize testimonio, on the other hand. As José Sánchez Carbó points out in "Las pesadillas están ahí todavía: Testimonio y literatura en *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya," the narrator of *Insensatez* is an anomaly within the fields of testimonio and human rights activism:

El narrador se describe como un escritor ateo que desconfía de 'los poetas izquierdistas vendedores de esperanza,' la Iglesia, los vegetarianos, los militantes de corrientes en boga y los fanáticos de la corrección política. No profesa ningún tipo de compromiso o simpatía ideológica, religiosa o humanitaria alguna, como es frecuente en las personas que colaboran en los trabajos de memoria o literatura testimonial. Su aproximación es estrictamente profesional, lee y corrige el voluminoso informe porque recibirá cierta cantidad de dólares. (60)

This profile reveals a general indisposition towards adhering to the testimonial pact and resistance to the intended effect of the reception of testimonio. The result is an eclectic mix of distance and closeness, of attraction and repulsion, of over- and under-identification with the texts. The narrator's close contact with the testimonios causes a symbolic slippage, a liminal space where his own experiences merge with those he reads about in the texts. This, however, should not be mistaken for a bond of solidarity with the cause of the victims but rather a misappropriation of their experience and, as suggested, a possible allegory for an improper reception of testimonio. Yet, in addition to this lack of distance, he also places too much distance between himself and the testimonial texts, in the sense that he systematically blocks the mechanisms that characterize the reception of testimonio. Most significantly, the narrator remains intransigent in his reading of the testimonios: primarily concerned with their aesthetic qualities, he is impervious to their political dimension. In other words, he reads testimonio without solidarizing and without any call to action or participation in a cause. Furthermore, his recognition of the victims of genocide and State terrorism is entirely unsentimental, matter of fact, and lacking any political implicatures.

When referring to the indigenous *testimoniante*s, for example, the narrator employs a series of distancing techniques which disrupt the operations of solidarization and idealization. In the heat of the fit of indignation provoked by the failure of the Human Right Office to pay him the full amount of his emoluments on time, the narrator implies that he deserves better treatment than the indigenous testifiers. Unable to regulate his discourse, he asks the payroll clerk, at the top of his lungs, if he “¿no se daba cuenta de que yo no era otro de esos indios acomplejados con quienes acostumbrada a tratar?” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 39). By asserting his class and ethnic privilege in this way, the narrator reinforces the subalternity of the indigenous, which is

the exact opposite effect of the intended reception of testimonio. In the same way that the narrator misreads testimonio by copying excerpts into his notebook based on strictly poetic criteria, disattending the message and explicit pragmatic force of the texts, he also misreads his cues and refuses play the role assigned to him within the conventions for the production and reception of testimonio. More specifically, the narrator refuses to function as a nexus, as a mediator, between subaltern and middle class, in his capacity as an intellectual. According to Zimmerman and Beverley, testimonio represents “a powerful ideological figure or symbol of the union between a radicalised intelligentsia with the poor and working masses of a country, which has been so decisive in the development of movements for social change in the Third World” (176). The narrator of *Insensatez* flatly refuses to assume this social function. Although imbued with the necessary symbolic capital and capable for intervening in the public sphere, the narrator rejects the political function of the public intellectual.

Disattending the social and political dimension of testimonio, and his implicit role as an intellectual, the response of the narrator to subaltern subjects is primarily private, individual, and idiosyncratic. When the narrator witnesses a procession of indigenous women one morning, his interest is framed almost exclusively sexual terms. In other words, instead of approaching them as social or political subjects in a potentially common struggle against oppression and exploitation, the narrator views them as objects of desire. Neither does he view them as angels, bypassing the operations of idealization, and sacralization that often accompany testimony (Derrida 121). Furthermore, his account is entirely lacking sentimentalism or moralization. Finding their traditional garb unattractive, he simply loses interest in them, sexually or otherwise:

había deambulado un par de horas atrás en el Parque Central ... disfrutando la mañana luminosa en medio de esas centenares de indígenas ataviadas con sus étnicos trajes domingueros de colores festivos entre los que se imponía el rojo saltarín y contento, como si nada tuviera que ver con la sangre y el dolor sino que fuera más bien el emblema de la alegría de esas centenares de empleadas domésticas que disfrutaban de su día de asueto en la extensa explanada a cuyos costados reposaban la catedral, el palacio presidencial y los viejos portales del comercio, un paseo espléndido e ilustrativo porque mientras deambulaba bajo el cielo brillante pude constatar que ninguna de aquellas mujeres de ojos rasgados y piel tostada despertaba mi apetito sexual ni mi morbo, gracias a lo cual me desplazé glacial y con levedad, mi fantasía sosegada por completo, atento más bien al diseño de los tejidos y al corte de esos trajes étnicos cuyos faldones coloridos impedían el mínimo asomo de la carne. (79-80)

Not filtered by any ideology of solidarity, in flagrant violation of the norms of political correction, this strictly individual response is determined almost entirely by the libido of the individual. In “Las pesadillas están ahí todavía,” Sánchez Carbó reaches the conclusion that in the narrative of Castellanos Moya “prima el espacio del individuo,” as opposed to the social and explicitly political concerns of both testimonio and Boom literature (63). According to Sánchez Carbó, the point of view articulated in *Insensatez* constitutes “la singular posición de un escritor ajeno a compromisos morales, ideológicos, religiosos o solidarios” (59). This turn towards the individual and away from the social and political opens the space to consider the narrative project of Castellanos Moya as an emergent discourse in Latin American literature. which breaks with the residual expectations of a politically committed literatures. The insistence of Castellanos

Moya on the political incorrectness and antisocial nature of his narrator would seem to support this interpretation, which will be addressed in greater detail in the conclusion of this chapter.

To be clear, this is not to say that *Insensatez* does not repudiate genocide or State terrorism but rather that it does so without solidarizing nor idealizing the victims. The novel of Castellanos Moya exposes the atrocity of the crimes of the military and its proxies, with the gruesome details reminiscent of the naturalism of a Eugenio Cambaceres²⁰, yet it dispenses with the ideological frameworks of revolutionary social and political transformation that characterize testimonio. The thoughts and feelings of the narrator towards Rigoberta Menchú, the center of the testimonial canon, capture this ambivalence:

la familia real española y las demás monarquías europeas que no sólo recibían con el más alto protocolo a la indígena de marras sino que se retrataban con ella y permitían que esas fotos fueran publicadas ni más ni menos que en la revista *¡Hola!*, una indígena gordita rodeada de reyes, príncipes, marqueses y condes como en un cuento de hadas. ... una indígena a la que ninguna de las familias blancas y respetables del país en que ahora tomábamos café hubiera recibido por la puerta de la cocina como no fuera para que entregara las tortillas, esa misma indígena ganadora de las más altas distinciones internacionales era la única ciudadana de este país que aparecía rodeada de la realeza europea en la revista *¡Hola!*, algo verdaderamente impresionante ... salir en la revista *¡Hola!* era lo máximo que podía aspirar y algo que los blanquitos dueños de este país jamás le perdonarían a la gordita, porque ellos de ninguna manera tenían ni jamás tendrían cabida en esas prestigiosas páginas. (90)

²⁰ Many of the descriptions of atrocity in *Insensatez* bear the mark of the naturalistic rendering of the suicide of Andrés at the end of *Sin Rumbo*.

Although the narrator recognizes the military and other “dueños del país” as common enemies, there is no apparent intention to use his position as an intellectual to bridge the gap between the subaltern and the educated middle classes in a bond of solidarity. In fact, the use of dismissive and disrespectful epithets like “la gordita” and “indígena de marras” marks the narrator’s intention to distance himself. Even though he expresses admiration for Menchú for having humiliated the ruling elite, this does not spare her from becoming, at the same time, an object of his ridicule. In this passage, this chastising tone can be subsumed within the ironic treatment of the incorporation of testimonio into the culture industry and mass media.

In any case, the scene evidences a significant shift from the idealization and sacralization of the testimonial subject, which Thorton refers to as a “fetishization of the other” (215). In “The Aura of Testimonio,” Alberto Moreiras signals a “structural limitation of testimonio:”

[T]he testimonial subject, in the hands of the Latin Americanist cultural critic, has a tendency to become epistemologically fetishized precisely through its (re)absorption into the literary system of representation. In other words, solidarity, which remains the essential summons of the testimonial text and what radically distinguishes it from the literary text, is in perpetual risk of being turned into a rhetorical tropology. (215)

To understand how this works, that is, how testimonio fetishizes and, then, how Castellanos Moya challenges and effectively disarms this fetishization, it may be useful to take a paradigmatic example: the representation of Rigoberta Menchú in the introduction of Elizabeth Burgos to *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. Burgos organizes her discourse upon a division between a first-person intellectual that encompasses herself, as transcriber/editor, and the reader, on one hand, and a third-person testifier that corresponds to the subaltern Other, on the other hand:

Escuchar su voz significa asimismo sumergirnos en nuestro propio interior, pues despierta en nosotros sensaciones y sentimientos que creíamos caducados, encerrados como estamos dentro de nuestro universo inhumano y artificial. Nos trastorna porque lo que dice es sencillo y verdadero. Esta voz nos llevará hacia otro universo distinto, sobrecogedor, poético... (10)

According to the distribution of attributes in this passage, the Self corresponds to the inhuman and artificial, while the Other signifies the simple, authentic, comforting, and poetic. The exaltation of the Other, then, is coextensive with a lack of the Self: “nos invita a penetrar en su universe cultural, donde lo Sagrado impregna lo cotidiano, donde el rito y la vida doméstica son todo uno, porque cada gesto tiene un objetivo determinado de antemano, cada cosa posee un sentido” (10). From the point of view of the modern, secular, and disenchanting world of the metropolitan intellectual, the premodern, enchanted, traditional milieu of the subaltern offers the possibility of redemption. It is unclear, however, how much of this opposition is based on concrete sociohistorical realities and how much corresponds to the essentializing and exoticizing projections of a nostalgic metropolitan intellectual. In the case of the introduction of Burgos, the testimonial alliance between the intellectual and subaltern is certainly not free of condescension: “Lo que me sorprendió a primera vista fue su sonrisa franca y casi infantil. Su cara redonda tenía forma de luna llena. Su mirada franca era la de un niño, con labios siempre dispuestos a sonreír. Despedía una asombrosa juventud” (12). Within the self-perception of the intellectual, as the embodiment of logos, the subaltern occupies the space of the child, the irrational, and nature. The discourse of Burgos is founded upon a series of binary oppositions, such as mind/body, culture/nature, reason/emotion, logos/pathos, sacred/profane, self/other, in which the first term corresponds to the author and the reader to the exclusion of the subaltern Other, who embodies

the attributes of the second term. Within the original context of enunciation, this condescension was a part of a conscious exaltation, idealization, and even sacralization of a subaltern Other for concrete political purposes as a symbolic inscription and declaration of solidarity with Central American revolutionary struggles. From our present horizon of reception and our current sensibilities, it is easy to point out the excesses of Burgos' programmatic text, including its tendency to fetishize an indigenous Other. This is certainly not the place to pass value judgments on the poetic-political testimonial project of Burgos. It is, however, the place to signal the exhaustion of a paradigm that Burgos helped erect and that the narrative of Castellanos Moya has been instrumental in dismantling.

The crude, desacralizing, and wholly unsentimental treatment of the indigenous subject by the narrator of *Insensatez* marks a clear break with the testimonial tradition, consecrated by Burgos, among other intellectuals. This cantankerous narrator repudiates the atrocities of the military without seeking to establish an alliance between intellectual and popular classes and narrates political violence without the need to exoticize, essentialize, or fetishize. Furthermore, the novel signals the problem of overidentification with the testimonial subject through the secondary trauma which afflicts the narrator on account of his intense interaction with testimonial texts. At the same time, the narrator's obsession with the texts is rooted in invariably aesthetic concerns and, as such, constitutes an individual response which lacks the social and political dimension of the canonical reception of testimonio. Through a categorical refusal to solidarize, *Insensatez* performs a new representation of Central American intellectuals, one that bypasses former modes of conceiving the public function of intellectual in terms of political commitment. The narrator's invariable refusal of the solidarity response constitutes a flagrant violation of the testimonial pact and signals the emergence of anti-epic and anti-sentimentalist

responses to accounts of violence. In the next section, we turn our attention to the problematization of another aspect of the reception of testimonio: the danger of the reader's overidentification with the testimonial subject and the misappropriation of the experience of political violence.

3.3.2. From Empathic Unsettling to Misappropriation

The narrator of *Insensatez* misreads testimonio in many ways. By exalting the aesthetic dimension of the texts and diminishing their referential dimension, he puts himself at too much distance, missing the cue to the solidarity response, which is a part of the testimonial reading pact. At the same time, though, he is also too close to the texts, overidentifying with the testifiers in such a way that blurs the distinction between his subject position and theirs. At the beginning of the novel, for example, the narrator announces the possibility that “convivir con esos textos las veinticuatro horas del día podría ser fatal para una personalidad como la mía, dispararía mi paranoia a niveles enfermizos” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 31). His workmate, Toto, warns him of the danger of not establishing a safe distance between himself and the testimonios: “corregir mil cien cuartillas con historias de indígenas obsesionados con el terror y la muerte podía quebrantar al espíritu más férreo, intoxicarme con una morbosidad malsana” (31). As the story progresses the narrator grows progressively more anxious and paranoid, a state that he describes as “sumido en una creciente vorágine de paranoia” (101). He often perceives his life to be in danger, a sensation that originated with the correction of the testimonios: “en seguida fui víctima de una sensación aún más rara... como si estuviera a punto de empezar un destino en el que mi voluntad apenas contaba y cuyo principal rasgo era el peligro” (26). In fact, his entrance

into the archbishopric palace is described as a descent into an underworld of catacombs and death:

el relato de mis impresiones en esa primera mañana de trabajo ... sólo podía comenzar con la extraña sensación que tuve al tocar el enorme portón de madera ubicado a un costado de la catedral, como si estuviese pidiendo que me abriesen las puertas de unas catacumbas siempre temidas y aborrecidas, pero a las cuales el destino me obligaba a penetrar, esa extraña sensación de estar al punto de entrar a un mundo prohibido e indeseable (25).

This sense of danger is largely based on a fear of the violence and repression of the military and its proxies. More specifically, the narrator intuits that military intelligence has infiltrated the archbishop's office of human rights and is targeting him and others who are working on the Remhi report. Only having access to the troubled subjectivity of the narrator, however, it is difficult to establish whether this perception is a paranoid delusion, a projection of the narrator's fear, or whether there is a legitimate basis for his suspicion.

A symptom of this second-hand trauma that seems to afflict the narrator is the conflation of his subject position with that of the victims of atrocities and human rights violations. In the first place, the narrator systematically refers to himself as a victim whose life is threatened by the military (and any possible infiltrators within the human rights office). When not referring to himself directly as a victim – “víctima de una conspiración” (17), “víctima de una sensación aún más rara” (26) – the testimonio of the narrator is structured to emphasize his victimhood. On his payday, for example, the narrator discovers that the Archbishop's Office of Human Rights is exploiting his labor by paying him less than the amount he had agreed upon: “En vez de las quinientas cuartillas acordadas me tocaría trabajar sobre el doble de material, sin que pareciera

dispuesto a doblar mis emolumentos” (27). His formulation of the conflict evokes the imaginary of the testimonial texts that he corrects since he frames the event in terms of a violation of his humanity: “el hecho de haberse cagado en mi humanidad” (39). In a much more banal example, a conflict arises between the narrator and a secondary character, Jota Ce, after the narrator has sexual relations with his girlfriend. Once again, the narrator frames the conflict in terms of a potential violation his humanity: “...se llevaría mi humanidad entre las patas y de la manera más irresponsable pondría mi vida en riesgo” (101). When the narrator is trying to seduce Pilar because “un buen polvo, de ser posible, relajaría mis nervios y gratificaría mis sentidos luego de una semana de permanecer encerrado leyendo sólo sobre cadáveres y torturas,” she irrupts in tears and confides that she is still in love with her ex-boyfriend (53). Without abandoning his original intention of seducing her, the narrator is nonetheless offended. The fact that she would assert herself as a subject as opposed to conforming to his expectations and ideals for an object of desire provoke indignation in the narrator, an indignation that he expresses as an affront to this personhood:

Pero la Pilarica volvió a las andadas, con un llanto ya francamente grosero, irrespectuoso hacia mi persona, que sólo quería beber unas cervezas y tantear la posibilidad de seducir a una chica que parecía guapa e inteligente, craso error, que la guapura con mocos no cuaja ni la inteligencia con llanto (51).

The narrator’s appropriation of a lexical field of testimonio to refer to his own life is not gratuitous but consistent throughout the novel as part of a broader operation of symbolically homologizing the protagonist’s experiences with the suffering of the victims of genocidal practices.

This general tendency to conflate subject positions finds another expression in the frequent habit of the narrator to equate his experiences to those of the victims of genocide, transposing the violence they suffered onto the framework of his life as a middle class intellectual. In a fit of insomnia prompted by the anxiety of what the narrator believes to be the mistake of sleeping with Fátima, the girlfriend of Jota Ce, a Uruguayan military official, the narrator reads from his notebooks of excerpts from the testimonios of the Remhi report. In these readings, which he mistakenly thinks will help calm him down, he comes across a phrase from an elder Quiché man who witnessed the brutal dismemberment of his children, grandchildren, and other relatives by the military. The man asks who will bury him now that all his relatives are dead, and the narrator's response is to immediately equate this tragedy to his own situation:

yo tampoco tenía quien me enterrara en case de que el tal Jota Ce o los especialistas de la mal llamada inteligencia militar decidieran eliminarme, nadie se haría cargo de mis restos si algo me sucedía, pensé con tristeza, ni los pocos familiares que quedaban en mi país ni ninguno de mis conocidos en esta tierra ajena se harían cargo de mis huesos, me lamenté ya en un estado de autoconmiseración. (104)

The narrator confesses to feeling “tan solo y abandonado como él,” despite the fact that he is safe and sound in a bed with “una chica durmiente en mi cama, la chica intensamente deseada que me había poseído” (105). The incommensurability between the conditions of enunciation of the original phrase of the Quiché elder and its appropriation and re-signification by the narrator signals an operation of projection or over-identification on part of the narrator. With small variations, the scene repeats itself several times throughout the novel, as in the following scene from the final chapter. After fleeing what he perceived to be persecution from the military after

their infiltration of the human rights office of the archbishop's palace, the narrator embarks on his third exile, this time from Guatemala City to an unnamed city in Germany:

sin perder la costumbre de desenfundar mi pequeña libreta de apuntes para leer las frases que tanto me conmovían, muchas de las cuales ya sabía de memoria, como aquella que decía *Para mí recordar, siento yo que estoy viviendo otra vez*, cuya sintaxis cortada era la constatación de que algo se había quebrado en la psiquis del sobreviviente que la había pronunciado, una frase que cabalmente se aplicaba a mi situación en esa ciudad extranjera y lejana donde me había ido a refugiarme gracias a la hospitalidad de mi primo Quique, donde para mí recordar era vivir otra vez los testimonios de pesadilla tantas veces leídas. (149)

The meta-testimonial dimension of *Insensatez*, signaled by Kokotoiv, is articulated with particular clarity in this passage. On one level, the novel constitutes a fictional testimony of a Central American intellectual who is persecuted and forced into exile on account of his collaboration on a report that exposes the crimes of the military. In this same scene, the last of the novel, the narrator sees the features of persecutor, Octavio Pérez Mena, on the faces of the people in the bar in Germany (154). This trauma corresponds to the narrator's firsthand experiences of repression by the Guatemalan military. Yet, at the same time, within this fictional framework there is another level of testimonios: the accounts of atrocity that compose the text of the Remhi report. For the narrator, "to remember is to relive the nightmarish testimonios that I read so many times" (149). Not only does the narrator suffer from his own experience with the military's infiltration of the archbishop's office of human rights, but he also suffers from the trauma provoked by his overidentification with the testimonios that he corrects. I argue that the separation between these two levels breaks down throughout *Insensatez*. The narrator

consistently conflates his subject position with that of the *testimoniantes* whose accounts of atrocity he reads obsessively. This symbolic slippage or superposition between the two levels of testimonio is consistent throughout the novel.

If the closing scene of the novel exemplifies this indeterminacy, the same can be said about the opening scene. *Insensatez* begins with the narrator writes an excerpt from the testimonios of the Remhi report into his personal notebook: “*Yo no estoy completo de la mente*” (13). The phrase, uttered by a Cachiuel man, attests to the:

quebrantamiento de su aparato psíquico a causa de haber presenciado, herido e impotente, cómo los soldados del ejército de su país despedazaban a machetazos y con sorna a cada uno de sus cuatro pequeños hijos y enseguida arremetían contra su mujer, la pobre en shock a causa de que también había sido obligada a presenciar cómo los soldados convertían a sus pequeños hijos en palpitantes trozos de carne humana. (13-4)

The reaction of the narrator is immediate: he appropriates the traumatic utterance of the Cachiuel man, victim of a gross violation of human rights, and applies it to his discomfort with his new office job: “Yo tampoco estoy completo de la mente, me dije entonces, en ese mi primer día de trabajo, sentado frente al que sería mi escritorio durante esa temporada, con la vista perdida en las altas y blancas paredes casi desnudas de esa oficina” (15). Beyond the explicit ethical incorrection of such an appropriation, it signals a potential problem in the reception of testimonio, a potential misuse of testimonio.

One way to conceptualize this conflation of subject positions is through the categories of empathic unsettlement and identification proposed by Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). In addressing both the ethical and methodological problems of working with testimonies, LaCapra seeks a “middle response” that recognizes the need for subjective

response but at the same time seeks to safeguard objectivity and avoid the dangers of overidentification: “[O]bjectivity should not be identified with objectivism or exclusive objectification that denies or forecloses empathy, just as empathy should not be conflated with unchecked identification, vicarious experience, and surrogate victimage” (40). As a solution to this dilemma, LaCapra proposes an intermediate distance that allows for empathy without foreclosing objectivity:

Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably victims, implies not the appropriation of their experience but what I would call empathetic unsettlement... At the very least empathetic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility). (41-2)

In this passage, LaCapra signals the danger of the misappropriation of testimony, that is, its instrumentalization within totalizing discourses that are ultimately self-serving. There are many levels on which *Insensatez* can be read as a story about the misuse of testimony, including its self-interested appropriation by the local and international actors within the human rights community to hide their past, assuage their guilt, and advance their careers. A lack of distance or separation in the reception of testimony, which LaCapra considers an ever-present danger, constitutes one such misuse of testimony:

There is something in the experience of the victim that has an almost compulsive power and should elicit our empathy. This empathy may go to the point of fascination or extreme identification, wherein one becomes a kind of surrogate victim oneself and assumes the victim’s voice. (146)

This danger of “fascination” or of a mode of identification that ignores separation is precisely what Toto warns the narrator about when they meet for drinks after the first day of the job. Yet, time and again the narrator proves unable to heed this advice and consistently appropriates the imaginary of the victims to communicate his own experiences, conflating two radically different subject positions. For LaCapra, this type of behaviour signals that a line has been crossed and the distinction between “empathic unsettlement” and “unchecked identification” has been crossed (102). At the end of the novel when the narrator remembers the months he spent in Guatemala City, from a barstool in Germany, what afflicts him is *having read* the testimonios. This second-hand trauma stems from a misappropriation of testimony: the lack of boundaries and distance between the narrator and the testimonial accounts triggers a psychological crisis, a breakdown, in which the narrator conflates his experiences with those he reads about in the Remhi report. A central enigma of the novel is whether the narrator was indeed targeted by the military or whether his paranoia, alluded to so many times throughout the text, causes him to misinterpret the signs of his new environment and perceive that he is in more danger than he actually is. The assassination of Bishop Gerardi confirms that the Archbishop’s Office of Human Rights was indeed infiltrated by the military, but it is impossible to determine whether the narrator’s life was in any real danger. What is clear is that the narrator’s obsession with the testimonies, which includes not only correcting them but copying fragments into his personal notebook and reciting these excerpts to himself and others, precipitates a crisis of acute anxiety.

What is less clear is how to interpret this aspect of the work. One might be tempted to interpret the vicarious victimhood of the narrator as a confirmation of secondary trauma, which is certainly a much-debated topic in memory studies and in the discussions around “limit events” of extreme political violence (LaCapra 36-7). This interpretation, however, is not in consonance

with the overall tenor of the text, which is characterized by a careful avoidance of sentimentalization and by disruption of the testimonial pact, according to which the texts procure the solidarity of the reader with the victims of political violence (Beverley and Zimmerman 177-8). In fact, the opposite could be argued: instead of narrativizing secondary trauma for the purpose of sensationalizing “limit” events and, in effect, broadening the circle of those afflicted by violations of human rights, *Insensatez* can be read as a critique of the misappropriation of testimonio. The crisis of the narrator, then, would serve as an allegory for the misuses of testimonio and for what happens when it is consumed without critical distance. Far from providing clarity, the narrator’s close relationship with the testimonios only serves to cloud his judgment and debilitate his ability to comprehend the specific political context in which he finds himself, which ultimately compromises his ability to act effectively. Furthermore, this interpretation of the narrator’s condition syntonizes with the thematization of other misuses of testimonio throughout *Insensatez*, such as its self-serving appropriation by the human rights community, to be discussed in greater details later in the chapter.

3.4. Objectionably Objective: Testimonio and Truth Claims

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur identifies what he describes as the “crucial question” of testimony: “To what point is testimony trustworthy? This question balances both confidence and suspicion” (162). In an operation that Beatriz Sarlo terms “optimismo teórico,” which characterized the climax of testimonio in both Latin American literature and literary criticism (49), Zimmerman and Beverley exalt the referentiality of the testimonial text to the suppression of its aesthetic qualities:

Because it is the discourse of a witness who is not a fictional construct, testimonio in one sense or another speaks directly to us, as an actual person might. To subsume testimonio under the category of literary fictionality is to deprive it of its power to engage the reader in the ways indicated, to make of it simply another form of literature. The more interesting question ... is how testimonio radically puts into question the existing institution of literature itself as a form of class, gender and ethnic violence. (177)

In the passage, the resistance to reducing testimonio to its literary qualities is accomplished by a voluntary erasure of its narrative, rhetorical, and properly discursive elements. Seen in this light, “testimonio appears therefore as an extraliterary or even antiliterary form of discourse” (Beverly 42). The optimism of these accounts of the genre necessarily minimizes its medium: language. This suppression of the medium is communicated with clarity in the introduction of Elizabeth Burgos’ *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*: “el relato de las ceremonias y de los rituales es tan detallado. Del mismo modo, si nos hubiéramos encontrado en su casa, en el Quiché, la descripción del paisaje no hubiese sido tan realista” (16). In the formulation of Burgos, testimonio re-presents almost without mediation, as if the medium itself were transparent. This operation of course is intended to guarantee the truth and objectivity of Menchú’s account and underscore the epistemological value of her testimonio. These accounts represent the pole of “confidence” within the spectrum described by Ricoeur. In *Tiempo pasado. Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo: Una discusión*, Sarlo summarizes the confidence in the subject’s capacity to apprehend external social and historical realities in a reliable manner:

La actualidad es optimista y ha aceptado la construcción de la experiencia como relato en primera persona, aún cuando desconfíe de que todos los demás relatos pueden remitir de modo más o menos pleno a su referente. Proliferan las narrativas llamadas ‘no

ficcionales...’: testimonios historias de vida, entrevistas, autobiografías, recuerdos y memorias, relatos identitarios. La dimensión intensamente subjetiva (un verdadero renacimiento del sujeto que se creyó muerto en los años sesenta y setenta) caracteriza el presente. ... Un movimiento de devolución de la palabra, de conquista de la palabra y de derecho a la palabra se expande reduplicado por una ideología de ‘sanación’ identitaria a través de la memoria social o personal. El tono subjetivo marcó la posmodernidad, como la desconfianza o la pérdida de experiencia marcó los últimos capítulos de la modernidad cultural. Los derechos de la primera persona se presentan, por una parte, como derechos reprimidos que deben liberarse; y como instrumento de verdad, por la otra. (49-50)

More than merely a summary, however, Sarlo’s analysis carries the polemic force of a critique. She argues that the right to remember does not in any way guarantee the truth of what is remembered and advocates for suspicion towards “memoria ejercido como construcción de verdad del sujeto” (57-8).²¹ This skepticism regarding the epistemological value of testimonio constitutes the “suspicion” pole of Ricoeur’s testimonial spectrum.

The suspicion of Sarlo coincides with recent developments in Central American literature, which, according to Ortiz Wallner, displays “tendencias que se inclinan por deconstruir, superar o resemantizar el espacio narrativo del testimonio” (*El arte de ficcionar* 81). In *El arte de ficcionar: la novela contemporánea en Centroamérica*, Ortiz Wallner argues that the literature of the region has undergone a “cambio de paradigma” since the late 20th century:

²¹ In broader terms, Sarlo critiques the manner in which the theorists of testimonio bypass questions of how to anchor the epistemological dimension of testimonio. In her view, the political concerns about mobilizing testimonio contributed to exempting the genre from the same rigor demanded of other documents that purport to generate knowledge about the past (*Tiempo pasado* 94).

emergen textos que oscilan entre una denuncia de los efectos de verdad construidos por el discurso y la configuración de textos literarios que van a retomar elementos y técnicas propias de la literatura testimonial, pero ya con un interés desestabilizador, crítico, incluso, subversor, a través del que se articulará una ruptura definitiva con el carácter representativo-simbólico del testimonio y se reubicará a la ficción literaria en las nuevas dinámicas de producción, circulación y recepción literarias en época de la posguerra en Centroamérica. (83)

As already established, Castellanos exhibits this same ambivalence towards testimonio: at the same time that he critiques the aesthetics and politics of testimonio (including its claim to truth and authenticity), Castellanos Moya also heavily borrows from the genre's central techniques in the elaboration of his own radically divergent literary and ideological project. In the present section I argue that *Insensatez* registers a shift in contemporary Latin American literature from confidence to suspicion regarding the veracity, objectivity, and authenticity of testimonio, in addition to suspicion regarding its validity and relevance in contemporary political and cultural contexts that differ substantially from those of its inception and ascendance. In both its form and content, Castellanos Moya's novel problematizes the relationship between testimonio, literature, and history. More specifically, the systematic blurring of the boundaries between literature and testimonial texts is one of the principal strategies for undermining confidence in testimonio. In a broader sense, the author's narrative participates in emergent conceptions of the role of the Latin American intellectual in the public sphere and of the proper role of literature in politics and society, in open dispute with residual models of political commitment as the measure of cultural currency.

