

Other Communion:

Maya, Mulatto, Woman and God in Miguel Ángel Asturias 1923-1974

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Romance Languages and Literatures: Spanish)
in the University of Michigan
2010

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the ever-changing community of graduate students, professors, lecturers, students and staff frequenting the halls of the Modern Language Building for nurturing my growth. I am especially grateful to my committee members for their assistance and guidance with this dissertation: Gareth Williams for supporting research on Central American literature and Ivonne del Valle for her insights into *Mulata de tal* and for her careful reading of drafts and insightful questions. I so appreciate their advocacy through the years, and their engagement with this project. Thank you also to Vincenzo Binetti and Lawrence M. La Fountain-Stokes for their comments and assistance. I would also like to thank the Romance Languages and Literatures Department Chair, Cristina Moreiras Menor, for her encouragement and for her dedication to providing a supportive community for graduate students; graduate assistant Mindy Niehaus-Fukuda; and professors Jossiana Arroyo and Santiago Colás for their assistance earlier in my studies.

Support from the Romance Languages and Literatures Department, Rackham Graduate School, FLAS, Sweetland Writing Center, and the Center for Education of Women made my research possible. Because of this support I was able to visit Miguel Ángel Asturias' archive at the BnF (where I relied on the expertise and assistance of manuscript librarian Laurence Le Bras and the generous friendship of H  l  ne Lambert, Claire Simon and Henri). The financial aid provided also allowed me to leave my baby

in the competent and caring arms of professional caregivers while I taught, read, wrote and revised. I am profoundly grateful to each of those women.

The Sweetland Writing Center Summer Dissertation Institute, under the guidance of Louis Cicciarelli, helped with early drafts. Most recently, the friendship and helpful criticism of readers Rebecca Wines (Romance Languages and Literatures, French), Sebastian Ferrari (Comparative Literature) and Christina Chang (Art History) assisted me in assembling this dissertation. I am sure they will never be the same after reading—via plot summary—almost all of Asturias’s perverse and fantastical novels.

The Graduate Employees Organization (Local 3550, AFT/AFL-CIO) provided a very necessary refuge. I am grateful for the solidarity offered by all members of that collective but Andy Clarno, Cedric de Leon, Claire Decoteau and Bashar Tarabieh became close friends. Their training in sociology, coupled with their activism, challenges and inspires me.

The very beginning of the project lies with the mentorship of three women twenty years ago: my Steller Spanish teacher Nina Bonito-Romine, community activist Ruth W. Sheridan and poet Karen A. Tschannen. I am grateful for the language, the books, the ideas and the opportunities they provided me. The steady accompaniment of Chris Dixon and Diana Redwood at Steller, and later at the Evergreen State College, has sustained me in Alaska and Outside. At Evergreen I met Hilaria, Emiliana and Yolanda Cruz—their wit and wisdom have come to my aid on multiple occasions. Alejandro IV Barragán inspired and supported me through my tenure as a teacher in Anchorage, and assisted me during early research in Guatemala and El Salvador in 2004. I also thank Erwin

Rabanales for his hospitality in Guatemala, and for teaching me the imperfect subjunctive, integrals and agronomy during my first visit to Quetzaltenango in 1993.

I would not have pursued graduate school if not for the insistence of Dr. Francisco Miranda of the University of Alaska Anchorage. He and teacher Nancy Boxler, formerly of the Anchorage School District, have been excellent mentors. I am also grateful to Cathy Moses and Darlene Lincoln of Toksook Bay for their generosity and instruction, Quyana.

I thank my parents and my sisters for their love and support. I thank Ila and Tim Suchy Dillon of Seldovia for including me as one of their own. I am blessed to have so many places to come home.

Finally, I would like to thank Duncan Talomé for his comments on different drafts, for despising Miguel Ángel Asturias and yet still understanding this project, and sharing a commitment to Central America. He has nurtured me throughout, and helped me to embrace new challenges with grace and strength. The love and companionship of Duncan, and our son Sahid, nourishes me and gives me great joy.

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Abstract

“Other Communion: Maya, Mulatto, Woman and God in Miguel Ángel Asturias 1923-1974” engages the Guatemalan Nobel Laureate’s literary production over five decades, beginning with his portrayals of the Maya and expanding to include his representations of the mulatto, female and God. I am primarily concerned with close readings of *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960), *Mulata de Tal* (1963) and *El árbol de la cruz* (1997) but I draw also from others of Asturias’s novels, as well as historiography, postcolonial and feminist theory, to show how Asturias narrates the nation through literary figures of the Other.

Chapter 2 begins with an intellectual history of Asturias as a “Maya” author, tracing the roots and permutations of this myth through biography, autobiography, and literary criticism. I then show how his appropriative creation of a Maya indigenismo is central to his political and aesthetic conception of Latin American literature. However, Asturias’s novels extend beyond this fictive Maya center. Chapter 3 analyzes a non-Maya, untranslated phrase associated with a mulatto character in Asturias’s *Banana Trilogy*. I analyze an emerging negrista aesthetic and argue that the interruptive repetition of the phrase structures the novel’s account of the recent history of revolution, land reform and democratic rupture in Guatemala, as well as the more distant legacies of the conquest, colonialism and slavery.

Mulata de tal also features a mulatta character and in Chapter 4 I explain how Asturias connects land to the female body through a complex series of fragmentations, profanations and redemptions. In contrast to the more historical concerns of the Banana Trilogy, this novel is encased within an apocalyptic framework, marking a shift in Asturias's attention from a Maya origin to the end of days.

Finally, I examine a sketch published after Asturias's death, *El árbol de la cruz*, calling attention to Asturias's connection between the female Other and the cross in what amounts to a brief treatise on communion. I show how this text, read accumulatively through popular religiosity in others of Asturias's novels, balances between definitive origin and conclusive end.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Mimesis and Guatemalan National Literature

*Gente. Gente. Los de los
altos olorosos a lana, risco y
chopo. Los de la costa
apestando a sal y sudor
marino. Los de oriente,
hechos de tierra de cuevas,
despidiendo huele de tabaco,
queso seco, ácida yuquilla y
almidón en bolita. Y los del
norte, olorosos a chipichipi,
jaula de cenizote y agua
cocida.
—Asturias *Hombres de maíz*¹*

Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899-1974) was the first Guatemalan, and the first Latin American novelist, to win the Nobel Prize in 1967. His work, spanning five decades, undergoes several significant shifts—transforming early twentieth-century regionalismo into an indigenismo that in turn possesses many of the same aesthetic characteristics that later characterize the “Boom” and magical realism. Asturias traveled widely, spent a great part of his adult life in Europe and was a central figure in the 1960s categorization of Latin American literature. Yet he never abandoned his referent: Guatemala. Seldom mentioning his country by name he returned constantly to its geography and history in his novels.

The title of Miguel Ángel Asturias's second novel, *Hombres de maíz* (1949), is one example of his national vision. It derives from the creation story present in the Maya-K'iche' *Pop Wuj*. Part of the *Pop Wuj* tells the story of the creation of humans, in three separate experiments. The only trial that is not destroyed is the trial that produces humans made from corn. The title of Asturias's novel, the center of the creation chronicled in the *Pop Wuj*, has such a presence in contemporary Guatemalan society that today "Hombres de maíz" is synonymous with all Guatemalans. "Hombres de maíz" represents Guatemalans externally and quotes from the novel accompany Rigoberta Menchú's (Guatemala's other nobel laureate) 1982 testimonio. The novel highlights this in the description I chose for the epigraph: "Hombres de maíz" are those from highlands or coast, from the North or the East.

This is a great, and bitter, irony. On one side stands Asturias's prolonged, fortified edification of *lo maya*, a literary and autobiographical creation that he began constructing in the early 1920s. Asturias's copy and imitation of *lo maya*—as he understood it through the *Pop Wuj* and other Maya texts he read—was layered with his own inventions. He carries out this task to the extreme, to the point of creating a Maya origin for himself. Asturias, paraphrasing Michael Taussig, copies, imitates, becomes the Other (*Mimesis and Alterity* xiii). I would add, also, that he fabricates the Maya Other for Guatemala's dominant political classes in such a way that "Hombres de maíz" is an amenable descriptor, as its meaning is limited to a poetically noble past or a utopic future. "Hombres de maíz" is ever able to avoid the present.

The present, of course, is the bitter side of the irony. Later in Taussig's book, while explaining the strategy of mimesis and alterity using first world against local third

world, he explains that “while the phantom figure of the pure Indian becomes the object of desire by the First World, that same Indian tends to be the cause of unease if not the object of erasure in the Third World—as in Guatemala” (142). My own accounting of the relationship between Asturias and *lo maya* in Chapter One would be remiss if I did not emphasize both the epistemic and real violence that Maya people experience. Guatemalan sociologist Duncan Talomé condemns this irony—the simultaneous veneration and exploitation of the Maya—explaining that it “solo puede ser aceptada por una sociedad que vive y se mantiene del sometimiento de una gran parte de la población, y cuya máxima expresión de podredumbre es precisamente la exaltación de estos intelectuales y maestros de la literatura como símbolos nacionales, amén del racismo que vomitaron a través de la pluma y la mirada” (can only be accepted by a society that lives off and is maintained by the subjugation of a large part of the population, a society whose greatest expression of their own decay is precisely the celebration of these intellectuals and literary masters as national symbols, in addition to the racism they vomited through pen and gaze) (5). Asturias, along with the French and Guatemalan environments that fostered him, was able to treat *lo maya* as an object, make *lo maya* his own, and speak in place of *lo maya* because political and societal structures were (are) such that Maya people were (are) excluded from national life.

Importantly, as anthropologist Jorge Ramón González Ponciano notes, “el indígena estuvo ausente de los mitos fundadores de la nación” (3) (the indigenous were absent from the founding myths of the nation) in Guatemala and mostly absent from (or negatively portrayed in) literary production until the twentieth century. For example, the few indigenous characters in late nineteenth century novelist José Milla’s historical

novels of the conquest and colony are almost uniformly villainous. Their behavior and language is incomprehensible. His mestizo characters, in contrast, share none of these attributes, and are fully absorbed into colonial society and government.² Around the beginning of the twentieth century, “los liberales convirtieron la cultura indígena en objeto estético y literario” (4) (the liberals converted indigenous culture into an aesthetic and literary object). Asturias—unlike his peers of Guatemala’s regionalista Generación de los 20 who focused on nature, or his successors of la Generación de los 30 who employed realism in pseudo-anthropological sketches or bildungsroman—wedded himself to an idea of the Maya that was at once material and aesthetic.³ He developed this aesthetic in his early literary work like *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930) and *Hombres de maíz* (1949), written mostly outside of Guatemala, and later referred to *lo maya* as a primary source for his creativity. Critical reception of his work celebrated the perceived Maya influences in his fiction and the link between Asturias and *lo maya* was strengthened by new fabrications about Asturias’s childhood, parentage and experiences, as well as by its repetition.

There were those who questioned this essentialist association between Asturias and *lo maya*. Borges, in a scene recounted in Jimena Sáenz’ biography, as part of 1964 Latin American authors’ colloquium in Berlin, questioned Asturias on his insistence of an authentic, original *indigenismo*:

Los más publicitados del coloquio fueron Borges y Asturias y hubo algunas corteses escaramuzas entre ellos. Cuando Asturias defendía el indigenismo *a outrance* como base de la narrativa y la temática americana, Borges le contestaba que ambos hablaban español y provenían de una cultura común y latina, y que en todo caso si su indigenismo era tan genuino, que discutiera en el idioma maya, y él le contestaría en querandí, más modesto por supuesto en

cuanto a cultura. Agregaba el poeta argentino que sospechaba que ni Asturias podría hablarle en maya ni él mismo contestarle en querandí, pues ambos, escritores de habla hispana, desconocían sus lenguas aborígenes y autóctonas (238).

(Borges and Asturias were the two best known at the conference and there were a few polite skirmishes between them. Asturias defended indigenismo *a outrance* as the base of American narrative and thematics, Borges answered that they both spoke Spanish and came from a common Latin culture, and if in fact his indigenismo was so genuine, that he present his argument in the Maya language, and he would answer in Querandí, more modest in cultural terms. The Argentine poet added that he suspected that Asturias wouldn't be able to speak to him in Maya, and that he wouldn't be able to answer him Querandí, because both, as Spanish speaking writers, were unfamiliar with their aboriginal and autochthonous languages.)⁴

While Borges's challenge exposes Asturias's indigenismo as a creation, not an origin (Asturias, in fact, did not speak any of the more than twenty Guatemalan Maya languages), it also exposes the gulf between two writers' experience.⁵ Borges's assessment is reductive and ultimately he is able to discount "Querandí" because he is from an environment that its speakers do not inhabit. Asturias, however, always writes about Guatemala, a location that is majority Maya. His worldview, while not Maya, is not Borges's. His perception of injustice leads him to write an undergraduate thesis on "el problema social del indio" (the social problem of the Indian) in Guatemala. He is unable to write from a Maya position (through heritage, language or experience), but he is unable—unlike Borges—to write around the Maya. Instead, Asturias struggles to claim that Maya position (by reading about *lo maya*, by using Maya names, by trying to write like the *Pop Wuj*, by citing Maya sources, by inventing a Maya mother, etc.) during more than five decades.

A more recent response to Asturias's complicated appropriation and reiteration of the *lo maya* occurred in January of 2004. Humberto Ak'abal, a K'iche' poet, was nominated for Guatemala's most prestigious literary prize, El premio nacional Miguel Ángel Asturias, by the Academia Maya. He refused it on the grounds that Asturias's 1923 undergraduate thesis, *El problema social del indio*, was offensive to the indigenous peoples from Guatemala. In an interview with Juan Carlos Lemus in Guatemala's largest newspaper, La Prensa Libre, Ak'abal remembered:

Cuando yo conocí la tesis...a mí me lastimó muchísimo. Él con esa tesis ofendió a los pueblos indígenas de Guatemala y yo soy parte de esos pueblos (quoted in Kahn 154).

(When I read that thesis...it hurt me a lot. With that thesis he offended Guatemala's indigenous peoples and I am a part of those peoples).

This is perhaps the embodiment of Taussig's "late twentieth-century Reverse Contact now-time, when the Western study of the Third and Fourth World Other gives way to the unsettling confrontation of the West with itself as portrayed in the eyes and handiwork of its Others" (xv).⁶ Ak'abal's refusal of the award, his presence alongside numerous other Guatemalan Maya intellectuals, authors, organizations, politicians, artists and citizens, also occupies a space that Asturias (and others who might seek to do likewise) cannot now so easily appropriate.

I began this dissertation questioning the myth of Asturias and *lo maya* that is memorialized in his Nobel Prize award and his stature as a Guatemalan national literary figure.⁷ The recent critical editions of Asturias's first novels coordinated by Gerald Martin, *El Señor presidente* (1946) and *Hombres de maíz* (1949), meticulously frame—both politically and aesthetically—Asturias's literary creation. Martin's work, supplemented by Stephen Henighan's recent investigation of Asturias's time in Paris and

study of Maya history at the Sorbonne, effectively account for how *lo maya* functions in Asturias's literary production. I add to this scholarship by contextualizing Asturias's appropriation of *lo maya* historically.

Gerald Martin's heavily annotated critical editions helped me to map Asturias's creation across texts, a task assisted by UNESCO's other critical editions in the Colección Archivos series—*París: 1924-1933 Periodismo y creación literaria, Cuentos y leyendas, Mulata de tal* and *El árbol de la cruz*—along with my own readings of Asturias's other works, especially *Maladrón* and *Los ojos de los enterrados*. Although the close readings presented here are dedicated to this latter novel, *Mulata de tal* and *El árbol de la cruz*, they are also deeply conversant with others, reaching across texts to pursue connections, understand repetitions and draw out new interpretations.

Although Asturias is undeniably an important Latin American writer for both his literary merit and his critical location at the onset of indigenismo, magical realism and the “Boom,” he is not very popular. His novels are difficult to follow, harder to summarize and challenging to translate. Literary criticism has settled on a few “masterpieces,” focused repeatedly on Maya elements within them and ignored the remainder. I found, after reading the critical editions, that *lo maya* had been extensively explored by other critics and chose instead to reframe Asturias's appropriation through an intellectual history of both the ladino writer's reflexive assessment of literary mayanism and the literary critics who read him. I then selected three texts that present “other communions” in Asturias—*Los ojos de los enterrados, Mulata de tal* and *El árbol de la cruz*. I show that Asturias's other literary figures—mulatto, woman, God—share some of the same

traits as his literary mayanism, expressing most saliently the novelist's conception (or problematization) of history during the 1960s.

Thus, in seeking to understand Asturias's literary oeuvre over time I had first to grapple with Asturias's relationship to the Maya—not in his novels but rather in literary criticism's representation of Asturias and Asturias's own assessment of Latin American literature. In Chapter Two I study Asturias's appropriation of *lo maya* through an examination of his auto/biography, contrasting versions of his life and childhood that he told in 1960s and 1970s interviews with a 1924 letter that he wrote to his mother. I correlate this auto/biography with the history of anthropological and archeological representations of *lo maya* in order to historically contextualize Asturias's own. I then turn to literary criticism to analyze its uncritical acceptance of Asturias's conception of *lo maya*, that is, I detail how Asturias's orientalizing of *lo maya* is repeated in Asturias's orientalizing of himself (as Maya) and in literary critics' similarly orientalizing perception of him and his work. I also identify critics—Gerald Martin, Stephen Henighan and Arturo Arias—who account for *lo maya* in Asturias in a different way. Finally, I turn to Asturias's own consideration of how *lo maya* (in Taussig's terms, “the phantom figure of the pure Indian”) is integral to an authentic, American, and political body of literature. Drawing on research at Le Fonds Asturias at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France of Asturias's letters, papers and speeches I show how his concept of *lo maya* included a writing practice centering on the repetition of a Maya origin.

Synthesizing and analyzing this large body of literary criticism, particularly the work of Martin and Arias, allows me to advance the discussion of Asturias's themes beyond *lo maya*. To this end I present a close reading of one of his later novels,

published in 1960. *Los ojos de los enterrados* is a novel that has been neglected by criticism, in part because it is overtly political and in part because it has been deemed less polished than Asturias's other novels. In Chapter Three I argue that the novel's repetition of an untranslated phrase, *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*, structures its examination of 1944 and 1954 national history as well as documenting previous political catastrophes—the moments of primitive accumulation and the histories of the conquest and slavery. My analysis looks closely at Asturias's engagement with Guatemalan history and compares it with the historiography of the period to argue that *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* serves an interruptive function in Asturias's fictional timeline. This phrase, however is not connected to *lo maya*, and is instead connected to an Afro-Guatemalan character, Juambo, and a negrista (rather than indigenista) aesthetics.

The Banana Trilogy, of which this novel is a part, is the first time that Asturias creates central Afro-Guatemalan characters. *Mulata de tal*, published in 1963, also has an Afro-Guatemalan main character. While that novel has enjoyed greater critical attention than *Los ojos de los enterrados*, the bulk of that attention has focused on Maya elements present in the text. My close reading draws on gender studies to explore the connection between the land and the female body. When the novel profanes those two sites my analysis turns to religious symbolism, offering a new reading of the novel's final pages. Drawing on the political analysis of the novel offered by Arturo Arias I explain the bounds of the political theology that Asturias has set up in the novel, analyzing the structural themes of sacrilege and redemption that are played out in the novel's repeated use of ellipses.

My readings of *Mulata de tal* and *El árbol de la cruz* (a sketch published after Asturias's death) expand on the Christian themes suggested by *Los ojos de los enterrados*, specifically Asturias's references to biblical texts, religious rites and an apocalyptic framework. Here, I propose an accumulative reading of the text, analyzing its themes through references from *Mulata de tal*, *Hombres de maíz* and *Maladrón*. My analysis calls attention to Asturias's repetitions of the themes of redemption, the female body and the cross as well as the tension between beginning and end—origin and apocalypse—that are ultimately left unresolved in his work.