Having addressed the ways that *Insensatez* breaks with the norms for the production and reception of testimonio in the first and second sections of this chapter, respectively, the current section assesses the transgression of another crucial element of the testimonial contract: the pact of referentiality. In his novel, Castellanos Moya undermines the epistemological claims of testimonio in several ways: the exaltation of the properly textual aspects of testimonio; the thematization of the impossibility of producing definitive testimonial accounts of historical events; and the systematic use of indetermination to produce epistemological doubt. The following sections addresses each of these strategies in turn.

3.4.1. From Confidence to Suspicion

The claim that testimonio constitutes an “antiliterary form of discourse” rests upon what is perceived to be the genre’s privileged relationship to extraliterary socio-historical realities. In the zeal to anchor the referential potential of the genre (and, derivatively, its political utility), the properly rhetorical, narrative, and discursive devices of the testimonial texts are downplayed and overlooked. In the analysis of Alberto Moreiras in *The Exhaustion of Difference*, “the attraction of testimonio, as a postliterary genre, depends upon the fact that in testimonio the literary breaks off into the unguarded possibility of the real:”

The testimonial subject, by virtue of its testimonio, makes a claim to the real in reference to which only solidarity or its withholding are possible. The notion of the total representativity of the testimonial life, which in fact points to a kind of literary degree zero in the testimonial text, paradoxically organizes the extraliterary dimension of the testimonial experience: solidarity is not a literary response but that which suspends the literary in the reader’s response. (224-5)

The privileging of the extratextual real led to the reduction of testimonio to a “hermeneutics of solidarity,” as a politicized reading strategy, yet, as Moreiras points out, “[o]ne cannot have a hermeneutics of solidarity without a poetics of solidarity to go with it” (225). Furthermore, while “solidarity allows for political articulation,” it does not provide any guarantee as to the epistemological value of the testimonio (215). The critical intervention of Moreiras, then, consists in reading testimonio as a mode of representation, attendant to its rhetorical and literary devices. As it turns out, this is the same strategy that Castellanos Moya uses in *Insensatez* to articulate his critique of testimonio.

In *Insensatez*, the narrator’s treatment of testimonio is an inversion of the mode of reception prescribed by the theorists of the genre. Instead of minimalizing the literary dimension of testimonio in order to privilege its referentiality, he suspends the referential function as a way to isolate and intensify its literariness. As it turns out, the novel narrates the method by which he accomplishes this operation: throughout his long hours of work as corrector of the Remhi report, the narrator selects excerpts of testimonio based exclusively on poetic criteria and then reads these passages to himself or in the company of others at often inopportune moments throughout the course of the novel. This practice is one of the reasons why the narrator manages to get on the nerves of just about everyone that he meets, most of whom are associated with the national or international human rights community. The behavior of the narrator, in particular his insistence on a literary and specifically non-solidarizing reading of testimonio, is unintelligible within the idiom of the milieu. Nonetheless, these misunderstandings raise important issues concerning not only the political uses of literature in contemporary Latin America but also the legitimacy of competing modes of representing political violence in literature.

What immediately impacts the narrator on his first day on the job is the literary dimension of the testimonios that he corrects. Obsessed by the “riqueza del lenguaje,” by the “intensas figuras del language,” and by the “la curiosa construcción sintáctica que me recordaba a poetas como el peruano César Vallejo,” he limits his reading to the surface of the text, intentionally bracketing its referentiality. With the poetic function of language as his criteria, the narrator proceeds to collect passages to conform what he describes as a type of literary collage:

enseguida extraje mi libreta de apuntes del bolsillo interior de mi chaqueta con el propósito de paladear con calma aquellas frases que me parecían estupendas literariamente, que jamás volvería a compartir con poetas insensibles como mi compadre Toto y que con suerte podría utilizar en algún tipo de collage literario. (43)

In direct opposition to the conception of testimonio as antiliterature, the narrator insists on its literary stature: “unos testimonios conmovedores, alucinantes, en especial ese lenguaje de una riqueza expresiva digna de la mejor literatura, exclamé y a punto estuve de echar mano a mi libreta de apuntes para deleitar el oído de monseñor” (68). This mode of reading testimonio, however, provokes misunderstanding and other adverse reactions for those expecting modes of reading and interpreting testimonial texts that abide by the conventions of the genre. The following passage places these two modes side by side in a way which illustrates their apparent incompatibility:

Monseñor se me quedó viendo con una mirada indescifrable tras sus gafas de cristales ahumados y montura de carey, una mirada que me hizo temer que él me considerara un literato alucinado en busca de versos allí donde lo que había era una brutal denuncia de los crímenes de lesa humanidad perpetrados por el ejército contra las comunidades indígenas de su país. (69)

The incomprehension of Bishop Gerardi is certainly understandable since the testimonios were produced in a context which imbued them with a specific pragmatic force and entrusted them with a specific legal and political objective: to attest to genocide and condemn the crimes of its perpetrators, principally the Guatemalan military and its proxies. By re-contextualizing them in his notebook and re-signifying them in his literary collage, the narrator deprives the testimonios of this originary pragmatic meaning.

How, then, are we to interpret this transgressive use of testimonial texts and flagrant violation of the cultural politics of the genre? Is Castellanos Moya saying that testimonios of genocide should be used for impromptu poetry recitals or to seduce potential sexual partners? One possible alternative is to read the narrator's appropriation of testimonio as an analogy of a conflict between emerging and residual modes of narrating political violence in Central America's recent past. As discussed above, Ortiz Wallner sees the narrative of Castellanos Moya as indicative of a waning in the hegemony of testimonio, as a residual discourse, and of its displacement by emergent literary forms, such as fictional renderings of political violence (*El arte de ficcionar* 85). Within this potential analogy, then, the intolerance of the narrator's interlocutors, staunch defenders of the conventions of testimonio, would stand for resistance to conceding the literary dimension of testimonio. The narrator's appropriation of the materials of testimonio, for its part, would stand for the attempt to approach political violence in the region's past through literature, in opposition to "an antiliterary form of discourse." This would explain *Insensatez's* incessant attacks on the epistemological claims that serve as the basis of the referentiality of testimonio, as a "degree zero" of representation. Furthermore, on a meta-literary level, this would serve as the basis of a justification of the novel itself. In "A Postwar Perversion of Testimonio..." Thorton argues that Castellanos Moya "criticizes the Left's privileging of

testimonial writing" by "blurring and parodying elements associated with the authenticity of testimonial discourse" and offering "a perversion of *testimonio* through the lens of fiction, reminding readers that history itself is a construction and interpretation of reality" (211). There is a scene of *Insensatez* that condenses this defense of the legitimacy of fiction as a means of addressing political violence. In one of the improvised poetry recitals from his notebook of excerpts, the narrator addresses a group of forensic anthropologists who recently returned from the excavation of a former military base where they disinterred "las osamentas de setenta y siete personas de diversas edades, incluidas mujeres embarazadas y bebés recién nacidos" (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 122). When faced with their incomprehension, the narrator confronts his interlocutors and asks why they cannot comprehend that there is value in converting unearthened bones into literature:

exclamé por tercera vez, con las cejas alzadas, en el filo del entusiasmo, para que comprendieran de una vez por todas ... para que convirtieran los huesos recién desenterrados en palabras, en poesía de la mejor, algo que no alcanzaba a entrar en sus cabezas de alcornoque. (122-3)

It is important to point out that, in his effort to make his interlocutors see the "transcendence" and "luminosity" of the fragment of *testimonio*, the narrator is not denying in any way that it is also "terrible" since "en verdad se refería a la pesadilla del terror y de la muerte" (122). Rather, the narrator argues that the fact that the fragment refers to something terrible, to a situation of terrible political violence, does not make it incompatible with literature. This affirmation, of course, contradicts one of the premises of *testimonio*: an "antiliterary form of discourse" that accentuates the referentiality of the textual form, presupposes the transparency of the linguistic medium, and minimizes problems of representation is more appropriate for addressing situations

of political violence. Yet, it is not only the narrator but also the novel itself that challenges this presupposition. For this reason, this passage can be read as an interpretative key for the novel and indeed as a declaration of the narrative program of the author.

3.4.2. Six Gunshots and Four Chimneys

In the very center of *Insensatez*, in the middle of the sixth of the twelve chapters, there is a scene that radically casts doubt upon the epistemological claims of testimonio, its aspiration to truth, and its pretension to apprehend sociohistorical realities. The narrator is getting dressed in the morning in his apartment at a busy intersection of downtown Guatemala City when he hears gun shots. Immediately after the first shot, he begins counting aloud as each successive shot is fired. He uses this technique, which he brought with him from El Salvador, where gunfire was a daily occurrence, as a means to gauge the severity of the situation. In fact, he claims to have perfected the technique to such a point that he is often able to identify the make and model of the firearm. Standing at attention by the open window of his apartment, the narrator is certain to have counted five shots from a 9mm pistol. The fact that it is the first shootout that he heard in the month and a half since his arrival to the city caused him to pay even closer attention to the occurrence. Upon leaving the building, however, he engages in small talk with the doorman who has a different account of what happened. According to this character, there was a car chase down the avenue in which people from a first car shot at the people of a second vehicle with an automatic weapon. This version does not square with the recollection of the narrator, who heard neither a car chase nor automatic weapons. In their brief conversation, the doorman and the narrator were unable to reconcile their discrepancies as to what occurred outside the building just a few minutes earlier. In a bad mood on account of the misunderstanding, the narrator leaves the building and walks down the avenue towards his office at the archbishop's palace. At the corner,

he asks a street vendor about the shooting who, to his consternation, gives him yet another version of the shooting, insisting that there were six instead of five gunshots. To make matters worse, when the narrator asks the opinion of another street vendor, “resulta un caso peor aún que el vendedor de discos piratas” (77). In the end, the reader is left with nothing more than divergent accounts of the same event. Furthermore, the credibility of the narrator is already well tarnished at this point of the novel through ubiquitous references to his mental instability and penchant for cognitive distortion.

This scene replicates a common critique of testimony and signals one of its telltale blind spots, the same one signalled by Felman and Laub in a celebrated passage of *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), in which Dori Laub narrates his experience of interviewing a survivor of Auschwitz for the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. As a witness to the Auschwitz uprising, the woman being interviewed recounted her experience of hearing shouts, cries, shots, and explosions. Furthermore, she vividly describes seeing four chimneys erupt in flames. This account ended up being the subject of this intense debate when Laub showed the footage at a conference. The reason is that “[t]he testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four” (59). Those on one side of the debate argued that this discrepancy discredited the rest of the testimony. Laub’s position, on the other hand, was that the number of chimneys did not constitute grounds for dismissal since the witness to the Auschwitz uprising “was not simply testifying to empirical historical facts” (62). Laub argues that the testimony registers

an essential part of the historical truth she was bearing witness to. She saw four chimneys blowing up in Auschwitz; in other words, the unimaginable was taking place right in

front of her eyes. And she came to testify to the unbelievability, precisely, of what she had eyewitnessed – this bursting open of the very frame of Auschwitz. ... She had come, indeed, to testify, not to the empirical number of the chimneys, but ... to the breakage of the frame of death. (62)

This episode raises an important question about testimony, which is central to *Insensatez* as a programmatic text: what is the truth of testimonio? Is it the truth of the text or the truth of history?

The reaction of the historians at Laub's conference manifests resistance and intolerance towards any degree of subjective elaboration or narrative reworking of in the recounting of historical events. This should not, however, come as a surprise. In its attempt to legitimize itself as a science, history, as an academic discipline, aspires to apprehend realities from the past. This endeavor often involves downplaying the ways in which the interests of the present affect our interpretations of the past. Furthermore, this positivist understanding of historiography implies suppressing the necessarily rhetorical, discursive, or textual dimension of any narration of past sociohistorical realities. According to the theories of narrativist philosophy of history presented in the introduction, this endeavor masks a hermeneutical phantasy since historical writing of any kind cannot rid itself of its narrative elements or its textual nature any more than we can crawl out of our skin to contemplate ourselves from without.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra argues that testimonial genres often incur the same error. In the chapter, "Holocaust Testimonies," he dismantles the disjunctions between objective and subjective approaches to historical realities, thus opening the space for middle terms:

Objectivity is a goal of professional historiography related to the attempt to represent the past as accurately as possible. One may reformulate and defend this goal in postpositivistic terms by both questioning the idea of a fully transparent, unproblematic representation of the way things ‘really were’ and recognizing the need to come to terms with one’s transferential implication in the object of study by critically mediating projective inclinations, undertaking meticulous research, and being open to the way one’s findings may bring into question or even contradict one’s initial hypotheses or assumptions. One may also distinguish objectivity from excessive objectification that restricts historiography to narrowly empirical and analytic techniques and denies or downplays the significance of problems of subject position and voice. (99)

LaCapra advocates for a “middle voice,” “gray zone,” or a “hybridized approach” that avoids the extremes of both positivism and radical constructivism (1-2). “On this model,” he writes, “writing is not a problem,” that is, there is no need for testimonial genres (or even history for that matter) to attempt to suppress its narrative elements or tropological dimension. In a similar manner, in “La ficción del testimonio” Ana María Amar Sánchez critiques what she believes to be a “falsa antimonía:”

Por lo tanto el género exige una lectura que ponga el acento simultáneamente en su condición de relato y de testimonio... Es decir, no es posible leer los textos como novelas ‘puras,’ quitándoles el valor documental; pero tampoco puede olvidarse un trabajo de escritura que impide considerarse como meros documentos que confirman lo real. El juego ... entre ambos campos articulan lo específico del discurso testimonial. (449)

Testimonio, in other words, is situated at the intersection between history and literature, and there is no need to sacrifice the former to save the latter. In fact, to do so would be to indulge in

what LaCapra describes as “the fantasy of total mastery,” that is, the fantasy of total correspondence between text and world which, in order to exist, reduces languages to a degree zero of transparency and denies the necessarily linguistic and discursive medium of both history and literature (90).

The scene of the gunshots, at the very center of *Insensatez*, demonstrates that, to some degree, the truth of testimonio is always necessarily a truth of the text. In addition, it exposes a theoretical oversight and methodological shortcoming of testimonio: the fetishization of referentiality and the attempt to rid itself of its undesirable literary underside. To be aesthetically (and even politically) legitimate, the narration of situations of political violence does not have to be “antiliterature.” The novel itself is proof that the suppression of the literary is not necessarily the most productive or legitimate way to approach historical realities marked by violence. By means of “el arte de ficcionar” Castellanos Moya exposes the continuities between civil war and postwar Central America and addresses many of the contradictions of postwar culture, including those of testimonio (qtd. in Ortiz Wallner, *El arte de ficcionar* 85).

3.4.3. Indetermination and Overinterpretation: A Semiotics of Violence

With few exceptions, *Insensatez* avoids the use of the proper names of people and places. This obliges the reader to fill in the gaps of the text, to borrow a phrase from reception theory, and infer information about the story. The reader knows, for example, that the narrator is from El Salvador and that he has recently moved to the capital city of a neighboring Central American country whose indigenous population had suffered genocide during a recent civil war. With the slightest information about the political and historical context, the reader can recover the implicature and infer that the narrator is residing in Guatemala City. Likewise, the reader knows

that the narrator is working on the correction of the pre-publication version of a report of human rights violations coordinated by the office of the archbishop:

un proyecto en el que participaban decenas y decenas de personas, comenzando por los grupos de catequistas que habían logrado sacar los testimonios de aquellos indígenas testigos y sobrevivientes, la mayoría de los cuales ni siquiera hablaba castellano y temía por sobre cualquier cosa referirse a los hechos de los que habían sido víctimas, siguiendo con los encargados de transcribir las cintas y traducir los testimonios de las lenguas mayas al castellano en que el equipo de profesionales destacados para la clasificación y análisis de los testimonios, y también para la redacción del informe. (18)

According to Rachel Hatcher in *The Power of Memory and Violence in Central America*, this report has left an indelible mark on the politics and culture of Guatemala and on the history of human rights politics on an international level (10). For this reason, Castellanos Moya's elliptical allusion to the Informe del Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica and the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala is within the grasp of most readers informed about the politics and culture of the region. The principal plotline of the novel, as well, is not fictional but taken from history: the infiltration of the human rights office by the military and the subsequent assassination of bishop Juan José Gerardi, who remains unnamed as well, appearing in the text simply as "el monseñor." Other references are even less problematic to reconstruct, such as the thinly veiled moniker Octavio Pérez Mena to designate Otto Pérez Molina.

This minimal cognitive demand put on the reader to fill in the gaps of the texts is coupled with a greater challenge. Another factor that contributes to the indetermination of *Insensatez* is the fact the events that compose the novel's plot are filtered through the subjectivity of an

ostentatiously unreliable narrator. This unreliability is marked extensively throughout the text by the narrator's obsessive descriptions of his own deteriorating psychological state, such as “al borde del trastorno” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 17); “a punto de desfallecer bajo un fulminante ataque de paranoia” (19); “en un estado de perturbación”(67); “presa de un ataque de pánico” (87); “agujoneado por el desasosiego” (113); “en un estado de ofuscación mental y extrema agitación emocional” (115); “una sensación de que el piso se hundía a mis pies, el vértigo de quien ha traspasado la frontera prohibida” (115); “al cuarto día mi mente se me fue de las manos” (139); to cite only a few examples. Furthermore, this sequence of passages attests to the progressive psychological disintegration of the narrator, although his mental health was already compromised to begin with – keep in mind that the opening sentence of the novel is “*yo no estoy completo de la mente*” (13).

To make matters worse, the narrator suffers from a series of hallucinations towards the end of the novel in which he is momentarily unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. In the second to last chapter, for example, the narrator has secluded himself in a spiritual retreat house for the purpose of advancing as much as possible with the correction of the manuscript with the least possible amount of distraction. As it turns out, much of the narrator's distractions, together with much of his suffering, originate in his own mind. The reading of the testimonio of an indigenous man who witnessed the brutal dismemberment of his children at the hands of the military and who expresses a desire to transform himself into a venomous snake in order to take revenge on the assassins triggers a series of mental associations through which the narrator envisions the general Octavio Pérez Mena as a venomous snake and then himself as the general Pérez Mena.

no estaba en ninguna choza sino en la pequeña habitación de la casa de retiro espiritual, ni yo era ese teniente que reventaba la cabeza de los bebés recién nacidos contra los horcones al calor de la masacre, sino un corrector perturbado por leer ese testimonio que se repetía a lo largo del informe. Entonces, sudoroso y con los nervios a flor de piel, volvía a sentarme frente a la computadora, obligado a seguir adelante en la revisión del texto, que el tiempo apremiaba, persistía en mi trabajo como obseso hasta que al paso de las horas mi concentración languidecía y una vez más era poseído por la misma imagen, me ponía de pie y me transformaba en el teniente Octavio Pérez Mena, oficial a cargo del pelotón destacado para la masacre, así que entraba de nuevo a la choza de esos indios de mierda que sólo entenderían el infierno que les esperaba cuando vieran girar por los aires al bebé que yo mantendría tomado de los tobillos para reventar su cabeza de carne tierna contra los horcones de madera. Y era el reguero de sesos palpitantes el que me hacía volver en mí, descubrirme en medio de la habitación, agitado, transpirando, un tanto mareado por los movimientos vertiginosos hechos cuando giraba el bebé por los aires.

(138)

This hallucination of the snake-headed military general symbolically fuses the figure of the victim, the perpetrator, and the reader of testimonio in a conflagration of violence that erases all subject positions. It also makes the reader unable to determine whether the narrator is truly in danger of an ambush from the military at the retreat house or whether the whole episode of his persecution and subsequent escape are simply the paranoid delusion of a deeply troubled and unstable individual. As Sánchez Carbó observes in “Las pesadillas están ahí todavía,” “ya para cuando su equilibrio mental se deteriora, los límites de lo real con lo imaginario se disuelven, situación que alcanza al mismo lector porque carece de otra perspectiva con la cual se pueda

contrastar lo relatado” (61). In other words, “la pretensión de objetividad... de la literatura testimonial tradicional” is denied to the reader of *Insensatez*, who is left with nothing more than the “subjetividad y vulnerabilidad” of the narrator (63).

There is, however, another dimension to the indeterminacy that characterizes *Insensatez*. The interpretative activity of the reader, provoked by a calculated indeterminacy of the text and the unreliability of the narrator, finds a structural parallel in the narrator’s own hermeneutical endeavors. In other words, just as the reader struggles to determine the veracity of what is narrated, the narrator is enveloped in an epistemological crisis of his own. In the climate of silence and impunity that characterized the climate immediately after the Peace Accords in 1996 (Hatcher 100-1), the narrator applies himself with interpretative zeal to the task of reading the signs of postwar Guatemala to decipher the danger of his situation, that is, the danger of retaliation from the military for the activities of the Truth Commission’s report. I argue that, in fact, the overinterpretation on behalf of the narrator stems from an underdetermination in the public sphere, that is a lack of transparency, accountability, and justice concerning the crimes of the military and, to a much lesser degree, Guatemalan revolutionary movements. Newly arrived on the scene and with little symbolic and cultural capital in local currency, the narrator becomes a semiotician of violence who struggles to interpret the signs of his new environment. His interpretations, then, are often based on assumptions, projections, and interpretative leaps of all kinds.

In the fifth chapter, for example, the narrator sees his name mentioned in an article by a local journalist and assumes that the military intelligence apparatus is sending him encoded threats. The starting point of the narrator’s interpretative process represents the insignificant gossip of an embittered colleague:

esa mañana de viernes resultó ser un periodicucho llamado Siglo XX, el cual fui leyendo sin encontrar nada que me sorprendiera hasta que llegué a la columna de Polo Rosas, en la que de pronto me vi mencionado de manera ignominiosa, el escritorzuelo ese a quien yo había visto un par de veces en mi vida durante mi estadía en México afirmaba en la columna de marras que yo le había contado que fulanito me había contado que fulanito me había contado que zutanito se había opuesto a que a tal Polo Rosas le otorgaran un premio de novela una década atrás. (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 60)

Through an apparently unmotivated interpretative leap, the narrator begins to suspect that the author of the article is trying to infer that he is an informant: “todo ello era traída de los pelos para sugerir que yo era un soplón” (60). From here, it does not take long for panic to set in and for the narrator’s interpretation to escalate to the next level: “comprendí que ése era un mensaje clarísimo del Estado Mayor Residencial para decirme que ellos sabían que yo estaba en esa ciudad metido en lo que estaba metido” (61). This prospect causes the narrator to spin out of control in a desperate attempt to read the signs “para analizar qué significaba esa maniobra y cuáles medidas había que tomar para contrarrestarla” (61-2). When he tries to communicate his interpretations to someone else, however, the narrator is met with the usual response: misunderstanding, incomprehension. When the narrator presents his theory to Toto in a nearby bar, his workmate attempts to calm him down: “Dejate de culeradas, cuando los chafas te quieran enviar un mensaje, mínimo te van a pegar un trabón” (64). Toto’s response, of course, is of no avail and only serves to stoke the narrator’s fear and paranoia. In this scene, then, the narrator connects the dots between a seemingly disparate series of signs in an interpretative trajectory that goes from insignificant gossip to death threat.

The structure of this scene is repeated in key scenes throughout the novel. In the scene of the birthday of Johnny Silverman, for example, the narrator interprets a private conversation between three people, without being able to hear their voices and without being able to positively identify one of the “conspirators,” as evidence of a conspiracy within the archbishop’s office. In a similar manner, in the scene at the retreat house the narrator interprets a series of “sombras” and “ruidos de mi propio mente” to be an ambush by the military to sequester him and confiscate the report. This conclusion, clearly, is not based on any concrete empirical evidence but, to the contrary, on a hodgepodge of subjective impressions, suppositions, projections, and even hallucinations. The pattern of hermeneutic zeal, interpretative leaps, and seemingly faulty reasoning, openly confessed or described by the narrator, causes the reader to doubt the character as much as the character doubts his surroundings, which in turn heightens the effect of the end of the novel when the theories of the narrator are confirmed by the news of the assassination of bishop Gerardi.

There are, then, three levels of indeterminacy in *Insensatez*. The most apparent and accessible form of underdetermination is the lack of key proper names of people and places. This technique places a minimal cognitive demand on the reader and sets the stage for the second level of indeterminacy. Here the reader doubts the reliability of the narrator, following the many asseverations of the narrator concerning his own mental instability. The access of the reader to the events that comprise the plot is entirely filtered through the thick veil of the subjectivity of the troubled character. The inability of the reader to establish a secure knowledge of what is happening, then, finds a structural parallel in the narrator’s own incapacity to positively assess his situation. As a central constructive principle of the novel, this indeterminacy (which prompts the interpretative enterprises of both character and reader) causes profound epistemological

doubt. This feature, for its part, stands in sharp contrast to one of the defining features of testimonio: the reinforcement of the referentiality of the text in an attempt to ground its claim to truth and authenticity.

This section has explored the many ways that *Insensatez* undermines confidence and foments suspicion in the epistemological capacity of testimonio. By exalting the literary and properly rhetorical aspects of the testimonial text, Castellanos Moya diminishes the foundational pillar of the aesthetics and politics of testimonio: its referential value. In doing so, he draws attention to the linguistic medium, shifting from a concept of representation based on a principle of transparency to one based on opaqueness. Through a series of scenes that foreground the impossibility of producing definitive testimonial accounts, *Insensatez* thematizes and dramatizes the limits of the genre. Lastly, the indetermination of the text, as well as the categoric overinterpretations of the narrator, generate a high degree of epistemological doubt that affects not only the protagonist but the reader as well, who has no other access to the events of the interdiegetic world of the novel. By mobilizing these strategies, Castellanos Moya transgresses the pact of referentiality that forms part of the basis of the testimonio.

3.5. Conclusion: The Impossible Novel

Insensatez was a long time in the making, in the sense that many of its formal features were rehearsed in the novels leading up to its publication. This is especially the case for the author's appropriation of the format of testimonial literature, such as the first-person narration of political violence, already present in one form or another in *La diáspora*, *El asco*, *La diabla en el espejo*, *El arma en el hombre*, and *Donde no estén ustedes*. Yet, in another sense *Insensatez* stands alone, since it not only parodies the formal strategies of testimonio but also makes them

the center of the content of the work: the novel, in other words, is about testimonio. The misadventures of the unnamed narrator as he works on the redaction of the Recovery of Historical Memory (Remhi) Project constitute an exploration of the limits and the legitimacy of testimonio. This type of engagement with the genre also articulates a literary program since, through narrativizing the limits of testimonio, Castellanos Moya also theorizes about the possibility of a post-testimonial aesthetics, at the same time he puts them into practice.

As such, *Insensatez* is not merely a novel about testimonio, but a text written in a testimonio style that also thematizes testimonio literature (and the relationship between history, memory, and literature). It addresses the same situations of political violence as earlier expressions of Latin American testimonial literature but adopts a different mode of narrating traumatic historical events that, at the same time, comments upon earlier modes. In this sense, the novel is situated in a liminal position, with one foot in the tradition and the other one outside of it, so to speak, emerging from within the tradition and moving beyond it. Stated more radically, one might be tempted to say that Castellanos Moya mines the tradition from within and thus opens a horizon from a post-testimonial novel. Continuing with this line of thought, *Insensatez* could be said to bring the genre to a close: Castellanos Moya writes an end for the tradition of testimonial literature and, in doing so, moves beyond it into new territory.

Commenting upon the manner in which *Insensatez* interpellates the tradition of testimonio literature, Misha Kokotovic, in “Testimonio Once Removed: Castellanos Moya’s *Insensatez*,” refers to the novel as “meta-testimonio, or testimonio once removed” (559). If on one hand the novel addresses genocide and other expressions of extreme political violence, on the other hand it simultaneously contemplates the problems associated with the representation of this violence in literature. This meta-literary dimension of *Insensatez* is condensed in a scene

where the narrator faces the dilemma of wanting to write a novel that he considers impossible to write. In his work as corrector for the Remhi report, the narrator of *Insensatez* comes across a testimony that he feels would make a good plot for a novel. He contemplates the possibility of writing a fictionalized account of the true story of the registrar of a Guatemalan town called Totonicapán who was tortured and assassinated by the military for refusing to hand over the list of defunct townspeople so that General Ríos could use their names to falsify votes for his party in the coming elections as a way to legitimize his recent military coup d'état. The hypothetical novel, as imagined by the narrator, would begin immediately after the assassination of the registrar who, as a soul in purgatory, would try to establish communication with his living friends and relatives so that they could write his name on the list of the dead and thereby save his soul. As a second plotline, the protagonist would also narrate the story of the list of the dead and the reasons behind his decision to hide it from the military and the death squads. It would be an easy novel for the narrator of *Insensatez* to write, “una trama llena de suspense y aventuras,” especially considering that “el realismo mágico no me es por completo ajeno” (73-4). In the end, however, the narrator discards the idea of converting the testimony into a novel since “a nadie en su sano juicio le podría interesar ni escribir ni publicar ni leer otra novela más sobre indígenas asesinados” (74). The claim of the narrator, as it turns out, is of central importance to *Insensatez* since the novel that the author has written and that the reader is reading is precisely a novel about assassinated indigenous people. In other words, both the production and reception of the novel would seem to fall within the conclusion of the narrator that nobody in their right mind could be interested in writing, reading, or publishing another novel about the topic. *Insensatez* represents the possibility of writing the impossible novel, whose realization depends upon moving beyond the impasse of testimonio towards post-testimonial modes of narrating political violence.

The narrator's claim that nobody in their right mind would write another novel about human rights violations in Central America presupposes that there has already been a significant production of literature on the theme, so much so that it had reached a point of saturation after which it is no longer possible to produce such literature without being redundant or falling into clichés. This asseveration coincides with the research of Erik Ching in *Stories of the Civil War in El Salvador: A Battle of Memory*. In reference to the sheer amount of testimonial literature produced in El Salvador since the Peace Accords, he observes:

It is difficult to measure the volume of stories that have emerged since 1992... Roughly speaking, at least a couple hundred life story publications have appeared in one form or another, and that figure could easily be raised to multiple hundreds of stories if a person were to count each individual narrative. If measured in page numbers, the stories would consist of tens of thousands of published pages. (5)

Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, for her part, does not hesitate to categorize testimonial literature as a hegemonial literary form in Central America:

La producción literaria centroamericana fue ubicada en un lugar sumamente privilegiado dentro del campo literario latinoamericano de la segunda mitad del siglo XX a raíz del proceso de canonización literaria a que fue sometido el testimonio. Una primera consecuencia fue que la narrativa testimonial producida en los años setenta y ochenta del siglo XX llegó consolidarse como “la tendencia subgenérica característica de Centroamérica” (Zavala 1990: 380) fundamentada en una idea para entonces ya ampliamente aceptada que definía al testimonio como el paradigma de una “literatura de resistencia” (Harlow 1987). ... Así, su conversión en la práctica literaria hegemónica de

la región se consolidó en definitiva a través de su canonización por parte de la academia estadounidense. (*El arte de ficcionar* 77-8)

Castellanos Moya, then, was coming of age as a writer at the moment when testimonio was reaching a climax and shifting to a hegemonic position within Latin American literature. Beatriz Cortez points out that, at the time, the need for a Central American author to comply with the literary and political demands was such that to not do so risked being interpreted as “betrayal:”

desde la cultura revolucionaria se le asignó a la producción artística y, en el caso de la narrativa, a la producción de ficción el estigma de la traición. ... la ficción con frecuencia fue vista como un instrumento de evasión, como una forma de alienación de la urgencia de la realidad centroamericana. Por otra parte, la tradición literaria y cultural que sí se consideraba ligada con la cultura revolucionaria por mucho tiempo tuvo considerable apoyo, tanto al interior de la región, como de manera particular fuera del istmo. Como lo verifica en gran medida, para ilustrar este punto con un ejemplo, la crítica académica estadounidense sobre la producción literaria estadounidense durante el último cuarto de siglo, los movimientos de solidaridad internacional dedicaron su atención casi exclusivamente a la producción testimonial del área. De esta forma, estos movimientos, consciente o inconscientemente, ayudaron a relegar a la producción de ficción a un lugar secundario. (89)

In the context of this privileging of testimony within Central American literature, Castellanos Moya defends what he refers to as “el arte de ficcionar” (qtd. in Ortiz Wallner 2012). In an early nonfiction text, *Recuento de incertidumbres*, the author expounds an aesthetics (and politics) of fiction:

La ficción como ejercicio de libertad, como práctica de invención, asusta a quienes todo quieren controlarlo, a aquellos para quienes la imaginación debe ‘ajustarse a las necesidades de la revolución,’ Una izquierda que busca renovarse, que se plantee como proyecto libertario, debería entender que la ficción es una rica fuente de conocimiento y proyección nacional y que -como sostiene Mario Vargas Llosa- “la literatura no describe a los países: los inventa.” (Castellanos Moya, *Recuento de incertidumbres* 67)

This affirmation of the epistemological value of fiction is coextensive with a resistance towards what the author feels to be an obligation to put literature to the service of revolution. Keep in mind that, according to his own account in his programmatic text, “El asesinato político y sus derivaciones,” the author’s narrative project is founded upon a double rejection, a refusal of the twin pressures exerted on him from within the tradition of Latin American literature: 1) the injunction to politicize his literature, that is, to put it to the service of revolution, and 2) the obligation to write within the aesthetic and political parameters of testimonial genres (Castellanos Moya, *Roque Dalton* 170). If Castellanos Moya’s refusal of these two demands constitutes the starting point of his narrative, the young writer faced a dilemma, which, as it turns out, is the same dilemma fictionalized in the scene about the hypothetical novel mentioned above: how to write about the political violence in the recent past of the region without writing testimonio or just another “mournful” account of historical tragedies?²² The problem of the narrator of *Insensatez* is the same problem that Castellanos Moya faced when he initiated his

²² I refer here to the thesis of Idelbar Avelar in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* that Latin American literature of the eighties and nineties was marked by “a mournful turn” as an attempt to confront the collective traumas of dictatorship and political violence. We will explore this theme in greater detail in the discussion about sacralization later in the conclusion.

narrative project. Is there a different way to narrate atrocity? The answer to that question is Castellanos Moya's narrative production; the answer to the question posed in *Insensatez* is *Insensatez* itself.

The novel of Castellanos Moya, then, encapsulates a programmatic reflection on the limitations of testimonio and the possibility of a post-testimonial poetics. Here, the prefix of the term post-testimonio does not merely signal the temporal dimension of what comes after testimonio, but rather signifies a qualitative leap as well. The post-testimonial program of Castellanos Moya can be articulated in positive as well as negative terms. In this chapter we have focused primarily on the ways in which Castellanos Moya breaks with three of the foundational aspects of the genre: the production, the reception, and the referential pact of testimonio. In doing so, of course, we have hinted at the emergence of new subject positions and of new modes of the production and reception of narrations of political violence. Admittedly, however, we have largely limited ourselves to the analysis of the points of contention and rupture. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the affirmative aspect of the post-testimonial program of Castellanos Moya and focus less on what he is turning away from than what he is turning towards.

Chapter 4: Post-Testimonio and Cynicism

4.1. Introduction: Situated Cynicism, or Diogenes in Latin America

The narrative project of Castellanos Moya can certainly be said to portray a cynical worldview in the conventional meaning of the term as skepticism regarding the sincerity, honesty, and integrity of the motivations of individuals, social groups, or political projects. This strand of cynicism is present in his novels on the level of the enunciated through characters such as el Turco in *La diáspora*; Edgardo Vega in *El asco*; Alberto Aragón and José Pindonga in *Donde no estén ustedes*; and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*. For this reason, Beatriz Cortez, in *Estética del cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra*, considers the author one of the principal proponents of what she terms an aesthetics of cynicism (25). Cortez subsumes this mode of cultural production under a generalized postwar sensibility in Central American society, which she characterizes in the following manner: “al hablar de sensibilidad de posguerra me refiero a una sensibilidad que ya no expresa esperanza ni fe en los proyectos revolucionarios utópicos e idealistas que circularon en toda Centroamérica durante la mayor parte del siglo XX” (25). For Cortez, then, the narrative of Castellanos Moya is situated at the fault line of a paradigm shift between two sensibilities organized around an opposition between belief and doubt in revolutionary projects. The aesthetics of cynicism that captures this postwar sensibility does not end here, however, but has another important attribute: it is a “proyecto fallido” (26; 284). According to this account, cynicism “fails” because it is self-defeating: if on one hand it constitutes an attempt to exert a new subject position, an emergent postwar subjectivity, on the other hand it can only lead to the destruction of the subject whose

constitution is in question. Cortez describes this antinomy as a “trap” since the affirmation of this cynical subject position results in its radical negation:

el cinismo tiene sus limitaciones: mientras que nos permite reír de nuestras propias faltas, de nuestros miedos, de nuestros deseos, al final, tal como lo hemos visto expresado a través de los textos literarios, el cinismo lleva al individuo a su propia destrucción. El suicidio, como una forma extrema de escapar de la normatividad social, se convierte en el máximo acto de cinismo, en el acto culminante de la irreverencia contra la sociedad y contra uno mismo. Este hecho tiene gran importancia, ya que implica que el proyecto del cinismo es un proyecto fallido porque llena al individuo de pasiones que no lo llevan a experimentar alegría, sino muy por el contrario, que lo llenan del dolor. Es así que el cinismo vislumbra como una trampa que constituye la subjetividad por medio de la destrucción del ser a quien constituye como sujeto. (284)

Within the argument of Cortez, the narrators of the novels of Castellanos Moya, who spiral downward towards their dissolution in a paroxysm of self-destruction, would exemplify, then, the self-defeating character of the cynicism that characterizes the sensibility of postwar Central America.

Alberto Moreiras, in “The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *La diáspora*,” takes issue with the Cortez’ interpretation of the narrative project of Castellanos Moya. More specifically, he takes issue with her use of the term cynicism: “is she not confusing the plane of writing with the plane of the written?” (58). “[T]here is a critical difference,” Moreiras insists, “between depicting cynicism in one novel and assuming it as the novel’s perspective” (54). The confusion, Moreiras argues, arises from the unintelligibility of the position of the author within a rapidly changing cultural and intellectual camp. This

unintelligibility, for its part, stems from the refusal of Castellanos Moya to follow the script, that is, to play the roles assigned to him as a Central American public intellectual, largely determined by criteria of political commitment. As already established, the author's narrative project rests on a double refusal: 1) the rejection of the obligation to put his literature to the service of revolution, 2) his rejection of the aesthetic and political model of testimonio (*Roque Dalton* 170). Moreiras acknowledges that "Castellanos Moya's literature registers a monumental crisis in the political" and exposes the contradictions of revolutionary movement but then asks if "the critique and denunciation of guerrilla organizations in revolutionary or post-revolutionary situations is always necessarily cynical" (54). Does the author's critique of some practices on the revolutionary Left automatically and necessarily translate into a wholesale rejection of politics as such or indicate a turn to a typically postmodern apolitical approach to cultural production? Or worse, does it imply complicity with the Right or an implicit underwriting of a grossly unjust state of affairs?

Moreiras rejects this interpretation unequivocally:

Horacio Castellanos Moya is a man of the left. His literature cannot be confused with any attempt to guarantee or strengthen the status quo favoring corruption, incompetence, gangsterism, violence, and deep social injustice in his country, which indeed his literature has never stopped exposing. (49)

The nonfiction writing of the author does indeed corroborate the asseveration of Moreiras, in particular essays such as "Crónica de éxodos y retornos" and "Palabras en La Moneda," in which Castellanos Moya recounts his involvement with revolutionary movements, defends the legitimacy of these movements (despite his critique of their faults), and situates his current political stances squarely within Left discourses. Given this biographical information of the author, then, why are these political stances not clear in his narrative? We already know that

answer to this question: from his first publications, Castellanos Moya was, in his own words, “en guardia ante las demandas políticas e ideológicas de poner mi obra al servicio de una causa. La literatura se construye, se crea desde el ser humano concreto, desde el ser humano como es, y no como debería ser” (*Roque Dalton* 171). What emerges, then, is a figure of a Latin American public intellectual with strong ties on the Left who nonetheless does not use his literature to further its causes. As it turns out, this is a novel position within the recent history of Central American culture, one that announces the emergence of a type of public intellectual that breaks with the models of political commitment established within the traditions of the Boom and testimonio. Ignacio Sánchez Prado makes this point in “La ficción y el momento de peligro: *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya,” when he argues that

Castellanos Moya es, en cierta forma, una reacción tanto al concepto sesentero de poeta *engagé*, representado en la narrativa de Beverley y Zimmerman por figuras como Roque Dalton, como al intelectual a la Elizabeth Burgos, cuya validez en tanto figura letrada radica en su posibilidad de darle al subalterno al discurso literario. Castellanos Moya, al igual que coetáneos como Roberto Bolaño y Fernando Vallejo, apuesta al desmontaje radical de la idea del intelectual como figura necesaria para la articulación de lo político. (243)

It is precisely this radical disarticulation of politics and literature that creates so much misunderstanding around the narrative of Castellanos Moya. Expecting something much different from a Central American public intellectual, both the general public and critics find his work difficult to reconcile with existing categories. For Moreiras, this is precisely the value of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya. It challenges or “pre-empts” existing categories such as committed or apolitical:

If Castellanos Moya could be understood to offer what I earlier called a novel figure of the writer in Central America ... it is because his writing leaves behind the parameters presented by Beatriz Cortez in her book, which actually offer an axis for the age-old discussion regarding the function of intellectuality in Latin American. Castellanos Moya is neither a writer of insurgency, committed to postcolonial liberation in the name of a slavish identity that seeks redemption, nor a conservative writer that favors the political dominance of a particular social group through the artistic projection of class ideology. (59-60)

By grounding her analysis on categories that Castellanos Moya does not accept, Cortez misreads the nuance of the author's narrative, which is irreducible to the available terms. The novelty of his narrative project resides precisely in the fact that he disregards previous imbrications of literature and politics, moving beyond them to found a literary program that pre-empts these discourses. The innovation of Castellanos Moya consists in conserving the content of testimonial and post-dictatorial literatures, that is, writing about the same historical and political events, but doing so from a radically different subject position and assuming a properly post-Boom and post-testimonial role as a public intellectual. Moreiras argues that this innovation does not make Castellanos Moya narrative cynical but merely misunderstood. There is no reason to assume that his literature is as self-defeating as the acerbic narrators that he prefers to use.

The odd thing about this polite polemic exchange between scholars is that neither Cortez nor Moreiras take the time to define the term whose meaning is the point of contention of their disagreement. This is even odder considering that cynicism has such a long and rich tradition within Western thought and culture, extending back to its original articulation in Greek antiquity

through figures like Diogenes of Sincope and Demetrius the Cynic. The question, then, must be posed: what are we talking about when we talk about cynicism?

Peter Sloterdijk's landmark work, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987), can provide some insight. Here he argues that a "universal and diffuse" form of cynicism constitutes an ideological dominant for contemporary culture that operates simultaneously on an individual, social, and institutional level (3). "Times are cynical," he states bluntly. "Being concerned, caring about people, securing peace, feeling responsible, caring about the quality of life and about the environment – none of that really works" (xxvii). The principle of Sloterdijk's argument is simple: "The more a society appears to be without alternatives, the more it will allow itself to be cynical" (112). Although cynicism as a philosophical mode is present throughout history and across cultures, its degree of influence and pervasiveness is historically variable. The emergence of a "universal" cynicism, however, is a recent and unprecedented phenomenon that is coextensive with a specific historical context: the failure and defeat of the projects of revolutionary social and political transformation on a worldwide scale. In his introduction to the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, "The Return of Diogenes as Postmodern Intellectual," Andreas Huyssen characterizes contemporary cynicism as "the pervasive sense of political disillusionment in the wake of the 1960s and the pained feeling of a lack of political and social alternatives in Western societies" (xi). If this were the whole picture, Beatriz Cortez's analysis would hold true. As a form of resignation marked by profound disillusionment and bitterness, cynicism cannot lead to anything other than negation, whose final expression is self-annihilation. Sloterdijk's definition of cynicism, however, is more nuanced.

The recent expansion of cynicism into a diffuse, global sensibility is not merely a quantitative change but has a qualitative dimension as well. Stated simply, as a mass figure, the

contemporary cynic is “no longer an outsider,” no longer an oppositional figure (4). The critical edge of her gestures has been removed. What is left is what Sloterdijk defines as “enlightened false consciousness,” a “charmingly mediated alienation” (5; 7). On an individual level, this implies a mode of subjectivity that is conscious of its own alienation but no longer seeks to know itself “authentically,” conscious of acting on bad faith but unwilling to change. On a social level, this implies a quiet acquiescence and accommodation to the status quo. In exchange for an “unhappy consciousness,” the modern cynic, as “Anyone,” benefits to a greater or lesser degree from the status quo, which justifies relinquishing any residual ideals and hope of a future different from the present.

This emergent form of cynicism, however, coexists with a residual form, markedly more oppositional, which displays a greater potential for critique and resistance. To differentiate it from cynical accommodation and acquiescence to the status quo, Sloterdijk refers to it as “kynicism,” from the Greek *kynon* for dog, and traces a genealogy of this philosophy that extends back to Greek antiquity and the figure of Diogenes of Sincope. The legend of Diogenes, then, constitutes the origin of kynicism, a genesis founded upon the rejection of Platonic essences in favor of a “dirty materialism” and a resistance to the power of Alexander the Great “from below” (105). According to Huyssen, kynicism “privileged satirical laughter, sensuality, the politics of the body, and a pleasure-oriented life as forms of resistance to the master narratives of Platonic idealism, the values of the polis, and the imperial claims of Alexander the Great” (xv). From this dirty dog origin, kynicism emerges at critical points throughout human history: “The phenomenon of kynicism is thereby separated from its historical origin and becomes a type that crops up again and again historically whenever in crisis civilizations and civilization crises, consciousnesses clash with each other. Kynicism and cynicism are,

accordingly, constants in our history, typical forms of a polemical consciousness ‘from below’ and ‘from above’” (Sloterdijk 218). The figure of the kynic, as a disruptive and subversive “outsider,” represents consciousness from below while, in today’s world, those who represent consciousness “from above” can be further divided into two groups: 1) the cynical powerful or ruling elite who benefit enormously from the current geopolitical and economic arrangements and 2) cynicism as a mass phenomenon, through which vast swathes of the middle classes tolerate and wittingly or unwittingly accommodate themselves to the interests of the ruling elite in exchange for personal gain in the short run, however nominal.

A series of problems arises, however, when we try to contemplate the realities of Latin America in light of Sloterdijk’s concept of cynicism/kynicism. One would have to question both the universality and the periodization of his account, which apparently is not applicable evenly everywhere within the Western sphere of influence. This does not mean that it is not valid but rather that it would have to be qualified and adapted to the context of Latin America. The revolutionary movements that Sloterdijk assumes to be defunct, for example, were alive and well in Central America at the time he was writing his critique in the early 1980s. If the Cold War was a time of armchair cynicism in Central Europe, in Latin America it was anything but cold. On the contrary, it was an epicenter of violence and the theater upon whose stage rival visions of how to organize economic, political, and social institutions clashed. In the case of Latin America, the transition between revolutionary optimism and cynical disillusionment and accommodation was instituted through widespread violence and State terrorism whose effects reverberate in the present. If Sloterdijk’s periodization applies to the Cold War experience in Europe, a comparable cynicism situated in Central American could only correspond to the end of the revolutionary period and the postwar epoch. With the exceptions of *Desmoronamiento* (2006) and *Tirana*

Memoria (2008), all the novels of Castellanos Moya are set in this period, and they all return time and again to the problems of political commitment in a cynical era, especially for public intellectuals and artists.

A more difficult problem to solve is the supposed universality of modern cynicism. Sloterdijk claims that, while cynicism is increasingly rare in today's world, cynicism has become a widespread ideological dominant on a global scale. Nonetheless, he primarily has the middle classes of his native Europe in mind. The acquiescence and complicity of the European middle classes does not necessarily fit the Latin American postdictatorial and Central American postwar political and cultural landscapes. As the paradigm of revolutionary thought and practice, with its Marxist underpinnings, waned, the emerging paradigm of memory discourse and human rights practice replaced it (Traverso 56-7). Throughout the continent, Latin American post-dictatorship politics and culture were marked by social movements for memory, truth, and justice, which opposed the military cynicism of the elite, their desire for amnesty, their advocacy of silence, and their apologia of State terrorism. Furthermore, these movements had the support of Latin American public intellectuals, who adapted to this new context, more inclined toward memory discourses than Marxism. This public opposition to the political program of the military and business elite is a far cry from the ineffectual backyard cynic of the European middle classes. This is not to say, however, that there is no cynicism in the figure of the politically committed Latin American intellectual of the postwar / postdictatorship period nor that Castellanos Moya does not make this figure a target of his cynicism. There is and he does. It simply means that a situated Central American postwar cynicism would have to contemplate the fact that there is less complicity of the intellectuals with the military elite. At the same time, there is also more complicity than these intellectuals would like to admit, which is precisely where Castellanos

Moya comes into the picture. In fact, the function of the cynical narrators of the author is precisely to expose the duplicitousness of their politically committed intellectual colleagues, to expose the many ways that they benefit materially and symbolically from their public interventions, which they attribute to altruism not self-interest, to lofty ideals not worldly motives. After all, to expose hypocrisy is the age-old social function of the cynic, at least according to Sloterdijk, who defines the cynic as someone who “assumes that human beings are not really what they pretend to be” and operates under the basic assumption that “outward moral appearance is deceptive” (40). The most innovative aspect of the narrative program of Castellanos Moya resides not in the opposition to the military elite but rather in his cynical prodding of the culturally consecrated figure of the Latin American politically committed intellectual, be it in the period of revolution or that of human rights.

This brings us to a crucial point about *Insensatez* that I believe could clear up some of the misunderstandings surrounding the narrative project of the author. The narrator opposes both the criminality of the military and business elite and the duplicity of the human rights community. The emphasis in this statement falls on the coordinated copulative conjunctions ‘both... and.’ In other words, the two critiques can coexist harmoniously without mutually cancelling each other. The relationship between them is not based on an ‘either/or’ disjunction but can admit an aggregative ‘and.’ The conclusion that *Insensatez* advocates apathy or a characteristically postmodern apolitical resignation simply does not follow from the critique of the moral hypocrisy of human rights discourse. In other words, there is a false syllogism at play here: the Right opposes human rights discourse and practice (premise one) + *Insensatez* articulates a critique of human rights discourse (premise two) = Castellanos Moya is enacting an apologia of the Right (conclusion). In a simplified form, this is the structure of the argumentation of Cortez.

Although this conclusion is possible, it is not necessary. The response of Moreiras is to argue that Castellanos Moya is not on the Right and therefore not cynical. While I agree with Moreiras that it would be a shame to reduce the complexity of body of work like that of Castellanos Moya to a limited concept of apolitical cynicism, I think that there is enough room within the tradition of cynicism to contemplate his innovative literary program. In particular, Sloterdijk's distinction between cynicism and kynicism can be a productive way to capture the specificity of the work of the author. Across his production leading up to *Insensatez*, there is a strong presence of a kynical opposition or resistance to *both* the cynicism of the powerful and the diffuse cynicism of the accommodated middle classes.

In this chapter, I argue that the kynicism of the author does not lose its subversive edge nor collapse into the apathetic and resigned expression of cynicism that, according to Sloterdijk characterizes the sensibility of a larger part of contemporary culture on a global scale. To the contrary, the narrative production of Castellanos Moya from *La diáspora* to *Insensatez* consistently articulates a double kynical critique aimed at both the military and business elite (ruling cynics) and accommodated intellectual middle classes (diffuse modern cynicism). The first section explores the principal method of critique: humor. The application of humor, albeit a dark humor, to situations of political violence is one of the major innovations of Castellanos Moya, and it constitutes a substantial break with the sacralising, sentimentalist, and somber traditions of both testimonio and the first-generation post-dictatorial novel. The second section, for its part, explores the subversive nature of the kynical operation of exposing the hypocrisy of the military, religion, revolution as religion, and the sexual politics of the Latin American intelligentsia. In the conclusion, I return to Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* to demonstrate that the kynical narrative program of Castellanos Moya goes beyond the moment of

mere negation to affirm an emergent Latin American intellectual and aesthetic project that is properly post-testimonial.

4.2. Laughter

4.2.1. The Cynical Divide: Doubters and Believers

Why is *Insensatez* funny? What is so funny about the story of the psychological collapse of a narcissist provoked by close contact with horrific descriptions of atrocity? As Juan Carlos says of el Turco in *La diáspora*, the unpredictable histrionics and obfuscated musings of the cantankerous narrator may indeed be considered “entertaining” in their vitriolic excess (33), but why does the text provoke laughter, especially considering the gravity of its theme? This section addresses this question through an analysis of Castellanos Moya’s different strategies to produce a humoristic effect. As kynics and cynics, the narrators of the author’s novels do not laugh with but rather *laugh at* the other characters. This implies a fixed dynamic based on a typology of characters, each with their respective features and functions. The basis of this relationship between character types resides in the transgression of taboos through parodic inversion or satirical ridicule. The present section focuses on the respective features and functions of the two most common character types within the literature of the author.

The construction of the characters in the novels of Castellanos Moya up to and including *Insensatez* displays an opposition between two types. It is not difficult, then, establish a typology of characters, with their respective functions, based on a structural confrontation between doubters and believers. A cursory enumeration would include, on the side of the skeptics, el Turco from *La diáspora*; Edgardo Vega from *El asco*; Alberto Aragón and José Pindonga from *Donde no estén ustedes*; and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*. Among the corresponding list

of believers figure el Negro, Quique, Antonio, and Gabriel from *La diáspora*; Olmedo from *El asco*; Rita Mena and Albertico from *Donde no estén ustedes*; and Pilar, Fátima, Jota Ce, Charlie, Joseba, and Johnny Silverman in *Insensatez*. Only occasionally does a figure like Carmen from *La diáspora* appear who cannot be accounted for within this scheme since she occupies an intermediate position that displays features from both types. Her case, however, is the exception not the rule. What, then, are the respective features of these character types? What is the nature of the relationship between them as structural opposites? What is the specific function of each within the narrative of Castellanos Moya?

To state that the two types of characters are structurally opposed is a purely formal description. For a more complete picture that also includes the semantics of the narrative of the author, it is necessary to make some further qualifications, such as the following. Beyond mere opposition, the relationship between character types is based upon hostility. Furthermore, this aggression is unilateral: with sarcasm and slander as their weapon, the cynical doubters attack the hypocrisy of the believers. To understand the reasons behind this provocation, we would need to know what the believers believe and what the doubters doubt. In general terms, the believers tend to believe in or subscribe to two ideological formations, two discursive frameworks: revolution and human rights activism, according to their respective historical periods, that is, according to which side of the divide that they fall on in the shift between Marxism and memory paradigms within Left discourse. The function of the believers is to normalize and hegemonize their respective ideological formations. This normalization may take the form of an apologia of the revolution, including the crimes of revolutionaries and the Party, as in the case of Quique of el Negro in *La diáspora*. Or it may serve to legitimize a human rights discourse that is blind to its own contradictions and wittingly or unwittingly accommodates a

postwar status quo, which the cynic finds intolerable. In *Insensatez*, the duplicitous character of human rights activism finds its maximum expression in the figure of Erick who, as a potential infiltrator and double agent, embodies human rights practice at the same time that he ensures that the Peace Accords represent only a nominal change and that business continues as usual in postwar Guatemala, with all the violence that this expression implies.

The fact that this typological tendency is dominant in the literary production of Castellanos Moya does not mean that it applies to all cases or that there are no intermediate positions. To a certain extent, Juan Carlos and Carmen from *La diáspora* occupy a liminal space between both categories. Retreating from the pole of the believers like el Negro and Quique, they withdraw their support of the revolution, yet without reaching the point of active hostility, as is the case with a doubter like el Turco. They oppose the leadership of the party but support the revolution in principle. Structurally, Juan Carlos and Carmen triangulate the relationship between doubter and believer types. Symbolically, this triad is reinforced by the fact that Carmen, girlfriend of Antonio (believer), has sexual relations with el Turco (doubter). While the vast majority of the believers subscribe to discourses on the Left, there are two notable exceptions to this rule: Laura Rivera, the narrator of *La diabla en el espejo*, and Robocop, the narrator of *El arma en el hombre*. While these narrators exhibit some of the tendencies of their counterparts in other novels – such as vehemence, vitriol, and verbosity – they are not oppositional figures. Quite to the contrary, their discourses, firmly rooted in the ideological frameworks of the Right, legitimize and glorify the power of the powerful, the status quo of State terrorism and dictatorship in Central America. If Robocop appears to be an outsider for a large part of the novel due to his excessive use of extralegal violence, his accommodation becomes clear at the end of the novel when his violence is normalized, harnessed by the CIA for their

interventions in Central America. Within the scheme of Sloterdijk, these figures represent the cynicism of the powerful or what he refers to as “cynicism of domination,” as opposed to the “enlightened unhappy consciousness” of the middle-class intellectual cynics (xx). We may account for the fictional testimonies of Robocop and Laura Rivera within the phenomenon that Hugo Vezzetti in *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* describes as a “widening of memory” (*Pasado y Presente* 31-31). By focusing on the violence of the military and State terrorism, which accounted for the vast majority of the crimes against humanity during the cycle of South and Central American revolutionary movements, the testimonies of perpetrators and collaborators tended to be overshadowed by the accounts of victims. Comparing the truth commission reports of South Africa and Argentina, Claudia Hilb argues that South Africa chose truth over justice by granting impunity to perpetrators in exchange for their testimony (95). The truth commissions of Argentina choose justice over truth. Hilb is not interested in making value judgments, that is, determining which of these approaches is “better.” Her objective, rather, is to analyze the effects of each one. In the case of Argentina, and by extension Guatemala, perpetrators had no incentive to share their testimonios and, with few exceptions, proved unwilling to voluntarily do so. The emphasis on justice has unwittingly produced a deficit of truth.²³ A powerful way to compensate for this deficit and recuperate this dimension of memory is through the imaginative potential of literature (Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* 149). The fictional accounts of perpetrators of crimes against humanity, such as Robocop, and of those who support the violence of the military and death squads, such as Laura Rivera, fill the

²³ Hilb argues that in the case of South Africa this ratio of truth to justice was inverted. The amnesty offered to perpetrators in exchange for their testimonios produced a surplus of truth that was coupled with a deficit of justice (93-94).

gap created by the absence of the testimonios of those responsible for atrocity and their apologists.