I start with Asturias's repetition of *lo maya*, looking at how it is represented in Asturias's auto/biography and work and what it allows him to do with language. In my readings of lesser-known texts I examine other repetitions in Asturias—an invented phrase, ellipses—to show how Asturias structures his writing of national history. This dissertation thus contributes to existing scholarship by showing how *lo maya* was identified as a critical part of Asturias's writing praxis by Asturias and literary critics, how Asturias moved away from *lo maya* as a central theme in his 1960s novels *Los ojos de los enterrados* and *Mulata de tal* and how Asturias narrates history through interruptive repetitions. My close readings offer a fresh look at Asturias—particularly his portrayal of Afro-Guatemalans, the female body, and popular religiosity.

¹ “People. People. People from the highlands smelling of wool, crags and black poplars. People from the coast stinking of salt and sea sweat. People from the east, made of hillside earth, giving off an odor of tobacco, dry cheese, yucca paste and corn starch, and people from the north smelling of drizzle, mockingbird cages, and boiled water” (Martin, *Men* 107-8).

² There is an interesting transition between pre- and early independence cultural production, which includes more positive portrayals of indigenous peoples (Rafael Landívar’s *Rusticatio mexicana*, for example, or the heroic status of Atanasio Tzul in Guatemalan independence), and early national cultural production later in the nineteenth century, which does not.

³ For a more complete catalogue of movements in Guatemalan literature see Francisco Albizurez Palma, Seymour Menton (*Historia crítica de la novela guatemalteca*) and Marc Zimmerman.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. A notable exception is *Hombres de maíz*, for which I have used Gerald Martin’s excellent, annotated translation, *Men of Maize*.

⁵ Asturias, in turn, labeled Borges a European author in a 1970 interview with Rita Guibert stating “as an American-Indian, when I read Borges I get the impression that he’s a European author, deeply versed in European culture, a man whose interests are European [...] and I don’t find American roots in it [Borges’ writing], our preferences, nor if you like our defects” (155).

⁶ Arturo Arias’ assesses this event, along with others, as part of his analysis of globality (*Taking their Word* 180).

⁷ Arturo Arias best sums up this connection between Asturias, *lo maya* and the Guatemala nation: “*Hombres de maíz* tried to portray a consensual nationalist identity. One of its objectives was to find in the realm of the imaginary a common ground on which to forge a national-popular unity that fused Maya and Ladino cultures for the benefit of the democratic Ladino state” (238, note 46). Arias postulates a political design for this novel as an instrument by which the Arévalo presidency would consolidate power. While I am skeptical of this claim, given that *Hombres de maíz* was in gestation long before the Arévalo-Arbenz presidencies, it does reflect retrospective perception of the novel.

Chapter 2

Asturias and *lo maya*

Introduction

Miguel Ángel Asturias's grave in Cimetière Père-Lachaise is perched on a small hill, an anomaly amongst the more gothic-style arched monuments (Appendix 1). In place of a tombstone, a cement copy of a pre-Conquest stela rises from a rectangular base, depicting a central figure with headdress, shield and staff. The metal plaque at the base of the replicated stela emphasizes the fusion between Asturias and *lo maya*, bearing a reproduction of Asturias's signature, the date of his death using Maya numerals and the epitaph "Gran lengua de Guatemala/ Unigénito de Tecún Umán" (literally "Great Guatemalan tongue (or translator)/ Sole descendant of Tecún Umán").¹ The triptych of signature/epitaph/Maya date succinctly intertwines Asturias, the nation of Guatemala and Maya indigeneity. It also positions Asturias as its sole scribe, as the messianic descendant of Tecún Umán.²

Archaeologist Leonardo López Luján assesses the strangeness of this choice, since Stela 14 is a non-classic ninth century portrait of a non-Maya warrior governor, not, as would be expected, a Maya one like Tecún Umán. "La elección de la Estela 14 sólo se explica desde una perspectiva en que las expresiones culturales prehispánicas—

despojadas ya de su contenido y su significado originales—suelen ser valoradas simplemente por sus cualidades estéticas, que transmiten la imagen idealizada de un pasado nacional glorioso” (69) (The choice of Stela 14 can only be explained recognizing that pre-hispanic cultural expression—stripped of its original content and meaning—is usually only valued for its aesthetic qualities and for transmitting the idealized image of a glorious national past). López Luján’s assessment of the Stela’s placement is easily applied to Asturias’s own appropriation, invention and repetition of a “Maya” aesthetic and origin.

Asturias spoke no Maya language nor was he ethnically Maya. Instead, his grave site draws on a literary representation in which critics and Asturias himself established Asturias as a writer (and for a long time—until Rigoberta Menchú—*the* writer) of Maya-Guatemalan reality for a global audience. This reputation was built on a perception of *lo maya* in his novels and other works (including his 1923 undergraduate thesis focused on the Guatemalan “indio,” his co-translation (from French into Spanish) of the K’iche’ *Pop Wuj* in 1927, his 1930 collection of legends and his 1960 compilation of a book of pre-Columbian poetry) along with embellished biographical events that became more widely circulated after Asturias was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1967. In this chapter I unravel Asturias’s and critics’ fusion of his literary work with *lo maya* and chronicle the construction of a “literary mayanism,” both as an aesthetic practice and a critical discourse.

The construction of Asturias’s literary mayanism from the 1930s to the 1970s occurs concurrently within the academic conceptualization of Maya classic (A.D. 200-600) and post-classic (A.D. 900-1500) civilizations in the early to mid-twentieth century.

This conceptualization was based on archeological excavations, the publication and translation of colonial-era texts like the *Pop Wuj* that Asturias co-authored in 1927, and the still ongoing decipherment of the codices. Thus, Asturias's literary mayanism is synchronous with a larger category of *lo maya* that was and is being negotiated in the fields of archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics.

I use the term literary mayanism to describe *lo maya* in relation to the figure of Asturias as author and Asturias's work, similar to how indigenismo is used to refer to literary representations of the indigenous Other in Latin America. Literary mayanism is specific, however, and encompasses the phenomena of 1) Asturias's biographical/autobiographical relationship with *lo maya*, 2) literary reception of his works following such rubrics as committed literature, magical realism and the Latin American novel and 3) Asturias's own reflections on Latin America, its indigenous peoples and literature. Thus, the analysis that follows is a dissection of Asturias's memorial within different spaces and at different moments. Starting with the fact that Asturias was not ethnically Maya and had very little interaction with contemporary Maya people, it attempts to determine just what was (and is) considered "Maya" about Asturias and what was expected of these "Maya" elements within Asturias's novels and within Asturias himself as a Latin American writer.

In this first section I examine an oft-repeated, though unstable, anecdote of Miguel Ángel Asturias's re-birth as a Mayan author in Paris. This anecdote has both autobiographical and biographical sources and leads to a discussion of the importance of Asturias's choice and labeling of "Maya" themes for subsequent literary reception and categorization. In the second section I consider principal critics' assessments and

constructions of *lo maya* in Asturias's body of work, starting in the 1960s. I then present Asturias's own reflections on his work and Latin American literature in general, principally from the 1960s.

The category of *lo maya* that is fabricated and negotiated in literary mayanism—in Asturias's autobiography and reflections on his novels, as well as his reflections on Latin American literature generally—has temporal as well as geographic limits. Briefly, the temporal refers to the binary of past/present that also occurs in archaeological discourse. I am using “past” instead of “history” because I want to distinguish between the history of Guatemala as a nation-state and the re-constructed timeline of Maya civilizations debated by archaeologists and epigraphers. The archaeological discoveries of Maya temples began in the 19th century and the first European museum exhibit of these finds was the British Museum's Maudslay exhibit of 1923.³ These exhibitions bind the category of the Maya to the past. Yet the Maya exist contemporaneously with these archaeological expeditions—indeed, Maya laborers are employed as guides and assistants. These contemporary Maya were largely invisible to these first explorers and scholars and the time span separating the fall of the classic Maya civilization (A.D. 900) and their contemporary descendants became an impassable abyss.⁴ Asturias varies in his approach to this binary of past and present, at times collapsing past and present in a time that is neither (sometimes referred to as “magical” time by literary critics).⁵ At other moments Asturias focuses on specific historical events of colonial or nation/state consolidation.⁶ The geographic aspect describes the Central America/Europe binary of origin. The explorations and discoveries of Mayan civilization occur in Central America and Mexico (mostly during the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th) but the

artifacts are removed and shipped, or cast and reproduced, for display in Europe. The body of knowledge constructed from these artifacts is also, for the most part, developed in Europe and the United States. The artifacts' journey parallels Asturias's own as he moves from the isthmus (Guatemala City) to Europe (Paris) in the early 1920s.

Finally, there is a linguistic limit to Asturias's creation of *lo maya*. On a basic level there are the languages of Spanish (the language of Asturias's literary production) and French (the language of knowledge that Asturias learns in Paris). But the creation of *lo maya* is an interrupted gesture towards the Maya languages—interrupted because these are the languages Asturias does not learn, but learns *of* during his study at the Sorbonne. Asturias's reference to Maya languages engages the limit of what is and is not communicable about *lo maya*. At times literary mayanism resembles the enigma of the codices (in the 1920s they were not yet deciphered) and *lo maya* is described as mysterious and unknowable. At other times literary mayanism, through Asturias, is the communication or translation of this same enigma.

The Birth of the Maya Asturias

There is an event in 1920s Paris that is emblematic of Asturias's dynamic relationship to the category of *lo maya*. Although there are many versions of this anecdote, they mostly stem from two second-hand accounts—the first published in English in Chilean critic Luis Harss' and Barbara Dohmann's 1967 collection of conversations with ten Latin American authors, *Into the Mainstream*, and the second in a book-length interview published by Spanish poet and essayist Luis López Álvarez in 1974. The event's omnipresence in critical studies of Asturias indicates its value—

almost as a shorthand—in illustrating Asturias’s relationship to *lo maya*. A version of this anecdote is repeated in almost every single work of literary criticism about Asturias. Toward the end of this section I also examine the only known first-hand version of the event—a 1924 letter sent from Asturias in London to his mother, María Rosales de Asturias, in Guatemala. My reading of the three versions pulls out the three aspects of the category of *lo maya* outlined above—the temporal, the geographic and the linguistic—and explains the relationship between them in order to elucidate how literary mayanism is created by and/or associated with Asturias himself.⁷

In the Spanish translation of *Into the Mainstream*, in the “Prólogo arbitrario” (Arbitrary prologue), Harss clarifies that these conversations are not interviews.⁸ This clarification—*conversación not entrevista*—is indicative of the meandering literary-biographical nature of the work. In keeping with this serendipitous and casual methodology the second chapter, “II: Miguel Ángel Asturias, or the Land Where the Flowers Bloom,” contains few direct quotes. However, Harss specifically names and thanks Asturias (alongside other authors) in the prologue “for going to the trouble to read, correct, and occasionally rewrite parts of their statements in the essays on them” (*Into* 34). The *Nota* prefacing the book declares that the work was first written in English and credits Harss’ wife Barbara Dohmann as collaborator (she is listed as second author of the English edition).⁹ If Asturias did read and correct the manuscript—as Harss asserts in both the English and Spanish prologues—it must have been this Spanish language manuscript, as Asturias was not fluent in English.¹⁰ Harss therefore advertises Asturias’s approval of the content, even though the format is unconventional and it is not always

possible to discern whose words (Asturias's or Harss'/Dohmann's) were chosen in the final write-up.

After a brief biography of Asturias's life in Guatemala—childhood, dictatorship, University, the 1917 earthquake—Harss presents Asturias's recollection of his 1923 exile in Europe.¹¹ The following excerpt describes Asturias's encounter with *lo maya* in London, and his subsequent enrollment at the Sorbonne to study Maya rites and religions. The comparison between the correlative “translations” is useful in establishing discrepancies but also to stress the language that is used—by Harss? by Asturias?—to describe Asturias's recognition of *lo maya* in Europe.¹²

One of the first things he did in London, Asturias recalls—he was there to study economics—was visit the Mayan collection in the British Museum. The objects he saw were like scarecrows out of his own past. They were a mute reminder that although time and distance had effaced the tattered splendors of the old Indian civilization, its vision of the world and its modes of thought were not entirely gone. He had caught glimpses of them at home, dormant, fossilized in an inscrutable population reduced to misery and despair. But their signs could still be read. Perhaps he had begun to find traces of them in his own conscience. The fourteenth of July—Bastille Day—of 1923 he was holidaying in Paris, when wandering through the Sorbonne he came on an announcement for a course taught by Professor George Raynaud, a specialist in Mayan rites and religions. It was a moment of truth (*Into the Mainstream* 76).

Una de las primeras cosas que hizo en Londres, recuerda Asturias—iba a estudiar economía política—, fue visitar la colección maya en el Museo Británico. Los objetos que vio allí parecían fantasmas salidos de su propio pasado. Eran un mudo testimonio de que, aunque el tiempo y la distancia habían borrado los esplendores caducos de la vieja civilización indígena, su visión del mundo, sus actitudes vitales, no habían desaparecido por completo. Los había captado ya alguna vez en su patria. Dormitaban, fosilizados en una población insondable reducida a la miseria y la desesperación. Sus huellas eran apenas

descifrables. Pero tal vez Asturias ya había comenzado a descubrir las claves en su propia conciencia. El 14 de julio—día de la Bastilla—de 1923, de vacaciones en París, recorría la Sorbona cuando encontró el anuncio de un curso dictado por el profesor Georges Raynaud, especialista en ritos y religiones mayas. Y cayó el rayo (*Los nuestros* 96-7).

This excerpt succinctly captures the three aspects—the temporal, the geographic and the linguistic—of Asturias’s literary mayanism.

The first recognition of *lo maya*, in this account, is the result of a geographic displacement: the recently arrived Asturias’s visit to the British Museum. The exhibit he refers to is the Maudslay Collection of Mayan sculptures, an array of casts and originals collected between 1881 and 1894 from Yucatán, Honduras and Guatemala.¹³ The exhibit opened in 1923 and was a permanent fixture in the museum until the Second World War (The British Museum “History of the Collection”). In Harss’ rendering these Maya sculptures confront Asturias shortly after he disembarks from a long Atlantic journey and immediately remind him of the Central America he has recently left—not the isthmus of the present, however, but of centuries past. The statues, like Asturias himself, have made the journey from Central America to Europe. The specters (*fantasmas*) that he reads as vestiges of an expired civilization are simultaneously ascribed to him through the possessive adjective “propio.” Thus, while this description dictates Asturias’s temporal disconnection from *lo maya* (as ancient, expired), it also illustrates his personal, more immediate connection to them in these more contemporary glimpses and traces, all within an overall context of being confronted with home in an institutional setting while abroad.

The Maudslay exhibit “consists, in the main, of casts made from Dr. Maudslay’s moulds, but a few original sculptures collected and presented by him are also included” (Hobson “Preface” British Museum 1). The introduction to the British Museum’s *Guide*

to the Maudslay Collection of Maya Sculptures (Casts and Originals) from Central America draws on John L. Stephens' 1839 book *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* and refers to the "great Maya semi-civilization" exclusively in the past tense, thereby underscoring the temporal abyss between the Maya of the past from their contemporary descendants (5). It also refers to the Maya texts "Chilan Balan," the "Popol Vuh," and the Dresden Codex and explains what was then known about the Maya calendar.¹⁴ Sculptures and casts are from six sites in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras: Quiriguá, Copan, Chichen Itza, Ixkun, Palenque and Menche.¹⁵ It is worth noting that the casts of stelae, monuments and statues are very large, and filled several rooms.¹⁶ Thus, they would have surrounded Asturias in the exhibition space, overwhelming his visual field. There is some explanation of the "glyphs," and some light speculation, in the guide, as to their meaning, but Maya writing was not even recognized as a logographic system until 1952 and this recognition only achieved general academic canonization in 1979 (Coe 234).¹⁷ The decipherment of the codices is to date incomplete, although great advancements have been made recently (from 1979 to the present) such that "it can now be said that the Maya hieroglyphic system has been deciphered, although, to be sure, doubts remain about certain elements" (Houston, Chinchilla Mazariegos and Stuart 3).

Given how little was known about Maya writing at this time, Asturias's ability to *read* "the Maya" in the early 1920s is striking. Although they are a "población insondable" ("inscrutable" in the translation, but perhaps more literally "unfathomable") he had been able to capture them ("los había captado") in his native Guatemala. He is able to read their signs, in the early 1920s, because he possesses the necessary code with which to unlock them, "ya había comenzado a descubrir las claves en su propia

conciencia.” This is very much in keeping, of course, with the surrealists’ connection of the primitive with the unconscious.¹⁸ Asturias’s own literary conception of *lo maya* privileges *lo maya* as mysterious and magical while simultaneously—and paradoxically—creating or borrowing a Maya “voice” in novels such as *Hombres de maíz* and *Maladrón*.¹⁹

The Maya sculptures in the description are exterior to Asturias. He sees them in the quiet halls, landings and rooms of the museum. They remind him of something he has seen before, in a population that is alien to him but within the context of a familiar territory. Now that Asturias is geographically distant from that territory, Guatemala, the sculptures resonate internally. This movement—from external to internal—is of primary importance for understanding how Asturias negotiates *lo maya*. First, it is a paternalistic and violent appropriation because Asturias is in the privileged position of knowing *lo maya*, of absorbing *lo maya*, and, finally, speaking for *lo maya*. Yet acknowledgment of *lo maya*, given the historical context of Asturias’s youth in a ladino household in early 20th century Guatemala, is a transgression. Ladino, a term specific to Guatemala (and Chiapas, parts of which were Guatemalan until the 1880s), initially referred to the cultural and linguistic assimilation of the indigenous—majority Maya—populations. This assimilation depends upon the rejection of the Maya Other. Its meaning later extended to the miscegenation between European and indigenous peoples (Tedlock 250 and Warren 10). Asturias uses this term in his 1923 undergraduate thesis *El problema social del indio* to denote the civilizing “we” of the document on the fifth page (“mestizo/*ladino*” (36, italics in the original)). We can infer that Asturias considers himself ladino from his statement of the problem, that “el indio sigue, como antes,

olvidado por parte de aquellos a quienes la nación confió sus destinos y por parte de los gobernados que *formamos* la minoría semicivilizada de Guatemala (profesionales, estudiantes, comerciantes, periodistas, etc.)” (32, emphasis mine) (the Indian continues to be, as before, forgotten by those to whom the nation trusted with their destiny and by those governed who form part of the semi-civilized Guatemalan minority (professionals, students, business-people, journalists, etc.)).

Given this, internalization of *lo maya*—identification with *lo maya*—is even more surprising. The internalization of this event in the 1960s account is a marked departure from Asturias’s 1923 assessment of the social problem of the Indian within the national context of Guatemala, written before his trip to Europe. In that study the “indio” is abjectly Other, and if there is a clear hypothesis to be garnered from the document it is that the salvation of the “indio” is dependent on an injection of stronger, European blood (a borrowing from José Vasconcelos’ idea of *la raza cósmica*).²⁰

Estelle Tarica proposes a dual nature for indigenismo and evaluates it as “an exoticist and racist discourse that furthers colonial aims of exploiting, subordinating, and silencing Indians” while also acknowledging that its “critiques of social injustice, still alive today, advance notions of common belonging and coexistence that cut across racial and ethnic lines” (xi).²¹ I partially agree with Tarica’s assessment here. In Asturias’s case, the appropriation of *lo maya* is exoticist, essentialist and violent. At the same time, he creates a composite voice that he labels/is labeled Indigenist/Indian/“Maya” that he couples with social concerns in order to critique social, and at times ethnic, injustices. This is not to say that any social conscience he may have had rectifies the violence of appropriation.²² At times, Asturias’s complicated identifications with *lo maya*—and his

glimpses of structural inequity and injustice—allow him to step outside the rigid boundaries of ethnicity and class that structure Guatemalan society. But I would argue, at least in the case of Asturias, that these are merely individual aesthetic explorations, and not ones that advance collective “notions of common belonging and coexistence” as Tarica attests.²³

In Luis Harss’ retrospective, Asturias’s visit to the Maudslay Collection is a central encounter that directs his course of study and collapses the geographic distance between Central America and Europe.²⁴ The sculptures testify to a particular Guatemala, a Maya Guatemala, an ancient Guatemala, a mysterious, yet readable, Guatemala. In the narrative the move from London to Paris becomes a seamless transition from one institution to the next. In the same paragraph, instead of wandering through the statues of the Maudslay Collection, Asturias wanders through the halls of the Sorbonne and “happens” upon a course announcement about Maya rites and religions. The paragraph ends with the climactic, decisive “Y cayó el rayo” (lightning struck, translation mine). The account drives towards this fated, yet mysteriously serendipitous moment, and the motor is *lo maya*.