The doubters, for their part, have their own set of features and functions. What they doubt is the sincerity and integrity of the believers, and their function is to unmask and expose the hypocrisy of the latter's self-righteous moralism. There is much joking involved in the process of unmasking, but it is not all fun and games, as they say. To the contrary, there is a cruel and destructive edge to the humor of the doubters. Remember that in *La diáspora* Juan Carlos describes el Turco, the first in a series of kynical narrators, as "pure venom" and "always seeing the dark side of things" (33). The doubters target the belief of the believers as their primary object of ridicule. Faith in substantial social or political transformation, whether it be through revolution or human rights activism, does not survive the scrutiny of the doubters. Furthermore, there are two dimensions to their critiques: for as merciless as they are with the ingenuousness of the believers of the Left, they are unwavering in their denunciation of State violence and equally mercilessly in their critiques of the Right. It is this dissatisfaction with the status quo and the symbolic gesture of calling the bluff of the high-sounding promises of postwar rhetoric that forms the basis of the kynicism of the doubters. They reject the postwar status quo precisely because not enough changed with the signing of the Peace Accords and because violence continues under new and insidious guises. The infiltration of the headquarters of the Remhi project by the military and the tragic assassination of bishop Gerardi in *Insensatez* attests to the continuing power and impunity of the Guatemalan military despite a formal end to the conflict. *Donde no estén ustedes* paints a vivid picture of the outcome of the Peace Accords for both the Right and the Left. With the aid of the United States, the Right took power before it was even done washing the blood off its hands, while the leaders of the Left scrambled to accommodate

themselves to new status quo and secure petty privileges for themselves. Lamenting this situation, Alberto Aragón exclaims:

Iluso de ilusos: sólo a él pudo ocurrírsele que la izquierda ganaría las elecciones cuando todo el dinero y el apoyo de Estados Unidos estaban con la derecha. ... Y no hubo triunfo sino derrota, y ... cuchilladas a mansalva para defender posiciones dentro de las pequeñas estructuras partidarias de los grupúsculos sectarios. (Castellanos Moya, *Donde no estén ustedes* 60)

Although the novel is about defeat, and indeed Alberto Aragón serves as a metonym for the political and moral collapse of the revolution, the character's disillusionment over being abandoned by revolutionary leaders in no way compromises his hatred for the Right and his repudiation of their crimes. Herein lies the cynical aspect of the character. His double-pronged critique of the shortcomings of the Left and the brutality of the Right is not mere resignation but an active opposition to the status quo. This is the oppositional, transgressive, and even "subversive" dimension that Sloterdijk identifies in the tradition of cynicism (110). The same observation holds true for el Turco, José Pindoga, and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*. The only true cynic of the bunch is Edgardo Vega. By jumping the proverbial sinking ship of El Salvador and saving his own skin by moving to Canada, he is no longer concerned about the region's fate. Cynically overlooking asymmetries in military, political, and economic power, Vega adopts the ideology of the imperialist center as his own and blames the periphery for its poverty. Essentializing in a manner that mirrors racist ideologies, he attributes the problems of El Salvador to an ontological evil inherent in its population. As an end to itself, then, his hatred cannot serve as a means to challenge the status quo and does not lead to anything other than

resignation and isolation. As a cynic and not a kynic, Vega is unconcerned with challenging the status quo. To the contrary, he is dead set on doing everything he can to benefit from it.

4.2.2. The Butt of the Joke

The transition from Marxism to memory within the discursive frameworks of the Latin American Left coincides with a shift in the tenor of cultural production from epic to tragic. As the cultural component to revolutionary struggle, Beverly and Zimmerman consider testimonio, in its first phase, to be an epic genre (174). After the defeat of revolutionary projects throughout Central and South American, testimonio, in a second moment, became more closely aligned with tragedy. In other words, it became a genre of the aftermath whose job was no longer to advocate for a revolutionary political, economic, and social transformation but, settling for much less, merely aspired to advocate for the victims of State terrorism. For as important as it is to fight for the right of victims, this shift rests upon a tacit acceptance of the postwar (neo)liberal status quo and registers a change from an offensive to a defensive strategy. The fall of Central American national liberation movements was also coextensive with the collapse of the Nation as the foundation of a sense of community and a subsequent shift from universalist to particularist discourses, which corresponded to the influence of theoretical paradigms of the North American academia, such as feminism, multiculturalism, and subaltern studies (Beverly xi). For this very reason, George Yúdice in “Testimonio and Postmodernism” sees an affinity between testimonio and postmodernism: “Testimonial writing shares several features with what is currently called postmodernity: the rejection of master discourses or prevailing frameworks of interpreting the world and the increasing importance of the marginal” (21). I would tend to argue that this asseveration only applies to the second moment of testimonial production, since the first phase,

in the 1960s and 70s, indeed embraced teleological and emancipatory “master discourses.” In light of the trajectory of the genre from its rise in the 1960s to its decline in the late 1990s, testimonio could be said to span different moments of production that include both typically modernist utopian political ideals and a postmodern shift to the particular and to antifoundational discourses. For our present concerns in this section, I would simply like to point out that these broader historical political and aesthetic shifts coincide with a decline of an epic discourse and the ascendance of a tragic register that manifests itself both in first-generation postdictatorship narrative and in the second moment of testimonio. What is missing, of course, in this schema of literary genres is the third option analyzed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*: comedy.

Until recent years, the content of testimonio has placed a set of constraints on the formal parameters of the genre. In other words, due to the urgency and gravity of the sociohistorical realities represented within these genres, either epic or tragic registers have been considered more appropriate than comic ones. Focusing on Latin American literatures of the 1980s and 90s, in the aftermath of “limit situations” of State terrorism, Idelbar Avelar focuses his analyzes on the shift towards tragic registers. In *The Untimely Present: Latin American Postdictatorial Literatures and the Task of Mourning*, he considers mournfulness to be the quality par excellence of Latin American postdictatorial literatures (3). Applying humor to disappeared persons, torture, and genocide would be as counterintuitive and potentially inappropriate as cracking a joke at a funeral. It would take a profoundly imprudent person to do such a thing, a person characterized by *insensatez*, willing to flout constraints and flagrantly transgress norms. This, of course, is precisely the function of the kynical narrators of the novels that we have been analyzing up to this point. Castellanos Moya was one of the first authors to broach the solemnity of testimonial genres, although the application of humor to tragedies in the recent past of Latin American has

becomes increasingly more commonplace since the mid-2000s through the narrative of authors such as Juan Manuel Robles, Álvaro Bisama, Juan Pablo Villalobos, Mariana Eva Pérez, Gustavo Nielson, Félix Bruzzone, and Alan Pauls.

The shift towards the application of humor to horror, the comic to the catastrophic, is a part of larger historical developments. Human rights policies were incorporated into State institutions in many countries throughout Latin America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, thanks to the work of human rights activism and grassroots movement for memory, truth, and justice. This development meant that the State took over many of the political functions that had formerly been limited to counterhegemonic social movements. Literature played an important part in these counterhegemonic social movements for human rights by assuming the responsibility for advocating for victims of dictatorship and State terrorism in a context of impunity, silence, and oblivion (Amar Sánchez 120). This is the reason why Beatriz Sarlo stated, in the early 2000s, that literature had been freed from constraints regarding the politization of literature and the political function of the public intellectual (qtd in Maguire 86). From the very beginning, the narrative of Castellanos Moya was set on challenging the exigences of 1) the political commitment of the public intellectual and 2) of putting literature to the service of political causes, so it is not surprising that he would take advantage of this opening to push the region's literature in new directions.

The presence of humor in the narrative of Castellanos Moya, however, cannot be explained by sociohistorical conditions alone. In fact, its effect is closely related to the inherited semantic constraints imposed on testimonial genres; in other words, one of the principal strategies for producing a humoristic effect resides in the flagrant transgression of taboos. According to Freud in *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious*, there is a close relationship

between jokes and inhibition, prohibition, and repression. Given the “influence of censorship on conscious thinking, the technique of the joke involves some inhibiting power as a part of its formation” (Freud, *The Joke* 165). In many cases, the humor of the joke is produced against the force of this constraint. In other words, the pressure exerted by a constraint results in “a release of psychic energy” when this constraint is flouted: “the joke puts itself at the service of tendencies and intentions to produce new pleasure by lifting suppressions and repressions” (131). In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk, for his part, argues that jokes “function in the collective consciousness like a drainage system - regulating, balancing, equilibrating - as a universally accepted regulative mini-amoralism that cleverly assumes that it is healthy to poke fun at what exceeds our capacities to become outraged” (304-5). I would like to suggest that the humoristic effect of *Insensatez*, as a calculated textual strategy (and not merely the subjective response of the reader), is based upon this principle. To illustrate how this mechanism functions, I will analyze Castellanos Moya’s treatment of two consecrated figures in the traditions of the Central American Left, bishop Juan José Gerardi and Rigoberta Menchú.

The central enigma of the plot, concerning the possibility of a conspiracy within the human rights office of the bishop, revolves around the figure of bishop Gerardi. Furthermore, on a formal level, the effect of the end of the novel is based upon the revelation of his assassination, which retroactively re-signifies the interpretations of the narrator, placed under heavy scrutiny up until this point. The tragic event confirms not only the deepest fears of the narrator as an individual but also, on a political and social level, the continuation of the power and impunity of the military in the postwar era. The violence of the previous decades proved itself too deeply rooted to be eradicated by the Peace Accords of 1996: it was merely adapted to the emerging postwar political and culture climate and assumed new guises. If we analyze *Insensatez* as the

testimony of the narrator, the bishop incarnates the figure of the victim of the military's ongoing human rights violations. According to Freud in *Mourning and Melancholia*, idealization of is a normal part of "work of mourning" and overcoming attachment to a lost object (204). This idealization has a literary counterpart in the privileged position of the victim within the genre testimonio, as a part of mobilization of the victim's experience to foster solidarity and foment support of political struggles (Beverley 77). Furthermore, the figure of bishop Gerardi is a part of a martyrology within Central American radical politics that remits his work in human rights back to previous protagonists of liberation theology, such as Oscar Romero, which establishes continuity between the Marxist-based theory and praxis of the revolutionary period and the human rights agenda of the Left in the postwar epoch (Hatcher 10-11). In the context of a symbolically laden event like the assassination of Gerardi, a figurehead of the human rights movements, and against the backdrop of the sacralization of the movement's martyrs, Castellanos Moya's irreverent treatment of the Archbishop constitutes a radical rupture with the sensibilities of the postwar Left.

In the fifth chapter of the novel the narrator meets the bishop for the first time. At the time, Gerardi was already an important figure on both a national and international scale due to the importance of his work as coordinator of truth commission's report (Hatcher 10-11). Within the emerging political framework on the postwar epoch, more centered on the issue of memory and human rights, the bishop was considered a hero before his assassination converted him into a martyr of the cause as well. You would not notice, however, by the description of the narrator:

La tarde de ese mismo día estuve por primera vez con monseñor en una breve reunión, en mi propia oficina, que en verdad era su oficina, donde el gran capo entró acompañado del chiquitín del bigotito mexicano para conocerme e indagar sobre los avances del informe,

un hombre alto y fornido, con ese porte que impone respeto, propio de los de la *Cosa Nostra*, y también de los altos dignitarios eclesiásticos del Vaticano, comprendí yo en ese momento, que este monseñor bien podía interpretar el papel de Marlon Brando en *El padrino*, quizá con mayor pertenencia. (67)

Later in the chapter the bishop is simply referred to with the epithet “el padrino:” “sin que el padrino cambiara su mirada indescifrable ni dijera palabra, lo cual me puso nervioso, como un cura inquisidor que escucha como si uno tuviera que hacer una confesión vergonzosa, así me sentía” (69). In these passages, the figure of the bishop is associated with criminal activity through allusions to conventional images of the mafia in the popular imagination. In this recasting of the image of Gerardi, the monseñor is represented as threatening, authoritarian, associated with an imaginary of criminality:

lo que me impresionó positivamente, habida cuenta de que imagen de los curas, procedente de mis años de primaria en un colegio salesiano, era la de unos maricones, cuervos en sótano y de mirada pervertida, la cual no se correspondía para nada con la imponente de este hombre silencioso que apenas preguntaba y más bien fijó su mirada inquisidora en los gestos de mis manos, algo que nunca me había sucedido, sentirme descubierto por el movimiento de mis manos, caramba, como si de pronto estuviese confesando todos mis pecados con el movimiento de mis manos. (67-8)

The allusions to the Inquisition further complicate this representation of the bishop since they associate him with a religious use of violence similar to the political one that he is denouncing. This superposition of images fuses elements of the figure of an emancipator with that of an oppressor, of the figure of the victim with that of a perpetrator. This juxtaposition of incompatible propositions is precisely how Graciela Reyes defines the operation of parody in

Polifonia textual: la citación en el relato literario. According to this account, parody, as an expression of the broader textual phenomenon of polyphony, contemplates a single object from two opposing points of view. The relationship of these points of view is one of negation: the parodic effect is produced by the presence of the explicit affirmation that negates the point of view of an implicit proposition that affirms its opposite (Reyes 153-8). In the example of bishop Gerardi, the parodic effect is generated by the association of Gerardi with violence and oppression, a point of view that negates another implicit point of view that asserts its opposition: that Gerardi represents peace and justice. The production of the parodic effect, of course, is based upon cultural assumptions and a specific context of reception that enable the recuperation by the reader of the contextual implicatures. In other words, the parody of the passage is activated by the knowledge of the consecration of Gerardi and his work within the general field of Central American radical politics.

This same technique is replicated in the treatment of Rigoberta Menchú in *Insensatez*. The repetition of the pattern of parody signals that the allusions to the culture industry in the representation of Gerardi were not gratuitous but form part of network of associations between testimonio and mass media. The association of the bishop to Hollywood movies is complemented and reinforced by the image of face of the “indígena gordita” on the cover of *¡Hola!* Magazine. In this representation, politics takes a backseat to spectacle: the political importance of Menchú is sidelined and her status as a celebrity is placed in the foreground. The scene illustrates that the subaltern not only speaks but she also appears on the cover of the magazines valued by the new rich. Disinterring the theory of Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*, *Insensatez* highlights the facility with which the vested interests of late capitalism can neutralize potential threats, absorb them into dominant culture, and put them to the use of their own

interests. The parodic effect, of course, is the result of the uneasy co-existence, in the same utterance, of two incompatible propositions: 1) Rigoberta Menchú is a political activist who represents resistance and popular struggle; and 2) Rigobera Menchú is a rich and famous celebrity who represents the world of spectacle and reactionary culture. In addition, this use of parody signals a crisis in the genre testimonio which, in the diachronic development of the Central American literature, went from a peripheral discourse to a hegemonic cultural form showing clear signs of exhaustion (Ortiz Wallner, *El arte de ficcionar* 78).

Why parody these figures and not others? Both Gerardi and Menchú are iconic figures in Central American politics and literature, respectively. More than “icons,” one might argue that Castellanos Moya uses them metonyms. As figureheads, his ridicule is not directed at them personally but rather at something they stand for. The rise of Menchú to international stardom parallels the reception of testimonio on a global level and the special place it holds within the North American academy (Castellanos Moya, *Roque Dalton*, 170). From a peripheral discourse in the 1960s, testimonio had become a hegemonic literary form in Central American in the 1980s, and by the time Castellanos Moya was initiating his narrative project it was showing clear signs of exhaustion. The irreverent gesture of taking Menchú off her pedestal, then, metonymically codifies the decline of the genre. The narrator’s irreverence towards the poster child of testimonio parallels the author’s own categorical rejection of the genre as a viable literary option to communicate the experiences of his generation. Something similar could be said of Gerardi. The antipathy between the narrator and this character can be read as a reluctance or refusal to form an alliance between a political movement (whose figurehead is Gerardi) and a new generation of public intellectuals (the narrator). In this case, what is at stake is a shift in the social role and political function of the Central American public intellectual, who no longer feels

the need to take the side of the *pueblo* or affiliate oneself with a cause, albeit a just one. The narrator's distance and irreverence towards Gerardi, then, communicates through allegory the decentering of a paradigm of the explicitly political obligations of Latin American intellectuals. Thus, parody, as a calculated textual strategy aimed at producing a humoristic effect, serves Castellanos Moya's greater literary program of forging a properly post-testimonial poetics.

Lastly, the choice of the setting of *Insensatez* also contributes to the force of constraint against which parody produces its humoristic effects. According to Rachel Hatcher in *The Power of Memory and Violence in Central America*, human rights discourse constitutes a "common discursive framework" in Guatemala:

Members of Guatemala's different sectors – from the most conservative with ties to the perpetrators and economic elite to the most adamant advocate of exhumations and justice – insist very broadly that the past be remembered so that it never happens again.

Promoting the work that memory does to prevent the repetition is Guatemala's common discursive framework. This scaffolding shapes and so limits how different groups interact and struggle with each other, always within the context of unequal ... social power. (5)

The work of the human rights community, both national and international, "has to a large extent determined how the past is framed in Guatemala" (5). A sign that the discursive framework of human rights has achieved a degree of hegemony is that "[c]onservatives and those with an agenda counter to the human rights community's must use the human right's discourse to oppose that sector's message" (6). The atrocious violence of Nation's genocidal civil war and military dictatorship could be considered what LaCapra terms "a foundational trauma" that cemented "a sense of collective identity" in the postwar epoch (81).

This was not, however, the case with El Salvador. According to Hatcher's comparative study of transitional justice in the two countries:

El Salvador's public conversations about the war are not limited by a common discursive framework. Instead, conservatives and the human rights community each have their own discursive scaffoldings that compete against each other in the public sphere. In this, conservatives have the upper hand because the mainstream media and political, social, and economic elite support the conservative agenda. (6)

In other words, there is no consensus about the meaning of the past that is anchored in a human rights idiom. Having established this important difference in postwar Salvadoran and Guatemalan politics and culture, we can consider Castellanos Moya's choice for the setting of his novel.

The novels of Castellanos Moya leading up to the publication of *Insensatez* deal principally with Salvadoran characters and the effects that the political violence of El Salvador has on their lives. If Mexico is a recurrent setting in these novels, it is because its capital became the privileged site of exile for Salvadoran intellectuals fleeing violence and repression in their country. *Insensatez* stands alone in the narrative production of the author as the only novel set in Guatemala. At the same time, it stands alone in another respect: while earlier novels tend to focus on the shortcomings of the revolutionary Left, *Insensatez* introduces a new theme: human rights politics and discourse. Using the same type of narrator as previous works like *La diáspora*, *El asco*, and *Donde no estén ustedes*, *Insensatez* articulates a series of critiques of the human rights discourse. Human rights activists, in particular, are portrayed satirically and become one of the central objects of the narrator's ridicule and disdain. We might ask, then, whether these two innovations – the change of setting and the change of theme – might be related in some manner.

Recalling our discussion above concerning the role of context and constraint in producing the humoristic effect of the novel, I argue that the context of Guatemala is more propitious for the aesthetics of *Insensatez* than that of El Salvador. The hegemony of memory discourse in Guatemalan society, as a common discursive framework which figures like bishop Gerardi and Rigoberta Menchú helped construct, offers the “constraint” against which the “release” of a parody of human rights practice generates its effect. If human rights discourse were peripheral and counter-hegemonic, as is the case of El Salvador, his gesture would not only be less transgressive but the effect of parody would also be debilitated. Furthermore, in the context of Guatemala the critiques articulated in *Insensatez* are less politically equivocal. In other words, it is less likely that the novel be received as a critique of the uses (and abuses) of human rights discourse, which I believe to be the case, as opposed to an attack on the need for memory, truth, and justice per se. In the case of El Salvador, there is more risk that a work with the characteristics of *Insensatez* be absorbed by the discursive frameworks of the Right and used accordingly in the public sphere. If Castellanos Moya’s novel walks a thin line between a criticism of the abuses of human rights and a critique of human rights as such, setting the novel in Guatemala makes this difficult feat easier to accomplish.

4.2.3. Cynical Activism

The parodic treatment of Gerardi and Menchú analyzed in the previous section forms part of a more general use of humor in *Insensatez*. Perhaps the single most innovative aspect of the novel is the comically irreverent treatment of the human rights activists – most of whom are wealthy foreigners – that converge around the archdiocese. Understood intertextually within the context of the early production of the author, this feature can be considered a development or an

offshoot of the critique of the revolutionary leadership during the civil war and the injunction to put culture to the service of political programs, a dilemma embodied by a character like el Turco in *La diáspora* who leaves the Party precisely on account of the intolerance of its leaders and the restrictions placed on his artistic and intellectual freedom (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 33). In *Insensatez*, this critique of the subordination of literature to political concerns assumes a new form: the parody of memory. The critique of the contradictions of the revolution during the civil war, for its part, evolves into a critique of the implementation of human rights discourse and practice in the emerging historical context of postwar Central America where memory was displacing Marxism as the ideological dominant of the region's Left. While the previous section addressed Castellanos Moya's parodic treatment of Gerardi and Menchú, the present section discusses the polemic treatment of human rights activism in *Insensatez*.

In his analysis of the novel, Sánchez Carbó singles out "la indiferencia del protagonista frente a los trabajos de la memoria" as the defining feature of the narrator of *Insensatez* (60). This generalized aversion breaks the surface on the many occasions when the narrator refers to his colleagues at the archdiocese as "los mal llamados veladores de derechos humanos" (45). The narrator's compulsive grumbling and griping about the human rights community undermines the sincerity and legitimacy of their altruism. We may think of this operation in terms of Sloterdijk's distinction between cynicism and kynicism. The human rights activists of *Insensatez* fall within Sloterdijk's category of "modern cynics," that is, accommodated middle-class intellectuals and professions who have lofty ideals yet, knowing them to be unrealizable, have no intention to put them into practice. They accept this contradiction as inescapable and resign themselves to a status quo that they would oppose in theory but in practice gives them enough benefit to relinquish any aspiration of significant change. This is not the false consciousness of Marx's

ideological critique but rather an “enlightened false consciousness,” that is, a (post)modern form of subjectivity that is conscious of its own duplicity yet accepts it as unescapable. The human rights activists of *Insensatez*, for example, are more than happy to assume a public image of selfless altruism while simultaneously seeking personal advancement through the considerable symbolic and material benefit that can be had from the business of helping others. It is not a coincidence that the vast majority of them – Pilar, Fátima, Jota Ce, Charlie, Joseba, Johnny Silverman – are wealthy, although they often go to lengths to conceal their class origins. Furthermore, they all have incriminating ties with the Right, an aspect that is allegorized in the scene of the “secret meeting” between Erick, Johnny Silverman, and general Octavio Pérez Mena. In relation to this relatively homogenous group of “modern cynics,” the narrator is an outsider, an anomaly that is difficult to account for within their frameworks of intelligibility. His function is to expose the duplicitousness of their cynical activism through his kynical histrionics.

Let’s take the example of the narrator’s relationship with Pilar. She is described as a “fanática de la sandez llamada corrección política” who acritically adopts “militancias de moda” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 46). This depiction of Pilar as weak-minded suggests that her commitment to the cause of human rights in Guatemala is frivolous or can be attributed to her susceptibility to trends. Furthermore, information about the character’s backstory suggests that her activism may be compensation for guilt over her origin of class and her family’s support of authoritarian regimes. In the little information that the reader receives about Pilar from the narrator, her father’s support of Franco is mentioned three times. She is presented to the reader as “la hija de un médico militar y franquista convertida en salvadora de indígenas,” as if there were causal relationship between the first and last syntagm of the utterance, that is, as if the fact that her father was a *franquista* motivated her to pursue a career in human rights. At the same time,

this passage is part of a larger technique of superimposing images of the political Right and Left, of blurring the lines between both. The public image of Pilar, for example, is one of the committed political activist, yet once she is in the privacy of her own apartment a much different image comes into view. When the “fanatical” daughter of a diehard supporter of Franco comes out of her bedroom she is wearing “aquel pijama franquista utilizado en conventos de época pretérita para que las novicias ni siquiera pudieran meter sus manos en sus partes pudendas” (57). Just as Gerardi is cast as an authoritarian figure associated with a criminal underground, this unflattering image of Pilar, the “savoir of the indigenous,” is tainted with deep undercurrents of authoritarianism and repression.

This pattern by which the kynical narrator blurs the boundaries between human rights activists and their enemies on the Right is repeated in the characterization of Fátima. The connection with the military is perhaps even more pronounced in this case, since her boyfriend, Juan Carlos Medina, is “un mayor del ejército uruguayo” (99). The affinities between characters like Jota Ce, as Fátima calls him, and the Guatemalan military arose the suspicion of the narrator. The couple has plans to move to “un amplio y moderno departamento” in an exclusive neighborhood of the city, “una zona para ricos” (100). These plans “transgredía algunos de sus principios, en especial aquellos relacionados con la pobreza y el sufrimiento de los indígenas con los que trabajaba” (100), but she nonetheless chooses comfort and privilege over her ethical commitments. The fact that Fátima’s actions are inconsistent with her beliefs does not seem to undermine her sincerity or the legitimacy of her activism to anyone except the narrator. He represents the kynical zone of unintelligibility in the milieu of (post)modern cynical activism. The narrator exposes the “enlightened false consciousness” of activists who are more than happy to live with an unresolvable contradiction between what they say about themselves in public and

what they do in private. This aporia finds its allegory in Fátima's relationship with José. By night she both figuratively and literally goes to bed with the enemy – the military – of those she advocates for by day. After helping the victims of the military, she returns home to her luxury apartment in an exclusive part of town to rub elbows with the business and military elite who were largely responsible for the atrocities (*Insensatez* 100). Although this makes the narrator question the allegiances of Fátima, who appears in combat boots in her encounters with the narrator (96-7), none of this is cause for alarm to anyone else. The activist community is more than happy to live with the contradictions, with the “enlightened false consciousness,” that the cynical narrator rejects.

This technique of blurring the lines between Left and Right perhaps finds its fullest expression in the figure of the mole, the military informant who infiltrates the human rights community. Here, the epistemological uncertainty that characterizes other aspects of the work assumes a political dimension. In other words, it is impossible to know what lies beneath the surface of any of the human rights activists, all of whom may be the mole. Not only are activists ridiculed and their intentions scrutinized but it is uncertain whether they are even activists at all: they may very well be working for the G-2, the Guatemalan military's intelligence service. *Insensatez* leaves no way to distinguish Left and Right, activism from simulacrum. This duplicitousness serves as the basis of Sloterdijk's “theory of the double agent.” In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, he argues that the ambivalence of the double agent does not merely “survive on the margins of political systems” but has come to “touch on the existential core of societies” (113). In the figure of the mole, Sloterdijk's finds the same structure of the modern cynical subjectivity, which, as a “demoralized enlightened consciousness,” is “afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestablished relations that it finds dubious, to accommodate itself to

them,” and finally to promote its own interests within this framework. The political commitments of the activists in *Insensatez* come across as hollow since they barely conceal an underlying drive for self-promotion and accommodation to a corrupt system. The mole that infiltrates the archdiocese, then, is not an anomaly but rather the general structure of a cynical modern consciousness taken to its maximum consequences.

These critiques of the cynical narrator of the novel should not be understood separately from the context of his concomitant opposition to the military and unequivocal repudiation of genocide. Kynicism regarding the status quo is not an either/or affair but contains within it a double-pronged rejection of both the violence of the military and the duplicitousness of human rights activists who often (ab)use memory to further personal gain. In this double rejection, Castellanos Moya creates a novel character within Latin American literature: the figure of the public intellectual who categorically fails to advocate for the people and exposes the insincerity of intellectuals who do. This gesture bears considerable symbolic weight given the long tradition within Latin American culture of intellectuals who either use their symbolic capital to advocate for political causes in the public sphere or to put their literature to the service of political programs. Across his narrative production, Castellanos Moya breaks substantially with this tradition and offers a series of disillusioned and cynical narrators as a counterpoint. This operation reinforces the central tenets of the author’s poetic program, which includes the disarticulation of literature and politics, the rejection of the figure of the politically committed Latin American public intellectual, and a defense of fiction that emerges from within the testimonial tradition but moves well beyond it into an aesthetics of post-testimonio.

4.3. Resistance

4.3.1. Cowardice: The Unmasking of Military Cynicism

In this section I would like to argue that the narrative of Castellanos Moya announces a shift in sensibility within Latin American literature that can be characterized as a turn away from a defense of the violence of the revolutionary agents and movements of the period from the 1960s to 1990s. Although this sensibility has become increasingly more prominent since the early 2000s, this was not the case when the author was making his appearance on the literary scene. At that time, the paradigm of Central American literature as “an ideological practice of national liberation struggles and of literature as a ‘cultural weapon’ and ‘resistance literature’ predominated” (Mackenbach 319). In “Representations of Violence and Peace in Contemporary Central American Literature,” Werner Mackenbach frames this amalgam of literature and politics through its ambivalent relationship to violence, which he expresses through a spatial metaphor: “representations of violence occupy a central place as a denunciation of the violence of those who govern / have power (violence from above) and as a justification and praise of the violence of the oppressed against dictatorships (violence from below)” (319). The politically committed literature from the period between the 1960s and the 1990s defended and even idealized “violence from below,” framed as what Mackenbach describes as a “counterviolence” in response to “violence from above in the form of dictatorship, State terrorism, and genocide” (320). This tendency, along with the generalized cultural sensibility that accompanies it, began to show signs of exhaustion in the late 1990s and early 2000s when “several literary texts begin to question and subvert the denunciation of violence from above and the praise of violence from below” (329). It is replaced by an emergent discourse that Mackenbach describes in the following terms: “The dark side of the armed struggles are shown, and the multiple violence

exercised by the actors of the ‘counterviolence’ against members of civil society, as well as crimes committed within revolutionary movements themselves against their own militants, are denounced” (329). Castellanos Moya was an early proponent, a forerunner, of this discourse. Moreover, his literary program was founded on a cynical refusal both of politically committed literatures and sacralising apologies of revolutionary violence. Although there is evidence of a similar sensibility, a similar disconformity, in novels as early as José Revueltas *Los errores* in 1964, *Los compañeros* by Marco Antonio Flores in 1976, *Historia de Mayta* by Mario Vargas Llosa in 1984, and *No velas tus muertos* by Martín Caparros in 1986. It is not until Castellanos Moya that the critique of counterviolence came to form the basis of a literary program that explicitly strives to move beyond testimonial genres and push literature about political violence into new and uncharted territory. His literary program announces the arrival of a stage of Latin American culture in which the “symbiotic relationship between these representations of violence and revolutionary-utopian projects in politically ‘committed’ literatures is dissolving” (325).

Expanding on Mackenbach’s periodization, we can affirm that the defense of (counter)violence from below corresponds to the production of both the Boom and the first phase of testimonio, which was characterized by explicit inscription in revolutionary movements. The repudiation of violence from above corresponds to the (post)dictatorship novel and the second phase of testimonio, which is centered on the subaltern identity of the figure of the victim. The critique of counterviolence, for its part, corresponds to a posterior stage, properly post-testimonial, which has found its fullest expression in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. Furthermore, the apologia of revolution exhibits a tendency toward an epic register; the denunciation of State violence gravitates toward a tragic register; and the critique of counterviolence introduces a comic register into the tradition of literature about political violence

in Latin America. As a herald of this last and most recent tendency, the narrative program of Castellanos Moya abandons the epic register altogether, conserves the tragic as a backdrop, and superimposes a comic element, as a release of pent-up energy through the violation of taboos and transgression of norms. If I state that the narrative program of the author conserves the tragic element, it is on account of the critique of the violence from above, which is an aspect that is often overshadowed by the more salient and striking critique of counterviolence. Recall that the relationship between these two critiques is not a disjunctive ‘either/or’ but an aggregative ‘and.’ Castellanos Moya presupposes the violence from above, and he does not foreground it anymore than a writer from the deserts of North Africa would foreground a camel (to borrow an expression from Borges). By contrast, what Castellanos Moya does not presuppose is the legitimacy of the “violence from below,” at least in some of its expressions. In fact, it needs to be addressed precisely because it had been glossed over within contemporary Latin American literature and downplayed as part of a program to repudiate violence from above and defend violence from below. While the author has publicly stated his opinion that the Central American revolutions were justified in their use of violence in broad terms, this does not exonerate them for their crimes (*Roque Dalton* 123). The narrative of Castellanos Moya circles obsessively around these blind spots in the cultural traditions of the Latin American, returning time and again to the violence and shortcomings of the Left, in both the revolutionary past and human rights present.