Luis López Álvarez’ 1974 *Conversaciones con Miguel Ángel Asturias* differs from Harss’ in that he relates this event with quoted responses from Asturias. The introduction asserts that the majority of the conversations took place in Paris during the summer of 1973, approximately ten months before Asturias’s death, and outlines the poet’s friendship with Asturias over the preceding ten years. López Álvarez opens with a physical description of Asturias comparing him to the classic Maya—a comparison that occurs frequently among Asturias’s biographers and literary critics:

Su pesada figura parecía destinarle a permanecer sentado, sentado y erguido, buda maya, diosecillo entornando las pupilas para abrir los labios y transmitir sentencioso la sabiduría de su palabra, <<gran lengua>> del renacimiento maya (10).

(His heavy figure seemed to predestine him to a seated position, sitting tall like a Maya Buddha, a little god half-closing his eyes and opening his lips to transmit gravely the knowledge of the word, Great Speaker (Tongue) of the Mayan renaissance).

The literally orientalizing physiognomic description—“buda maya”—exalts Asturias and emphasizes his power of pronouncement through the word.²⁵ The phrase “gran lengua” appears at earlier points in the Asturias biography (and, as mentioned previously, on his similarly deific epigraph) and sums up the sentiment that Asturias is *the* writer of Guatemalan Mayan reality.²⁶ Thus, “buda maya” is the visual prelude for López Álvarez’ account of Asturias and his study of *lo maya* in Paris and it serves to reify the abstraction of *lo maya* in the materiality of Asturias’s body.

The structure of López Alvarez’ *Conversaciones* is that of a question-answer format and Asturias’s transcribed answers stretch on for pages. To a question about his youthful influences Asturias replies with anecdotes about his University experience in Guatemala, then, of his ocean journey (Puerto Barrios—Panamá—Liverpool) and, finally, his arrival in London. He describes his months in London in a sentence and launches into another explanation of how he came to study at the Sorbonne, thereby placing less importance on London than in the Harss account:

De allí [Liverpool] marchamos a Londres. Estuve en Londres poco más de dos meses (más que en Londres en el British Museum). El catorce de julio de mil novecientos veinticuatro me fui a París a ver cómo eran las fiestas. Me encontré en París a muchos compatriotas y abandoné la idea de mi padre de que debía hacer algún curso de economía en Londres.

En París me inscribí en la Sorbona, en los cursos de <<Mitos y religiones de la América maya>>, que daba el profesor Georges Raynaud, una autoridad en la materia (73-74).

(From there [Liverpool] we traveled to London. I was in London a little over two months (more in the British Museum than in London). On July 14th 1924 I went to Paris to see the celebrations. There I found many countrymen and I abandoned my father's idea about completing an economy course in London.

In Paris I registered at the Sorbonne for "Myths and religions of the American Maya," taught by Georges Raynaud, an authority in the subject.)

In this account Asturias stays on in Paris (abandoning his father's preference for economic study in London) because of friends, and the reason for his enrollment in the Sorbonne is not detailed. The catalyst of the Maudslay Collections is omitted, perhaps hinted at only in the parenthetical "más que en Londres en el British Museum." Instead, Asturias focuses on his first class with Raynaud:

Cuando asistí a la primera clase del profesor Raynaud me senté en el aula y noté que, al mismo tiempo que explicaba, se me quedaba mirando. Yo me decía qué pasaría. Me preguntaba si no sería que no estaba en el lugar que me correspondía. Hasta llegué a sacar el recibo de mi inscripción para asegurarme de que había pagado mi derecho a estar allí sentado. El profesor mientras tanto me miraba y me miraba. Nada más terminar la clase, se levantó y se vino hacia mí y me dijo: <<Vous êtes maya>>, y al confirmarle que procedía de Guatemala, el hombre se puso entusiasmadísimo. Me pidió que me fuese con él. Yo vivía entonces en una pensioncita en la misma plaza de la Sorbona, frente a la estatua de Auguste Comte. Le dije, al ver que paraba un taxi: <<No se moleste profesor, porque yo vivo aquí mismo.>> Insistió mucho en que fuese hasta su casa, que quedaba hacia la plaza de la República. Al entrar en su apartamento, abrió la puerta y me tomó del brazo hasta la cocina, en donde estaba su señora cocinando y le dijo: <<He aquí un maya. ¡Y tú que dices que los mayas no existen!>> (75)

(When I attended my first class with Profesor Raynaud I sat down in the classroom and I noticed that he kept looking at

me during his explanation. I asked myself what was going on. I thought that maybe I wasn't in the right place. I even got to the point of taking out my enrollment receipt to assure myself that I'd paid for the right to sit there. Meanwhile the professor kept looking at me. As soon as class was over he got up and came to me and said: "You're Maya," and upon confirming that I was from Guatemala he became really excited. He asked me to come with him. I was living in a little boarding house in the same plaza as the Sorbonne, in front of Auguste Comte's statue. I told him, seeing that he was stopping a taxi: "don't worry Professor, I live right here." He insisted that I come with him to his house, which was on the way to the plaza of the Republic. Upon entering his apartment he opened the door, grabbed my arm and led me to the kitchen where his wife was cooking and he said to her: "Here we have a Maya. And you say the Maya don't exist!")

In Harss' scene in the British Museum Asturias comes face to face with a sculpture, recognizes it and internalizes it. In this exchange the recognition is external: Raynaud names Asturias, "Vous êtes maya," to which Asturias replies with neither denial nor affirmation. He is from Guatemala. Undeterred, and in spite of Asturias's objections, Raynaud drags him to his house, and into the kitchen, to show Asturias off to his wife. In this scene Asturias is the Maya Other—"He aquí un maya"—and is displayed as a living statue in the intimacy of this Parisian home. The Other in this account is not an out-of-place, "ancient" Maya sculpture in the British Museum but Asturias himself.

Various geographic and temporal aspects emerge in this recollection. The first is Asturias's rejoinder to Raynaud's "Vous êtes maya." Asturias is clearly not Maya, culturally or linguistically. In his recollection he blurs this fact by responding that he is from Guatemala—a country within classic Maya territory. Raynaud interprets this as an affirmative, however, and presents Asturias as a relic, possessing him with the quote "He aquí un maya." The "aquí," the present tense, the living body of Asturias in Madame Raynaud's kitchen, locates *lo maya* in the present, not in the past. But Asturias is still a

Maya out-of-place, not unlike the Maya statues displayed in the Maudslay collection at the British Museum, uprooted from Guatemala and weighing heavily on a Parisian kitchen floor. Raynaud emphasizes the event's remarkableness in the account, as he exclaims triumphantly to his wife: ¡Y tú que dices que los mayas no existen!²⁷

Raynaud is the external European expert, labeling Asturias as Maya. And, in the account, Asturias does not reject this label outright. Yet at the time the event supposedly took place—1924—Asturias would certainly have resisted such a label internally, even though he might not have voiced his rejection to his eminent professor.²⁸ In Guatemala the term “indio” (the term “Maya” was only used to describe the ancient civilizations) connoted/connotes negative traits and the segregation of indios and ladinos in Guatemala was/is vigilantly enforced. In a 1924 letter from Asturias to his mother extolling the virtues of life in London compared to life in Guatemala he uses “indio” as a pejorative, as was common at that time: “Cuando me acuerdo del indio de la policía y gentes por el estilo, me siento feliz de estar lejos” (Asturias Montenegro 290).²⁹ Yet Asturias does not resist being labeled “Maya” by his French professor. While not actively adopting the descriptor, he is content with a sort of co-existence in this 1973 re-telling. This coexistence is amplified by the visual excess of his memorial—replete with stela, title and divine inheritance.³⁰

These retrospectives, from interviews that took place in 1966 Genova and 1973 Paris, both contain descriptions that locate *lo maya* as Other. In the Maudslay collection this Other is distant temporally but proximal enough spatially to interrogate the viewer (Asturias) and force him to contemplate its ancientness. In this contemplation there is recognition and the primitive, ancient, mysterious Other is revealed as knowable to

Asturias, both by codes he possesses and through internal resonance in the realm of the unconscious. In the López Alvarez biography the viewer is not Asturias but the revered Raynaud, an expert in Mayan mythology and religions, a European professor who recognizes Asturias as “Maya” and presents him as an exhibit to his wife. In his exchange with López Álvarez, Asturias cites Professor Raynaud as the authority. Raynaud presents the evidence that “the Maya” exist and are present temporally, in the figure of Asturias—who is also, like the statues, and like the texts Raynaud translates, transported from the far-away isthmus to Paris.

For a more contemporaneous account of this event I offer a letter that Jean-Philippe Barnabé asserts pertains to family documents preserved by Gonzalo Asturias Montenegro in Guatemala.³¹ Asturias writes to his mother on November 30, 1924:

En la Sorbona me pasó lo siguiente. Asistí como alumno inscrito a la Clase sobre la América Central que da el Prof. Reynauld [sic]. Al principiar la clase, el Profesor me llamó, hablándome en un idioma tan extraño que no le comprendí. Viéndome un tanto confundido, me dijo ya en francés <<ah! es que Ud no habla Quiché>>. Yo lo indiqué que en Guatemala ya casi no se hablaba el Quiché puro, a lo que él me respondió que era una lástima pues es una lengua tan dulce y sonora como el griego (Barnabé 466-7).³²

(The following happened to me at the Sorbonne. I attended as a registered student a class about Central America that Prof. Reynauld [sic] teaches. At the beginning of class the Professor called on me, speaking in a language so strange that I didn't understand him. Seeing that I was a little confused, he said to me—in French—“ah! It's that you don't speak Quiché.” I indicated to him that in Guatemala nowadays pure Quiché is hardly spoken to which he responded that it was a shame because it's a language as sweet and sonorous as Greek.)

This account is similar to the Harss account in many respects. Asturias and Professor Raynaud are in a classroom setting at the Sorbonne. But there are also several

discrepancies. The first is the year: 1924. In the Harss retrospective Asturias establishes his trips to London, and Paris, and his enrollment at the Sorbonne as occurring during June-July 1923, not 1924. And although the date (1924) is the same, he signs up for a class about “Mitos y religiones de la América maya” in the López Álvarez account, not a “Clase sobre la América Central.” Aside from these details there is a shift from the visual to the auditory, to language.

In the Harss account the Other are Maya statues arranged in the visual field of the British Museum. The Maya are mysterious, unfathomable, but accessible, through the unconscious, to Asturias. In the López Álvarez account the Other is Asturias himself, visually observed by Raynaud and named: “Vous êtes maya.” In this letter, there is also recognition, but the wall of incomprehensibility is absolute. Raynaud “recognizes” Asturias as Maya-K’iche’ and addresses him “en un idioma tan extraño que no le comprendí.” At this failed communication Raynaud assesses, correctly, that Asturias does not speak the Maya language. Asturias further negates connection with K’iche’ as a language by declaring to his mother (and to Raynaud) that in Guatemala “ya casi no se hablaba el Quiché puro.”

That assertion, that “pure” K’iche’ was hardly spoken in Guatemala, was not true in 1920s Guatemala and not true today.³³ But the assertion does serve as a mechanism with which Asturias can distance himself from the K’iche’ language—“un idioma tan extraño”—by judging it incomprehensible. In the account he also excludes K’iche’ from the lexicon of Guatemala. There is none of the identification found in the Harss account (“las claves en su propia conciencia”) and the connection between “the Maya,” Asturias and Guatemalan national identity found in the López Álvarez account (Asturias’s

response to Raynaud's "Vous êtes maya," we recall, is confirmation that Asturias is from Guatemala) is absent. The only way that Asturias can acknowledge a Maya Other at the time of the letter's writing in 1924, is to include Raynaud's praise of K'iche' as "una lengua tan dulce y sonora como el griego." He classicizes K'iche' by equating it with ancient Greek.³⁴ The inclusion of this valoration is perhaps the opening that permits Asturias's curiosity about Maya texts and language (at least ancient ones), given that in his 1923 thesis contemporary Maya culture and peoples are more worthy of pity and contempt. Indeed, by the 1960s Asturias has claimed Maya languages as the source for his unique literary language and, by extension, the indigenous languages of the Americas as the font for Latin American literature.

The terms of Asturias's relationship with the category of *lo maya* vary between the temporal, the geographic and the linguistic in these auto/biographic accounts. But it is language that emerges as the opening, the playing field, for Asturias's creation of literary mayanism. The difference between this 1924 letter in which Asturias dismisses *lo maya* in nearly absolute terms and the Harss and López Álvarez recollections in which *lo maya* plays a critical role as a "población insondable" that can paradoxically be related to, translated and internalized is critical. This movement from external to internal—from exclusion to limited incorporation—reverberates in the literary criticism of Asturias as critics look to his biography for the origins of his unique literary style which I analyze in section two, and in Asturias's own reflections about literature, Latin America and social protest in which he posits *lo maya* (and, more generally, the indigenous) as the source for the originality—and the political salvation—of the Latin American novel and Latin American literature which I analyze in section three.

Reception and propagation of literary mayanism

The essentialist aspects of literary mayanism that I discussed in the context of Asturias's biography and autobiography become integral to the literary criticism of his work. His first book of fiction, *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930), was well received, and reviewed, as early as the 1930s (especially in France). Sustained literary criticism of Asturias's subsequent novels, and the formation of a critical following, however, did not emerge until the 1950s, and increased with the award of the 1966 Lenin and 1967 Nobel literary prizes.³⁵ The 1960s also mark an increasing recognition of Latin American literature generally and its categorization using labels such as "magical realism," the "boom," "indigenismo" and "committed literature." These critics approach Asturias's work using these historically important categories, but they primarily attempt to explain Asturias's literary merit in terms of *lo maya*. Consequently, they can generally be divided into those who construct the myth of Asturias and *lo maya* (claiming that Asturias has a special ability to interpret and communicate an essentialist Maya worldview) and those revisionist critics who deconstruct those myths. As might be expected, critics adopting the first approach (Giusseppe Bellini, Richard Callan, Amos Segala, et al.) are more prevalent in 1960s and 1970s publications while those adopting the second, more revisionist approach (Marc Cheymol, Stephen Henighan, Arturo Arias, et al.) write in the 1990s or 2000s. But there are important exceptions—René Prieto, for example, a more constructionist critic publishing on Asturias in the 1990s, or Gerald Martin, who engages Asturias's work over several decades and who examines Asturias's work without assigning to it an essentialist Maya perspective.

In the first section I explained how *lo maya* in Asturias's auto/biography has three distinct aspects: the temporal, the geographic and the linguistic. This linguistic aspect engages the limit of what may or may not be communicable about *lo maya*, oscillating between *lo maya* as unknowable/untranslatable and *lo maya* as translatable/knowable. Finally, I suggest that language itself is ultimately what permits Asturias's creative engagement with and construction of *lo maya*.

Literary criticism engages this same question of communicability surrounding *lo maya* in Asturias's novels in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, it constructs a political role for *lo maya* and considers it a determinate attribute of the new Latin American novel. Beginning in the late 1980s, criticism reconsiders the question of communicability and *lo maya*, and begins to resituate it politically and otherwise. In this chronological survey of literary critics I identify how Asturias's literary mayanism is being defined/created by literary critics in order to show its relationship to the larger constructs of the Latin American and/or political novel. There is a significant shift from an essentialist interpretation of *lo maya* and Asturias (deriving from Asturias's auto/biography told through the Harss and López Álvarez interviews) towards an understanding of how Asturias constructs *lo maya*. I detail this shift in how literary criticism frames Asturias and *lo maya* and how it addresses the issue of communicability in what follows.

The Latin American Novel, the political novel, and lo maya

Giuseppe Bellini, an Italian literary scholar, was the first to publish a book-length analysis of Asturias's novels. *La narrativa di Miguel Ángel Asturias* (1966), explains how Asturias's use of *lo maya* in his work constitutes a new Latin American literature.

In the 1969 Spanish translation he presents Asturias as the greatest Spanish-language novelist in the Americas. This category of [Latin] American novelist derives from Bellini's reading of Peruvian critic Luis Alberto Sánchez' 1933 book *América, novela sin novelistas* (*America, novel without novelists*). Bellini cites a passage where Sánchez postulates how such [Latin] American novelists are emerging to write the great, essential and defining Novel, "América comienza ya ser pasto de novelistas, es decir a parir novelas a costa de su Novela, de su gran Novela esencial y definidora" (9, note 3). In order to validate his view of Asturias as the quintessential Latin American novelist, Bellini anchors him to a specific rural Latin American context and origin. He cites Asturias's childhood experiences in rural Guatemala as a retrospective explanation for both the political and the creative:

Allí el futuro autor toma contacto con la miseria del país y, al mismo tiempo, descubre en la gente pobre una incontaminada riqueza espiritual que le permite tener fe en el futuro. Este contacto, este descubrimiento determinarán todas las manifestaciones más significativas de su vida, la actividad política y creativa (16).

(There the author connects with his country's misery, and, at the same time, discovers in the poor an uncontaminated spiritual wealth that allows him to have faith in the future. This connection, this discovery, will determine all of the most meaningful events of his life—both in terms of political activity and creativity).³⁶

This essentialist description of poverty—which in this instance refers not only to the rural but to *lo maya*—paradoxically becomes the font for spiritual wealth and faith in Asturias, and, subsequently, the reason for his creativity. Bellini is thus one of the first, though not by any means the only, to group Asturias's politics and *lo maya* under the banner of the Great Latin American novel.

Continuing his explanation of the political in Asturias, Bellini's specifically includes Asturias's learning about *lo maya*:

La presencia de Guatemala se hace más viva espiritualmente en Asturias al contacto con el mundo de la antigua civilización centroamericana que ahora se le manifiesta en toda su grandeza por la profunda capacidad de Raynaud. Si en la tesis de doctorado [sic] el escritor había afrontado un tema humano de alcance tan decisivo para su país cual era la situación del indio, ahora un interés más amplio lo vuelve hacia el mundo cuya verdadera grandeza ha descubierto y lo conduce con urgencia a investigar los remotos orígenes en las fuentes literarias para descubrir la gran cultura de los Mayas, no con el entusiasmo de un erudito, sino con la convicción y el calor de quien entiende que la redescubierta grandeza espiritual sirve para levantar a su pueblo de una secular abyección, de una espantosa miseria (17-18).³⁷

(Guatemala's presence becomes more spiritually alive in Asturias through his contact with the ancient Central American civilization manifested in all its grandeur by Raynaud's profound knowledge. If the author, in his doctoral thesis [sic], had confronted such an important and nationally decisive theme as the situation of the Indian, his now broader interest returned him to that world whose true grandeur has now been discovered and it urgently drives him to investigate the remote origins in literary sources in order to discover the Maya's great culture, not with the enthusiasm of the erudite, but rather with the conviction and fervor of one who understands that the rediscovered spiritual grandeur serves to raise the people from secular abjection, from horrifying misery).

The spiritual grandeur of "the Maya" is again contrasted with an essentialist view of poverty—"abyección," "miseria." This poverty is described as secular (in the cyclical sense, occurring each century) but is also imbued with Christian metaphor as a situation to be risen above ("levantar a su pueblo"). Maya spiritual grandeur from the past, rediscovered and wielded by Asturias, is thus, in Bellini's reading, the savior of an abject present. Consequently, Bellini's interpretation of the significance of *lo maya* shares some of the temporal contradictions of *lo maya* in Asturias's auto/biography—*lo maya* of the

past privileged over *lo maya* of the present. However, in contrast to auto/biography where the role of *lo maya* is limited to literary muse and creation, Bellini transforms *lo maya* of the past into a potential contemporary political actor through its representation in Asturias.

Other critics' readings hone in on *lo maya* in Asturias's novels to highlight his unique ability to represent *lo maya* in literature, that is, to communicate an essentialist Maya reality—much like Harss' biography. Richard Callan published *Miguel Ángel Asturias*, the first book-length treatment in English of Asturias's work in 1970. In less than 200 pages Callan provides a synopsis for all of Asturias's published novels, short stories and dramas. His interpretive focus is Jungian, emphasizing the universality of the unconscious and myth while at the same time praising Asturias's ability to appropriate and reproduce a local Mayan worldview. Callan cites Asturias's education at the Sorbonne, drawing parallels between the novelist's achievements and those of Professor Raynaud. In the epilogue he states:

One of the great successes of Asturias is to have captured and reproduced the mind of the Indians, their view of the world, and their experience of it. He shares this virtue with his former Sorbonne professor, Georges Raynaud. Instead of minimizing the oddities and reducing the Indian texts to European terms to make them intelligible, Raynaud preferred to adjust his own mind and language to fit their thought patterns and to preserve their original essence. This makes his translations more accurate but more difficult to read than if he had used the reductive method. Asturias seems to use the same principle as Raynaud: in many of his Indian legends and in a novel like *Mulata*, he makes little or no concession to the Western turn of mind. Instead, he conveys his insight into the native mentality as it is, and offers us an opportunity to penetrate into this world of unreal reality insofar as we are willing to make the effort to follow him. One's natural tendency is to translate the unfamiliar into known terms and to disregard what

cannot be so handled. But the readers of Asturias owe it to him to throw off the moorings of Western culture and allow themselves to be submerged in the unfamiliar and mysterious life he has re-created. Then one begins to experience how the world looks to a Maya Indian (164-5).

Callan repeats the appropriative language of Asturias biography by describing how Asturias has “captured” and “reproduced” the Indian mind. The genius of Asturias, according to Callan, is that this reproduction is not reductive, and preserves somehow an “original essence” of *lo maya* that is contrasted with a “Western” one. Maya essence, in turn, is tied to issues of legibility that recall the question of communication described in the three accounts of the biographical section of this chapter. In the Harss account the Maya are “insondable” but Asturias holds some of the keys for understanding in his unconscious. Asturias’s ability to comprehend *lo maya* is reiterated by Callan with phrases like “insight into the native mentality.” Asturias’s privileged insight is what distinguishes him from a translator and Callan assigns him a role akin to that of a medium facilitating contact between *lo maya* and the reader.

Yet Callan also calls attention to the reader’s potential incomprehensibility—a troubled contact between the reader and *lo maya*. Callan alludes to this in terms of intelligibility, and ease of reading, hinting that Asturias’s novels are difficult because they describe an “unfamiliar and mysterious” life. Furthermore, Callan calls on the reader to suspend his or her own experience in order to accommodate the new and applauds Asturias for not making concessions to a Western frame of mind. Thus, Callan marks a strange state of un-translatability, privileging Asturias’s re-creation of a Mayan world that is decidedly *not* universal, but local. Consequently, Callan’s reading of Asturias and *lo maya* also fulfills the dual nature of Estelle Tarica’s *indigenismo*, a discourse that is racist while at the same time critical of injustice. It is certainly exoticist

and violently appropriative. This violence is evidenced in the one-sided nature of the relationship: Callan writes about the reader's "experience" of *lo maya* as communicated by Asturias, while there is no mention of a hypothetical Maya "experience" of the Western. But it also proposes an understanding of *lo maya* through Asturias that advances some limited notion of common belonging through the act of reading.

René Prieto and neo-Indigenista penetration

René Prieto's 1993 book, *Miguel Ángel Asturias's Archaeology of Return*, examines *Leyendas de Guatemala*, *Hombres de maíz* and *Mulata de tal* with an indigenist framework similar to that of Bellini and Callan. Indeed, his preface seems to paraphrase Callan: "Asturias was the first American author to succeed in portraying an indigenous world vision that is truly non-Western" (i). He traces the novels' production to "the cultural traditions of the ancient Maya" and "the rhetoric of surrealism" (i). Yet Prieto, unlike his contemporaries Henighan, Arias and Martin (below), constructs the myth of Asturias and *lo maya* in a way that is also unlike Callan and Bellini because it continually detracts from the political.

Prieto argues Asturias "can be counted among the very few Latin American authors who have managed to *penetrate* the surface of Indian consciousness" (12, my emphasis). His claim is developed through an evolution of literary terms, declaring that before Asturias

if a writer chose Indians and their culture as a literary subject in Latin America, there were two choices: Either the writer exploited them for their exotic, which is to say, their decorative value, or defended them in melodramatic tracts that always responded to the same cliché-ridden model and culminated in the same impasse: Indians should

have rights but they are exploited and abused by a white minority [...] (37).

Prieto categorizes the novel produced by the first type of writer as “Indianista” and the novel produced by the second as “Indigenista.” Like Callan, Prieto sees Asturias’s work as exceptional and declares that it escapes both these paradigms via three techniques:

First of all, he is, to borrow Joseph Sommers’s expression, the first to penetrate “beneath the surface of Indian consciousness” [...]; second, he incorporates with great success the narrative grammar and structural devices on which many pre-Columbian manuscripts rely; and third, he provides a model that translates the evolution from chaos to order in *Hombres [de maíz]* (42).

On the basis of this argument he uses a new word to label Asturias’s work, borrowing a term from Tomás Escajadillo’s unpublished doctoral dissertation, “neoindigenista.”

Prieto relies on Asturias’s biography for evidence of the first two techniques of neoindigenista literature (mainly via Harss, López Álvarez and Sáenz). And, while he often acknowledges its unreliability regarding Asturias’s experience with Maya cultures in Guatemala or his knowledge of Maya languages—citing Marc Cheymol’s 1987 *Miguel Ángel Asturias dans le Paris des “années folles”*—Prieto persists in using this biography to claim that Asturias’s representation of *lo maya* is authentic. He focuses particularly on the Sorbonne in order to declare Asturias an expert in all things Maya. This evidence is marginally convincing for Asturias’s use of pre-Columbian texts for narrative structure or inspiration (something more thoroughly supported in Jorge Alcides Paredes’ *El Popol Vuh y la Trilogía Bananera: estructura y recursos narrativos*, for example, or the critical editions of Asturias’s novels edited by Gerald Martin) but unconvincing regarding Prieto’s first claim about Asturias’s direct link to *lo maya*.³⁸ Indeed, just how Asturias might have “penetrated Indian consciousness” is never fully explained, only suggested.

What is clear is that Prieto uses the same tropes outlined above in section one, borrowing Harss' mythically connective language to lend Asturias a privileged voice.

As much as Prieto shares Bellini and Callan's approach to Asturias and *lo maya*, he differs in his reading of Asturias's politics. In the preface Prieto declares his intention to go "beyond the usual political readings (i)"—referring to Bellini's interpretation of political salvation through *lo maya* or Callan's association of aesthetics and politics—and subsequently derides Asturias's political critique, labeling it "tedious sermonizing" (1). Yet Prieto's readings of *Mulata de tal* and Asturias's other novels reiterate the same essentialist aspects, and instead of going "beyond the usual political readings," conclude with a reductive moral and didactic assessment of Asturias's intent: "When readers fail to heed his message [Mayas are the future for Guatemala], Asturias chastises them (in *Mulata de tal*) by showing that greed only leads to barrenness and the only true wealth lies in communication and human contact" (245). Although Prieto is asynchronous in that his book (1993) is later than Callan's (1970) or Bellini's (1966), his critical approach is typical of those critics that see Asturias, and other neo-indigenist authors, as authentic representatives for an essential Maya/Latin American Other. Thus Prieto perpetuates an orientalist reading of literary mayanism (and of Asturias himself) while divorcing it from any critique of social injustice.³⁹

Other literary critics avoid the myth of Asturias as the representative of an essential Maya worldview altogether, and instead deconstruct the myths of Asturias's biography, focus on his use of language, or analyze Asturias's use of *lo maya* as a metaphor. Although Stephen Henighan, Gerald Martin, and Arturo Arias contend with the same categories of the political novel and the American novel as the previous critics,

they rely less on exoticist interpretations of *lo maya*. Indeed, the issue of communicability—via translation or otherwise—is discussed in a remarkably different way.

For Stephen Henighan, this means examining the relationship between Asturias and *lo maya* and directly interrogating the claims of Asturias, biographers and critics regarding his links to *lo maya*. In his 1999 book *Assuming the Light: The Parisian Literary Apprenticeship of Miguel Ángel Asturias*, Henighan’s approach is more historical-biographical than literary and he reflects on Asturias’s biography critically, using Marc Cheymol’s earlier investigation as a starting point.⁴⁰ Narrowing his focus to the period that Asturias spent in Paris in the 1920s and early 1930s Henighan examines how Asturias chose “the Maya as the dominant symbol of Guatemalan identity” (3). His rigorous study, instead of attempting to substantiate a Maya Asturias, provides the caveat that “Asturias’s definition of his cultural identity was a fraught, flawed success” (6). His work, while not directly addressing the larger constructs of the Latin American novel or the political novel, does clarify how *lo maya* served the young writer Asturias and the political implications of that choice. Thus, Henighan addresses the question of how *lo maya* might have served the novelist’s goals.

The most important difference between Henighan’s work and that of other critics and biographers, is that he describes the power structures that permit Asturias’s acquisition of a Maya identity in Paris and those that make such a choice impossible in Guatemala. He establishes Asturias’s dual identity—“a Mayan in Paris and a *ladino* in Guatemala”—based on biography and literary criticism compiled in the UNESCO-sponsored volume *Miguel Ángel Asturias: París 1924-1933 Periodismo y creación*

literaria and argues that this dual Maya/ladino identity is the muse for Asturias's literary production (150). And, while he acknowledges the pioneering significance of Maya-indigenist imagery within a nationalist project, he is uncompromising in his critique of its Orientalist bent (63).

Henighan's last chapter, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka, pour une littérature mineure*, concludes that

Asturias erected the scaffolding of a new ideological hegemony over the traditional cultures of Guatemala at the same time that he was agitating for literary liberation of those cultures. These two impulses, poised in a tenuous balance, would generate the narrative universe of his subsequent novels (193).

Henighan's assessment—very much in accordance with Estelle Tarica's dual definition of literary indigenismo, above,—provides a revised explanation for the muse of Asturias's literary production. Asturias's auto/biography of his relationship to *lo maya* is still important to an understanding of his work, but it is not the essential Maya or penetrative insight of Callan, Bellini or Prieto. Instead, Henighan critically examines Asturias's construction of *lo maya* in tandem with his elaboration of other concerns of social justice.

Gerald Martin's tack is similar, as he maintains a boundary between Asturias's auto/biography and his literary production. The beginning of Gerald Martin's critical relationship with Miguel Ángel Asturias is archived at Le Fonds Asturias and their correspondence endured until Asturias's death. In a first letter dated June 18,th 1967 Martin, then a graduate student, outlines his division of Asturias's novels of “tendencia social y expresión poética” [social tendency and poetic expression] and “el problema de la novela comprometida” [the problem of the novel of political commitment] and

expresses admiration for Asturias's solution uniting all of these concerns. By 1974 Gerald Martin was preparing a first English translation of *Hombres de maíz* and this translation, *Men of Maize*, was published after Asturias's death in 1975 (letter April 26, 1974). Martin subsequently coordinated two of UNESCO's critical editions of Asturias's work: *Hombres de maíz* (1992) (and a critical edition of his translation of this novel, *Men of Maize* (1993)) and *El Señor presidente* (2000).

Gerald Martin's *Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (1989) explores the origins and development of the "New Novel" (the "boom") from the 1920s novel of the land, through surrealism and a Joycean renovation of literary style (4). For Martin the central phenomenon in Latin American cultural history is the "oscillation between a nationalist, continentalist or Americanist impulse and a Europeanist, cosmopolitan or universality impulse" (4). The movement between these impulses is recorded in the metaphor of the journey through Latin American history from Conquest to revolution (26). This conflict between America and Europe recalls the geographic aspect of literary mayanism in Asturias's auto/biography as well as Bellini's insistence on identifying—finally—a true Latin American novelist. Martin, however, resists Bellini's anchorage of literary mayanism to this Americanist impulse, instead showing how literary mayanism connects to the European impulse as well.

Martin presents two of Asturias's novels, *Hombres de maíz* and *El Señor presidente*, as landmark examples of the change in literature that he is describing. His analysis of *El Señor presidente* centers on Asturias's literary technique of including Surrealist and poetry sections (208). He also re-situates the novel historically based on archival research, stating that it would have appeared in the early 1930s (thereby

contemporaneous with *Leyendas de Guatemala* and dictatorship novels by other authors) had the political repression of the Ubico dictatorship in Guatemala not precluded its publication (267).⁴¹ *Hombres de maíz*, in Martin's synopsis, is a novel that opts for "a future which is different from the past, maybe even a negation of the past" (28). Martin's analysis, while acknowledging Asturias's interest in and study of *lo maya* at the Sorbonne, always refrains from endowing Asturias with privileged insight into an essential Maya worldview or spirituality and acknowledges the transformation in his concept of *lo maya* over time (267).

Thus, Martin's analysis differs from Callan's and Bellini's even as it reiterates Asturias's pioneering role as a different kind of Latin American novelist writing a different kind of Latin American novel. Martin labels Asturias's *Men of Maize* indigenist, but this label does not claim a privileged insight and instead refers to Asturias's different borrowings from the *Pop Wuj* and other texts.⁴² This archival work is especially important for establishing which version—or versions—of Maya literature (keeping in mind that, in the 1920s, Maya studies was an emerging field) that Asturias might have referenced in his novels, where Asturias used this knowledge almost as citation (for example, the incantation at the beginning of *Hombres de maíz*) and where this knowledge, which at times can seem like a sort of Maya-trivia of names and meanings, is a spring board for linguistic and structural experimentation.⁴³

Martin's analysis of Asturias's literary technique does intersect with the pronouncement of the legibility of *lo maya* found in Asturias's biographical myth (for example, Callan's assessment of Asturias's ability to communicate the "unfamiliar" and Prieto's avowal of Asturias's ability to "penetrate" and "translate" *lo maya*), but it is

revealed as an aesthetic choice. According to Martin, the text in *Hombres de maíz* journeys from indecipherability to legibility. In a section on Asturias's technique he claims:

The first Latin American novelist to vary his technique according to his subject matter within the same novel was Asturias, first in *The President* with the Surrealist and concrete poetry sections, and then, with a vengeance, in *Men of Maize*, where an initially indecipherable indigenist text gradually achieves almost complete Western legibility by the conclusion (*Journeys* 208).

Martin's focus on Asturias's technique marks an important shift in the criticism away from an essentialist Mayan "muse" for Asturias's production. But he also changes the parameters for the category of an indigenist text, at least regarding Asturias's work.

Although he labels *Men of Maize* as initially indecipherable (recalling Callan's "unreal reality") he describes an endpoint of legibility. *Lo maya* in Asturias's indigenist text, according to Martin, is a literary construction, and capable of symbolizing both legibility and its opposite.

Arturo Arias similarly examines how literary mayanism functions within Asturias's narrative. Arias is a Guatemalan novelist as well as literary critic and since the 1990s he has written extensively on Central American literature from within the U.S. academy. He edited the UNESCO critical volume of *Mulata de tal* and devoted a chapter to the novel in his 2007 book *Taking their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America*. He, like Martin and Henighan, esteems Asturias's work while also acknowledging the essentialist nature of his use of *lo maya*. Arias is clear on this point: "Asturias named the Maya community, spoke for it, and also spoke in its defense. But he did not speak *with* it. And the community did not speak. Thus his discursivity not only stripped identity away from the Mayas but also attacked them symbolically, representing

them as passive, suffering victims” (*Taking* 55). His 2007 reading of *Mulata de tal* centers on erotic transgression, reading the figure of the central character Celestino/Chiltic through codes of masochism. This psychoanalytic analysis is interrupted by historical references tying the writing of the book to the events of 1954, indicated by the section title “Transgressive Power as a Phantasmatic Political Representation.” In the final part of Arias’ chapter he attempts to unravel the novel’s apocalyptic ending through a notion of the lack of intelligibility on the part of the novel’s Westernized characters:

The human characters are all “crazy” [...] in a Foucauldian sense: they are incapable of communicating rationally because they lack a common language. They are capable of uttering only fragmented dialogues that denote an absence of sense, a lack that points to the final destruction generated by the clash between opposing systems (44-5).⁴⁴

In contrast, the world of the salvajos (a community of wild boar-people in the novel), in Arias’ estimation,

also represent the Mayas and their lost culture. The description of them is accompanied by a meditation about the nature of writing, framed as undecipherable hieroglyphics that secretly articulate the collective memory of a lost splendor. The reference to hieroglyphic writing, of course, immediately evokes classical Maya culture. Since the nineteenth century, Maya civilization has been a trope for “lost” civilizations, a fantasy like conception—in the eyes of many Westerners and Guatemalans as well—of a better world that has been annihilated (45-6).

In Arias’ reading the salvajos, like *lo maya* in Asturias’s auto/biography, oscillate between the unknowable (undecipherable hieroglyphics) and knowable (a better world). However, by contrasting los salvajos with the Western characters Arias turns the literary paradigm on its head by declaring the Western characters as “crazy” (lacking in sense) and the salvajos—who are an extended metaphor for a “lost” Mayan civilization—as

ultimately intelligible and capable of communicating an ideal society. With his analysis of the salvajes Arias describes how in this novel *lo maya* functions as a fantasy trope for an intelligible, albeit unattainable, utopia while the Western(ized) degrades into an incoherent hell.

It is clear from the criticism that there is a desire to account for *lo maya* in Asturias, particularly from the 1960s onwards. Especially at the beginning, this literary criticism draws on and reproduces the myths of *lo maya* and Asturias that are present in auto/biography and uses literary mayanism to define Latin American literature, or political literature. Bound up within this relationship between *lo maya* and Asturias is the question of legibility—does Asturias “translate” the mystery of *lo maya* with literary Mayanism? Or does he recreate the “unreal reality” of *lo maya*? Although the interventions of Cheymol and Henighan establish Asturias’s essentialist invention of *lo maya* through literary mayanism and transform claims of authenticity into Martin’s questions about sources and writing technique and Arias’ questions about tropes, the repeated tension between the communicable/incommunicable within literary mayanism remains.

Defining Latin American literature

In the first section of this chapter I analyzed several versions of Asturias’s symbolic Maya birth and the many facets of the connections between Asturias and *lo maya* created within and dispersed by his auto/biography. In the second section I examined how literary critics view Asturias and *lo maya* and how both fit within a definition of political Latin American literature. In this final section I return to Asturias

to address the questions of how Asturias articulates *lo maya* within his conception of literary aesthetics and political narrative praxis in his own writing and within the writing of Latin American novels generally.

The biographical interviews in López Álvarez and Harss and Dohmann are not Asturias's only reflection on the significance of *lo maya* for his work. *Le Fonds Asturias* contains letters, lectures and manuscripts that document Asturias's appraisal of Latin American literature generally, not just his own novels.⁴⁵ Because Asturias's focus is regional, and not limited to Guatemala, he broadens his indigenous referent at times to include other Latin American peoples. Emerging from these 1960s documents is an evolving and fluid definition of Latin American literature with three intertwined aspects: 1) a multi-ethnic, often indigenous origin that is different from Europe, 2) a political responsibility, and 3) a uniquely expressive language. This first aspect contains *lo maya* while also expanding to include other regions of Latin America. But Asturias also references *lo maya* within his explanation of the second and third aspects of Latin American politics and language. Thus, *lo maya* is integral to the three components he uses to develop his theory about the uniqueness of Latin American writing. His definition of Latin American writing is both an interconnected system dependent on origin, political praxis through narrative and unique language, and an autonomous accounting of style and form.

Because I am analyzing Asturias's speeches, drafts and published writings over a ten-year time span the definitions he provides are especially fluid, particularly with respect to the impulse of designating a definitive origin for Latin American literature. In the sub-sections that follow I outline his quest to describe that origin while also

highlighting those contradictory aspects of origin that he does not resolve. Finally, I argue that his attempt at defining the existent properties of Latin American literature leads him, instead, into a discussion of praxis. In other words, in attempting to catalogue the original attributes of an existent Latin American literature, Asturias switches tracks to simultaneously create a list of the actions of a Latin America author.