The *Critique of Cynical Reason* provides us with a very efficient tool for analyzing this novel combination of tragic, comic, and decidedly anti-epic discourses in the narrative production of Castellanos Moya. Sloterdijk argues that “military cynicism can emerge when three male martial characters have assumed clear contours in society: the *hero*, the *hesitater*, and

the *coward*” (220). These positions, of course, are not valued equally, but rather an “unambiguous hierarchy of values is established at whose summit the hero stands: everyone *should* basically be like him” (220). While the hesitater tries half-heartedly to assume the values of the hero, the coward openly flouts the injunction to be like him. The coward, as an anti-hero, pays dearly for this transgression of social expectations: “the coward must be held in contempt because otherwise the alchemy that is held to make battle-hungry fighters out of timid deserters cannot succeed. Mercilessly, the heroic model of the military group is forced on all” (220). In the marginalized position of the coward, Sloterdijk sees a potential for cynicism. Within this general framework, then, he recasts the coward as a potential cynical critic of the military cynicism that idealizes the figure of the hero, shrouded in an epic imaginary.

Just as the narrative of Castellanos Moya exhibits a division in the construction of character between believers and doubters, I argue that a parallel dichotomy operates within these texts between heroes and cowards. Not prone to middle terms, the hesitater is not a foundational piece within the narrative program of the author. A cursory approximation to the novels up until and including *Insensatez* demonstrates a clear textual opposition between “heroes” and “cowards:” on the side of the heroes figure characters like Quique in *La diáspora*, Olmedo in *El asco*, Albertico in *Donde no estén ustedes*, and Chucky in *Insensatez*; on the side of the cowards we find an archetype of ineffectual intellectuals that includes el Turco, Juan Carlos, Gabriel, Antonio, and Jorge Kraus from *La diáspora*; Alberto Aragón and José Pindonga from *Donde no estén ustedes*; and the narrator of *Insensatez*. Furthermore, this opposition between characters registers a confrontation between epic (heroes) and comic (cowards) discourses.

The protagonists of the novels of Castellanos Moya tend to openly declare their cowardice. Judging himself from within the epic imaginary of revolution, Juan Carlos from *La*

diáspora feels the need to apologize for not taking up arms, despite the fact that he dedicated eight years of his life to further the cause of revolution through his intellectual talents: “Salí de El Salvador en 1980, después de la huelga general de agosto. Colaboraba con el Frente Universitario y los militares ya me tenían cuadrículado. Enfrenté dos opciones: o me iba del país o pasaba a la clandestinidad. Desgraciadamente, nunca he sido hombre de armas” (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 27). El Turco, for his part, is unapologetic about choosing the guitar instead of the gun as an instrument of revolutionary change. More cynical than Juan Carlos, he does not blame himself but the intolerance of the Party for his departure from revolutionary politics. He argues the revolution does not understand the revolutionary potential of culture (33) and describes the Party as a machine that manufactures killing machines who blindly obey orders from above (34). The doubters of *La diáspora* are defined in juxtaposition to the men of arms, the heroes, like Quique López. Within the culture of the revolution, his practical experience gives him more prestige than the knowledge of his intellectual colleagues, which he disdains: “La verdad es que todos en la agencia le profesan un cierto respeto porque es el único del grupo que ha tenido experiencia militar, que se ha agarrado a putazos en el monte con el ejército” (68). For Sloterdijk, this praise causes a “hero” like Quique to “raise above self-doubt, experience himself as the one who lives at the zenith of his own ideal, radiant and self-confident” (221). The flipside of this confidence is the shame and self-contempt and nagging feeling of inadequacy that haunts a “coward” like Juan Carlos.

The opposition between character types is by no means limited to the period of the civil war but extends into the novels set in the postwar epoch, like *El asco*, *Donde no estén ustedes*, and *Insensatez*. Chucky el Muñeco Asesino from *Insensatez*, quién “era un audaz comando urbano de la guerrilla,” is heralded as a hero “por haber protagonizado todo tipo de peligrosas

aventuras en las que arriesgó su vida y cobró vidas ajenas” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 64-65). The narrator of the novel, as an anti-hero, fits Sloterdijk’s definition of the coward: “If cowardice is neutrally understood as the primary inclination to avoid confrontation, in the economy of human drives it must have priority over the desire to fight” (219). In the party at Johnny Silverman’s party, the narrator is more than happy to throw his dignity out the window, so to speak, and desperately flee from the scene in order to avoid a confrontation with Jota Ce (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 131). Fright and flight, in fact, is the principal modus operandi of this character: he flees from El Salvador where he perceives to be in danger for an article he wrote; he flees from the Johnny Silverman’s party where he perceives to be in danger of an attack from Jota Ce, although Jota Ce does not even attend the gathering; he flees from the retreat house where he perceives to be in danger of an ambush by Octavio Pérez Mena although there is no substantial empirical basis to this perception; and he flees from Guatemala before finishing the correction of the Remhi report because he perceives his life to be in danger when it was really bishop Gerardi whose life was targeted by the military. The protagonist of *Donde no estén ustedes*, Alberto Aragón, shares this same trait. Faced with the possibility of laying down the pen and picking up the proverbial sword, of joining the ranks of the guerrilla, as he claimed that he would do, Aragón instead opts to flee to México:

De regreso en Managua, Alberto se puso de acuerdo con su amigo Miguelito, el canciller de los sandinistas, y con su otro gran amigo, el embajador mexicano, Jaime Cordona, para hacer de su renuncia un acto político que desprestigiara aún más a esa pandilla de criminales, solapada bajo las supuestas credenciales democráticas del Loco Duarte, un acto político en el que Alberto denunciaría la política represiva del gobierno que hasta ese

instante había representado y anunciaba su decisión de pasar a las filas del frente guerrillero. (Castellanos Moya, *Donde no estén ustedes* 117)

Aragón indeed ends up renouncing his post as the Salvadoran ambassador to Nicaragua, but he does not join the revolutionary forces, a desire that he had expressed on many occasions: “¿Y qué hizo?, ¿se metió a la guerrilla o qué?, pregunta Gina. Me vine a México como asilado político, dice Alberto” (117). From the point of view of the military cynics, the kynical behavior of Aragón, who is critical of violence from above but simultaneously doubtful of the efficacy and legitimacy of violence from below, is unintelligible. This is a sore point and, when it comes up, the character is forced to account for his behaviour: “sólo la pregunta hecha a bote pronto por Ramiro de por qué renunció a la embajada cuando tampoco pasó a integrarse a las filas de la guerrilla obliga a Alberto a meterse de lleno en la conversación” (105). On many such occasions, Aragón tries to communicate his experience, but his liminal position can only be interpreted as cowardice within the ideological parameters of the epoch: “Decide, pues, explicarse: la decisión de aceptar ese cargo fue extremadamente difícil, compleja, ajena al maniqueísmo imperante en esa época” (92). His efforts to explain himself, however, do not make his actions any more intelligible to those around him, precisely because they are unable to think outside of the “Manichaeism of the epoch.” As a character type, the kynical intellectual “coward,” he is defined against his compatriot Calamandraca, an architypal hero, who is described in the following manner: “Calamandraca fue miembro de las fuerzas especiales, los más cabrones de todos, entrenados en Cuba para operaciones guerrilleras delicadísimas, para romper las líneas enemigas en el mayor sigilo, para asaltar trincheras a punta de cuchillo, los más temidos” (101). In the bar in Mexico City where the small group of exiles congregate, Yina, Ramiro, and Aragón himself hang on Calamandraca’s every word as he recounts his military

feats. When he finishes his tales, the other characters lift up their glasses to drink in his honor (102). Similar Manichaeic oppositions between archetypes can be found in *El asco* in the tension between cowardly intellectuals like Moya and heroic men of action, like Olmedo.

There is more than a mere opposition between archetypes at play here: in the narrative of Castellanos Moya the terms of the hierarchy of Sloterdijk's military cynicism are inverted. In other words, the figure of the coward is praised as a potential expression of kynical resistance to both the violence from above and the abuses of the counterviolence from below. Conversely, the figure of the hero is taken down from its pedestal and converted into an object of ridicule. A one-liner from Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* captures the kynics' inversion of values: "heroism may be quite good, but hesitation is at least as good, and cowardice is even better" (228). The resistance to epic discourse applies as much to the violence of the State and it does to the crimes of the revolution. Even Edgardo Vega of *El asco*, who is unequivocally the farthest on the political Right of all the intellectual narrators of Castellanos Moya, expresses profound contempt for the "violence from above." He has this to say of the presidency of Otto Pérez Molina:

Es increíble, Moya, realmente increíble, la estupidez humana no tiene límites, y particularmente en este país, donde la gente lleva la estupidez a récords inusitados, sólo así puede explicar que el político más popular del país en los últimos veinte años haya sido un sicópata criminal, sólo así se puede explicar que un sicópata criminal que mandó a asesinar a miles de personas en su cruzada anticomunista se haya convertido en el político más popular, que un sicópata criminal que mandó a asesinar al arzobispo de San Salvador se haya convertido en el político más carismático, más querido, no sólo por los ricos sino por la población en general, una asquerosidad de dimensiones monstruosas, si

lo pensás detenidamente, Moya, un sicópata criminal asesino de arzobispo convertido en prócer (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 35-6)

In this passage, it is clear that Vega's aversion to communism cannot be reduced to an apologia of the anti-Communist violence of the State. Neither escapes his cynical tirades. Vega is as frank about the crimes of the revolution as he is about those of the State. In his conversation with Moya, Vega denounces the leaders of the revolutions who he blames for the death of their mutual friend, Olmedo, whose case conspicuously echoes that of Roque Dalton: "Lo mataron sus propios camaradas, ... lo fusilaron por traidor, ... bajo la acusación de ser infiltrado del enemigo" (34-5). According to Vega, in the end the death of Vega was in vain, since the leadership of the revolution, as military cynics, proved just as corrupt in the postwar epoch as their former enemies: "¿Y todo para qué? Para que una partida de ladrones con disfraz de políticos se repartan el botín. Es increíble" (35).

Although his commitment to the revolutionary Left is far greater than that of Vega, this same double critique of military cynicism can be found in the protagonist of *Donde no estén ustedes*, Alberto Aragón. His decision to go into exile in Mexico after the signing of the Peace Accords on the 2nd of June of 1994 is politically motivated, and it registers his contempt for the Right as well as his deep disappointment of the Left: "por nada en el mundo se hubiera quedado ni veinticuatro horas en un país que regresaba a las pezuñas de la derecha troglidita santificada en elecciones y con la bendición de sus ex amigos comunistas" (26). From his adolescence, when he participated in the struggles against the dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, the sympathies of Alberto Aragón were always with the Left. He hesitates, however, to identify himself as a communist: "hombre de los comunistas, si no me equivoco. No exactamente, puntualiza Alberto, amigo de algunos de ellos, pero sin militancia, les ayudó en lo que pudo, les

servió de enlace para que conversaran con sus amigos de la derecha” (99). Apparently, though, this friendship was more one-sided than Aragón would have liked. When they were done with his services, his “friends” on the revolutionary Left were the first to abandon him. Throughout the novel, Aragón is quick to expose the contradictions and even the crimes of the Left. This, however, in no way diminishes his visceral hatred for the far Right and his repudiation of its violence. Among the crimes of the military figure the deaths of Albertico and Anita, the son and daughter-in-law of the protagonist. Using his information provided to him by his diplomatic contacts, he drives throughout the Salvadoran countryside to exhume Albertico and Anita’s mutilated bodies from a mass grave. He never heals from his loss, and his resentment is only intensified by what he sees as the hypocrisy of the leaders of the revolution and their abuse of “violence from below.”

What is at stake in Castellanos Moya’s use of this specific character archetype is a vindication of the point of view of the coward and a correlative delegitimization of the epic discourse of the heroes. Through the eyes of the kynics, the heroes are often fools and hypocrites. In *La diáspora*, for example, the third person narrator describes Quique as “un sagaz jefe de escuadra,” yet he is anything but wise (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 72). To the contrary, he is ignorant of the true nature of his squadron. Quique is always willing to believe what his superiors tell him: “Cuando se dio la orden de iniciar la ofensiva del 10 de enero, los jefes les aseguraron que se trataba de la embestida final para derrotar a la genocida junta de gobierno y luego construir el socialismo” (73). Any kynic could see, however, that Quique’s superiors were sending him to his death:

No obstante, hasta esa fecha, las fuerzas militares de la revolución en ese sector – unos 120 hombres mal armados – no habían sostenido combates de gran envergadura con el

enemigo. Por eso, cuando la ofensiva rebelde languidecía y las tropas gubernamentales se lanzaron en una feroz contraofensiva, el grupo de Quique no resistió el embate. (72)

Quique survives, just barely, but he is none the wiser. And this is not the only time that he is kept in the dark. He remains oblivious, “como si la crisis hubiera pasado a su lado, sin tocarlo,” to the news of the assassination of comandante Ana María and the suicide of comandante Marcial, which irrevocably upended the lives of the rest of the main characters of *La diáspora* (93). Given this extreme ingenuousness and the little understanding that he has of his surroundings, it would be hard to read anything but irony in the use of the attribute “sagaz.”

A similar pattern is repeated in the case of Olmedo in *El asco*. The reader is left with an image of the character that is anything but flattering: thinking that he was going to save the world, Olmedo runs off to join the guerrilla, only to be accused of being a spy for the CIA and summarily executed by his comrades in arms (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 34-5). In the case of *Insensatez*, when the sociohistorical context had changed substantially and the discourse of the Left gravitated toward Memory and away from Marxism, the heroes are no longer guerrilleros but human rights activists. Yet, even in this case, the kynical narrator is quick to puncture the epic aura of high levels figures like Gerardi and Menchú with his comic prodding. This anti-epic discourse is coupled with a vindication of the point of view of the coward. Let’s not forget about the plot twist at the end of *Insensatez*: after the systematic assault on the judgment of the narrator throughout the novel, it turns out that he was right about the infiltration of the office of human rights of the archdiocese.

In conclusion, then, we can state the relationship of Castellanos Moya to the traditions of contemporary Latin American literature, is based on a complex series of continuities and discontinuities. The author unequivocally abandons the apologias of revolution that characterize

literature of the Boom period and the first phase of testimonio. This aesthetic and political stance accounts for the markedly anti-epic dimension of his narrative program. At the same time, he continues these traditions by conserving the critique of violence from above, of dictatorship and State terrorism, which accounts for the tragic backdrop of his work. This element can move to the forefront in scenes that directly address State terrorism, such as the assassination of Albertico and Anita in *Donde no estén ustedes* or the brutal rape of Teresa by Octavio Pérez Mena and his soldiers in *Insensatez*. Here, we find common ground between the narrative of Castellanos Moya on one hand and the traditions of testimonio and the (post)dictatorship novel on the other. Yet, his aesthetic program presents an innovation that is not present in either of these prior literary traditions: he not only distances himself from apologias of revolution but also articulates a critique of counterviolence, an exposure of the violence from below. This operation is characterized by an ironic distance and parodic inversion with respect to both the revolutionary Left and the postwar human rights movements that followed in its wake. This accounts for one of Castellanos Moya's major innovations: although his narrative conserves a residual tragic tone, he introduces a ludic element that seeks to produce humor in the Freudian sense of a release of energy that derives from a disregard of constraint and a transgression of taboo.

4.3.2. Scatology: The Unmasking of Sexual Cynicism

The functions of the lower body have a special place in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. The pages of his works are "dirtied" with naturalistic descriptions of masturbation, copulation, defecation, regurgitation, and putrefaction. Neither does the author shy away from body fluids; in fact, the presence of vomit, blood, vaginal fluids, semen, and pus are so commonplace in his work that they deserve to be contemplated as a part of his narrative

program. Recalling the etymology of the word, ‘cynic,’ from the Greek word for canine, along with the nickname of Diogenes, referred to by other Athenians as “the dog” precisely on account of his obsession with lower bodily functions (Sloterdijk 165), we might think of the narrative of Castellanos Moya as dirty dog literature of sorts. Unfortunately, however, this could be misleading since it evokes the porous and diffuse category of Latin American dirty realism that has been applied to authors like Pedro Juan Gutiérrez from Cuba. By situating Castellanos Moya within a tradition of cynicism, or kynicism to be more precise, we avoid this problem. Referring to Platonic and Christian traditions in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk states that the “love of wisdom becomes from then on increasingly sexless; it loses the region below the belly line” (252). One of the functions of the kynic, then, is to assert the animal side of human beings and to suture the rift caused by Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian dualisms. For Sloterdijk, the sexual cynicism of the bourgeoisie expresses itself in the traditions of spiritualized love and in the institution of marriage:

In the bourgeois age, the stage was set for sexual cynicism in a new form. The bourgeoisie did not make claims on cultural hegemony without at the same time setting up its own model for ideal love: marriage for love. ... The bourgeois soul must take care that love remains strictly confined to marriage, that the ‘animal side’ plays no role, and that even in the most extreme case, the bodily aspect can be regarded as an ‘expression’ of the passion of the soul. The erotic lay idealism (it is not clerics who preach it) provokes sexual-cynical antitheses in virtually epidemic dimensions. (260-1)

For all this chaste spiritualization of love, however, animal instincts do not simply go away:

This suspicion has been, at least since the eighteenth century, with people in bourgeois society, a society that, on the other hand, began with the final taming of the inner animal

by reason, enlightenment, and morality, but which saw, as a by-product of this taming, an ever larger and threatening animal shadow emerge from below. (262-3)

This conflict between the injunctions of public morality and the injunctions of the animal sexuality of humans cannot be adequately resolved, and the *aporia* expresses itself in sexual cynicism, or hypocrisy, through which an irrepressible private vice lurks behind a façade of public virtue. Another one of the functions of the cynicism, then, is to expose this contradiction. Having rejected public morality from the beginning and thus shed the duplicitousness of sexual cynicism, the cynic is in a position to do so. The cynical narrators of Castellanos Moya assume precisely this role within the narrative of the author by either foregrounding lower body functions or unmasking the cynical sexual moralism of the other characters.

La diáspora ends with a hangover, which we might interpret as an allegory for the disenchantment of the characters that followed in the wake of the euphoria of their deep faith in revolution²⁴. One of the last images of the novel portrays el Turco on the bathroom floor, hugging the toilet:

Comienza a toser. Una sensación del carajo. Con cada espasmo siente que volverá a vomitar. Alguna migaja se le debe haber ido por el conducto equivocado. Nada de migajas: un pedazo de buitre, eso es. Preciosa palabra para denominar el vómito: buitre. Ahí viene con las alitas que salen por las comisuras de la boca. Parece que va a asfixiarse. La tos y el buitre, juntos, pateándole el estómago y la caja torácica. Mete la cabeza en la taza del excusado. Ya pasa. Le regresa el aliento. (147)

²⁴ Ignacio Sánchez Prado uses this same metaphor in “La ficción y el momento de peligro: *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya” when he suggests that “a certain past intoxication with revolutionary utopias has given way to a heavy hangover (244).

The fact that there is more than just an upset stomach at play in this scene is underscored in the following passage:

Apoya la frente y los codos en la taza del excusado. Necesita que alguien lo ayude, le diga palabras de consuelo, le acaricie esa cabeza dura. Pero Carmen ya se fue y Susana está lejísimos, al otro lado de la ciudad, acompañada por una pareja de poetas maricas, entusiasmados en una conversación que a él, al Turco, lo hubiera hecho vomitar de una manera más placentera, metafísica. (147)

Here, then, it is clear that there are in fact two nauseas. One is caused by drinking “a lo descosido,” and the other, the more pleasant of the two, is caused by the character’s intolerance of the naivety of Susana and her poet friends (34). What is at stake in this passage is the opposition between doubters and believers, heroes and cowards. El Turco sees through their naïve faith in revolution to the crimes committed in its name. He counters their epic discourse with a tragic outlook that seeks refuge in the comic. The second nausea, superimposed upon the first, codifies el Turco’s rejection of the epic discourse of the believers. This refusal takes the form of a violent expulsion that is both literal and figurative.

Vomit plays a similar role in *El asco*. Just as the title of the novel derives from the much-repeated exclamation of el Turco in *La diáspora*, *El asco* shares a similar penchant for bodily fluids. In his trip to El Salvador from Canada, the gag reflex and regurgitation is a common response of Edgardo Vega to the culture and customs of his homeland. On the flight to San Salvador, before even stepping foot in the country, Vega is so disgusted by the Salvadorans on the airplane that he seeks refuge in the water closet. To his chagrin, he jumps from the frying pan into the fire, so to speak:

Algo verdaderamente horripilante, un espectáculo del que sólo pude escapar en los momentos en que me refugiaba en los sanitarios, pero pronto los sanitarios se convirtieron en compartimientos asquerosos por las escupidas, los restos de vómitos, orines y demás excrecencias; pronto los sanitarios se convirtieron en un espacio irrespirable porque esos sujetos orinaban en los lavabos. (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 94)

Vega finds himself in a similar situation when his brother and his brother's friends take him to a brothel. Not wanting to partake in what he finds to be a lamentable ritual of male bonding, Vega once again seeks refuge in a bathroom and, once again, finds the opposite of what he was looking for. Instead of peace, his disgust only increases, so much that it passes the regurgitation threshold:

Alcancé a sacar mi pañuelo para taparme la nariz, pero ya era demasiado tarde, Moya, por concentrar mi energía en evitar una caída sobre aquellos charcos de semen y orines, penetré sin defensa a esa cámara de gases pútridos y cuando alcancé a sacar mi pañuelo ya era demasiado tarde. Vomité, Moya, el vómito más inmundito de mi vida, la más sórdida y asquerosa manera de vomitar que podás imaginar, porque yo era un tipo vomitando sobre un vómito. (120)

This bodily reflex mirrors the Vega's rejection of all things Salvadoran. The crucial distinction between this visceral response and that of el Turco is that the latter's disgust constitutes a critique of revolution from within, whereas the former's disgust is part of an ideology that idealizes the metropolitan center and blames the periphery for its underdevelopment.

Insensatez is no exception to the insistence on lower body functions and fluids in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. The day after having sexual relations with Fátima, the boyfriend of Jota Ce, the narrator begins to notice a certain discomfort in his genitals: "había sentido cierta

comezón en la punta del pene y una especie de tirantez en los testículos, sensaciones que yo atribuí a la natural irritación producida por el acto sexual luego de varias semanas de abstinencia, pero que ahora, con la atención agudizada, notaba que habían ido creciendo al paso de las horas” (Castellanos Moya, *Insensatez* 114-5). When irritation becomes too much to bear, the narrator decides to have a closer look:

procedí a revisar mi miembro: no hubo necesidad de que lo apretara demasiado para que apareciera la gota blanca que me dejó paralizado, boquiabierto, como hipnotizado, porque nunca en mi vida había padecido una enfermedad venérea, porque jamás creí que padecería semejante tipo de enfermedad en mi existencia, porque lo que más había temido del comercio carnal era la posibilidad de contraer un mal venéreo. Y no había alguna duda: ahí estaba la gota de pus tan temida, mirándome, acusadoramente, mientras yo tenía la sensación de que el piso se hundía a mis pies, el vértigo de quien ha traspasado la frontera prohibida, pues hasta entonces yo había creído que los hombres se dividían en dos grupos, los sucios y los virtuosos, y que era precisamente la posesión o no posesión de esa gota la línea divisoria. (115)

This passage brings us face to face with the same operation that is present in *El asco* and *La diáspora*, that is, a hermeneutics of the scatological. The drop of pus on the tip of the penis of the narrator is immediately attributed a meaning: it signifies the dividing line between the dirty and the virtuous, the pure and the impure. At this point, it should come to no surprise to the reader to find the narrator among the ranks of the dirty, as his kynical, or dog-like, qualities are extenuated time and again throughout the novel. Yet, the presence of the drop of pus, however, has further implications that extend into the community of human rights activists. Recalling his encounter with Fátima, the narrator conjectures that “era imposible que ella no supiera portadora de la

infección que ahora me carcomía y que sin ninguna duda le había contagiado el milico uruguayo frecuentador de quién sabe qué prostitutas” (115). What is truly surprising about this scene, then, is not the impurity of the narrator but that of Fátima and Jota Ce, since it contradicts their public images.

While the drop of pus precipitates the narrator’s personal downfall, his downward spiral into abjection, this insistence on the lower body also has the function of serving as a disruptive counterpoint to spiritualized love and its respective social institutions. Fátima considers Jota Ce her soulmate and, although they have agreed to “encuentros paralelos” in periods of separation on account of their human rights careers, she draws the line of fidelity at penetration: “enseguida me aclaró terminante que ella no pensaba follar conmigo, caramba, que ella tenía un novio al que mucho amaba y quien arribaría al país a la mañana siguiente, un novio al que jamás le sería infiel, aunque ahora mismo tuviera mi miembro en sus manos” (94-5). Fátima, then, considers foreplay within what is acceptable for her relationship with Jota Ce, while intercourse falls on the other side of the line, the side of infidelity. Her discourse of idealization love, however, does not prevent her from acting on lust:

ella ya entusiasmada por mi miembro en su boca terminó de quitarse las prendas que aún tenía encima, incluido el par de botas militares y las gruesas medias que para mí resultaban una moda un tanto grosera y desestimulante bajo su falda primaveral, una moda por lo demás compartida por la mayoría de cooperantes europeas y que yo nada más entendí como un capricho juvenil sin mayores consecuencias, pero que en ese instante adquirió su siniestra dimensión cuando desde ese par de botas militares ascendió un tufo que hizo trizas mis fosas nasales y me provocó la peor de las repugnancias ...

Ningún otro motivo podría explicar que yo no me enterara del instante preciso en que ella

dejó de mamarme y con un movimiento súbito se encaramó en mi miembro, sólo mi total estado de abstracción puedo permitir que Fátima empezara a cabalgarme sin que yo pecatara, porque cuando quise reaccionar ya estaba ella ensartada en mi miembro... (96-7)

Throughout the novel, the narrator categorically spurns love and attempts to act on lust. His colleagues, to the contrary, sublimate their “animal” desires within conventional relationships based on spiritualized love and the institution of marriage. Fátima is vocal in her advocacy of a similar conception of love that, though more open, constrains expression of lust within specific parameters. Despite her open-mindedness, she is unable to keep lust within bounds. Furthermore, the narrator insinuates that the same is true for Jota Ce, assuming that he frequents brothels. The kynical narrator, then, sees what the others cannot: the drop of pus on the tip of his penis which, together with the stench from Fátima’s feet, hints that something is not quite right, that there is something rotting beneath the cheery façade of the human rights community.

According to Sloterdijk, this is precisely the function of the kynic, that is, to see what the others conceal. As it turns out, this is also the job description of José Pindonga in *Donde no estén ustedes*, the private detective who has been hired by Henry Highmont to investigate the circumstances of the death of his childhood friend and ex-Salvadoran ambassador to Nicaragua, Alberto Aragón. The two were childhood friends who participated together in the resistance to the dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez before becoming estranged over politics: while Highmont switched over to the political Right, Aragón embarked on a turbulent diplomatic career with the intention of using his connections to benefit his allies on the Left. It is more than grief or nostalgia that motivates Highmont’s decision to investigate the death of his friend. Pindonga, the kynical detective, discovers his ulterior motive: to ensure that Aragón took the

Highmont family secret with him to his grave. The secret is question is that Margot Highmont, Henry's wife, had an affair with Aragón which engendered a baby girl, also named Margot. Henry decides to raise the girl as his own under the condition that Margot and Alberto break off their relationship, which they do. Pindonga finds out what Highmont wants to know, that is, that Aragón died in obscurity and abjection, without any reason to reveal the secret or anyone with whom to share it. In the process, however, Pindonga also discovers the ulterior motive of Henry Highmont. It is the kynical characters, Aragón and Pindonga, his doppelgänger, who know the deception, betrayal, and lust that hide behind the respectability of a family of the Salvadoran elite.

Moreover, this love triangle can be read in a political key. In general terms, the Aragón family, both Alberto and Albertico, are associated directly and indirectly with the revolutionary Left, whereas the Highmont family, Henry and Margot, are associated with the political Right and Salvadoran social and economic elite. The conflict between these two families can be said to represent differing stances of the middle classes in relation to the revolution. Margot's vacillation between Aragón and Highmont, then, can be interpreted as an ambivalence within Salvadoran middle and upper classes. Seduced by Aragón, Margot is also flirting, on a symbolic level, with the Left. This temptation, however, is not to be taken too far, and at the first sign of problem she goes running back to the arms of Henry, which can be interpreted as the withdrawal of support of revolutionary causes by the middle and upper classes, as has happened so many times throughout the history of Latin America. Furthermore, Henry Highmont takes revenge on his friend by using his political connections to have Aragón's son and daughter-in-law, Albertico and Anita, assassinated for their participation in revolutionary politics. To continue with our allegorical reading, then, the withdrawal of support of the middles classes for revolutionary causes is far

from a mere political preference but constitutes an alliance with the military that results in atrocity.