Beginnings: Asturias's representation of Latin American literature

Asturias's conception of Latin American literature is manifest after his involvement at a 1963 conference organized by the Columbianum in Genoa, Italy.⁴⁶ Asturias participated in a writers' panel that discussed the conference's themes: the components of Latin American civilization (including Indigenismo); the reality and limits of Latin American originality; and, finally, Latin American culture and art in the world community (Segala, "Desde el Columbianum," 428-432).⁴⁷ Although Columbianum planned to compile the discussions in a journal titled "América Latina" the increasingly conservative political climate in Italy prohibited its publication and Columbianum itself ceased to exist by the late 1960s (438).

Asturias's involvement in Columbianum and his friendship with one of its Italian organizers, Amos Segala, led, however, to a mini-course on the Latin American novel that Asturias taught at different Italian universities during 1964 (434).⁴⁸ The course outline parallels that of the doomed journal "América Latina;" the lectures on language, landscape and pre-Colombian literature reflect the Columbianum conference's focus on Latin American inheritance, while lectures on sociology and political protest in literature address the issue of social responsibility. Asturias also added a section on the importance

of the novelist in the University, reflecting perhaps on his own political activism as a university student and his role in the creation of “La Universidad Popular” in Guatemala City in the early 1920s (Guibert 129-130). It is in these lectures that Asturias’s develops his definition of Latin American literature, including the three aspects of origin, political responsibility and language.

In a first example of the intertwining nature of the three aspects, Asturias’s articulation of a political literature hinges on distinguishing Latin American literature from the European. In “La novela comprometida,” Asturias references Jean Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Mourier’s “litterature engagée” but advances instead his own interpretation of the term, “novela comprometida.”⁴⁹ A novela comprometida, in his definition, goes beyond the dichotomy of “arte por el arte” versus “arte por el pueblo” (art for art’s sake versus art for the people):

Nuestras novelas tratan de trascender, de ser algo más que literatura. Si nuestros países tienen que ser dueños de sus destinos, de su verdad, primeramente, y su verdad es la realidad circunstancial de esta época, para nosotros al menos, no pueden conformarse libros que son inhalaciones de otras literaturas, sueños históricos fuera de tiempo, evasiones de la hora crucial que vivimos (8).⁵⁰

(Our novels try to transcend, to be something more than literature. If our countries are to be the authors of their destiny, of their truth—and their truth is the circumstantial reality of this age—at least for us they can’t be books that are inhalations of other literatures, evasions of the crucial time that we are living in.)

Asturias emphasizes the separation between Europe and Latin America through his use of the first person plural to designate ownership of “our novels, our countries.” Asturias is clear that Latin American literature must distinguish itself from Europe’s, surpassing Europe’s litterature engagée, while still acknowledging a certain inheritance.

Furthermore, he rejects European influence as “inhalations,” and affirms that going

beyond literature, to politics, means concentrating on the contemporary social realities of Latin America.

In other lectures Asturias's focus on Latin America, against Europe, leads him to posit a Latin American origin for the protest novel in "La protesta social en la novela latinoamericana."⁵¹ The speech names an indigenous Latin American agent for social protest by declaring that "la protesta social viene primero através del protagonista indígena" (social protest comes first through the indigenous protagonist) (version 1) and Asturias provides a bibliographic gloss of indigenista literature with authors like Ciro Alegría and Jorge Icaza (version 2). He also cites anti-imperialist genres like the Venezuelan "novela petrolera" (oil novel) and the Central American "novela bananera" (banana novel) in order to emphasize how the geographic particularities of Latin America give birth to a political writing that is categorically different from that of Europe (version 2, 17). It is in this way that Asturias's argument is tautological: he presents regional geographies like the selva and the pampa as unique and, following that premise, argues that since Latin American literature emerges from that uniqueness, it must itself be unique.

Asturias further specifies the political nature of Latin American literature by identifying its protagonists of protest and naming its anti-imperialist genres. He emphasizes that the work of contemporary Latin American authors is to chronicle the exploitation of its peoples: "hay otra realidad que no debe olvidarse y es la que los actuales novelistas latinoamericanos están desmudando en sus obras, la terrible explotación a que se ven sometidos indios, negros, zambos, mulatos, mestizos y los mismos blancos (version 2, 16)" (there is another reality that shouldn't be forgotten and it

is that which contemporary Latin American novelists are unsilencing in their works—the terrible exploitation that indians, blacks, zambos, mulattos, mestizos and even whites are subjected to). Thus, in addition to linking politics, regional features and the indigenous subject within his definition of the Latin American novel, Asturias invents an action—*desmudar* (unsilencing, or, more literally, un-muting)—for these novel Latin American writers.

Desmudar

This verb, *desmudar*, is a peculiar choice. In auto/biography and criticism Asturias is at times the voice for *lo maya* (el “Gran Lengua” in Harss and López Álvarez, the re-creator of a Maya world in Callan). This view emphasizes the writer as the agent of communication. While *desmudar* posits the same author-agent, the action is less generative than Harss and López Álvarez’ “giving voice” and less altered than Callan’s translation of the Maya Other for the Western reader. *Desmudar* evokes an action similar to uncovering—that is, to reveal an authentic reality lying beneath. Since Asturias consistently reaffirms his conception of a unique, original (and originary) Latin American novel, this action presents an interesting (and unresolved) paradox: is the Latin American novelist outside of this authenticity? Is the action of writing, of *desmudar*, an action borne from within Latin America, or does it come from outside, from Europe?

In the fourth version of the speech, “La protesta en la novela latinoamericana,” Asturias describes the mechanics of *desmudar* through a process whereby language and literature become American⁵²:

Y se hacían [la lengua y la literatura] indoamericanas,
porque andaban en la calle mezclándose con los mestizos,

con los indios, con los negros, los mulatos, los sefarditas, los portugueses participando del hablar de todos y ellos y porque creían en la necesidad de “decir” cosas de América, empleando en su lenguaje palabras que no existían en castellano, ni en los idiomas europeos. Pero sobre todo se hacia latinoamericana porque era lengua de inconformes, que en el relato novelado o en verso, van a dar rienda suelta a su protesta. Y es así como aparece a la vanguardia de la literatura de protesta esa novelística que llamamos indianizante, fuerte, intensa, que no se detiene ante las escenas más crudas, los crímenes y violencias, los levantamiento[s] de indígenas y las represiones militares a punta de bala (1).⁵³

(And they [language and literature] were becoming Indo-american, because they mixed in the street with mestizos, with Indians, with blacks, with mulattos, with Sephardim, with Portuguese, participating in the speech of all of them and because they believed there was a need to “say” things of/about America, using in their language words that didn’t exist in Castilian, nor in European languages. But above all it was becoming Latin American because it was a language of non-conformists, in the novelistic account or in the verse they were going to give free reign to their protest. And that’s how this novelistic style we call Indianizing, strong, intense, that doesn’t shy away from the crudest scenes, crimes and violence, indigenous uprisings and military repressions by gunpoint arrives at the vanguard of protest literature).

Again, the origin of American language is ambiguous in Asturias’s analysis, as it is in his explanation of “desmudar” as an American way of writing. He begins with “se hacían” (they were becoming), implying that these languages and literatures already existed, that they did not originate in the Americas, rather that they changed upon their encounter with the Americas, without stating from the beginning that he refers to Spanish and Portuguese. At the same time, in their encounter with the impossibility of expression in European languages—a muteness?—they used “their language,” a language that already existed, was already Latin American and was already political. This contradictory

inheritance of within/without—this grasping for an origin—is again left unresolved as Asturias chooses to focus instead on the creative process itself, on writing and the word.

Thus, Asturias's return to his ever-unresolved question of an American origin for the Latin American novel propels him to think about the act of literary creation. He is perhaps most clear on the mechanics of inheritance and repetition in his own work. In a conversation about his writing method with faculty at the Universidad de San Carlos in 1966 during his last visit to Guatemala, he again calls on an indigenous original, while at the same time positioning the indigenous text as an aesthetic goal.⁵⁴ Here he describes a practice of writing and re-writing as an action working towards a re-creation of indigenous orality:

Yo creo que los textos indígenas pasaban verbalmente, en los momentos religiosos, de los abuelos a los padres, de los padres a los hijos; así pasaron los textos indígenas. [...] Hablábamos mucho sobre la posibilidad de escribir para América textos que se leyeran en voz alta, textos para multitudes, porque creíamos que iban a llenar otra función. “Tototumbo” yo lo escribía y re-escribía, porque debía sonarme en el oído. Y entonces acaso esto tenga un poco de la magia, de esa magia de los textos indígenas (*Coloquio con Miguel Ángel Asturias* 15).⁵⁵

(I believe that indigenous texts were passed down orally, in religious ceremonies, from grandfathers to fathers, from fathers to sons; that's how indigenous texts were passed down. [...] We talked [he and other Latin American authors] a lot about the possibility of writing texts for America that could be read aloud, texts for the multitudes, because we believed they could fulfill another purpose. I wrote and re-wrote “Torotombo” [a short story from *Week-end en Guatemala*], because it had to sound right. And so maybe it has a little of the magic, of that magic of the indigenous texts).

In this colloquium Asturias speaks to a Guatemalan audience, not a European one. He ignores indigenous written texts, including the *Pop Wuj*, and emphasizes an oral inheritance. But there is a subtle difference between the other lectures' claim of an

indigenous origin (however complicated) and this one detailing an intentional creative practice that imitates that origin repeatedly. In both, an indigenous, magical source of American writing is upheld but also visualized as an achievable goal, an oralized textuality that is part of an overall aesthetic chosen by the writer.

This emphasis on praxis is also present in Asturias's 1967 Nobel banquet speech and in his Nobel lecture. Returning to a European audience, Asturias asserts again the triple nature of Latin American literature as original, political and unique in its language, and expresses them not only through a literary bibliography but also through actions. Thus, developing further the action he described as "desmudar" in the earlier course lectures, and the oralized textuality of his 1966 colloquium, he elaborates an actual writing practice for himself and other Latin American authors.

The opening lines of Asturias's banquet speech exemplify this approach and echo the descriptive, exalting tone of Asturias's 1960s course. "Mi voz en el umbral. Mi voz llegada de muy lejos, de mi Guatemala natal. Mi voz en el umbral de esta Academia (1)." (My voice on the threshold. My voice arriving from far away, from my native Guatemala. My voice on the threshold of this Academy). This is the origin, the Latin American origin, embodied by the figure of Asturias on a European stage as he reads his speech aloud. The difference between this embodiment and the silent apparition of Asturias's visage in the Sorbonne and in Madame Raynaud's kitchen some forty years prior, is one of voice. Asturias repeats "my voice" three times in this introduction, asserting himself in action as speaker, certainly, but also as a writer because in his definition, Latin American writing must resound.

Asturias asserts the political aspect of Latin American literature as a writer's prerogative as well. In his Nobel lecture he likens this to the biblical action of witnessing, or giving testimony, tying political ethics to religious responsibility. "Dar testimonio. El novelista da testimonio, como el Apóstol de los Gentiles." (Bear witness. The novelist testifies, like the Apostle of the Gentiles). He extends this political action by positing a redemptive role for the Latin American novelist, declaring that

tenemos tierras que reclamar para nuestros desposeídos,
minas que exigir para nuestros explotados y
reivindicaciones que hacer en favor de las masas humanas
que perecen en los yerbatales, [...] la auténtica novela
americana es el reclamo de todas estas cosas, es el grito que
viene del fondo de los siglos y se reparte en miles de
páginas (4).

(we have to reclaim lands for our dispossessed, mines for
our exploited and to make demands in favor of the human
masses who perish in the fields, [...] the authentic american
novel is the demand for all of these things, it is the cry
surging from the depths of centuries echoed in thousands of
pages).

The political in the Latin American novel is—like the choice of "desmudar"—a decisive action, not only a denotation.

Asturias elaborates on the action of "desmudar" by calling attention to the language of the Latin American writer via a sustained emphasis on the word. In the Nobel lecture he describes a language of images in the novel, a language of American origin and ends by privileging the word as a separate entity:

Nuestras novelas parecen escritas no sólo con palabras sino
con imágenes. No son pocos los que leyendo nuestras
novelas las ven cinematográficamente. [...] Nuestra prosa
se aparta del ordenamiento de la sintaxis castellana, porque
la palabra tiene en la nuestra un valor en sí, tal como lo
tenía en las lenguas indígenas. Palabra, concepto, sonido,
transposición fascinante y rica. Nadie entendería nuestra
literatura, nuestra poesía, si quita a la palabra su poder de
encantamiento (5).

(Our novels seem to be written not with words but with images. There are more than a few who, reading our novels, see them cinematographically. [...] Our prose varies from the order of Castilian syntax, because the word, in our work, has a value in and of itself, just like it had in the indigenous languages. Word, concept, sound, fascinating and rich transposition. No one would understand our literature, our poetry, if the power of enchantment were taken away from the word).

Language and origin are again intermixed in Asturias's reiterative definition of Latin American literature, but the word is given special prominence. In his Nobel banquet speech, Asturias converts this description into praxis by naming the action that the Latin American author takes regarding these words, the search for them:

La búsqueda de las palabras actuantes. Otra magia. El poeta y el escritor del verbo activo. La vida. Sus variaciones. Nada prefabricado. Todo en ebullición. No hacer literatura. No sustituir las cosas por palabras. Buscar las palabras-cosas, las palabras-seres.⁵⁶

(The search for the dynamic words. Another magic. The poet and the writer of the active word. Life. Its variations. Nothing prefabricated. Everything in ebullition. Not making literature. Not substituting things for words. Searching for the word-things, the word-beings).

In his presentation of Latin American literature to a European audience Asturias emphasizes a novelist in action. His use of fragments and his non-derivative language both privilege an originary word. Thus he retains, always, the origin, and privileges it, to the point of claiming that authors do not create, but search, uncover and *desmudar*.

Asturias's course lectures and Nobel addresses are descriptive and performative. They define Latin American literature through the three, intertwined aspects that include an indigenous origin. But they are also prescriptive, promoting the specific political actions of the Latin American novelist: "desmudar," to be present (as an origin, as

Asturias was on the stage in Stockholm), to bear witness, to make demands, and to search for the right kind of word.

Further, the word that he imagines is itself active. “Palabras-actantes. Palabras seres. Palabras-imágenes.” Asturias makes the word the center of his conception of Latin American literature and infuses it with the three aspects—the indigenous origin, the unique language, and a redemptive politics. He fuses politics and aesthetics through language. *Lo maya*, too, is integrated within this emblematic word—via politics, language and origin. But Asturias’s reflections on *lo maya* at this time center more on its importance for a universal politics of resistance articulated through Latin American literature than through a national novel proper. These movements—away from the nation Guatemala, towards the regional Latin America (and away from the specificity of *lo maya* and towards universality of the indigenous)—center on the importance of an original word that changes with each iteration.

Conclusions

Lo maya is central to Asturias’s authorial self-conception, to criticism’s understanding of his work, and to Asturias’s own articulation of Latin American literature. *Lo maya*, for Asturias, represents something primary, originating and uniquely Latin American.⁵⁷ *Lo maya* is so integral that it becomes embedded within Asturias’s figure itself, as portrayed by the López Álvarez biography, in Asturias’s own statements to Günther Lorenz about his Maya mother, and most impressively (and absurdly) by his grave in Cimetière Père-Lachaise.

Asturias's approach to *lo maya* varied during his lifetime, from his pitying stance towards los indios as a national problem in his undergraduate thesis to his self-appointment as *la Gran Lengua*, heir of Maya grandeur and interlocutor to Europe. Likewise, critics' accounting of *lo maya* in Asturias's work has varied over time, ranging from an essentialist linkage between the author and an imagined Maya worldview to a more rigorous forensics of how Maya and non-Maya influences may have shaped Asturias's writing. Asturias's reflection on Latin American literature, including his own novels, reveals that *lo maya* is a central component of a practice of writing that Asturias frames through the idea of the repeated word.

Lo maya and Asturias are only loosely bound to Guatemalan national identity in these accounts. There are hints of these ties—in biography, in the opening of Asturias's Nobel speech—but mostly they serve as a reminder of a regional, Latin American origin. At this point Asturias does not present *lo maya* as a nationalist Guatemalan construct. Instead, Asturias's conference speeches and his Nobel lectures affirm a connection between an indigenous center and a unique Latin American expression. He establishes this in his assessment of his own creativity and in his mention of other authors that he believes embody this new way of writing: J.M. Arguedas, Mario Monteforte Toledo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, Rogelio Simán and Agustín Yañez.⁵⁸ But this regionality is in turn transformed into universality.

The conclusion of “La protesta en la novela latinoamericana,” for example, is at first regional, mestizo⁵⁹:

una expresión humana nueva, la del mestizo, la del hombre de un mundo en el que se trata no de folklore, no de pintoresquismo, sino de revalorizar lo que en el hay de auténtico, replantar [sic] los problemas, hacer surgir las

contradicciones, y encontrar la expresión más cabal del hombre ahora en lucha con los elementos, con la naturaleza, con su destino, con la sociedad que no le satisface. Cada vez más, por eso mismo, será más amplio el enfoque de nuestras novelas, más amplio y más humano (9).

(a new human expression, one belonging to the mestizo, to the man of a world—not of folklore, not of the picturesque—but an expression that revalues what is authentic, rephrases the problems, brings the contradictions to the forefront and finds the most exact expression of man in the struggle with the elements, with nature, with his destiny, with the society that does not satisfy him. Because of this, the scope of our novels will be ever more encompassing and ever more human.)

By the end of the speech Asturias arrives at a novelistic focus that is more universal than regional. He speaks of struggle, nature, destiny without asserting the regional and stresses, instead, a more global and human literature.⁶⁰

At the end of his life, Asturias attempts to realize this broader Latin American literary horizon. In the early 1970s he and his wife Blanca decide to donate his manuscripts and correspondence to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and an association, “Amigos de Asturias,” is formed in Paris to coordinate research and prepare critical editions from these texts (Janquart, “El Fondo Miguel Ángel Asturias de la BNF,” 496). Asturias, in a 1971 letter addressed to René Durand, a literary critic at the Université de Dakar in Senegal, invites him to participate in the project and declares that it is his intent

que esta iniciativa no quede limitada a los universitarios franceses [...] le envío mi más cordial mensaje, para que Usted, y la Universidad en la que Usted desarrolla sus tareas, se asocien a esta iniciativa a efecto de que adquiera carácter internacional, y contribuya a la afirmación de la Literatura Latinoamericana, en el mundo actual.

(that this initiative not be limited to French universities [...] I write you this message cordially so that you, and the

University where you work, become part of this association so that it acquires international character and contributes to the affirmation of Latin American literature in the world.)