In addition, yet another critique of sexual cynicism in *Donde no estén ustedes* can be found in the affair between José Pindonga and Margot Highmont, the daughter of Henry and Margot. Although Pindonga has no qualms about acting on lust, which is indeed part of his motivation, he develops an emotional attachment to Margot. This is an inverted image of her experience of the relationship: while feigning to be enamoured and leading Pindonga on, she is really motivated only by lust. The difference is that what Pindonga says is consistent with what he does, whereas Margot proves to be duplicitous since she appeals to discourse of idealized romantic love in order to act on her desire for him. In the beginning, his cynical instincts fail him, and he is unable to see beyond Margot's appearance to her true motivations. Her sexual cynicism, however, quickly becomes apparent:

me negaba a aceptar los argumentos que la princesa Margot blandía para acabar con nuestra incipiente relación en la que yo cifraba las mayores expectativas: que habíamos pasado un lindo día, dijo, un día intenso como pocos en su vida, pero que debíamos aceptarlo así, como un affaire único e irrepetible, ningún sentido tenía volver a vernos pronto, la posibilidad de establecer una relación amorosa era nula, que me la tomara suave, dijo, las diferencias entre nosotros eran inmensas y ella tenía ya una relación, una persona con la que en unos meses – una vez que ella terminara la maestría y regresara a San Salvador – se casaría, ese niño con apellido de abolengo al que apenas mencionó y en el que apenas reparé durante nuestro largo día y quien ahora aparecía con toda su contundencia, por nada en el mundo ella estaba dispuesta a poner en peligro esa relación de cinco años ni mucho menos deseaba generar en mi expectativas que no habrá manera

de cumplir y me harían el mayor de los daños. (Castellanos Moya, *Donde no estén ustedes* 258-9)

In this passage, the distance between her discourse of spiritualized love, consecrated by the institution of marriage, and her actual sexual practices is unbridgeable, yet this contradiction poses no problem for a sexual cynic. After his encounter, Pindonga comes to understand the affair from a kynical perspective, one that permits him to see through duplicitousness:

una chiquilla rica y caprichosa que me utilizaría como el trapo que tenía a mano para limpiarse su húmedo coño y que luego tiraría sin ninguna consideración al tarro de la basura, una chiquilla de la que yo me prendería como imbécil en una nueva vorágine de sufrimiento inútil mientras para ella la aventura conmigo no había sido más que eso, una aventura con un tipo de clase inferior gracias a la cual se había burlado de su padre y de la que se jactaría frente a sus amiguitas millonetas. (252)

In this scene, we find a critique of the cynicism of conventional sexual morality that, furthermore, is grounded in class and ethnic privilege. In this context, the job of the kynical narrator is to expose the immorality of the self-righteous.

Lastly, I would like to analyze the love triangle between Antonio, Carmen, and el Turco in *La diáspora*, since it exhibits a similar pattern of exposing sexual cynicism. Juan Carlos admits to feeling attraction towards Carmen, but throughout the novel he censors this impulse and is careful to limit his interactions with her, especially when they are alone together (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 19; 31). His response to his desire for Carmen is firm and unequivocal: “tuvo que hacer un esfuerzo para cortar de tajo lo que consideró como una ilusión peligrosa” (20). At the party at el Negro’s apartment at the end of the novel, el Turco asks him about it, and once again Juan Carlos proves to be intransigent: “Por principio no me involucro

con mujeres casadas” (140). El Turco, for his part, shows no such respect for the institution of marriage and social conventions of idealized romantic love: “Ay tú. No jodas,” he exclaims and then goes on to add: “[l]os principios me los paso por los huevos. Lo único que te digo es que, antes de que ese retardado se la levante, me la cojo yo” (140). This is precisely what ends up happening: Carmen and el Turco have sexual relations in the bathroom at the party at el Negro’s apartment. Upon seeing Juan Carlos’ response, el Turco attributes his sexual prudence to his revolutionary ethic: “Y la cara que puso Juan Carlos cuando los vio salir del baño. Ese cerote no tiene compostura: ni coge ni deja coger en paz. Ni que fuera su hermana. Como si la militancia lo hubiera podrido de por vida. Pobre pendejo” (147). While Carmen and Juan Carlos subscribe to the constraints put on sexuality by the institution of marriage, at least in theory, el Turco makes no such concessions to high-sounding ideals. To the contrary, he is more than happy to admit publicly that he is motivated by sexual desire. In the case of his friends, this desire must either be strongly repressed, as in the case of Juan Carlos, or kept in secret, as in the case of Carmen. Furthermore, as a cynic, el Turco sees through their duplicity by openly naming both Juan Carlos’ prohibited desire and Carmen’s secretive lust.

Moreover, the scene admits a reading as an allegory for the relationship of Central American intellectuals to revolution. As mentioned above, Carmen is one of the few “hesitators” in the production of Castellanos Moya: she is neither a believer nor a doubter but sits on the proverbial fence. The love triangle between Antonio, el Turco, and her encodes this intermediate position. Antonio continues to support revolution (Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* 18), while el Turco has definitively abandoned the cause. Originally allowing herself to be seduced by el Turco, Carmen immediately goes running back home to Antonio. We may interpret this vacillation as an allegory for her relationship, as an intellectual, to the revolution. Openly

disillusioned, she flirts with the idea of abandoning her faith in revolution, as el Turco already has, but, not willing to take the step, she returns to her comfort zone, to her relationship with Antonio and their identity as intellectual committed to revolutionary ideals.

4.4. Conclusion: Kynicism as the Affirmation of a Post-Testimonial Aesthetic and Political Program

One of the principal contributions of Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* is to have salvaged a long tradition of cynicism in Western culture and to have attributed a positive value to kynicism, as a form of opposition and resistance, as opposed to apathetic "modern cynicism." Moving beyond mere refusal or critique, Sloterdijk identifies an affirmative side to kynicism: in the face of the disembodied essentializations of idealist traditions, the kynic values the body just as much as the "higher" spiritual functions; in the face dogmatic and irrational thinking as an individual and social phenomenon, the kynic advocates critical thinking and skepticism; in the face of conformity and submission to social conventions, the kynic values transgression and boundless self-expression; in the face of the high humorlessness of bourgeois culture, the kynic responds with humor; and in the face of the duplicitousness of moral self-righteousness, the kynic cultivates blunt honesty and transparency.

After this enumeration, it is not difficult to see the affinities between the aesthetic program of Castellanos Moya and kynicism. There is no doubt that the author writes with a pen in one hand and the hammer of Nietzsche in the other, but there is more to his literature than just this destructive side. Beyond the injunction to negate, the author simultaneously advances a post-testimonial literary program with affirmative tenets. In the face of the referential zeal of testimonio and the fantasy of the transparency of the literary medium, Castellanos Moya

advocates for a “regreso a lo literario” (Sánchez Prado 245); in the face of the subordination of literature to political theory and praxis, Castellanos Moya asserts the relative autonomy of literature from such constraints; in the face of the epic discourse of testimonio, Castellanos Moya introduces a ludic element to narrating political violence; in the face of mournful and sacralising tone of the postdictatorial novel, Castellanos Moya responds with irreverence and profanation; furthermore, he defends the right to narrate the political violence in the region’s recent past without a discourse of redemption, without heroes, without a pedagogical ulterior motive, without pedantry, and without narrative closure, allowing violence to be violence, in all of its horror, without converting a moral lesson or a political point.

This aesthetic program exceeds the narrow confines of testimonial genres and the first-generation post-dictatorial novel and pushes contemporary Latin American literature about political violence into new and uncharted territory. In his blatant disregard for the norms and conventions of these genres, Castellanos Moya opened new possibilities not only for Central American but, more broadly, for contemporary Latin American literature as well. This is precisely the reason that Ignacio Sánchez Prado asserts that the publication of *Insensatez* “ubica tanto a la obra como al autor en el epicentro de una nueva cartografía de la narrativa latinoamericana” (239). In the preceding chapters, I have been reading the tradition of contemporary Latin American literature through the narrative production of Castellanos Moya up to and including *Insensatez*, which, together with Sánchez Prado, I consider to be a watershed novel. The narrative project of the author inaugurates an emergent discourse, a new mode of narrating political violence in the recent past of the continent. Furthermore, his work has substantial repercussions for both the figure of the Latin American public intellectual and for the relationship between Latin American literature and politics.

According to Sánchez Prado, the narrative of Castellanos Moya dramatizes “el desmoronamiento del intelectual como figura privilegiada de formación de la identidad y lo político en el contexto de las posguerras centroamericanas” (248). Although this revision of the figure of the politically committed intellectual runs throughout the production of the author, Sánchez Prado finds a particularly condensed and poignant expression of this tendency in *Insensatez* where “encontramos un intelectual epistemológicamente incapaz del acto de solidaridad requerido por el género” (241). This representation of a crisis within the literature of the author corresponds to a shift within the field of Latin American culture at large. In this sense, the insistence of the “figura del intelectual que deliberadamente evade los imperativos éticos de su condición” constitutes an intervention in larger debates concerning the social and political responsibilities of the Latin American public intellectual and the proper relationship between literature and politics in the region (Sánchez Prado 241). In particular, Castellanos Moya uses the figure of the disillusioned intellectual as part of a project to disarticulate literature and politics and vindicate the legitimacy of fiction as a mode to narrate political violence. Thus, Sánchez Prado reaches the conclusion that “Castellanos Moya concede de nuevo a la narrativa el poder de exploración experiencial despojado por la expectativa testimonialista” (249). The author confronts the ideological dominants of the Latin American Left of the moment – whether rooted in revolution or the human right discourses that followed in its wake – and decides to deliberately write literature without heeding their call, outside of the parameters of intelligibility of this cultural milieu. This aesthetic option has generated significant debate and what I believe to be a misunderstanding surrounding his work. This confusion derives from the following tendency, which Sánchez Prado adroitly points out: “Sería demasiado fácil leer esta resistencia al paradigma de la solidaridad como una postura reaccionaria o conservadora. Esto, sin embargo,

no hace nada más que juzgar a Castellanos Moya desde el preciso paradigma que su narrativa busca trascender” (245). Resisting this temptation to condemn the author, I have undertaken the challenge in the preceding chapters of determining the significance of his polemical interventions for the trajectory of contemporary Latin American literature.

In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk states that “the great offensive parades of cynical imprudence have become a rarity” (4). If this is the case, then Castellanos Moya’s great cynical literary program is indeed a rarity. Although other coetaneous authors, like Fernando Vallejo and Robert Bolaño, have exhibited similar cynical tendencies, neither of them returns so obsessively to the question of political violence as frequently or intensely as Castellanos Moya. In this dissertation, I take his narrative program as a starting point for a discourse that radiates outward both spatially and temporally within contemporary Latin American literature.

Conclusion

Over the past decade and a half there have been significant developments in the representation of political violence in Latin American literature. Fernando Reati characterizes this broad shift in the following terms: “se incluyen recursos como el humor, la parodia y la crítica burlona a las certezas de la militancia setentista” (“Culpables e inocentes” 102). Other critics have defined the phenomenon as a ludic turn (Blejmar 2), the queering of mourning (Sosa 3), demythologization (Richard 6), and profanation. As mentioned in the second chapter, Werner Mackenbach, for his part, considers the critique of counterviolence and the exposure of the “dark sides” of revolutionary militancy a defining feature of new approaches to narrating political violence (329). Taken together, this ensemble of features signals a qualitative shift in post-dictatorship narrative production, which we might refer to as the emergent post-dictatorship novel.

It is the backdrop of testimonio and the mournful post-dictatorship novel that makes this development so pronounced. Both genres privileged both the political function of the Latin American public intellectual and of the literary work (Pedregal 292). From its origins in the 1960s and 1970s testimonio was conceived as the cultural component of revolutionary struggle, imbued with the pedagogical task of revolutionizing the consciousness of the people (Zimmerman and Beverley 176-7). The injunction to “subordinate art to politics in revolutionary times” was constitutive to testimonio as a genre (Pedregal 292). The “revolutionary times,” however, came to an abrupt and bloody end as a wave of dictatorships and State terrorism, perpetrated by local elites with the support of the US, swept across large swathes of the continent. If revolutionary movements were extinguished in many areas, with the exception of small pockets of revolutionary activity in Peru and Colombia, Latin American literature and

public intellectuals conserved a political function, albeit under a new guise. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s testimonio became increasingly less concerned with revolution and progressively more concerned with memory and subalternity (Beverley xi). Testimonial genres posited themselves as the “voice of the voiceless,” understood as either the subaltern Other or the disappeared revolutionary (Beverley 19). In the 1980s and 1990s the post-dictatorship novel, for its part, was tasked with the role of confronting this defeat of revolutionary movements, mourning for this loss, and symbolically revindicating the imaginary of the vanquished (Avelar 231-2; Amar Sánchez 121). In this new post-revolutionary historical context, often characterized as the transition towards democracy, literature and cultural production was charged with the responsibility of remembering the past, in the face of State politics of amnesty, oblivion, erasure, and silence. This shift coincided with the waning of Marxism and the waxing of memory discourse as the dominant conceptual paradigm of the arts and humanities (Traverso 56-7). More concerned with the past than the future, more with the traumatic experience of limit situations of political violence than teleological conceptions of future emancipation, more with the non-repetition of past injustice than the radical transformation of economic and political institutions, post-dictatorship literature was deeply rooted in memory discourse and trauma theories. Although revolutionary militancy was idealized, it was often depoliticized, representing the vanquished as innocent victims of State terror, not as protagonists of history (Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, 198). Put in structuralist terms, Marxism was conserved more as a signifier than a signified. As revolutionary militancy became mythologized as a trope of an idealized lost past, it was reduced to an ethos, a set of oppositional values, a general worldview that valued passion and rebelliousness. Within the present of neoliberal triumphalism, as the crowning achievement of dictatorship, this “melancholic” recuperation of revolutionary militancy as an ethos of passion

served as a form of resistance to the new status quo (Gundermann 22). Expressed through both testimonial genres and the early post-dictatorship novel, the injunction to subordinate literature to politics spans a period of more than forty years, from the 1960s to the early 2000s. This overall sensibility and the overt politization of the literary work have shown clear signs of exhaustion over the past decade and a half and are rapidly being replaced by emergent aesthetics forms, characterized by qualitatively divergent modes of narrating political violence, ones that abandon de-politization, disrupt mythologization, and avoid sentimental attachment to lost ideals.

This sea change, situated within larger developments in the political and cultural contexts of Latin America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, was coextensive with the incorporation of human rights politics into State institutions and the appropriation of memory discourse by the culture industry and mass media. These factors seem to have contributed to the rise of a post-memory sensibility, not in the sense intended by Marianne Hirsch as the intergeneration transmission of trauma, but rather in the sense of what comes after the memory discourse losses currency as an ideological dominant. As Andreas Huyssen stated in 2003, “memory fatigue has set in,” and it is no surprise that Latin American cultural production should reaccommodate itself accordingly (*Present Pasts* 3).

In the preceding paragraphs I established an opposition between two modes of narrating the political violence in the recent past of Latin America. On one hand, testimonio and the post-dictatorship novel of the 1980s and 1990s offered positive, often idealized, renderings of revolutionary militancy, as part of a cultural politics that conceived literature as the cultural component of political struggle or as the site of symbolic inscription in the ethos of the vanquished. On the other hand, the past fifteen years have seen the emergence of new modes of

narrating political violence, characterized by the critique of the counterviolence of revolutionary movements; the rejection of epic and melodramatic renderings of the defeated; critical distance with respect to the sensibilities of the sixties and seventies; parodic inversion; desacralization; and the introduction of a ludic and humoristic dimension to the representation of violent historical events. There is an unequivocal difference in both form and content between the literary production of testimonio and the early, “mournful,” post-dictatorship novel, on one hand, and the novels of a second-generation of writers, on the other.

This analysis, however, does little more than juxtapose two discrete moments in contemporary Latin American literature, each of them assessed separately on their respective synchronic planes. In other words, what is missing from the analysis is the diachronic dimension, that is, the nexus between these two moments. If our objective is to explain (and not merely describe) the innovations of the emergent post-dictatorship novel, then it is necessary to comprehend how they came into being. In this investigation I argue that the narrative project of Castellanos Moya constitutes an inflexion point that enabled the exploration of new modes of narrating political violence in Latin American literature, which, in turn, have been taken up and disseminated by a new generation of writers. Wedged between these two opposing literary paradigms, the narrative program of the author was founded upon a break with revolution and a negation of the injunction to subordinate the work of art to political concerns. It is not merely a question of the work of the author spanning the period between these two tendencies in Latin American literature but rather that he makes a literary program of engaging with the decline of Marxist discourse and the rise of the memory paradigm and identity politics. By doing so, Castellanos Moya signals a third way and creates the possibility of narrating political violence without assuming either one theoretical idiom or the other. The next section analyzes, in greater

detail, the trajectory of this novel approach to narrating political violence and the tensions that it has generated within the field of contemporary Latin American literature.

Mournful versus Playful Post-Dictatorship Narrative Production

Within the diachronic development of contemporary Latin American literature, Castellanos Moya is situated in a pivotal position. His literature constitutes an inflexion point since he bequeaths a discourse to posterior generations, whose sensibilities he shares, at the same time that he is fluent in the cultural idioms of previous generations, such as Marxism, having participated firsthand in revolutionary political organizations in his youth. With one foot in the revolution and the other in neoliberal Latin America, Castellanos Moya has struggled to reconcile the codes of a revolutionary era when Marxism was the dominant interpretive framework with those of a decidedly post-Marxist epoch. As such, his narrative project serves as a nexus between two radically different historical moments and between two radically different aesthetic approaches to narrating political violence. Furthermore, his literature itself narrates the growing unintelligibility of Marxist discourse within Latin American intellectual circles and traces the subsequent ascent of a series of contenders for substitute dominant interpretive frameworks, such as memory or subalternity. By confronting these issues in his work, Castellanos Moya habilitated new modes of representing political violence, modes that broke with the conventions of the politicization of the literary work and of the idealization of revolutionary militancy that characterized both testimonio and the early post-dictatorship novel. At the same time, his innovative approach has had a considerable impact in the field of contemporary Latin American literature and has subsequently been taken up and further developed by a host of young writers, often referred to as the second-generation. In order to

analyze the convergences and divergences between the narrative production of these authors and the poetics of Castellanos Moya, it is first necessary to address a pressing terminological concern.

The period from mid to late 2000s to the present has seen the spread, on a continental level, of a new type of novel about the political violence in the recent past of Latin America. From one generation's distance from limit situations in Latin American history, writers like Juan Manuel Robles (Peru), Julian Fuks (Brazil), Álvaro Bisama (Chile), Nona Fernández (Chile), Rodrigo Hasbrun (Bolivia), Francisco Ángeles (Peru), Raquel Robles (Argentina), Ernesto Séman (Argentina), Mariana Eva Pérez (Argentina) and Félix Bruzzone (Argentina) have been developing a poetics founded upon the following principles: parodic inversion of inherited literary forms and contents; the ludic and humoristic treatment of tragic events; ridicule of the ingenuousness of revolutionary politics; non-inscription in the worldview of the vanquished; exposure of the crimes of revolutionary movements; incorporation of elements of the culture industry and "minor" genres; a problematization of the figure of the innocent victim; skepticism regarding the reasoning and motives of the defeated; and critical distance with respect to memory politics. Much of the literary criticism produced on this development has focused on the question of postmemory (Sosa 105-28; Maguire 5-19; Blejmar 72-3), that is, the intergenerational transmission of trauma between family members. There are several problems, however, with this approach. Firstly, many of the writers do not belong to families who were touched by political violence firsthand, as is the case with Félix Bruzzone or Mariana Eva Pérez, children of disappeared parents. In other words, the phenomenon cannot be reduced to a fixed set of familial relationships and, therefore, exceeds this model. Moreover, there is an incongruency in this approach between the methodology of investigation and the object of study. In other words,

postmemory studies, from Marianne Hirsch's foundational text, *The Generation of Postmemory*, onwards, have been firmly anchored in trauma theory, which focuses on the irreparable harm done to victims. As Cecelia Sosa has pointed out, a new generation of writers who challenge inherited interpretations of political violence in the recent past tend to reject the figure of the innocent victim and avoid victimization, a process that she refers to as queering mourning (3). The choice of a theoretical framework that centers on trauma hardly seems like a suitable choice to explain an object of study that rejects trauma theory and ridicules its political equivalent: memory activism. Lastly, postmemory theories participate in the turn towards the personal, the private sphere, the family, and affect, which is inadequate for exploring questions of the accountability of revolutionaries for illegitimate uses of violence or the proper manners in which to honor the defeated in the public sphere, both of which are central concerns for these authors.

In fact, trauma theories are better suited for the early post-dictatorship novel, which enact mourning as a strategy for coping with defeat (Avelar 3) or melancholia as the basis of a cultural politics of resistance in the context of triumphant neoliberalism (Gundermann 21-2). In early transitional Latin America societies, literature was seen as a privileged site for confronting the experience of limit situations due to its ability to represent the unrepresentable, to narrate the unnarratable. The canonical tests of trauma theory – such as Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Felman & Laub's *Testimony* (1992), Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* (2001), and Dominick LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust* (1994) – proved highly successful in disseminating this concept of literature. And, due to the degree of political violence in its recent past, Latin America was particularly receptive to trauma theories and became a hotbed for literature that purported to address traumatic experiences through the literary text. Both testimonio and the “mournful” first-generation post-dictatorial novel of the early transitional

period represent precisely such a mobilization of the literary text. This tenor of cultural production, for its part, was closely related to a specific sociohistorical context: the wave of triumphal neoliberalist democracies that followed in the wake of defeat attempts at revolution. These “weak” democracies proved hostile to grassroots social movements that advocated for “memory, truth, and justice” at the same time that they actively pursued amnesty for human rights violators, impunity for perpetrators of crimes against humanity, and oblivion concerning the role of the State in atrocity. By the early 2000s, however, the conditions in many areas of the continent started to change. From countries of the Southern Cone like Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile to Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America, passing through Peru and Bolivia in the Andes region, human rights measures were making inroads into State institutions. In some places, like Argentina and Guatemala, human rights achieved the status of what Rachel Hatcher call a “common discursive framework” (4-5). States began to implement a combination of some of the following measures: the creation of government offices to investigate human rights violations; the creation of programs dedicated to the restitution of victims of State terror; the implementation of public-school curricula designed to educated citizens about the violations of human rights; a proliferation of monuments to victims; and the inauguration of museums dedicated to limit situations in the region’s recent past. In short, there seems to have been a growing consensus concerning a shift from a paradigm of impunity and silence towards a restitution and a recognition of the role of the State in human rights violations. These changes coincided with a political shift towards governments that sought to break with the neoliberal consensus and attenuate its aggressive program of privatization, deregulation, and austerity measures for social programs. To one degree or another, the governments of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (1999-2014), Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (2003-2007 and 2007-2015, respectively)

Tabaré Vazqu ez in Uruguay (2005-2010), Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010), Evo Morales (2006-2019), Rafael Correa (2007-2017),  lvvaro Colom in Guatemala (2008-2012), and Mauricio Funes in El Salvador (2009-2014) all represent this general shift. This receptivity to human rights politics was accompanied by the increasing popularity of memory discourse in the media and culture industry (Huysen 15). A host of movies and television programs, both fiction and documentary, were consecrated to the experience of the victims of political violence. These renderings tended towards epic and melodramatic registers that employed a set of tropes to produce responses of commiseration, admiration, identification, anger, and self-righteousness in consumers (Garibotto 22-3). Within the field of literary production, this was the moment of the coronation and hegemonization of testimonial genres and the post-dictatorship novel. Yet, at the same time, it was also the moment when an emerging group of writers began to take distance from the aesthetics and politics of these literary forms. Writing after the appropriation of human rights politics by the State and the assimilation of memory discourse into mass media, writing after the memory boom had passed and memory fatigue was effectively settling in, these writers expressed a properly *post-memory boom* sensibility.

For these reasons, it is important to distinguish between two distinct periods of post-dictatorship narrative production: 1) from the defeat of revolutionary movements to the early to mid-2000s, and 2) from the mid-2000s to the present. Whereas the relationship between testimonio and post-dictatorial fiction can be thought of in terms of continuity, since both literary forms share important features, such as the condemnation of State violence and praise of counterviolence, the relationship between early first-generation post-dictatorial narrative and the production of recent second-generation authors is based on opposition and rupture. Many of the defining features of early post-dictatorial narrative have been challenged or abandoned in recent

years, such as the idealization of a lost past, the sacralization of the vanquished, the mythologization of revolutionary militancy, the solemnity of the tone, and the mournfulness of the register. These sensibilities appear to be on the wane, along with the trauma theories that inform them. In recent years, the work of many authors throughout the continent displays a clear will to transgress the norms established by the first generation of post-dictatorial narrative and thus differentiate themselves both politically and aesthetically. Situated after the passing of the political and cultural moment of the memory boom, these authors often express reticence towards memory politics and an abandonment of the injunction to praise forms of revolutionary militancy, which sounds increasingly anachronic, obsolete, or even unintelligible. These substantial changes warrant distinguishing between the narrative production that followed in the wake of revolutionary movements, that is, the first-generation post-dictatorial novel, and emergent narrative which addresses the same legacy of political violence in a dramatically different manner. If the narrative production of the early post-dictatorship epoch can be characterized as “mournful” (Avelar 3) or “melancholic” (Gundermann 22), recent production can be described as “playful” (Blejmar 15).

It is important to stress that this is more than a question of chronology since each respective period represents a qualitatively different mode of narrating political violence. In other words, the two general periods are not mutually exclusive but, to the contrary, allow for a degree of interpenetration. Different modes for narrating political violence coexist, then, within the same general field of Latin American cultural production, within which they compete for a hegemonic position. There is nothing, however, that prevents earlier modes of narrating political violence to subsist once they been displaced by an alternate mode. In fact, this is often the case. Later novels about the experience of dictatorship in the Southern Cone, for example, such as

Alejandro Zambra's *Formas de volver a casa* (2011) and Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* (2011), exhibit many features of the residual mournful post-dictatorship novel. Works like Laura Alcoba's solemn and mournful *Casa de los conejos* (2007), which repeat the tropes of residual modes of representing violence, coexist alongside iconoclastic and highly transgressive works like Félix Bruzzone's *Los topos*, which was published the same year. As residual modes of narrating political violence become increasingly obsolete, emergent modes are gradually displacing them and moving towards a dominant position. At present, emergent modes are still in the process of achieving dominance, that is, still in the process of disputing the hegemony of residual modes.

In *Marxism and Literature* (1976) Raymond Williams elaborates a theoretical framework for analyzing such cultural processes. In what amounts to a critique of structuralist methodology, Williams argues that to use synchronic models to infer the existence of an abstract system of relationships between constitutive elements does not do justice to the complexity of dynamic interactive processes of cultural production. The object of historical analysis is the "dynamic relations of any actual process," which are reduced to abstractions when "cultural process is seized as a cultural system" (Williams 121). "It is this seizure that has especially to be resisted" if we aspire to apprehend cultural production as a process (125). To address the object of study of a historical analysis of cultural production more adequately, then, Williams proposes to frame the cultural processes in terms of dominant, emergent, and residual cultural formations:

we have also to speak, and indeed with further differentiations of each, of the 'residual' and the 'emergent,' which in any real process, and at any moment in the process, are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characteristics of the 'dominant.' (120-1)

Any dominant cultural form implies an underlying tension between residual and emergent formations. “The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process,” whereas the emergent refers “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships” (122-3). There are many potential outcomes of this dynamic interaction: an emergent form may simply lose currency, in which case the residual form maintains its dominance; an emergent form may arise suddenly, displace a residual form, and thus achieve dominance; or it may develop more gradually and exist side by side with residual forms, disputing their cultural currency.

Over the past decade and a half, emergent modes of narrating political violence have been increasingly displacing residual modes and disputing their hegemony within the general field of post-dictatorial fiction. Residual modes, however, continue to hold considerable sway, due to the continuing relevance of human rights discourse in Latin American societies, as well as the fact that literary traditions and institutions are just as resistant to change to any others. The literary project of Castellanos Moya has been instrumental in challenging residual modes of narrating political violence and disseminating emergent ones. As such, his literature constitutes an important antecedent for emergent Latin American post-dictatorial narratives. For as much affinity as there may be between his work and the production of a new generation of writers, it is important to signal the divergences between his aesthetics and theirs, which is precisely the objective of the next section.

The Polysemy of Postmemory

While the categories of emergent and residual post-dictatorship narrative may indeed be useful for characterizing the tensions between competing modes of narrating a historical past of

political violence, the terms, in themselves, reveal nothing about the respective features of each mode. For this, we turn our attention to an analysis of some of the authors and works that best represent emergent second-generation post-dictatorship narrative. Once we have established this foundation, we can then move on to analysis the convergences and divergences between second-generation authors and the narrative project of Castellanos Moya.

Many contemporary authors who address legacies of political violence were born within the same ten-year period: Nona Fernández (1971), Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973), Álvaro Bisama (1975), Alejandro Zambra (1975), Patricio Pron (1975), Félix Bruzzone (1976), Mariana Eva Pérez (1977), Francisco Ángeles (1977), Juan Manuel Robles (1978), Rodrigo Hasbrún (1981), and Julian Fuks (1981). What distinguishes this generation from previous ones is that they did not participate in revolutionary movements firsthand. Their relationship to the revolutionary past is mediated through family members, their immediate communities, and inherited accounts. Taken together, this set of figurations of the historical past constitutes what is often referred to as “collective memory,” understood as a field of contentions in which competing interpretations concerning the meaning of a shared past struggle for dominance in the public sphere (Jelin 11).²⁵ In post-revolutionary Latin America, literature became a privileged site for promoting favorable and often idealized figurations of revolutionary militancy in the face of State policies of amnesty, impunity, and silence, according to Avelar (8), Gundermann (40), and Amar Sánchez (77). In other words, praise for revolutionary militancy was the ideological dominant within Latin

²⁵ According to Maurice Halbwachs, one of the first major theorists of collective memory, our individual understandings of a historical past are heavily mediated by “social frameworks” of interpretation, which are perpetuated and reinforced by social institutions, such as family, religion, social class, national community, or ethnic group (Ricoeur 120-1). Social frameworks for interpreting the past, for their part, are dependent upon the needs and interests of the group in the present.

American literature during the 1980s and 1990s, which is to say at the time that these writers were growing up. And, by the time that they came of age as writers, it was clear that many of them no longer shared the same sensibilities as the preceding generation. While residual post-dictatorship narrative continues to praise the defeated and defend their decisions, emergent post-dictatorship narrative differentiates itself by no longer abiding by this norm. This non-adherence to previously established political and cultural norms is not only a way to differentiate themselves as writers within the tradition of Latin American literature but also a way to affirm their experience on the other side of a generational divide, that is, on the side of those who were born too late to have participated in revolutionary politics firsthand.