With this letter Asturias intentionally extends the scope of the project beyond Europe to Africa. It reflects Asturias's increasing promotion of Latin American literature within the world, in dialogue with Leopold Senghor's universal humanism, a dialogue in its very initial stages at the time of Asturias's death.⁶¹

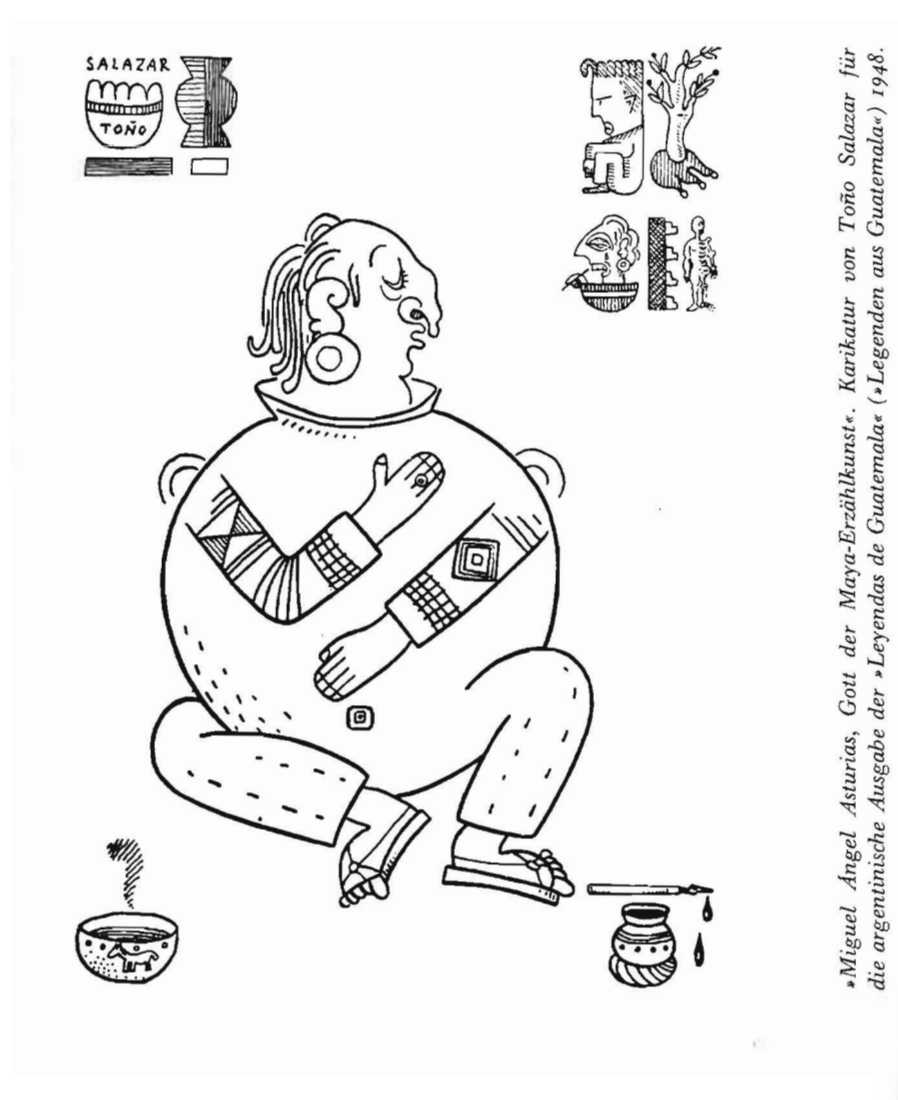
For Asturias, Europe and its Nobel Prize were insufficient in establishing the importance of Latin American literature in the world, and he sought out new connections in Africa. These new connections do not mean that Asturias has abandoned his orientalist construct of *lo maya*—after all, it lends authority to his argument for an originary Latin American literature and substantiates his own claims of authenticity. But located within *lo maya* is Asturias's call for social justice and that aspect allows for his fellowship with Senghor and his expansion into the ideal of the universal. More importantly, Asturias's pronouncements on Latin American literature reveal a profound meditation on the limits and possibilities of language.

In the following chapters I analyze two novels from the 1960s, showing how Asturias shifts his focus from *lo maya* to the mulatto and female Other and how his linguistic experimentation intersects with his representation of the nation and with secular and spiritual history.

Appendices



Appendix 1: Asturias's grave in Paris (Photo by Claire Simon)



»Miguel Angel Asturias, Gott der Maya-Erzählkunst«. Karikatur von Toño Salazar für die argentinische Ausgabe der »Leyendas de Guatemala« (*Legenden aus Guatemala*) 1948.

Appendix 2: Toño Salázar portrait of Asturias

»Miguel Angel Asturias, der vortgewaltige Kämpfer für indianische Rechte, auf der Suche nach den geheimnisvollen Wegen der Mayas«. Karikatur aus einer guatemalteckischen Zeitschrift anlässlich der Rückkehr von Asturias aus zwölfjährigem Exil, 1. September 1966.



CON LA PLUMA HA GANADO
CIENTO BATALLAS, Y HOY DE
RETORNO A SU SOLAR ARA
DO, LO HEROS VISTO CON
ANINO Y BOALLAS TAL CO
MO LO MUESTRA ESTE GRU
BADO BUSCANDO CON AFIN
CO DENODADO LA RUTA MIS
TERIOSA DE LOS MAYAS.

Appendix 3: Caricature of Asturias appearing in

Guatemalan Press in 1966

¹ Tecún Umán is a mythic/historic 16th century K'iche' who was killed in a battle against the Spanish invaders. He was canonized as a national hero-figure in 1960 and is memorialized in statues and on the smallest denomination (cincuenta centavo) paper bill.

² The adjective “unigénito” lends Asturias this messianic quality as “unigénito” is used in the Book of John to describe the relationship between God and Jesus.

³ For an analysis of 19th and early 20th century U.S. exhibitions of Maya archaeology see Evans' *Romancing the Maya*.

⁴ For example, for over a century most Western scholars of the codices dismissed the idea that these symbols might form part of a complete writing system, or even be related to the languages spoken in the Mayab (Coe 138). This disconnect between “past” and “contemporary” Maya is still present in Guatemalan culture and, in its extreme racist form, denies that the Maya of today are descendants of the Maya of classic civilizations.

⁵ See, for example, Ariel Dorfman “*Hombres de maíz: El mito como tiempo y palabra*,” originally published in 1970.

⁶ For example the novel *Maladrón* (1969) features historical figures from the Spanish conquest and the 1950s Banana Trilogy (analyzed in the following chapter) narrates the rise of the banana industry in Central America during the first half of the twentieth century.

⁷ Literary critics referring to this event almost exclusively cite Harss and López Álvarez' accounts. This bibliographic redundancy contributes to the myth-generating tendency of the criticism. Harss and López Álvarez are not prominent literary critics of Asturias, and are only referenced as biographical sources. Amos Segala, in his introduction to the centennial publication *1899/1999*, refers to these two sources, as well as Jimena Sáenz' posthumous biography (which again cites both Harss and López Álvarez), and laments the lack of a more complete and “fidedigna” biography, remarking, nevertheless, that “ésta es la <<versión>> de su vida que él quiso legarnos” (27-8) (this is the “version” of his life that he chose to leave us).

⁸ Harss writes, “Fue alrededor de nuestras conversaciones con ellos [the ten writers]—evitamos deliberadamente la palabra entrevistas—como el libro se desarrolló y adquirió, más o menos naturalmente, la forma que tiene (47).” (It was through our conversations with them [the ten writers]—we deliberately avoid the word interviews—that the book was developed and how it acquired, more or less naturally, the shape that it has, translation mine). This distinction is absent from the English edition prologue.

⁹ There is a discrepancy regarding this matter: the publication page in the 1968 Spanish language edition credits a first edition in 1966, a year prior to the 1967 first English language edition.

¹⁰ See Rita Guibert's interview regarding Asturias's knowledge of English (165).

¹¹ This “exile” would appear to be another biographical exaggeration: Marc Cheymol presents evidence that Asturias's trip was motivated more by bourgeois educational aspiration than political persecution, although certainly Asturias and others of his generation were targeted for their participation in student protests against the Estrada Cabrera dictatorship (“M.A. Asturias entre latinidad e indigenismo” 861).

¹² Recall the “Nota” prefacing the Spanish language edition that asserts that it is a translation from English, even if the conversations took place in Spanish.

¹³ Alfred P. Maudslay (1850-1931) provided the first comprehensive publication of the Mayan inscriptions. Born in 1850, he made seven trips recording the art, architecture and inscriptions of major Maya cities, all at his own expense. He carried a large format wet-plate camera for this purpose, as well as materials for making plaster casts, and his detailed documentation is still referenced today (Coe 86). For other institutions involved in Maya research in the 20th century see Houston, Chinchilla Mazariegos and Stuart, 11.

¹⁴ The longest version of Chilam Balam was written in Yucatec (using a Latin alphabet) sometime between 1824 and 1837, but there are previous versions from the 18th century (Edmonson 2). The *Pop Wuj* was written in K'iche', also using a Latin alphabet, sometime in the 16th century and a copy/Spanish translation from the 18th century survives. A bilingual French/K'iche' edition was published by the Abbé Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg in 1861 (Coe 100). The Dresden Codex is believed to have formed part of Hernán Cortés' tribute to King Charles I of Spain and was bought by the Royal Library at Dresden in the mid-18th century. It was first published in its entirety in *The Antiquities of Mexico* in the early 19th century (Coe 80). Of the three texts mentioned in the museum guide, it is the only one written in hieroglyphic Maya script, although of course such script was also present on the plaster casts and lintels exhibited.

¹⁵ This last site is presently known as Yaxchilan.

¹⁶ The Quiriguá section of the exhibit, for example, includes a "Plaster cast of Monolithic Animal P" displayed in the centre of one of the rooms, measuring 9'8" x 11'6" x 7'3" along with several stelae reproductions rising 25 feet off the ground (The British Museum 57). By contrast an original stone altar piece from the Copán section measures just 3'4" x 2'8" (64). See R. Tripp Evans' *Romancing the Maya* for a description and analysis of a similarly large-scale plaster exhibit of Mesoamerican architecture at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

¹⁷ See *Breaking the Maya Code* for a detailed intellectual history of decipherment. Interestingly, the translation of the codices also suffered as a result of Cold War politics, discussed in the next chapter about Asturias and the 1954 invasion.

¹⁸ See Gerald Martin's *Journeys through the Labyrinth* and his critical edition notes to *Hombres de maíz*, as well as Stephen Henighan's *Into the Light*, for Asturias's connections to the surrealist movement in Paris in the 1920s and documentation regarding probable influences. René Prieto also address this in *Miguel Ángel Asturias's Archaeology of Return*, but assigns Asturias's surrealism an ability to "transcend" the Western mind and to "grasp" the thought patterns of the Maya (34).

¹⁹ I am referring here to the first section of *Hombres de maíz* (1949), "Gaspar Ilóm," where the title character laments the loss of ancestral land to the maize-growers in a ceremonial voice and to the juxtaposition of the chapters focused on Caibilbalán (jefe de los Mames) with those focused on the Spanish invaders (Ángel Rostro, Duero Agudo, Quino Armijo and Blas Zenteno) in *Maladrón* (1969). Mario Roberto Morales notes in his critical edition of "Guatemala," one of the short stories published in *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930), that "con mínimas rectificaciones, estos dos párrafos reproducen fielmente dos pasajes de la traducción del Popol-Vuh publicada por Asturias y J.M.G. de Mendoza en 1927" (16) (with minimal corrections, these two paragraphs faithfully reproduce two passages from the *Pop Wuj* translation published by Asturias and J.M.G.

de Mendoza in 1927). In this latter case Asturias's creation of literary mayanism is citational.

²⁰ See Arturo Taracena Arriola, "Itinerario político, 1920-1933," especially pages 684-687, for a history of Asturias's connection to José Vasconcelos while a student at the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala. See also Luis López Álvarez' *Conversaciones*, pages 115-118.

²¹ Tarica also lays out a history of definitions for the term, most succinctly as "a discourse by non-Indians about Indians in Latin America" (xi).

²² A judgment—political or otherwise—of Asturias is beyond the scope of this chapter. My task here is to lay out the parameters of Asturias's literary mayanism and its critical repercussions.

²³ Tarica does not elaborate as to what these "notions of common belonging and coexistence" might entail. Two of the authors she focuses on—J.M. Arguedas and Rosario Castellanos—are perhaps more actively involved in political incidence than Asturias due to the institutional positions they held, but to my knowledge neither formed part of any collective/emancipatory movement.

²⁴ Asturias seems to have written no contemporaneous accounts of this exhibit. In Asturias's letters to his mother about his time in London he mentions the British Museum's "conferencias sobre los Egipcios, Asirios, Romanos, Griegos e Hindúes" but nothing specifically about the Maudslay Collection or any exhibit of the Maya (Asturias Montenegro 286). The only reference to the Maya are regarding some books authored by Mr. Yoyne (sp?) (270). Marc Cheymol comments, likewise, on the lack of newspaper articles dedicated to the British Museum during Asturias's employment as a correspondent for the Guatemalan newspaper *El Imparcial* in the 1920s ("M.A. Asturias entre latinidad e indigenismo" 852). It appears that the Maudslay collection becomes an important event only in retrospect.

²⁵ For example Jimena Sáenz' 1974 biography emphasizes Asturias's pre-Colombian literary inheritance via phrenology: "Hay una escultura en el Museo Antropológico de México [...] que parece la cabeza de Asturias [...] por lo cual deducimos que nuestro escritor, a pesar de su apellido y su gran parte de ascendencia española, es el mayor representante de aquellos poetas precolombinos" (A sculpture in the Mexican Museum of Anthropology [...] is similar to Asturias's bust [...] thus we can deduce that our author, regardless of his surname and Spanish heritage, is the greatest representative of those pre-Colombian poets) (42). Luis Cardoza y Aragón also likens a younger, 1920s-era Asturias to a Quiriguá stela in his 1991 biography: "la punzante faz de estela maya esculpida en piedra oscura, como los monolitos de Quiriguá; muy aindiado, señalo, para que no se le imagine en caliza blanca de Tikal o Yucatán" (the striking face of a Maya stela sculpted in dark stone, like the Quirigua monoliths; very Indian, I stress, so that he's not managed in Tikal or Yucatán white limestone) (16). See also visual portrayals such as Antonio "Toño" Salázar's caricatures of Asturias, where he is pictured with border designs, ear piercing and hair ornaments like those of Maya illustrations (Appendix 2 Lorenz *Miguel Ángel Asturias* 6, this is also the cover illustration for the Argentine publication of *Leyendas de Guatemala* and Giuseppe Bellini's literary study *De tiranos, heroes y brujos*. There is a similar portrait in *1899/1999*, p. 231). The Guatemalan press also portrayed

Asturias—curiously in a more North American, cartoonish fashion—upon his return to Guatemala in 1966 (Appendix 3 Lorenz 25, Lorenz does not name the source).

²⁶ Asturias is quoted in Harss as remarking that: “Among the Indians there’s a belief in the Gran Lengua. The Gran Lengua is the spokesman for the tribe. And in a way that’s what I’ve been: the spokesman for my tribe (*Into the Mainstream* 101).” (Entre los indios existe una creencia en el Gran Lengua. El Gran Lengua es el vocero de la tribu. Y en cierto modo eso es lo que yo he sido: el vocero de mi tribu (*Los nuestros* 127)). This quote is also the epigraph for the López Álvarez biography.

²⁷ Again, the present tense “no existen” echoes the pervasive denial that the contemporary Mayan have anything to do with classic and post-classic Maya civilization.

²⁸ In a 1970 interview with Rita Guibert he acknowledges this, even if at other points he emphasizes a more multicultural childhood: “We grew up at a period when it was necessary to appear to be European, when it was thought wrong to speak the native language, behave as a native, or show that one was in contact with the Indians” (127).

²⁹ See, also, his 1923 undergraduate thesis, *El problema social del indio*, which describes the indio as a degenerate race.

³⁰ Another event reaffirming Asturias’s “Mayanness” is his designation as “hijo unigénito de Tecún Umán” by “las comunidades indígenas” during his last visit to Guatemala in 1966 (*1899/1999* (381)). This was engraved on his tombstone. According to Jimena Sáenz’ biography, Asturias was honored by “unos indios que bajaron de sus aldeas con obsequios para el escritor, regalos que le fueron entregados tras el discurso de una “indita,” Alicia Cotzoyaj, leído en quiche y catchiquel” (some Indians that came down from their villages with some gifts for the writer, gift that were given to him after a speech by one of the little Indian girls, Alicia Cotzoyaj, read in quiche y catchiquel) (248). Unfortunately Sáenz does not state her source for the text of the speech. Cotzoyaj venerates Asturias as “nuestro Tecum Uman que representa el verdadero tata de la nacionalidad” (our Tecum Uman who represents the true grandfather of the nation) and presents him with an image of Tecún Umán engraved with one of his poems. That poem, titled “Tecún Umán,” was written more than twenty years earlier in 1945 (Martin “Génesis” 490). Ironically, both Asturias and the mythic/historic Tecún Umán are polemical symbols of national and/or Maya resistance within the Guatemalan imaginary starting in the 1960s.

³¹ Asturias Montenegro published MAA’s letters through October 1924 in *Miguel Ángel Asturias más que una biografía* (1999) and in the “Consideraciones finales” alludes to a future publication containing “cartas dirigidas por Miguel Ángel a distintas personas en Guatemala, especialmente a su madre María; así como misivas dirigidas a él” (331) (letters written by Miguel Ángel to people in Guatemala, especially his mother María, as well as letters written to him). This promised second volume has yet to be published.

³² An account of this event that is less flattering to Asturias is attributed to José Castañeda in Juan Olivero’s prólogo to *Sinceridades*. In this second-hand “anécdota deliciosa” the exchange goes like this: —“Maestro, perdóneme, pero acabo de llegar a París y todavía no comprendo muy bien el francés...” Y Maître Raynaud, lanzando una sabrosa carcajada: —“Francés...? Qué francés ni que nada, le estoy hablando en cackchiquel [sic]...” (xx).” (“Professor, excuse me, but I just arrived in Paris and I don’t yet

understand French very well...” And Raynaud, with a deep laugh, replied: “French...? Not a bit of French, I’m speaking to you cackchiquel [sic]...”). Although Olivero errs in attributing “cackchiquel” to Raynaud—who, working on the Pop Wuj, studied K’iche’—Kaqchikel is the prominent ethnic group for the area encompassing Guatemala City, and the Maya language most present in the area where Asturias spent his early childhood and adolescence (1899/1999 91).

³³ According to the 2003 *Atlas Lingüístico de Guatemala* there are almost one million speakers of K’iche’ in over nine departments (Richards 62).

³⁴ Asturias could be interpreting Raynaud’s assessment according to Vasconcelian notions of the origin of American indigenous people (Atlantis) and the disappearance of purity, given that, for Vasconcelos, “even the pure Indians are Hispanized, they are Latinized, just as the environment itself is Latinized. Say what one may, the red men, the illustrious Atlanteans from whom Indians derive, went to sleep millions of years ago, never to awaken” (*The Cosmic* 16).

³⁵ See Bellini, 2006, page 32 for a literary review of these first critics.

³⁶ As with the myth of exile, Asturias’s stay in rural Salamá in the early 1900s is cited as the origin for everything from Asturias’s use of myth, to a telluric connection with *lo maya*, to his social conscience (Cheymol “M.A. Asturias entre latinidad e indigenismo” 846, 861). Salamá, furthermore, is in eastern Guatemala, not part of the K’iche’ region and populated mostly by ladinos.

³⁷ Bellini is mistaken: Asturias wrote his undergraduate thesis, *El problema social del indio*, in 1923, before his study with Raynaud in Paris.

³⁸ Prieto’s psychoanalytic analysis of Asturias’s female characters hypothesizes that Asturias’s strong, unresolved attachment to his mother was to blame for a prohibition of sexuality in Asturias’s novels (25). He also goes to the trouble to emphasize, following the scanty evidence provided by other biographers and based mostly on visual examinations of family photographs, her mestiza (Spanish and Maya) identity (17). I speculate that this might be the underpinnings of Prieto’s argument for Asturias’s privileged insight (i.e. that Asturias’s mother’s alleged mestiza identity somehow accounts for Asturias’s particular Maya insight). Similarly, Seymour Menton claims an indigenous mother for Asturias as evidence for his argument that Asturias’s “realismo mágico” is somehow more authentic than Carpentier’s (*Historia verdadera* 171) and Asturias himself, in an interview with Günter Lorenz in April 1967 (pre-Nobel Prize), claims: “Mi padre era mestizo y de profesión abogado. Mi madre, india, maya, maestra” (My father was mestizo and a lawyer by profession. My mother, Indian, Maya, teacher” (*Diálogo* 256). This is clearly a fabrication that first appears in the 1960s and serves to validate the perception of Asturias as an author with Maya heritage.

³⁹ In the middle of psychoanalytical readings of two novels Prieto writes that although he is “unable to put Asturias on the couch,” “*Hombres de maíz* and *Mulata de tal* are strewn with clues of a biographical nature [...] a sort of confession in code” (111-112). Prieto thereby positions himself as a psychoanalytic translator for an “essential” Asturias, who is in turn his translator for *lo maya* (the “truly non-Western”).

⁴⁰ Marc Cheymol’s article, “Miguel Ángel Asturias entre Latinidad e Indigenismo: los viajes de Prensa Latina y los seminarios de cultura maya en la Sorbona,” (“Miguel Ángel

Asturias between Latinidad and Indigenismo: travels with the Prensa Latina and seminars on Mayan culture at the Sorbonne”) presents a rigorous assessment of the myths that Asturias, not to mention biographers and critics, spun, and, like his 1987 book, *Miguel Ángel Asturias dans le Paris des années folles*, debunks most of them with contradictory biographical evidence. His work is significant in deconstructing the myth of the Mayan Asturias.

⁴¹ To be clear, *El Señor presidente* references the previous dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera, but would still have been perceived as a political threat by Ubico.

⁴² See, for example, Martin’s 1992 critical edition of *Hombres de maíz*. It painstakingly corresponds quotes from the novel with plausible sources in Mayan myths and legends that would have been accessible to Asturias in the 1920s.

⁴³ Jorge Alcides Paredes attempts a similar task by comparing the structure of the Banana Trilogy to that of the *Pop Wuj*, as does Mario Roberto Morales in his critical edition notes in Asturias’s *Cuentos y Leyendas*.

⁴⁴ The surviving human characters at the end of *Mulata de Tal* are members of the cloth (not Maya) and the ladinized (no longer Maya) Celestino Yumí and Catalina Zabala.

⁴⁵ This is a unique archive housed at La Bibliothèque Nationale de France. It contains Asturias’s manuscripts (with the notable exceptions of *El Señor Presidente*, *Hombres de maíz*, *El Papa verde* and *Viento fuerte* (Janquart 1899/1999 496)); his correspondence from the 1950s until his death in 1974—including carbon copies of letters he authored—with fellow Nobel Laureates like Pablo Neruda, his Argentinean editor Gonzalo Losada, his translators, President Jacobo Arbenz, President Leopold Senghor and with several literary critics at the beginning of their careers; and conference papers. Asturias’s wife, Blanca Mora de Asturias, was responsible for the conservation and organization of these materials (Guibert 165).

⁴⁶ Columbianum was organized in the late 1950s as a round table about Latin America and the responsibility of Europe towards Latin America (I surmise given the fact that a priest was at the helm that this responsibility was of an ecclesiastical bent). This Italian initiative included a library, publications and conferences.

⁴⁷ The conference included writers J.M. Arguedas, Juan Rulfo and Jorge Amado as well as the first European screening of Glauber Rocha’s *Barravento* (1899/1999 432).

⁴⁸ The course, “Il romanzo latinoamericano e i suoi rapporti con i problemi politici e sociali del nuovo mondo,” (The Latin American novel and its relationship with the socio-political problems of the New World), included the following lectures: Introduzione alla letteratura latinoamericana (Introduction to Latin American literature), La narrativa nella letteratura precolombiana (Narrative in pre-Colombian literature), Il paesaggio e il linguaggio nella narrativa latinoamericana (Landscape and Language in Latin American literature); Apporti del romanzo alla sociologia (The novel’s contribution to sociology), Il romanziere nell’ “Università” e Alcuni romanzieri latinoamericani (The novelist in the University and some Latin American novelists) and Studio di alcuni romanzi di testimonianza e protesta sociale e politica (Study of the testimonial novel and social and political protest). Correspondence regarding the course is found in the folder “Correspondance—Columbianum” in Le Fonds Asturias (letter from Segala 18/12/63; 1899/1999 434)

⁴⁹ Written drafts of these speeches are archived in *Le Fonds*, under the generic entry <Miguel Ángel Asturias—Conferences>. Unfortunately, many of these are undated, making it difficult to catalogue their original presentation with certainty. Nevertheless, the lectures' content, compared with the outline for the 1964 mini-course and biographic corroboration of Asturias's subsequent appearances at universities in Spain and Latin America, indicates that Asturias began presenting his conception of Latin American literature in the early 1960s, perhaps beginning with his participation at the Columbianum conference in 1963.

⁵⁰ An almost verbatim copy of this section is published in 1971 *El novelista en la Universidad*, page 23, a speech given at a University in Spain. The publication lacks crucial information about the date(s) and location(s) of the original speech(es).

⁵¹ There are four versions of this speech grouped in the same archive folder. In the second and third versions the title reads "La protesta social y política en la novela latinoamericana" (Social and political protest in the Latin American novel) and the fourth reads, simply, "La protesta en la novela latinoamericana" (Protest in the Latin American novel). Again, no presentation data is given, but it is reasonable to assume that these texts were drafts for those presented as part of the course "Introduzione alla letteratura latinoamericana" in 1964. Unless otherwise indicated, the lectures are located in the folder <Miguel Ángel Asturias→Conferences> in Le Fonds Asturias.

⁵² See also a speech marking the closure of the Latin American Theatre Festival at the University of Manizales Colombia in 1968: "De todos los idiomas hablados por los hombres, además de las lenguas indígenas americanas que entran en su composición [sic], hay la mezcla de las lenguas europeas y orientales que las masas de emigrantes trajeron a nuestras costas (3)." (Of all the languages spoken, in addition to the American indigenous languages that enter into its composition, there's the mixture of European and Oriental languages that the emigrant masses brought to our shores.) On page four he reasserts this indigenous inheritance: "Nuestra prosa se aparta del ordenamiento de la sintaxis castellana, porque la palabra tienen en nuestras letras, un valor en sí, tal como lo tenía en las lenguas indígenas, palabra, concepto, sonido, transposición fascinante y rica (4)." (Our prose sets itself apart from the order of Castilian syntax, because the word, in our literature, has its own value—just like it did in the indigenous languages, word, concept, sound, fascinating and rich transposition, translations mine).

⁵³ This is the only version that bears a date: "París: invierno 1968," and therefore must have been re-written after his Nobel Prize award in late 1967.

⁵⁴ This was Asturias second visit since the 1954 coup. He also returned in 1959 (1899/1999 290).

⁵⁵ In a 1967 essay "*El Señor Presidente* como mito" Asturias seems to reuse this same description when describing the writing of one of his major novels: "Es así como nace *El Señor Presidente*, hablado no escrito. Y como al decirlo me oía, no quedaba satisfecho hasta que me sonaba bien, y tantas veces lo hacía, para que cada vez se oyera mejor, que llegué a saber capítulos enteros de memoria. No fue escrito, al principio, sino hablado. Y esto es importante subrayarlo. Fue deletreado. Era la época del renacer de la palabra, como medio de expresión y de acción mágica. Ciertas palabras. Ciertos sonidos. Hasta producir el encantamiento, el estado hipnótico, el trance." (That was how *El Señor*

Presidente was born: spoken not written. And by saying it I heard it, I wasn't satisfied until it sounded right, and I did this so many times—so that it each time it would sound better—that I memorized entire chapters. It wasn't written, at first, it was spoken. It's important to underline this. It was spelled out. It was the time of the word's rebirth, as a means of expression and magical action. Certain words. Certain sounds. Until achieving enchantment, hypnotic state, trance.) (Klahn and Corral, Eds. 332). This description also resonates with the techniques of the surrealist movement.

⁵⁶ In a 1971 publication he emphasizes an indigenous genealogy of these “palabras-imágenes” by comparing them to glyphs: “Nuestra novela reivindica lo que podría llamarse el idioma de las imágenes. ¿Se deberá acaso a que nuestra literatura en los países de culturas autóctonas, primero fue pintada—ideogramas pintados en tablillas hace siglos—, y de aquí ese pintar nuestra prosa con imágenes? Si nuestros antepasados para expresarse poética o literariamente recurrían a la imagen, no hacemos sino seguir una norma indígena americana, a tal punto que hay momentos que parece que no escribimos con palabras sino con imágenes. Palabras-imágenes en las que halla su expresión más auténtica la literatura americana y la que la diferencia de la novela europea actual” (*El novelista en la universidad* 28-29). (Our novel restores what could be called the language of images. Could it be because our literature in countries of autochthonous cultures was painted first—ideograms painted on tablets centuries ago—, and from that origin our prose with images? If our ancestors, in order to express themselves, recurred to the image, we're doing nothing more than following an indigenous american norm, to the point that there are moments that we seem to write not with words but with images. Word-images in which is found the most authentic expression of American literature and that which differentiates it from the contemporary European novel).

⁵⁷ Jean Franco, in her analysis of Latin American magical realism, writes that Asturias, J.M. Arguedas and Alejo Carpentier used race strategically as a way “to trump Eurocentrism” (160). Asturias perfected this strategy during the Columbianum years.

⁵⁸ Many of these authors that Asturias mentions were also involved with Columbianum, and their mention shows Asturias's support for the next generation of writers at this time; indeed, what he is expressing here is a shared creative project that includes political writing.

⁵⁹ Asturias chooses “mestizo” here, instead of the regional “ladino.” See my previous discussion of his 1923 thesis.

⁶⁰ Arias relates this to *realismo mágico*: “El llamado <<realismo mágico>>, entonces, pasaba a ser un híbrido de formas literarias europeas conformadas bajo la tutela del humanismo racionalista con una cosmovisión indígena que se apoyaba en elementos llamados <<sobrenaturales>> (“El contexto” 808) (So-called “magical realism,” then, came to be a mix of European literary forms shaped under the tutelage of rational humanism with an indigenous world view that was supported by “supernatural” elements).

⁶¹ Asturias and Senghor met at a conference in San Marino in the late 1960s and had great mutual admiration for the others' work. Together with Professor René Durand they organized a conference in Dakar on the intersection of indigeneity and negritude in 1974 (*1899/1999* 441-488). This section includes an introduction to Senghor's work by

Asturias and a text by Senghor entitled “Asturias le métis” (Asturias the mestizo) that, incidentally, reproduces the myth of *lo maya* associated with Asturias.

Chapter 3

Irrupted History: 1944, 1954 and *Los ojos de los enterrados*

Introduction

In the previous chapter “Asturias and *lo maya*” I explain how Asturias’s literary mayanism emerges between the bounds of the incommunicable (*lo maya* as mysterious, unfathomable) and the communicable (Asturias’s literary aesthetic as representative of a Mayan worldview), between the national/regional and the universal. This chapter draws on that analysis of how the national is subjectified vis-a-vis *lo maya* and turns to Asturias’s treatment of national history in the last novel of the La Trilogía Bananera, his Banana Trilogy. In *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960) Asturias relies less on *lo maya* and more on a negrista aesthetics expressed through a mulatto character, Juambo, and an invented phrase, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*, to complicate the historical narrative and the representation of the national.

La Trilogía Bananera is Asturias’s novelized history about the first half-century of the Central American banana industry. Social realist in part, and critical of U.S. imperialism as befits a novela bananera of the 1940s/1950s, the Trilogy is the biography of the U.S. owned banana company, Tropical Platanera, S.A., from its birth on the Atlantic coast to its ascendance as a “state within the state.”¹ The power of this company within national governance is emphasized throughout the Trilogy as Tropical Platanera, S.A. mobilizes the state’s military forces, writes constitutional law and directs the

president. Although the country is not named it is geographically consistent with Guatemala and, as shown later, with Guatemala's history. Intertwined with this Company biography are the bildungsromans of several characters: a major gringo stockholder-turned-cooperativist who is killed by a hurricane at the end of the first novel, *Viento fuerte* (1950) (Strong Wind), the gringo George Maker Thompson who begins the second novel *El Papa verde* (1954) (The Green Pope) as a second-rate pirate and ends as the President of Tropical Platanera, S.A., and Octavio Sansur, the ladino leader of the popular revolution in the final installment, *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960) (The Eyes of the Interred). Thus, the biography of the Company, Tropical Platanera, along with those of these additional characters, is wrought between a sometimes magical-realist, and always complicated, geographical history of natural disaster. The Trilogy follows a timeline consistent with the history of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala (namely the accumulation of vast tracts of land, the consolidation of plantation labor, and control of shipping routes that characterized the U.S. monopolization of the banana business in Central America up until the mid-twentieth century) and the 1944 October Revolution.

What sets the last novel of the Trilogy apart—both in terms of the novela bananera genre, and Asturias's other novels—is how Asturias treats history, particularly the national history of the 1944 democratic revolution and its 1954 backlash: a U.S. sponsored coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz.² I begin by analyzing Asturias's attention to and iteration of the date 1954 in his postscript to the Trilogy's final novel and how this date interrupts the endpoint of the timeline of the novel (1944). I then identify a phrase—*¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*—that emerges in *El Papa verde* and *Los ojos de los enterrados*. This phrase is connected to

three different narrative strands in the novel: the present (a “roots story” revealing the identity and origin of a marginalized mulatto character named Juambo who is the primary “carrier” of the phrase), the future (the story of the revolutionary movement led by Octavio Sansur that challenges Tropical Platanera, S.A.’s power) and the past (the history of the company’s birth). I use the three strands as a frame to reveal how the phrase disorders what might otherwise be a straightforward, linear history of the events of 1944 and also to illustrate how Asturias dwells on certain moments: the moment of primitive accumulation, for example, or the prophetic, revolutionary hope of the future. In the conclusion I return to history to analyze how another crucial date, June 29th, disrupts the novel’s finale.

The phrase is linked most strongly to an Afro-Guatemalan character named Juambo and, similar to Asturias’s literary mayanism, has temporal and political aspects. At times the phrase has a magical ability to transport Juambo between different time periods (the present of the resistance movement, the colonial past, etc.) and is both denunciatory and revolutionary. These two aspects are very much in keeping with Asturias’s use of *lo maya*. However *jchos, chos, moyón con ’s!* tie to black ethnicity, through Juambo, is not part of a national literary project. This is an important distinction between Asturias’s *negrismo* and his *indigenismo*. *Hombres de maíz* (1949) does tie Maya ethnicity into a national cosmovision, for example, and is resonant with *criollo* and later incorporations of the Maya within Guatemala. The Maya of course, also comprise the majority of the population. Guatemala, in contrast with Cuba, never had a black nationalism and Afro-Guatemalans are very much a minority both in terms of population and literary representations. Instead, Asturias’s onomatopoeic creation of *jchos, chos,*

moyón con! seems to imitate the Cuban writer Nicolás Guillen's *negrismo*. Juambo and the phrase are not tied to a specific Afro-Guatemalan community (for example, the West Indian migrants who were brought to work the coastal plantations in the twentieth century, the Garífunas who established communities on the Atlantic coast during colonialism, etc.). Thus, Asturias's creation of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* does not derive from or project a shared national community (unlike literary mayanism), and in the novel it interrupts the linear history.

Thus, my close reading of *Los ojos de los enterrados* examines how Asturias writes about history *as history is happening*. I argue that the novel's postscript, the repetition of the date June 29th and the not always intelligible phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* are irruptions within the text that challenge a cohesive, conclusive reading of *Los ojos de los enterrados* as merely the fictionalized history of the banana industry in Guatemala. Instead, these repeated irruptions suggest an integral instability in the fundamentals of the Guatemalan national novel as written by Asturias including, clearly, national history as an evolutionary continuum.

Writing history as History is happening

When Asturias started research for his *Trilogía Bananera*, in 1949, Guatemala was four years into a nationalist-democratic government under President Juan José Arévalo.³ A U.S. company, the United Fruit Co., was still a powerful force in Guatemala, and the first two novels offer a more or less accurate—although still very fictional—account of the company's development and collaboration with the dictatorships of the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ Roughly at the same time that Asturias was finishing the second

novel and beginning the third, the revolutionary government, under its second elected president Jacobo Arbenz, began threatening the United Fruit Company's interests. The 1954 coup—orchestrated by the U.S. C.I.A.—ended Arbenz' presidency. Consequently, the historical fiction that Asturias was trying to write—the history of the United Fruit Company as a “state within the state” in Guatemala and the history of the popular 1944 revolution—was being affected while he was in the process of writing it.

Asturias could have resolved this problem by limiting the scope of the novel, stopping the novel's timeline at 1944. To some extent he did, as the novel's final events resonate with those of the 1944 October revolution, before the Arévalo and Arbenz presidencies. However, my reading of the novel indicates points within and outside the text where Asturias's fictionalization of history does not end with 1944—instead the events of the 1950s future irrupt posthumously to threaten the historical tidiness of that 1944 endpoint. The first instance I examine is *Los ojos de los enterrado's* postscript.

At the end of Asturias's novels there is an inscription of place and date that reflects the conditions of writing. Thus, the inscription following *Hombres de maíz* reads “Guatemala, octubre de 1945./ Buenos Aires, 17 de mayo de 1949 (281),” and *El Señor presidente* “Guatemala, diciembre de 1922./ París, noviembre de 1925, 8 de diciembre de 1932” (340). *Leyendas de Guatemala* also bears the cosmopolitan “París, 1925-1930” (43). These postscripts notarize the production and gestation of the novels while also chronicling the novelist's journey from Guatemala to Paris as a young man, his 1920s stay in Europe and his return to Guatemala in the 1930s. In the case of *El Señor presidente* the postscript, in comparison with the publication date, also testifies to the political pressures that delayed the novel's publication.⁵ Indeed, Gerald Martin remarks

on the time elapsed between the writing and publication of *El Señor presidente* and proposes a regrouping of texts, recognizing its contemporaneity with other Latin American novels of dictatorship (*Journeys* 267).

Asturias also dates the postscripts of his Trilogía Bananera and *Los ojos de los enterrados*' postscript is the longest of the three. The first novel, *Viento fuerte*, is firmly Guatemalan—"Guatemala de la Asunción,/ Enero-Abril, 1950./ FIN"—and *El Papa verde* still very American—"Buenos Aires, 10 de diciembre de 1952./ FIN."⁶ Both postscripts are brief: they record one city, one year and sign off with "FIN." The year-date and the publication date are off, at most, by two years. The postscript to *Los ojos de los enterrados*, in contrast, is bulkier, with an extensive geographic and temporal label following, instead of leading, a conclusive

FIN

Buenos Aires 1952

París, 1953; San Salvador, 1954

Buenos Aires, julio, 1959.

The end of this novel is also the end of the Trilogía Bananera itself, but the lengthy list of dates—in addition to the time span of seven years from start to finish—hint at the difficulty of finishing this particular history. Furthermore, the cities and dates trail the "FIN," amending the novel's conclusion.

Los ojos de los enterrados' dangling postscript's significance is evident when examined within the context of the story told by the Trilogy. The Trilogía Bananera, as the novelized history of the Guatemalan banana monopoly, fictionalizes history by renaming the United Fruit Company "Tropical Platanera, S.A." and entrepreneur Minor Keith "George Maker Thompson" (Dosal 44 and 55). The nation is not named, but referenced to through its military repression at the orders of an unnamed president who in

turn is directed by George Maker Thompson. Indeed, in the hyperbolic *El Papa verde* Maker Thompson controls the nation as if it were part and parcel of his banana company (the “state within the state”). *Los ojos de los enterrados* tells the story of resistance to this banana company/dictatorship and, as befits the climactic final novel of a trilogy, drives towards the eventual triumph of a general strike. The description of organized union resistance (split between the city and the plantation coast), and references to historical events at the end of WWII in the novel, establish parallels between the novel’s popular revolution and Guatemala’s 1944 October Revolution, asserting the connection between history and fiction.⁷ The fictional Trilogy drives towards this climax of revolutionary triumph, making the lengthy postscript even more curious.