The proverbial boots of the revolutionary generation proved difficult to fill. Mythologized in counterhegemonic culture and politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the towering figure of the selfless revolutionaries who gave their lives for a better world cast a large shadow over the following generation. The identity of the new generation was determined by a logic of “hijos y hijas de” or by early childhood contact with revolutionary militancy. In other words, they were defined not by their own achievements and experiences but through their relationship to an early generation. Although they could choose the option of affiliating themselves with the previous generation, as was common in Left culture throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many young artists and intellectuals began to distance themselves from this pattern of symbolic inscription as their generation came of age and became active in the public sphere in the early 2000s. In this sense, the postulation of a generational divide which prompts the necessity to affirm one’s own experience, based on a radically different socio-historical context, seems warranted. This dynamic of generational tension is dramatized in the work of many up-and-coming writers. Laurence Debray, the daughter of Régis Debray and Elizabeth Burgos,

expresses this sentiment candidly when she states in *Hija de revolucionarios* (2017) that “mostrarse a la altura de los progenitores era una orden implícita” (181). In the face of this injunction, she reacts like many of the intellectuals of her generation: “[r]enuncié definitivamente estar a la altura” (267). In a passage that follows, she narrates this rupture, through which she affirms herself by differentiating herself from the overall values and sensibilities of her parents’ generation. Ostentatiously flouting her decision to work in a bank, she positions herself on the other side of a generational divide, implicitly framing revolution as a thing of the past:

A esa edad mis padres hacían la revolución. A mí me gustaba la implacabilidad de las cifras, el anonimato de una sala de mercado, la dureza de las relaciones profesionales. ... Tomar el mundo tal como es y sacar provecho de él. Todo era explícito, franco, directo: sin rodeos, sin disquisiciones académicas en tres partes, sin escrúpulos. Por supuesto, eso resulta menos glorioso que salvar a los pueblos de la injusticia y la desigualdad. (269)

This passage stages a confrontation between revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations, with their respective values and sensibilities. Although relatively free of value judgements, aside from the parodic dimension of subjectivisms like “glorioso” and “salvar,” the force of critique moves to the foreground in the next sentence: “Me parecía patético el desdén de la izquierda biempensante hacia el dinero e inquietante su desprecio por los desafíos económicos” (269). Here, Debray shifts to an offensive position in an attempt to delegitimize the discourse of her parents’ generation and hegemonize the sensibilities of her own.

Similar gestures can be found in other authors. In *Diario de una princesa montonera: 110% verdad* (2012), for example, Mariana Eva Pérez summarizes her history as a human rights activist in the 1990s, her break with memory politics, and her subsequent decision to become a

writer. In the following passage in which she narrates her experiences from the third person point of view of the autofictional character 'la princesa montonera,' she describes the process of generational affiliation that informed her human right activism of the 1990s:

En la niñez, reverencié de palabra a sus nobles padres ausentes, mientras íntimamente y con culpa temía su regreso. En la adolescencia, lloré su suerte desdichada y odié a los milicos. A los veinte, se abocó a la búsqueda de compañeros de militancia, de cautiverio, amigos, exnovios. ... Fue a tantos homenajes a los compañeros detenidos desaparecidos y asesinados que no puede contarlos. Gritó Presente cada vez que los oradores se lo requirieron y escuchó con asombro y desagrado el primer Ahora y siempre, hoy otro clásico. En momentos de arrebato kirchnerista temprano, hizo la V de la victoria. Conoció a Kirchner y lo contó que había llorado con su discurso de asunción, cuando reivindicó a los desaparecidos y los puso a refundar la patria, a la altura de los próceres y los inmigrantes. Espero no arrepentirme, lo amenazó casi, porque ella siempre fue chúcaro ante el poder. Te prometo que no te vas a arrepentir, le contestó Kirchner. Tiene una foto que registra ese preciso instante, donde se miran con ojos de enamorados. Oh, instante sagrado en la vida de la princesa de la izquierda peronista. Clímax de fe en la política, orgasmo de credulidad. Todas cosas de los veintipico. (Pérez 28-31)

Diario de una princesa montonera is structured according to a confrontation between a "before" of human rights militancy and an "after" of the repudiation of this stage in the life of the autofictional protagonist. The above passage, narrated in preterit, highlights the landmarks of the first stage and, as such, constitutes an origin story of the character of the *princesa montonera*. The present of enunciation, for its part, corresponds to the afterward, that is, to the stage of the

repudiation of the first stage and the subsequent abandonment of human rights militancy. Within the text the past corresponds to the process of the construction of the *princess montonera*, while the present occupies itself with the deconstruction of this myth. As the title suggests, insofar as it constitutes a parodic reference to herself as a princess within the “Disneyland des Droits de l’Homme” of Argentina during the Kirchner era, the text constitutes a self-critique and, by extension, a critique of the shortcomings of memory politics (160). This critical edge is reinforced by the abundant usage of pejorative neologisms to designate human rights activism. Throughout the text, for example, Pérez frequently refers to herself and her former colleagues repeatedly as *militontos* and to their activities as *militontismo*, both of which derive from the union of the Spanish words for foolishness (*tonterías*) and political activism (*militancia*).

Between the “before” and “after” of the text, there is a third moment which, although largely suppressed, can be inferred from the other two. The nexus between the “faith in politics” of the first stage and the disillusionment of the second is the moment of deconversion. Like *La diáspora, Diario de una princesa montonera* is the story of loss of faith in a political cause. The difference is that in the novel of Castellanos Moya the cause in question is revolution, whereas in the novel of Pérez it is the human rights movement which displaced Marxism as the dominant interpretive paradigm of Left intellectuals in the 1980s (Traverso 55-6). Since the experience of deconversion is not itself narrated, we are left to infer it from textual implicatures. The most efficient way to proceed, then, is to deduce information about the moment of deconversion from the critiques of memory politics, which can be grouped into three general categories: the ingenuousness of memory activism/activists, the commercialization of memory, and its misappropriation by the State.

From the perspective of the present of enunciation of the text, at which point Pérez and her auto-fictional figuration were thirty-three years old, the human rights activism of her adolescence and twenties is dismissed as ingenuousness, just so much “militontismo” (Pérez 110). In other words, it is a present tense of lost innocence and profound skepticism, not without a substantial dose of resentment. In a letter to a friend, written in the present, the princess frames her days of activism as foolishness: “ay, Vivi, me hiciste acordar a la militonta que fui” (32). If activism is reduced to the formula, “todas cosas de veintipico,” then remaining a *princesa montonera* in your thirties is equivalent to refusing to grow up:

Crecieron

las princesas.

Son mayores...

Sobrevivieron.

Ya se tiñen el pelo y se ponen cremas.

Y siguen siendo princesitas huérfanas

de la revolución y la derrota

en el exilio eterno de la infancia. (20)

If remaining a human rights princess is equated to being condemned to an eternal childhood, then the renunciation of this title constitutes a path towards maturity.

The commercialization of memory is the second general category of critique. The counterhegemonic dimension of memory politics and its status as counterculture are destabilized by the self-interested appropriation of memory discourse by the culture industry and mass media. Pérez is heavy-handed in her critique of the treatment of memory in mass media. One of her strategies is to commodify her experience as the child of disappeared parents and offer it as

merchandise to sell to consumers in a burgeoning memory market. In the following passage, for example, Pérez mimics the languages of a television or radio commercial and the carnivalesque aesthetics of the world of spectacle:

Mandá TEMITA al 2020 y participa del fabuloso sorteo “UNA SEMANA CON LA PRINCESA MONTONERA”

Ganá y acompañaala durante siete días en el programa que cambió el verano: ¡El Show del Temita! El reality de todos y todas. Humor, compromiso, sensualidad de la mano de nuestra anfitriona, que no se priva de nada a la hora de luchar por la Memoria, la Verdad y la Justicia. Cada día un acontecimiento único e irrepetible relacionado con El Temita: audiencias orales, homenajes, muestras de sangre, proyectos de ley, atención a familiares de la tercera edad y militontismo en general.

Una vida 100% atravesada por el terrorismo del Estado.

¡Viva vos también esta vuelta a 1998!

Mandá TEMITA al 2020 y cumplí tu fantasía

Maintenant, en français!

(39)

Here, the “minor issue” of the disappearance of her parents becomes the main attraction of a show which is being raffled, that is, sold to consumers. The show, of course, satirizes the banalization and commercialization of memory in mass media. The satirical thrust is heightened by the reference to the disappearance of her parents as “el temita” since it mimics the frivolousness of the media’s treatment of such issues and suggests that such sensationalist misappropriations cheapen the discourse of human rights.

In a similar scene, the *princesa montonera* offers to be the posterchild of a tissue paper advertisement whose selling point is the use of the product to dry the tears of those who mourn the disappeared:

La princesa montonera extiende los brazos y de su pecho vuelan palomas blancas de suave y tibio papel tissue, que van a enjugar las lágrimas del pueblo montonero que hace memoria en una callecita de Palermo, bajo los plátanos con sus bolitas alergenas. Dale, joven publicitario a cargo de la cuenta de Carilina [sic], sé proactivo y escribime. (90)

As with the “El Show del Temita,” this passage constitutes a satire of the manipulation of human rights related themes in the culture industry. Through her auto-fictional diary, Pérez repeatedly signals an excess of memory in the media, depicting the highly solicited princess as struggling to keep her head above water in the high tide of memory. In this context of the omnipresence of memory, the princess finds herself disoriented “en el medio de este torbellino memorioso” (73).

The third general category of the abuses of memory is the (mis)appropriation of human rights politics by the State. While Pérez depicts herself as a princess in the “Disneyland of human rights,” the role of prince is reserved for Néstor Kirchner. In fact, her status as princess is directly related to her utility to the Kirchner administration and the cultural capital allotted to her as the daughter of disappeared parents. Like so much of the diary, the title is parodic since the implementation of memory politics by the State was far from a fairy tale, despite importance for the human rights movement of such legitimization. The *Diario de una princesa montonera* goes on to chronicle the love-hate relationship of the princess with the Kirchner administration as she struggles to come to terms with her identity as an activist, artist, and public intellectual. The enthusiasm and naivety of her involvement with activism in the 1990s stands in sharp contrast to the disillusionment and skepticism she expresses in the present towards both the Kirchner

administration and the response of human rights groups to the institutionalization of memory politics.

One consequence of the newly achieved hegemony of memory discourse was that the State began to disrupt and displace the activity of grassroots social movements and human rights advocacy groups, many of which were comprised of family members of victims of State violence, like Pérez herself. The annual march, on the 24th of March, to mark the anniversary of the military coup became a barometer of the level of appropriation of acts of remembrance (Bell 11-12). What was once a counterhegemonic activist tradition was rapidly overtaken by State organisms and official political parties. In her diary, the *princesa montonera* documents how there was a proliferation of such public acts that were appropriated by the State, like the following homage to the disappeared, in which Eduardo Luis Duhalde, the minister of the newly created Ministry of Human Rights, made a high-profile appearance:

Hay un escenario grande y muchas sillas en la platea, todas ocupadas. Llega Eduardo Luis Duhalde y mira para todos lados buscando las cámaras.

A la derecha del escenario, a un costado, fuera del escenario principal, estoy yo, con un militante de los 70, probablemente amigo de José, que me cuenta que ya no pueden organizar homenajes a los desaparecidos: pedimos permiso para hacer un homenaje, viene el gobierno de la ciudad y hace el homenaje, se queja. Ya les pasó varias veces. El compañero está frustrado porque les roben iniciativa, pero insiste con el mismo procedimiento, porque, según entiendo, no pueden hacer actos sin autorización oficial. Todo esto me comenta, mientras vemos circular a Eduardo Luis Duhalde a muchos otros funcionarios de traje, desde el costado. Somos espectadores de lo que debió ser nuestro propio acto. (Pérez 139-40)

The configuration of the space within this scene is revealing. The victims of State violence during the dictatorship and human rights activists are literally sidelined, relegated to the background, while State officials take center stage. The people who were once protagonists of a movement of social justice have been converted into spectators, unable to act without asking permission from the government.

This critique of the misfires and lack of sincerity of the appropriation of a human rights agenda by the State reaches its high point with the episode of the “kidnapped goals.” At the time of the World Cup in 2010, the Fernández de Kirchner administration was engaged in a political standoff with the major media conglomerates. Overturning the *Ley de medios*, which had been established during the dictatorship and consolidated the power of the Argentine media, was one of the political objectives of *kirchnerismo* at the time. As part of an effort to break up the media monopolies and offer an alternative to paid coverage of the World Cup games, the Kirchner administration launched “Fútbol para todos,” a state-sponsored initiative to provide free coverage of soccer games on public television. In promoting the service, Fernández made an analogy between paying to watch the World Cup games and kidnappings that took place during the dictatorship by saying the media companies were attempting to “secuestrar goles” or kidnap goals. Blejmar summarizes this misappropriation of memory discourse in the following manner: “Cristina Fernández, President of Argentina between 2007 and 2015 and Nestor’s wife, made an unfortunate comparison between the need to pay to view football and the abductions that took place during the dictatorship, using the phrase ‘disappeared goals,’ as if they have been kidnapped by commercial television” (80). In the diary, the *princesa montonera* confesses that “[l]os goles secuestrados marcaron el lowest point de mi relación amorosa con los Kirchner” (Pérez 190). When Geoffrey Maguire, in *The Politics of Postmemory*, characterizes the politics

of the blog as “a direct aversion towards the politicization of mourning in post-dictatorship Argentine society,” he is referring precisely to this type of instrumentalization of memory discourse within partisan politics (109). It is important to note that, although she often felt “usada” by the administration, she was deeply affected by Nestor Kirchner’s death and recognized the importance of the State’s adoption of a human rights platform, however flawed its implementation turned out to be (Pérez 190).

This political mishap demonstrates both the degree to which memory discourses have fused with popular culture in the national imaginary and the way in which memory politics have been used instrumentally by the State as part of a partisan political program. The scope of Pérez’s critique exceeds the merely personal and extends to the utilization of memory politics and discourse by the media and the State.

These types of criticism are by no means limited to Mariana Eva Pérez. Félix Bruzzone, in his fiction, articulates many such criticism of the misappropriation of memory by the State and mass media. In *Campo de Mayo* (2019) Bruzzone mercilessly satirizes this use of memory by the culture industry as spectacle and as a commodity within a specialized memory market. Tierra, for example, one of the characters of novel who sells black market merchandise on trains, comes up with a business plan to sell jars with little pieces of the walls of the ESMA to tourists interested in the memory sites of Buenos Aires:

Tierra, entonces, se dice: ahora esto de los derechos humanos va a ser un tema importante, puedo plegarme al negocio y ponerme a vender pedacitos de la ESMA a los turistas. Ir a Plaza de Mayo y vendérselos a los que van a ver la ronda de las madres, por ejemplo. Un pedacito de la ESMA, el más famoso campo de concentración de la

dictadura, como recuerdo de haber visitado la Argentina, país de los desaparecidos.

(Bruzzone, *Campo de Mayo* 96)

Since the Campo de Mayo is closer to his apartment, Tierra ultimately decides to use its dirt for his money-making scheme. The final product is a test tube with a label that reads “Tierra de Campo de Mayo,” followed by the slogan used by the Abuelos, Madres, HIJOS and other human rights advocacy groups, “30,000 detenidos desaparecidos, presentes ahora y siempre” (98). This scene can be read as an analogy of the process of the commodification of memory discourse and its lucrative incorporation into the culture industry. It also demonstrates the degree to which the explicitly political demands of human rights organizations can be successfully appropriated, recontextualized and utilized for commercial purposes.

Private initiatives, like those of Tierra, would not be possible without the existence of what Andreas Huyssen describes as a global cultural of memory: “Certainly, the voraciousness of the media and their appetite for recycling seems to be the sine non qua of local memory discourses crossing borders, entering into a network of cross-national comparisons, and creating what one might call a global culture of memory” (*Present Pasts* 95). The appropriation of memory by the media, then, goes hand in hand with the development of an infrastructure that encompasses international tourism, publishing houses, television, and film production companies specifically designed to produce memory commodities, such as literature, film, and souvenirs to be sold in a specialized market. An opportunist like Tierra, then, is merely a symptom larger shift in culture, politics, and economy.

Bruzzone broadens his critique to include some of these aspects when, in *Campo de Mayo*, he ridicules The Memory Park in Buenos Aires. The park, conceived as a “monument to the victims of State terror,” like the ESMA, has become a major tourist destination for national

and international visitors. Bruzzone exposes how this project, an initiative of the State, displaced the historic Gay Village of Buenos Aires:

y se autorizó el desalojo de la llamada ‘Aldea Gay,’ ubicada en los fondos de la Ciudad Universitaria, con el fin de hacer un parque natural y armar las defensas para el río que necesitaban construirse, no solo para el parque natural, sino también, y sobre todo, para el Parque de la Memoria, homenaje a los desaparecidos. (Bruzzone, *Campo de Mayo* 53)

The monument to past victims has created new ones, further marginalizing vulnerable communities in the present. The indifference of the State to the inhabitants of Gay Village undermines the sincerity of its commitment to past victims. Without necessarily denying the good that can undoubtedly come from museums like the ESMA and The Memory Park, Bruzzone raises the question of the potential harm that such instrumental uses of memory can cause. In this sense, the scene can be read as an analogy for abuses of memory.

In *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* (2015), Juan Manuel Robles makes a slightly different use of the culture industry. Throughout the novel he homologizes his father’s activity in the MRTA, or Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, and the activities of other revolutionary organizations throughout Latin America with the heroes of comic books and cartoons. We do not need to go further than the cover of the Seix Barral edition of the novel to find an example of how this technique functions. The cover contains the image of a Superman figurine with an insignia of the hammer and sickle on the chest of his superhero uniform. In his right hand he is assertively holding a flagpole, as if staking a claim to the territory he is standing upon. His brow is furrowed, his gaze is locked directly ahead, and his left hand is clinched, as is his prominent jaw, which causes the muscles in his neck to stand out. His red cape is waving in the wind, as is the flag, which is the red flag of the Soviet Union with the hammer and sickle

imprinted in yellow. This image typifies Robles' characterization of Latin American revolutionary militants. Guerrilla movements, for example, figure variously as the protagonists of G.I. Joe, He-Man, the Transformers, and the eighties B-class television program *V*. While this is clearly an analogy for the axiological oversimplification, self-romanticization, epic self-rendering, and adventurism of Latin American revolutionary militancy, it can also be read as a critique of the appropriation of the signs of revolution by the culture industry. Though possible, it is not necessary to infer the critique of the commercialization of memory from the image of the cover, since it is explicit within the body of the text, as exemplified by the following scene in which the narrator looks on eBay for the "soviet pioneer" uniform that he used to wear at the School of Young Pioneers at the Cuban Embassy in La Paz:

No había querido ponerme cualquier disfraz. Si decidía celebrar Halloween, iba a hacerlo con estilo. Por eso estuve navegando en Internet desde semanas antes. Al principio, nada me convencía. No quería ser un superhéroe de Marvel. Tampoco travestirme o gastar una fortuna. En plena búsqueda, se me ocurrió ingresar mi edad en eBay, como para que me hicieran una. Sugerencia. Funcionó. Un par de clics y allí estaba: la imagen que andaba buscando sin saberlo. En este lugar, todo está catalogado y lleva un precio, hasta la memoria de una generación. Si quieres recordar, paga. (Robles 137)

Among the few possessions that the protagonist brought with him from Lima to New York figures the blue bandanna that formed a part of his uniform for the School of Young Pioneers. One day he has it on the tabletop of the restaurant where he is sitting when he is approached by a disapproving stranger who, recognizing the blue bandanna, offers the following commentary: "En este mundo esnob cualquiera puede ponerse un trapo comunista. Es hasta cool. De hecho, ¿sabías que la pañoleta de la CCCP se vende en Amazon? *Soviet tie*. Cuarenta y tres dólares.

¿Alguien paga eso, Dios mío?” (143-4). Divorced from their original context, these signifiers of revolution, or perhaps simply non-conformism, become high-priced commodities within a market of Cold War memorabilia.

This decontextualization is reinforced by the recollections of the narrator of his childhood experiences at the School of Young Pioneers. In these passages, the perspective of the child is used to defamiliarize the signs of revolution, such as an iconic photo of the cadaver of Che, whose meaning is transparent to the adult characters but opaque to the children:

Misael fue el primero que me habló sobre el cuerpo del Che. Fue después de ver juntos una revista boliviana en la que aparecía su última foto. La imagen me dejó pensando. El Che estaba sin camisa y su expresión era rara: la manera de sonreír, como si nada le hubiera importado mucho en el instante en que lo retrataban; por su mirada y por la luz en el rostro podría pensarse que estaba viendo la televisión, tirado en la cama al final de un día de mucho trabajo. ¿Tenía el Che televisión? (53)

This scene of an originary misunderstanding of the signs of revolution is central to the poetics of the novel, so much so that an entire section of the novel, titled “Che Mirando Television,” is dedicated to it.

Another manner of destabilizing shared assumptions about revolution is through the metaliterary dimension of the novel, that is, through the constant questioning of the capacity of the literary text to apprehend historical realities. *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* is the story of Iván Morrante, a young man living in New York who has left behind his life as a computer programmer in Peru to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. A photograph pinned on the wall of his apartment in Harlem triggers a series of reflections about his childhood in La Paz, Bolivia, where he attended school at the Cuban Embassy. On a trip to Lima to visit his family, he leaves

behind the manuscript of a text he is writing about his childhood. His sister, the only one of his four siblings who attended the school at the Cuban Embassy with him in La Paz, finds the manuscript and reads it. This provokes a series of arguments between Iván and his sister, Rebeca, over what really occurred in La Paz. Rebeca, who has a photographic memory, accuses him of “not remembering well” and distorting what really happened (Robles 18). This conflict continues throughout the novel in many conversations and interactions between the two siblings. Iván describes his relationship with his sister in the following manner: “A mí me gustaba convertir pequeños objetos en nostalgia, hacerles una historia. Y entonces aparecía Rebeca para negar la autenticidad de las cosas, para informarme de su origen verdadero” (18). In *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría*, then, there is an opposition between two modes of remembering the past. Rebeca’s modes of recording, “tan mecánico y riguroso,” resembles the approach of history as a scientific discipline: “Ella sí recordaba bien, ella podía archivar, catalogar, relatar” (19). Iván, however, is more than happy to accept the subjective dimension implied in memories and the literary dimension involved in narrating them. He argues that “memoria no nos dice la verdad exacta de nada” and that the method of Rebeca “arruina toda la magia” (18; 21). This insistence on the literary dimension of any attempt to narrate the past resembles the attitude of the anonymous narrator of *Insensatez* to the testimonies that he edits. The opposition between siblings, which codifies a methodological rivalry between history and memory in their respective claims to representing the historical past, is not the only way that *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* addresses the issue of the epistemological value of memory.

While residing in New York, Iván Murrante is contacted by two people, Nura and Saldaña, who are interested in his childhood memories. Nuria Ramón is a psychiatrist who believes that there are episodes from Iván’s childhood that he has suppressed and are not

available to his conscious mind. In their meetings, Iván narrates his memories to her, although it is not clear whether he is giving testimony or being treated for trauma suffered as a child (Robles 126). Saldaña, for his part, is an operative of the Cuban government who has contacted Iván to collaborate, with his testimony, in a project to found a Memory Museum in La Habana. Both Nuria and Saldaña are convinced that Iván encountered the remains of Che Guevara at the Embassy School in La Paz, despite the fact that he has no recollection of ever having done so. Through the relationship between Iván, Nuria and Saldaña, *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* explores several of the central themes of memory studies, such as the effects of trauma, the epistemological status of testimony, and the appropriation of the memories of victims. In the face of some many accounts of his past, like those of Rebeca, Nuria and Saldaña, which contradict his own memories, Iván decides to employ his talent as a writer to reconstruct, in literature, an account of his years in Bolivia. Elements of the culture industry, like comic books, superheroes, enigmatic eighties television programs merge with iconic images of the Latin American Left to create the pastiche of the images and ideologies of the narrator's childhood. Throughout Ivan's extensive musings about his family's past, the figure of Ivan's father becomes a recurring theme. What Iván could not see or understand as a child gradually becomes clear to him: in addition to his work as a journalist for the party, his father was active in armed movements. Looking into the matter, Iván discovers that his father was indeed a member of the MRTA o Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru, but this discovery is further complicated by what he believes to be clues that his father may have been working as a double agent for the CIA. As is the case with the discrepancies between the memories of Iván and those Rebeca or with Nuria and Saldaña's hypothesis of the remains of Che Guevara, it is impossible to establish a definitive account of family past.

In the end, all efforts to produce a secure knowledge of the historical past end in frustration, and the attempts to construct a coherent narrative of the family history, which is intimately entwined with that of Latin America, remain unresolved. What is left are tentative approximations to an uncertain past that raise more questions than they answer. *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* narrativizes the many ways in which the past recedes at our approach and remains just out of our reach. In its place, the novel of Robles offers us the uses and abuses of memory, that is, the way that the past is appropriated by different actors in different contexts with different interests in mind. Furthermore, the confrontation between two modes of apprehending the past can be read as an analogy of the differences between history and memory or, in literature, between testimonio and fiction.

The problematization of the epistemological pretensions of the literary text is a familiar issue to us at this point in the investigation. In fact, Chapter 3 addressed Castellanos Moya's assault on the epistemological claims of literature in *Insensatez*. As it turns out, the relationship between Ivan Morante and Rebeca in *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* bears a strong resemblance to the opposition between the human rights community in Guatemala and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*, between the Remhi report and the convoluted conjectures of the protagonist. The narrator of Castellanos Moya's novel refuses to acknowledge the truth claims of testimonios and insists on the literary stature of accounts of atrocity. Furthermore, the narrator is consistently unable to construct reliable version of past events, as evidenced by the scenes of the five gunshots and the attack on the retreat house. This same strategy constitutes a cornerstone of the aesthetics of Félix Bruzzone in *Los topos* (2008) and *Campo de Mayo* (2019). The detective-like narrators of these novels wear themselves out, both physically and mentally, as they criss-cross from one side of the city to another, from one part of the country to another, in search of

answers about what happened to their loved ones. Yet, invariably, they come up empty-handed. Like Ivan of *Nuevos juguetes* and the narrator of *Insensatez*, the protagonists of the novels of Bruzzone are consistently unable to construct stable and coherent accounts of past events.

If I have privileged the analysis of the literature of Bruzzone, Pérez, and Robles in the preceding paragraphs, it is because their texts are the most illustrative of the aesthetics of emergent post-dictatorship narrative and contain the greatest concentration of features of this innovation in contemporary Latin American literature. More concretely, the narrative of these authors displays, in a condensed form, the following features: distance from epic and sentimental renderings of revolutionary militancy; critique of counterviolence; application of humor to tragic events; consciousness of the collapse of the intellectual currency and growing unintelligibility of an idiom of revolution; parody of the naivety of militants, past and present; critique of (mis)appropriation of human rights discourse by the State and mass media; and a problematization of the epistemological claims of the literary text. Although I have chosen to focus my presentation on Bruzzone, Pérez, and Robles since these features are found with particularly clarity in their literature, a combination of the above features can be found in the narrative of Nona Fernández, Julian Fuks, Albertina Carri, Juan Gabriel Vásquez, Álvaro Bisama, Alejandro Zambra, Patricio Pron, Félix Bruzzone, Mariana Eva Pérez, Francisco Ángeles, Juan Manuel Robles, Margarita García Robayo, Raquel Robles, Ernesto Semán, and Rodrigo Hasbrún.

The literature of Castellanos Moya anticipated the abovementioned features and for this reason his literary program constitutes an important literary antecedent of emergent post-dictatorship narrative. At the same time, however, the case of Castellanos Moya presents a series of idiosyncrasies that differentiate his literary approach from both the production of emergent

post-dictatorship narrative and that of his own generation. Born in 1957, he forms part of the same generation as Roberto Bolaño (1953), Miguel Huezco Mixco (1954), Sergio Chejfec (1956), Daniel Guebel (1956), Martín Caparrós (1957), and Alan Pauls (1956). Many of these authors do indeed distance themselves from the idealization of revolutionary militancy that typifies early post-dictatorship narrative and articulate critiques of the crimes of the revolutions, in works such as *No velas tus muertos* (1984) by Caparrós, *Los planetas* (1999) by Chejfec, *La vida por Perón* (2004) by Guebel, the seventies trilogy of Alan Pauls (*Historia del llanto*, *Historia del pelo*, *Historia del dinero*, published in 2007, 2010, and 2013, respectively), *A quien corresponda* (2008) by Caparrós, and the *Casa de Moravia* (2017) by Mixco. This facet, however, only constitutes a minor part of the narrative production of these authors, whereas in the case of Castellanos Moya the revision of revolutionary movements runs throughout the entirety of his literature, from his first novel in 1989 to his latest in 2021, and forms a central tenet of his literary program, defined by the author himself in terms of a defense of the “art of fiction” in contraposition to testimonio; a definitive break with the injunction to subordinate the literary work to political programs; and the redefinition of the figure of the Latin American public intellectual. Furthermore, as has been established throughout the chapters of this thesis, the innovative aspect of the literary program of Castellanos Moya exceeds the critique of the crimes of revolution and broaches new territory, such as the critique of the discourse and practice of memory politics, which is a feature that his literature shares with that of younger generations.

What differentiates Castellanos Moya from second generation authors is the fact that he has firsthand experience of revolutionary militancy, not as a combatant but as an organizer that contributed to the cause through his intellectual labor. Stated slightly differently, his experience with revolution in Latin America is direct, whereas that of the generation that is currently coming

of age as writers and public intellectuals is mediated by “collective memory,” which is to say a set of “social frameworks” for interpreting the historical past reinforced through families, communities, nations, social class, and geographical or cultural region (Jelin 11; Ricoeur 120-4). There have been numerous attempts to characterize the nature of the relationship of second-generation artists to the traumatic historical past that preceded them, as evidenced by the following passage from Hirsch’s *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012):

The particular relation to a parental past described, evoked, and analyzed in these works has come to be seen as a ‘syndrome’ of belatedness or ‘post-ness’ and has been variously termed ‘absent memory’ (Ellen Fine), ‘inherited memory,’ ‘belated memory,’ ‘prosthetic memory’ (Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg), ‘*mémoire trouée*’ (Henri Raczymow), ‘*mémoire des cendres*’ (Nadine Fresco), ‘vicarious witnessing’ (Froma Zeitlin), ‘received history’ (James Young), ‘haunting legacy’ (Gabriele Schwab), and ‘postmemory.’ (3)

The sheer number of terms attests to the necessity of forging a language, in cultural theory, to speak about the phenomenon. In her much-debated work, Marianne Hirsch uses the blanket term, “second generation,” to refer to the children of those who experience traumatic historical realities firsthand. She reserves the more specific term, “postmemory,” however, to designate the mode of cultural production that characterizes second generation artists. The central feature of this mode of cultural production is precisely the mediated character of its relationship to the past that it purports to apprehend, represent, or signify:

‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors they grew up with ... Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by

imaginative investment, projection, and creation ... This, I believe, is that structure of postmemory and the process of its generation. (5)

In her research, Hirsch focuses on the affective intergenerational transmission of memory through the family units through photos, memorabilia, and what she terms “testimonial objects” (177). While Hirsch’s concept of postmemory as an intergenerational form of transmission that necessarily implies multiple instances of mediation is indeed very valuable to my general line of research, the specific needs of my investigation nonetheless imply broadening the scope of postmemory to contemplate the *cultural* transmission of a set of meanings and uses of the past through institutions such as, for example, the literary canon. In this case, it is imperative to acknowledge that the relationship of a new generation of writers who address a historical past of political violence is mediated by cultural and literary traditions and institutions. In fact, a series of literary works from testimonial genres and the mournful post-dictatorship novel had already been consecrated within the literary canon by the time these writers were coming of age. In other words, a literary idiom for addressing political violence, equipped with a stable set of conventions and tropes for representing political violence, had already been consolidated and indeed consummated by the early 2000s. Young writers such as Bisama, Bruzzone, Robles, Fernández, or Fuks, then, are simultaneously writing from within a tradition and against it. In their attempt to communicate their specific relationship to a historical past of extreme political violence, they must necessarily confront an inherited body of representations, significations, and usages of that past by previous generations. The result of this confrontation has been a complex process of affiliation and differentiation which is simultaneously a process of selection in which many of the aesthetic and political principles of previous generations have been left to the wayside, most notably the sacralization of the vanquished, the idealization of revolutionary

militancy, the praise of counterviolence, and oversimplified epic and sentimental renderings of political conflicts. The single most salient feature, that which most distinguishes Latin American second-generation artists from the preceding generation, is their parodic distance with respect to memory politics. Throughout this investigation I have been developing the thesis that this shift is also influenced by the incorporation of memory politics into State institutions and the appropriation of memory discourse by the mass media. In the period before assimilation of memory discourse into the State and culture industry, which was a period of amnesty, impunity, and silence, literature and other forms of cultural production were invested with the responsibility of mourning a defeat, advocating for justice, and serving as the mouthpiece of the voiceless. Once the historical conditions changed and other political, social, and cultural institutions assumed this function, it was no longer necessary for literature to do so. Although there is no shortage of residual cultural production that replicates the solemn and sacralising aesthetics of the 1980s and 1990s, literature was freed from certain constraints and could narrate hitherto unexplored aspects of the historical past (Blejmar 39), such as the responsibility of revolutionary movements in creating the underlying conditions that led to limit situations, the legitimacy of their use of violence, or the shortcomings of the institutionalization of the memory politics (Reati, “Culpables e inocentes” 102). For this reason, in the case of Latin American second-generation artists the term ‘postmemory,’ understood on the level of cultural and not familial transmission, encompasses not only the mediated character of their relationship to the past but also the fact that they are producing literature in an epoch whose sensibility is defined by the overdetermination and subsequent exhaustion of the memory paradigm. In other words, they can also be considered *postmemory* in the sense of engaging in cultural production after the

memory boom. This was decidedly not the case for Castellanos Moya when he was coming of age as a writer and public intellectual.

Although the direct experience with a historical past of political violence, as opposed to a heavily mediated one, is the most substantial difference between Castellanos Moya and second-generation writers, there are other divergences, such as their respective usages of the figure of the detective. The mediated relationship to a traumatic historical past is often expressed, in second generation post-dictatorship narrative, through the figure of the narrator-detective. Though not real detectives, these narrators function as detective figures who struggle to assemble the pieces of a shattered past and interpret the clues to form a coherent version of what really happened.²⁶ Furthermore, the narrator-detectives are often separated from the historical events that they investigate by a generation's distance. As members of the second-generation, the enigma that they are trying to solve is the experience of the generation before them. The autofictional narrator of *Diario de una princesa montonera* refers to herself and her colleague from HIJOS, the organization of children of disappeared parents, as detectives: "Ernesto y Gema vinieron a casa a estudiar. Somo algo así como una subcédula del grupos de hijis [sic]... Ellos también son detectives y hay entre nosotros un acuerdo tácito" (109). In a similar fashion, the image on the cover of *Los topos*, from the first pressing until the latest, is the author dressed as a detective. Despite the efforts of these detective-narrators, however, no positive knowledge of the past is established. By the end of both novels, neither character nor reader have any clearer version of the past than they did at the beginning but, rather, the past proves opaque and resists any attempt to be apprehended. Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la*

²⁶ In *Diario de una princesa montonera*, Mariana Eva Pérez refers jokingly to this characteristic of second-generation narrative as "detectivismo" (55).

lluvia and Alejandro Zambra's *Formas de volver a casa*, both initially published in 2011 and reprinted several times since, make use of the technique of the first-person narrator-detective. These novels differ from those of Bruzzone and Pérez in that they replicate the mournful and melancholic register of residual or first-generation post-dictatorship narrative. Significantly, the narrators of the novels of both Pron and Zambra achieve what they set out to do, which is to say that they solve the enigma of the family's past. Zambra and Pron piece together the remnants of their childhoods to understand more fully as adults what escaped them as children. The narrator of *Formas de volver a casa* says that "[h]e vuelto a la infancia en un viaje que tal vez necesitaba" (140). In the same conversation, a secondary character responds that "[e]n este viaje has recuperado tu pasado" (140). There is a similar scene of the affirmation of the power of writing to recuperate the past at the end of *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* when the narrator claims that he is "dispuesto a recuperar una historia que era la suya, la de sus compañeros y también la mía propia" (187):

...yo tan solo iba a poder escribirla cuando ya formase parte de una memoria que había decidido recobrar, para mí y para ellos y para los que nos siguieran. Mientras todo esto de pie junto a la mesa del teléfono vi que había comenzado a llover nuevamente y me dije que iba a escribir esa historia porque lo que mis padres y sus compañeros habían hecho no merecía ser olvidado y porque yo era el producto de lo que ellos habían hecho, y porque lo que habían hecho era digno de ser contado porque su espíritu, no las decisiones acertadas y equivocadas que mis padres y sus compañeros habían tomado sino el espíritu mismo iba a seguir subiendo en la lluvia hasta tomar el cielo por asalto. (185-6)

The certainty of the capacity to recover the past, together with gesture of inscription, despite the disclaimer that some of the decisions of his parents may have been wrong, is what separates

residual from emergent post-dictatorship narratives. Although they use features of second-generation post-dictatorship narrative, like the narrator-detective who investigates a family history, the need for affiliation, the tendency to idealize a lost past, and the mournful tone are more aligned with earlier modes of post-dictatorship narrative production. In emergent second-generation post-dictatorship narrative, these residual traits are largely absent. Novels like Roble's *Nuevos juguetes de la guerra fría* (2016) and Bisama's *Estrellas muertas* (2010) make use of the figure of the narrator-detective but, like Bruzzone and Pérez, there is no inscription, no reassurances of a recovered past, no nostalgia, and no ultimate lesson to be learned.

The predominance of the figure of the detective, then, signifies a mediated relationship to the past through which the narrator interprets the signs in order to try to reconstruct a coherent account of the experience of the previous generation. Although Castellanos Moya occasionally uses detectives in his novels, like José Pindonga in *Donde no estén ustedes* and Lito Handal in *Baile con serpientes* and *La diabla en el espejo*, they investigate the present, not the past. In fact, the characters of the novels of Castellanos Moya have a radically different relationship to the past: if the detective-narrators of emergent second-generation post-dictatorship narrative move from the present to the past, the characters of Castellanos Moya are exiles who are fleeing from a past that they are never able to outrun and which invariably catches up to them. With the force of the return of the repressed, the past irrupts in the present as an unwelcome force. The main characters of *La diáspora*, for example, are exiles in Mexico City who struggle to put their lives back together but who nonetheless find themselves unable to rid themselves of the aftereffects of political violence. Likewise, the protagonist of *Donde no estén ustedes*, Alberto Aragón, drives his beat-up car from Nicaragua to Mexico City in a similar attempt to start anew. Haunted by the deaths of his son and daughter-in-law at the hands of Salvadoran death squads and by the

betrayal of his allies within the Salvadoran revolution, he dies alone and without consolation in a fit of alcoholism. Suffering from second-hand trauma due to his close contact with the testimonies of the Remhi report, the narrator of *Insensatez*, for his part, brings the horrors of the Salvadoran civil war with him to Germany, where he seeks exile. The most graphic example of the past invading the present, however, is *El sueño de retorno* (2013). In this novel the traumatic past of the protagonist, Erasmo Aragón, returns in the form of a physical symptom, stomach cramps, which cannot be relieved until he undergoes hypnotherapy and purges his repressed memories of the assassination of his cousin at the hands of death squads, the execution of his father after it was discovered that he had infiltrated the Salvadoran revolution as an informant for the CIA, and the subsequent suicide of his grandfather. In all these cases, the past does not simply pass but irrupts within the present and demands to be confronted. This structure of an involuntary irruption of the past in the present is proper to those who have firsthand experience with violence (Caruth 3-4). The structure of this relationship to the past is an inversion of that of emergent second-generation post-dictatorship narrative, in which the characters voluntarily move from the security of the present towards a past whose secrets they desire to reveal.

Another significant divergence between the narrative production of Castellanos Moya and second-generation emergent post-dictatorship narrative is his treatment of violence. Graphic descriptions of violence, together with the discursive violence of his narrators, are a constant throughout the narrative of Castellanos Moya. In this foregrounding of violence, his literature shows an affinity with the other expressions of violence in contemporary Latin American literature, such as the *narconovela* or the *novela sicaresca*. In the novel of Castellanos Moya that most resembles the *novela sicaresca*, *El arma en el hombre*, Robocop, a former soldier and combatant in a death squad finds himself unemployed after the signing of the Peace Accords in

El Salvador in 1992. A specialist in the field of killing and torture, there is no shortage of people who require his skills in the early postwar epoch. He has no trouble selling his services as an assassin first to local crimes lords, then to regional drug traffickers, and finally to the CIA. Castellanos Moya spares few details in the descriptions of the violent exploits of this trained killer who is eager to put his technical expertise to new uses in the context of post-civil-war Central America. *Morongá*, the novel of Castellanos Moya which most resembles the *narconovela*, tells the story of another assassin, also an ex-combatant, this time from the side of the Salvadoran revolution. José Zeledón fled from El Salvador after the demise of the revolution and moved to the United States under a false name. He uses his military expertise to intervene in internal disputes between Salvadoran narcotraffickers living in Chicago. The scenes of gratuitous violence in *El arma en el hombre* may suggest an affinity with a lineage of *sicaresca* novels that include Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994), Jorge Franco's *Rosario tijeras* (1999), Arturo Álope's *Sangre ajena* (2000), José Libardo Porras Vallejo's *Hijos de la nieve* (2000), Mario Mendoza's *Satanás* (2002), and Orfa Alarcón's *Perra Brava* (2010). Likewise, the imaginary of a narcotraffic criminal underworld in *Morongá* might suggest an affinity with narcoliterature, such as Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino* (2004), Juan Pablo Villalobos *Fiesta en la madriguera* (2010), Elmer Mendoza's *Nombre de perro* (2010), and Orfa Alarcón's *Loba* (2019).

These affinities, however, do not hold up under closer scrutiny. First of all, the representation of criminal violence is not treated autonomously in the narrative of Castellanos Moya but is contingent upon the central overarching theme of his work: political violence. In this sense, the violence that is narrated, however graphic, is not meaningless or gratuitous but carefully contextualized and forms part of a continuity or history of violence. Stated in colloquial

terms, the violence of his novels does not come out of nowhere, as it were, but has a specific context and history. The strategy of Castellanos Moya, therefore, is contextualize violence and frame the relationship between the civil war and the postwar period in terms of continuity, not rupture. This strategy coincides with Avelar's critique of the term 'transitional societies' on the grounds that there is more continuity than rupture between the violence of the period of dictatorship and civil war and the neoliberal democracies that followed in its wake. The true rupture, he argues, occurred earlier, in the implementation of counterrevolutionary State terrorism throughout Latin America since it was this shift that determined not only the experience of the former period but that of the latter as well:

The critique of the theory of authoritarianism entails a terminological change: I will not designate the term *transition*, as do the social sciences, as the return to parliamentary democracy, free elections, and juridical institutionality. The end of the dictatorships cannot, from the perspective I advance here, be characterized as a transitional process. As was implicit in my critique, *the real transition were the dictatorships themselves*.

According to Willy Thayer, "Let us not take 'transition' as the postdictatorial process of redemocratization in Latin American societies, but rather more broadly, as the process of 'modernization' and transit from the modern national state to the transnational post-state market. In this sense, for us the transition is primordially the dictatorship. It was the dictatorship that made the transition from State to Market, a transition euphemistically designated as 'modernization.'" This interpretation crucially shifts the emphasis from a derivative transition to an epochal one. The epochal transition was no doubt the dictatorship, not the return of civil rule that ensued once the real transition had been

accomplished. In other words, the return to democracy in itself does not imply a transit to any place other than the one where the dictatorships left off. (58-9)

Pilar Calveiro, in *Política y/o violencia: una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años setenta*, also localizes the root of transitional Latin American societies in State violence and frames the neoliberal present in terms of continuity with a dictatorial past:

La victoria ‘occidental y cristiana,’ que ya ‘olía’ a neoliberal, se instauró primero mediante estas violencias enormes y desmedidas por parte del Estado, para consolidarse luego con los procesos de ‘tránsito a la democracia,’ que erradicaron cualquier forma de violencia política que no fuera estrictamente estatal. (151)

Castellanos Moya expresses this same sentiment frequently in his literature. In the following excerpt from *Donde no estén ustedes*, a secondary character, el Flaco Pérez, expresses his disappointment with the return to democracy on the grounds there can be no substantial changes as long as the same people are in power:

...empezó a apoyar a la guerrilla más radical, a la única que garantizara acabar de una vez por todas con la putrefacta estirpe militar, cuando veinte años más tarde esa guerrilla y el gobierno derechista pactaron su acuerdo de paz para poner fin a la guerra civil ... el Flaco Pérez dejó en claro que él ni loco regresaría a El Salvador, un sitio en el que permanecería el mismo ejército corrupto con los mismos criminales que le habían metido noventa tiros entre pecho y espalda a su amigo del alma, el coronel Reyes, máximo jefe de aquel golpe de Estado, quien regresó de su exilio con la idea de que las cosas habían cambiado. (40)

The analysis of el Flaco, narrated in free indirect speech, meets with the approval of the narrator, Alberto Aragón: “Pinche Flaco – piensa Alberto mientras se empina su vaso de vodka – tenía

toda la razón, lo esencial no cambió en el paisito: la impunidad, la prepotencia, la miseria” (40).

Edgardo Vega in one of his rants in *El asco: Thomas Bernhard in El Salvador* touches on the same topic:

Por eso, en contra de mi voluntad, he tenido que escuchar a esos políticos apestosos por la sangre de las cien mil personas que mandaron a la muerte con sus ideas grandiosas, un tremendo asco me producen esos tipos tenebrosos que tienen en sus manos el futuro de este país ... sólo necesitas encender el televisor para verles en la jeta la ansiedad por saquear lo que pueden a quien puedan, unos pillos de saco y corbata que antes tuvieron su festín de sangre, su orgía de crímenes, y ahora se dedican al festín del saqueo, a la orgía del robo, me dijo Vega. (Castellanos Moya, *El asco* 32)

The violence of the dictatorship and civil war era, then, has not disappeared but merely changed forms: in the postwar epoch it is expressed as social and economic violence. In novels like *El arma en el hombre* and *Morongá*, the figure of the ex-combatant serves as an analogy for this transmutation of violence from one form to another. The political violence of the counterinsurgency soldier and the guerrillero becomes, in the postwar epoch, the social violence of the delinquent or the drug trafficker. When el Viejo solicits the service of José Zeledón in *Morongá*, the latter reflects on the meaninglessness of this new form of violence:

-Te vas a pudrir en este país de mierda. Y peor en ese pueblo perdido en la nada...

-Más podrido estaría con tus nuevos patrones. Ya sabés que no me gustan. Yo me formé para accionar sabiendo quién era el enemigo. Todo muy claro. Había un sentido, una causa. (132-3)

Despite these misgivings, however, Zeledón ends up accepting the job as a hit man to settle the score between drug traffickers. Alternately, the services of ex-combatants can be recycled by the

State for the purpose of repression, as illustrated by the brief military training of José Pindonga in *Donde no estén ustedes*:

...ingresé a esa novel institución surgida de los Acuerdos de Paz firmados por el gobierno y la guerrilla, esa institución destinada a formar agentes del nuevo cuerpo policíaco que garantizaría la paz y la democracia luego de diez años de guerra civil ... me la pasaba husmeando en las aulas y en las barracas y en los campos de entrenamientos donde jóvenes ex soldados y ex guerrilleros ... eran reformateados por carabineros pinochetistas y guardias civiles franquistas para que cuidaran la nueva sociedad democrática que se construiría en El Salvador. (133)

As with the new forms of social violence, the repressive force of the State is fueled by the rechanneled energies of the “ex soldados y ex guerrilleros.” In this way, current expressions of violence in Latin America are not baffling or meaningless but contextualized historically as outgrowths of the violence of the Latin American Cold War. While Calveiro affirms that “no se puede entender el terrorismo de Estado de los años setenta por fuera de la llamada Guerra Fría y sus estrategias,” we could add, taking into account Castellanos Moya’s account of the transition to democracy, that you cannot understand the new forms of violence of the postdictatorship epoch without recognizing its continuity with the political violence that preceded it.²⁷

²⁷ Castellanos Moya himself expresses, in his nonfiction writing, the continuity between the civil war and postwar periods in terms of recycling:

Ya cuando me exilié por última vez hace veintidós años se palpaban los síntomas del desastre que ahora acontece: el reciclamiento de la violencia a través de las maras, la pauperización de la mayoría de los habitantes, la corrupción de las élites política y económica, la emigración hacia Estados Unidos como única forma de buscar futuro. (*Roque Dalton* 109)

The last substantial difference between the literary project of Castellanos Moya and second-generation post-dictatorship narrative –other than the abundance of graphic descriptions of violence and his unmediated relationship with the historical realities that are the object of his narrative– is the misogyny of his preferred type of narrator, discussed in Chapter 1. This feature as well may be a part of a generational divide since a vast number of contemporary authors display a far greater sensibility to questions of gender than previous generations and seem to have naturalized feminist discourse and practice to a greater degree. Feminist and queer discourses, in fact, has become a prominent factor in the literature of writers like Selva Almada, Samantha Schweblin, Fernanda Melchor, Raquel Robles, Margarita García Robayo, Guadalupe Nettel, and Camila Sosa Villada. By foregrounding issues related to gender and violence against women and sexual dissidents in Latin America, the production of these authors establishes a symbiotic relationship with emergent social movements like *Ni una menos* and the reproductive rights movements that have been sweeping across broad areas of the continent over the past decade. Although the second-generation writers analyzed in the present section thematize political violence in their literature, their gender politics are more in line with their contemporaries than with the generation of their parents. In fact, a novel like Bruzzone *Los topes* challenges not only political identities but gender and sexual identities as well, through the figure of the transgender child of disappeared parents, embodied in both Moira and the narrator.

At the same time, this framing of the problem of misogyny in the narrative of Castellanos Moya in terms of a generational divide may be misleading. The fact that writers on this side of the divide tend to stray away from misogynist characters, unless they are clearly cast as villains to be denounced, does not necessarily mean the Castellanos Moya himself is misogynist nor that he shares the misogynist attitudes of previous generations. As signaled in Chapter 1, this

interpretation blames the author for the attitudes of his characters. The problem for many readers, perhaps, is that the author withholds moral judgment on his misogyny of his characters. The lack of overt axiological markings in the text to orient and assure readers, however, is not grounds to conflate the plane of enunciation with that of the enunciated. Moreover, the discursive violence and flagrant offensiveness of the lineage of abrasive narrators that goes from el Turco to Edgardo Vega to Robocop to Alberto Aragón to the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez* should be situated within the author's broader program of transgressing norms of acceptability and decency. Without excusing misogyny, this concession offers a more coherent interpretation of excesses of violent narrators within the overall literary project of Castellanos Moya.

Conclusion: Sexual Impotence, Politics, and Literature

Erasmó Aragón is sitting on the edge of the mattress, at the foot of the bed. Mina, his lover, pulls herself up to a seated position and leans against the headboard at the opposite end of the bed. Both are naked. Moonlight is streaming in the window, through the space between the curtains. Aragón runs his hand through his hair, struggling to find the words to justify his inability to perform sexually. Mina diminishes the importance of the episode, but she will reproach him for it in their next argument. This staging of the scene of sexual impotence is not exclusive to *Moronga* but can be found in *Insensatez* as well. Despite his incessant comments that objectify women's bodies, the sexist narrator of *Insensatez*, in the moment of truth, proves much less virulent than he claims to be. Although this pattern exposes the misogynist who secretly fears and hates the bodies that he claims to desire, these scenes can be read allegorically as well (Sánchez Prado 245). Briefly and by way of conclusion, I would like to explore the

possibilities of an allegorical reading of scenes of sexual impotence and analyze their implications within the narrative program of Castellanos Moya.

Of the two main characters of *Moronga*, José Zeledón, an ex-combatant for the revolutionary forces in the Salvadoran civil war, represents the “man of action,” while Erasmo Aragón, visiting professor from El Salvador and researcher at a university in the Midwest of the United States, fills the role of the “man of letters or the contemplative man.” This opposition might suggest a confrontation between two time-honored metonyms, the sword and quill. For this to be the case, however, both the man of action and the man of letters would have to be on the same side, given that the disjunction itself refers to two different approaches to furthering the same cause. This is not the case in *Moronga*: while José Zeledón was indeed a revolutionary, for Erasmo Aragón the revolution is no more than an object of study. He researches the circumstances surrounding the execution of Roque Dalton but does not share the poet’s political convictions. Upon closer examination, then, *Moronga* does not present its reader within a binary opposition since there is a third term, occupied by the revolutionary poet, Roque Dalton. In other words, the figure of the intellectual or “man of letters” is further divided into two categories, occupied respectively by Aragón and Dalton. Whereas Dalton is the epitome of the committed intellectual, not only having dedicated his literary talents to the cause but having taken up arms as well, Erasmo serves as a counterimage, that of the disengaged intellectual. The very opposite of altruism and selflessness, Aragón is narcissistic, sexist, petty, and self-serving, like so many of the narrators of Castellanos Moya going all the way back to el Turco and Edgardo Vega. The true confrontation, then, between the metonyms of the quill and the sword can be found only in the relationship between Dalton and Zeledón. The relationship between Dalton and Aragón, for

its part, is reserved for the confrontation between two models of Latin American intellectuals, defined by their relationship to politics.

What does any of this have to do with sexual impotence then? Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado associates the less-than-flattering representations of Latin American intellectuals in the work of Castellanos Moya with sexual impotence:

Dicho de otro modo, el protagonista de *Insensatez*, éticamente deleznable, incompleto de la mente y con momentos de impotencia sexual, es la contraparte de una mitología literaria construida en torno a figuras heroicas como ‘el poeta,’ ‘el guerrillero’ o ‘el indígena.’ Una refundición de la escritura, como planteada por Castellanos Moya, presupone el vaciamiento de los mitos constitutivos de la retórica grandilocuente y anacrónica de las revoluciones. (245)

The figure of the “macho impotente,” then, may serve as a counterpoint to the committed intellectual so highly valued in the revolutionary politics and culture in Cold War Latin America (*Moronga* 288). This figure of the self-absorbed and politically disengaged intellectual is a constant in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. As analyzed in detail in the preceding chapters, a large part of the content of the narrative production is dedicated to the ascendancy of the politically uncommitted intellectual and the progressive unintelligibility and obsolescence of the figure of the politically committed Latin American public intellectual that was dominant in both the Boom epoch and throughout the period of the hegemony of testimonial narratives in Latin American literature. In fact, *La diáspora*, as an origin story, narrates the birth of a new type of Latin American public intellectual, whose kynical potentials Castellanos Moya explores throughout his posterior narrative production. Within the author’s elaborate construction of the figure of the disengaged intellectual throughout his literature, sexual impotence serves as an

allegory for the Latin American intellectual's loss of power and influence in the public sphere. The days of intellectuals like García Márquez, who whispered into the ears of kings and held audience with the likes of Fidel Castro and Bill Clinton, are long gone. In the context of the recalcitrant anti-intellectualism that characterizes the post-Cold War neoliberal political and cultural climate (Butler 3), the aspiration (and obligation) of the all-powerful public intellectual to transform the world could only seem anachronistic, if not megalomaniacal. In his narrative, Castellanos Moya consistently negates this conception of the political and social capacities and responsibilities of the Latin American artist and intellectual. In its place, he insists on the representation of intellectuals who cannot act effectively in the world and have very little control over their own lives, let alone those of others. In *Moronga*, for example, Erasmo Aragón is unable to complete his research project at Merlow College. In his archival work on the poet, Roque Dalton, he discovers a "nueva explicación al asesinato del poeta" that he characterizes as a "revelación, si se le puede llamar de esta forma al descubrimiento de un sentido donde antes no lo había" (238-239). In a rapture of inspiration, he writes down his thoughts in a notebook which he guards dearly. After a few days, however, he loses his interest in the idea and dismisses his enthusiasm as naïve, going so far as to throw away the notebook. This professional incompetence is coronated when Aragón loses his job at the university at the end of the novel. This pattern is, of course, nothing new in the narrative of Castellanos Moya. In *Insensatez*, the unnamed narrator was unable to finish his work as corrector of the Remhi report. After months of work, he abandoned the project and took a plane to Germany, convinced that his life was in danger, when the person who was really being targeted was Monseñor Gerardi, not a dispensable intellectual hack like the narrator. In both cases, the inability to act in the world is reinforced by the characters' sexual impotence. While the sexual impotence of the narrator of *Insensatez* can be

inferred through his casual encounter with Fátima, the erectile dysfunction of Erasmo Aragón is chronic, a part of a pattern that repeats itself in his relationships with Heather, Mina, Petra (176; 212; 216 respectively). In these contexts, impotence allegorizes the incapacity of the Latin American intellectual to wield influence and act effectively in the world. As such, it forms part of a constellation of attributes that, taken together, announces a different type of Latin American intellectual and, consequently, a different configuration of the relationship between literature and politics in Latin America.

Although a large part of this thesis has been dedicated to the textual analysis of the early novels of Castellanos Moya, its scope exceeds the literary artefact and aspires as well to contemplate the implications the narrative production of the author for Latin American literature and culture. This approach situates the literature of the author within the literary and cultural traditions with which it dialogues. In this way, Castellanos Moya's usage of sexual impotence, for example, can be read as an intervention in larger debates concerning the responsibilities of the Latin American public intellectual and the relationship between the literature and politics. While my analysis is indeed rooted in a close reading of literary texts, it does not stop at the text but broaches broader questions pertaining to the field of contemporary Latin American literature and culture. It has been my contention that the literary program of the author is anomalous, unprecedented within Latin American letters, not only in the sense of developing innovative literary techniques but also of inaugurating new subjection positions, new sites of enunciation, and new modes of enunciation. More concretely, I have argued that Castellanos Moya has developed novel modes of narrating political violence, based upon a novel understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Latin American public intellectual, which, in turn, has implied a reconfiguration of the understanding of the relationship between literature and politics. This

qualitative shift came at the price of a substantial and decisive break with the politicization of the literary work within the traditions of the Boom, testimonio, and the first-generation post-dictatorial novel. At the highwater mark of the praise of revolutionary militancy and the injunction that Latin American intellectuals and artists affiliate themselves with revolutionary struggle, Castellanos articulated a rotund critique of counterviolence and exposed the contradictions of the revolution. Although he was not alone in doing so, his criticism was not an isolated phenomenon, as it was with other authors whose literature focuses on other themes, with an occasionally foray into narrative about political violence. To the contrary, the critique of the contradictions of Left discourse and practice is a central tenet of the literary program of Castellanos Moya, to which he has remained faithful from the publication to *La diáspora* to the present. Furthermore, as the paradigm of memory eclipsed Marxism as the dominant discursive framework, Castellanos Moya proved just a critical of the inconsistencies of memory politics at the time of their consecration as he was of the illegitimate uses of violence of the revolution. As such, his literary program constitutes a kynical defense of critical thinking over authoritarianism, of transgression over conformity, of playfulness over humorlessness, at the same time that it articulates a relentless critique of an unjust status quo which stems from past injustices. In short, the literature of Castellanos Moya exhibits an unequivocal stance with respect to the points of contention and the fault lines of a tradition struggling to keep time with rapidly evolving historical contexts. His literature program has exceeded the aesthetic and political paradigms of inherited tradition and, in his negotiation within that tradition, Castellanos Moya has forged innovative discourse which, largely misunderstood at the time, have been moving from a peripheral to a progressively more central position and have been taken up by a new generation of writers concerned with Latin America's legacy of political violence. Thus, the literary

program of the author constitutes a turning point within contemporary Latin American literature which created new subject positions for authors and pushed the narration of political violence into new and uncharted territory.

In his analysis of Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado writes that it would be possible to situate “tanto a la obra como al autor en el epicentro de una nueva cartografía de la narrativa latinoamericana” (239). As this passage suggests, the narrative project of Castellanos Moya has been sufficiently successful at disrupting inherited literary traditions to merit reconceptualizing our understanding of the field of contemporary Latin American literature in light of his contributions. In fact, this has been one of the overarching objectives of the present investigation. Over the preceding chapters, I have read the tradition of contemporary Latin American literature through the narrative program of Castellanos Moya, as a source of valuable insights into both the recent past and the new developments in the field.

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