Indeed, if *Los ojos de los enterrados* had been published before late June 1954 the triumph of the strike in the novel’s last pages would correspond to the triumph of this revolution. Instead, the novel wasn’t published until 1960—eight years after the novel’s initial postscript of 1952. This delay is significant when compared to the first two novels of the Trilogy. The lengthy geographic itinerary of the postscript bears witness to Asturias’s journey of diplomacy and exile. In 1953, for example, Asturias served President Arbenz’ revolutionary government as the Ministro Consejero in Paris. Coronel Arbenz, elected in 1951, is remembered most for the land reform begun during his administration, a modest program that began with decree 900 on June 17, 1952 (Cullather 128). The program’s intent was to redistribute the unused land of large-scale landowners to landless peasants, with landowners compensated in accordance with their own property valuation on tax forms. The United Fruit Company (Asturias’s fictional Tropical Platanera, S.A.) had, since the 1930s, been the largest landholder in Guatemala (Soluri 6

and Handy 128). As such, the Company had much to lose with the enforcement of decree 900 and protested both in Guatemala and by pressuring the United States government to intervene politically. In late 1953 Asturias was named ambassador to El Salvador and he held that post (and was in San Salvador) at the time of the 1954 coup d'état and subsequent reversal of decree 900 (1899/1999 289, López Álvarez 129, Arbenz 1).⁸ The postscript's third date thus marks the historical event of the coup, and, with it, Asturias's exile.⁹ The final date and location mentioned in the postscript reference Asturias's continued status as a political exile—traveling on an Argentinean passport—at the time he finished writing the novel in 1959.¹⁰

The four dates together—1952, 1953, 1954 and 1959—thus highlight the interruptions of the manuscript's production and the author's geographic displacement during that time. But the third date, 1954, stands out as the historically important military invasion that ended the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz and the legacy of the October Revolution. This paradox of circumstance—Asturias is writing the Trilogy's triumphant popular revolution in the early 1950s, based on the events of 1944, while the 1954 coup extinguishes that same revolution—may even have delayed the novel's termination. Indeed, *Weekend in Guatemala* (a short story collection written in response to the events of U.S. intervention through CIA operative PBSUCCESS and the 1954 coup and not part of the Banana Trilogy) was published between *El Papa verde* and *Los ojos de los enterrados* in 1955.¹¹ Yet the publication of *Los ojos de los enterrados* was delayed.

According to Jimena Sáenz' 1974 biography, Asturias's conclusion to the Trilogy had been advertised as early as 1954. She quotes a 1958 interview where Asturias

explains why the final novel's publication was delayed, even though the manuscript had been finished earlier:

En ese año [1954] la novela ya estaba terminada. Los sucesos de Guatemala, la invasión al país, la traición del ejército y la instauración de un gobierno de represión de la democracia y entrega a los consorcios extranjeros de nuestras riquezas, me hizo abandonar el texto, ya que la novela se conjugaba en el momento del triunfo de las leyes de la Revolución Guatemalteca sobre la arbitrariedad de la Frutera (190).

(The novel was finished that year. But events in Guatemala—the invasion, the army's betrayal and the installation of a government repressing democracy and the delivery of our wealth to foreign consortiums—made me abandon the text, since the novel takes place at the moment of the Guatemalan Revolution's triumph over the arbitrariness of the fruit company).

In Asturias's account he abandoned the text because of the invasion of 1954, an event that brought an end to the revolution. Although we do not know if he made any changes to the novel's conclusion, the date 1954 stands out in the novel's postscript as a striking endnote to a historical novel that appears to focus exclusively on the triumphant history of 1944. This postscript—1954—is irruptive because it is one that any reader versed in Latin American history would recognize. Its significance—the end of national-democratic revolution—is marked without words. 1954 laces the conclusion and prompts a reevaluation of the fictional triumph in light of historical ruin. Although 1954 is outside of the bounds of the novel because it appears after the "FIN," it disrupts the novel's timeline with its projection of the future. Thus, viewed from the perspective of the end of the novel (which, though never dated in the text, resembles the events of 1944), the 1954 postscript foretells the death of the revolution. At the same time, viewed from the perspective of 1960 (the novel's publication date), the date 1954 irrupts to record the betrayal of that hopeful, celebratory and triumphant dawn with which Asturias

ends his novel.¹² In either case, the conclusion is no longer a distinct entity, bounded by 1944.

I read the irruptive postscript of 1954 as evidence of how Asturias is choosing to narrate history through specific moments, like 1954, that appear seemingly out of order. His history is not a neat, linear timeline. The difference between 1954 as prophecy (when read from the time position of the end of the novel) and 1954 as past (when read the 1960 publication date) also indicates that the timeline of the novel is not a closed one. Instead, that timeline is continually disrupted by irruptions coming from both the past and the future. Perhaps Asturias's difficulty finishing the novel hints at this as well. He succeeded in finishing and publishing the first two installments before the coup (*El papa verde* is published only four months before the invasion), only five years after beginning the project in 1949.¹³ But these novels only prophesize the triumph of 1944. The apex of the trilogy, its culmination, languishes for six years. *Week-end en Guatemala*, an immensely denunciatory and contemporary work, and therefore highly subject to pressures of censorship, is published in the interim. It is therefore unlikely that the sole delay of *Los ojos de los enterrados* resulted from political pressure.¹⁴ Instead, the novel accumulates pages: in Losada's edition these pages number nearly 500. *Viento fuerte* and *El Papa verde*, by contrast, have only 200 and 300 pages in their respective Losada editions. Asturias calls attention to this publication disruption in his postscript, suggesting that even the task of completing the writing of this history was a challenging one.

Asturias took ten years to finish the Trilogy project, seven to finish the final installment. He chose to end the novel with a metaphor of beginning, with the dawn of

the revolution's victory, but followed it with a postscript of closure, with counterrevolution. Thus the interruption of 1954 within the postscript is like another element interrupting the story of the revolution *within* the text—the enigmatic exclamation *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*—which is able to reference past and future in addition to the present. *¡Chos, chos, moyón con!* possesses the same irruptive qualities that 1954 presents within the timeline of the novel, but in a less direct way. *¡Chos, chos, moyón con!*, unlike 1954, is never definitively translated. It is uttered by several different characters and it appears in the textual timeline of the novel with multiple meanings and the power to temporally distort the narrative in multiple directions.

The exclamation “*¡Chos, chos, moyón con!*” is first introduced in *El Papa verde* and is repeated more than 15 times in *Los ojos de los enterrados*.¹⁵ Its words are never definitive, but rather encompass many meanings. In *El Papa verde* it is described, paradoxically, as both meaningless and full of meaning: “no quiere decir nada y quiere decir todo” (145) (it doesn't mean anything and it means everything). In this state of malleable indecipherability, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is an integral part of the many plots and subplots in *Los ojos de los enterrados*. It expresses three separate temporal strands within the novel: 1) the present tense biography—a “roots” story—of a minor/marginal mulatto character's reunification with his family on the banana plantation, 2) the future revolutionary strike led by Octavio Sansur that will destroy dictatorship and Tropical Platanera, S.A. and, 3) the past of the first violence of primitive accumulation that began George Maker Thompson's banana empire. The abrupt, non-chronological movement between strands is crucial to my reading of Asturias's irruptive history.

The order in which I describe these temporal strands is arbitrary, since all of the strands intersect and, it can be argued, are mutually derivative and originary. Asturias's characteristic interweaving of plots, subplots, sideplots and extended baroque description often makes for difficult reading, but this novel is especially challenging. The phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* interrupts narrative linearity and coherence so frequently that it acts as an element as—or even more—important than individual characters. It references the different temporalities and calls attention to events of the present, past, future. But it also interrupts the timeline of the novel with flashbacks and prolepsis. The immediacy of these irruptions is indicated by its violent punctuation: *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is almost always italicized and framed by exclamation marks.

¡Chos, chos, moyón con! is not only irruptive and undefined, it is unauthored. It connects characters like Juambo and Sansur, references the past and articulates the resistance to the banana company across geographical distance. But it is not tied exclusively to a single individual. Ranajit Guha, in a section of *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, posits the importance of one type of anonymous, unauthored speech—rumour—in spreading insurrection, stating “One would perhaps be quite justified in saying that rumour is both a *universal* and *necessary* carrier of insurgency in any pre-industrial, pre-literate society” (251, emphasis in the original). Thus, Asturias's invention of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* can perhaps be characterized as an aesthetization of rumour because the anonymous phrase is a carrier for insurgency within the Trilogy, “conducted over vast areas,” between its Atlantic origin, the highland capital and the Pacific coast (252). Additionally, *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*'s use is mostly

violent—both in its interruptive function within the text, and in its reference to primitive accumulation and resistance.

In order to situate the phrase within the novel I provide a brief synopsis of *Los ojos de los enterrados* here. It is the longest of the Banana Trilogy novels and is divided into four parts. The first part (Chapters I-VI) centers on the capital city, at the bar Granada, and follows the lives of several marginal and marginalized characters: most notably Juambo, a mulatto orphan who is George Maker Thompson's servant; Anastasia, a displaced mulatta from the banana-producing coast and estranged sister to Juambo; and don Nepo, Anastasia's co-worker.¹⁶ Octavio Sansur, the ladino orphan-turned-revolutionary hero and therefore central to the main plot, meets with Juambo and plans to utilize him in his revolutionary movement. The second part (Chapters VII-XV) takes place in the highlands, narrating the urban ladina Malena Tabay's ascendance from teacher to school director to revolutionary leader alongside her romantic involvement with Octavio Sansur.¹⁷ Octavio Sansur and Malena Tabay (known also by their many pseudonyms as revolutionaries) become a heroic male/female pair in the novel and together orchestrate the general strike that will end the banana company, Tropical Platanera, S.A., and the dictatorship.¹⁸ The third part (Chapters XVI to XXXVII) straddles the City and the Pacific banana coast, Tiquisate, and details the organization of the general strike.¹⁹ Juambo travels to the coast as part of Sansur's overall plan to infiltrate the Tropical Platanera, S.A.'s offices, but becomes distracted by his reunification with his mother. The fourth part (Chapters XXXVIII to XLI), mainly on the Pacific coast, describes the reaction of the military and the police to the resignation of the President on the 29th of June, the deaths of the Banana Company President and his only

grandson Bobby, the fall of the Company/dictatorship, the reunion of revolutionaries Sansur and Tabay and the triumph of the revolution.

The geographic displacements of the novel (Mayan highlands, Ladino capital, coast) mirror three generalized geographies of Guatemalan national literary production and reference the economies of those regions (coffee production, servant labor, banana production).²⁰ This allows for Asturias's critique of gringo imperialism and its pursuant evils: land appropriation, internal migration, labor exploitation, the use of mercenaries, and puppet governance.²¹ The entwined nature of the U.S. company and the dictatorship is expressed in a dialogue between Rosa Gavidia (Malena Tabay) and Juan Pablo Mondragón (Octavio Sansur) after a long, painful separation.²² Their discussion centers the political critique of the novel on both the company Tropical Platanera S.A. (which Asturias has modeled on the U.S. United Fruit Company) and the government (similarly modeled on the Ubico dictatorship) and the circumstances of U.S. economic imperialism. In the quote Rosa Gavidia addresses Juan Pablo:

Dictadura se te hizo evidente que era inseparable de frutera, consubstanciales. Derrocar a la fiera militar de turno dejando la frutera intacta, era engañarse, y atacar a la compañía con el dictadorzuelo encima, era imposible. Había que acabar con las dos al mismo tiempo... (225)

(It became obvious to you that the dictatorship was inseparable from the company, that they were consubstantial. Overthrowing the military beast while leaving the company intact would be to deceive oneself and attacking the company with its dictator hang-on impossible. It was necessary to finish them both off at once...)

While themes of imperialist socioeconomic exploitation are present in *Hombres de maíz*, as well as the other novels of the Trilogía, *Los ojos de los enterrados* explicitly posits a state-within-a-state structure of governance whereby the President/military/nation act on the orders of a foreign Company. Thus, as Gavidia attests, “Había que acabar con las dos

al mismo tiempo.” This quote calls attention to the main difference between the historical 1944 revolution and Asturias’s fictionalized one. The 1944 uprisings against Ubico did not address the United Fruit Company’s imperialist stronghold on Guatemala, but were focused on ending the Ubico dictatorship (achieved in large part through the rebellion of the Guatemalan Army). Gavidia’s reiteration of Mondragón’s strategy—based on an understanding of Tropical Platanera and the Guatemalan government’s symbiotic relationship—constitutes, perhaps, Asturias’s criticism of recent history by postulating a more effective 1944 revolution than the original.²³

But Sansur’s logic is not the only strategy for overcoming the dictatorship. The mysterious, rumour-like *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* proves an essential carrier for this revolutionary goal of the future, but it drags along with it the present “roots story” of the character Juambo.²⁴ Through this present-tense “roots story” Juambo, described as mulatto, recovers his original family and is progressively seduced by the past through the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!* The back and forth movement initiated by the phrase—between Juambo’s past and the forward-marching revolutionary project—are part of what disrupts the novel’s linearity. Thus, in the complicated timeline of *Los ojos de los enterrados, ¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*’s utility to the revolution begins in the present, is projected towards the future but ultimately arrives in the past. I first trace the characterization of Juambo from its beginnings in *El Papa verde* to the moment when *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* possesses him in the present and instigates his reunion with his mother. I then detail the projection of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* towards Sansur’s future revolution. Finally, I tie *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* to the pre-Tropical Platanera, S.A. past. The three temporal strands enacted by *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*—present, future, past—

are the second component of Asturias's irrupted history that I am proposing with my reading of this novel.

Present: Juambo possessed

In order to explain how *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* disrupts the narrative linearity of the main plot (that is, the organization and triumph of Sansur's national revolution) I turn to the character of Juambo. Juambo acts as the first porter of the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* and appears first in the second novel of the Trilogy, *El Papa verde*, as a minor character within the biography of George Maker Thompson.²⁵ Juambo is Thompson's fosterling and servant, and this marginality is emphasized in this introduction where Juambo serves him as chauffeur:

En el motorcar, mientras los señores *lunchaban*, esperaba Juambo el Sambito comiendo bananos. Pelaba la fruta con parsimonia y luego se engullía hasta el galillo la candela de crema vegetal en que la seda y la vida van juntas. Un banano tras otro. Babasa de lujo le rezumaba de la boca, por las comisuras de sus labios gruesos, ligeramente morados. Cuando le chorreaba por la quijada, ya para resbalarle el güergero se sacudía, moviendo la cabeza de un lado a otro con fuerza, o se limpiaba con el envés de la mano. Y otro banano, y otro banano, y otro banano. Ellos, los jefes *lunchaban*: él, Sambito, comía bananos (*El Papa verde* 86).

(In the motorcar, while the men had their lunch, Juambo the Sambito waited, eating bananas. He peeled the fruit carefully and then gorged himself, to the uvula, on the candle of vegetable cream in which silk and life come together. One banana after another. Luxurious saliva oozed from his mouth, from the corners of his thick, purplish lips. When it flowed down his jaw, almost sliding down his neck, he shook himself, moving his head back and forth forcefully, or he cleaned himself with the back of his hand. And another banana, and another banana, and another banana. They, the bosses, had lunch: he, Sambito, ate bananas.)

Juambo's title, "El Sambito," marks him racially. In an earlier description of the Caribbean port of Puerto Barrios in Amatique Bay, Asturias uses the colonial term "zambo," used to describe those of mixed African and indigenous American heritage, in a list describing the port's diversity:

Paseantes en el muelle. Negros.²⁶ Blancos. ¡Qué raros se miran los blancos de noche! Como los negros de día. Negros de Omoa, de Belice, de Livingston, de Nueva Orleáns.²⁷ Mestizos insignificantes con ojos de pescado, medio indios, medio ladinos; zambos retintos, mulatos silenciosos, asiáticos con trenza y blancos escapados del infierno de Panamá (10).²⁸

(Idlers on the dock. Blacks. Whites. How strange whites look at night! Like blacks by day. Blacks from Omoa, from Belize, from Livingston, from New Orleans. Insignificant mestizos with fish eyes, half-Indian, half-ladino; dark black zambos, silent mulatos de Nueva Orleáns. Mestizos insignificantes con ojos de pescado, medio indios, medio ladinos; zambos retintos, mulatos silenciosos, asians with braids and whites escaped from the hell of Panama.)

The description of Juambo in the motocar is a similar physiognomic list and the language Asturias uses both animalizes Juambo ("galillo", "guérgero", his method of cleaning himself by shaking his head or wiping himself off with the back of his hand) and racializes ("labios gruesos", "ligeramente morados") his features.

Juambo alone in the car resonates with his condition as Thompson's fosterling. He seemingly has no family or community. He is an orphan, believing that his parents left him to tigers and that he was rescued and fostered by George Maker Thompson. The descriptions of Juambo emphasize this separation from others in the way that he talks, how he eats and what he is like. In this way too, he is without history at this point in the Trilogy, even though his description is directly tied to the main subject of the Trilogy: the

banana.²⁹ His presence in the Trilogy is thus curiously paradoxical: he is marginalized but at the same time central to the plot.

Juambo's poor man's lunch of bananas mirrors the profit reaped by the bosses. The adjectives used to describe the bananas denote wealth incongruous with Juambo's condition: "crema", "seda" and "de lujo." At the same time, these adjectives are employed in a sexualized context—the homoeroticism of the banana, the excess of consumption, the expression "babasa de lujo." The conflation of wealth and erotic poetics in the description expands the critique of imperialist capitalism to a comparison with lust through the medium of the marginalized Juambo. Juambo's lunch is the consumptive counterpart of the insatiable greed with which the bosses market "otro banano, y otro banano, y otro banano." Gringo imperialism (obliquely referred to with the anglicism "lunchaban") is mimicked and sexualized with Juambo's performance.

Juambo's introduction in *El Papa verde* thus emphasizes his marginality, beginning with racial stereotypes about Afro-Guatemalans. Furthermore, the description isolates him inside the vehicle, emphasizing his separation from the other men and highlighting his orphanhood. His orphan state is the starting point for his quest to find his family in the last novel of the Trilogy. Yet, somewhat paradoxically given the consistent inscription of his marginality, the substance of his meal reconnects him to the larger novelistic concern of banana commerce. These two aspects of Juambo's characterization—marginality emphasized through racial stereotype and the physical and emotional isolation of the orphan story juxtaposed with an integral connection to the banana industry itself—are perhaps unimportant within *El Papa verde*, yet another of Asturias's intercalated stories that does not seem to have much to do with the overall

novel. But it makes him the perfect vessel for the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* in *Los ojos de los enterrados*. In the Trilogy's finale his centrality becomes clear.

Thus, Juambo's importance to the plot changes within the Trilogy. He is of minor importance within *El Papa verde* but becomes an integral cog in the revolutionary machine by the third part of *Los ojos de los enterrados*. There, the ladino leader Octavio Sansur, from the capital, organizes a national revolution and travels to the coast in order to coordinate union support between the two banana plantations—Bananera (on the Atlantic Coast) and Tiquisate (on the Pacific Coast). Juambo's role in the revolutionary plot becomes central to this goal in two ways: first he becomes a vessel for the revolutionary cry *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* and, second, because of his strategic closeness to El Papa Verde (the nickname of Tropical Platanera, S.A.'s President George Maker Thompson), he is persuaded by Sansur to infiltrate the banana company. Importantly, both of Juambo's roles—as vessel, as pawn in a revolutionary plan—depend upon such marginality. Thus the ethnic difference between Sansur (ladino, with a European, through Jean-Paul Marat, intellectual inheritance and ties to *lo maya* developed primarily in the second part of *Los ojos de los enterrados*) and Juambo (mulatto, but with a strong ancestral connection to the land) also determines their capacity for national subject-hood. In a different reading of the Trilogy, Sansur would be the national-subject—the obvious hero-protagonist of the Trilogy's national revolution—and Juambo would be its subaltern porter. The repetition and function of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* complicates that reading, however, by disrupting the linear trajectory predicted by Sansur's biography and the timeline of the fictional revolution itself.

Juambo's transformation from Thompson's servant to the voice of the revolution is tangled up in a "roots story"—the true story about Juambo's abandonment and his subsequent reconnection with his family. Therefore, his story is not told through a revolutionary bildungsroman (as Sansur's is), but articulated in bits and pieces, the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* acting as a catalyst for the deep memory of a yet-unrecovered past.

These bits and pieces of Juambo's "roots story" emerge in stages, initiated with his reunion with his sister. Anastasia goes to find him at the bidding of don Nepo (who is himself at the bidding of the revolutionary Octavio Sansur), and they are reunited at the home of George Maker Thompson. Their reunion is at first joyous, but subsequently falters, wavers, as Anastasia struggles to find the words for her errand. It is at this moment that *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* appears:

De pronto se le ocurrió algo que fue su salvación.
Acercóse a la oreja de Juambo y le dijo:

—*¡Chos, chos, moyón con!*...

(Suddenly something occurred to her that was her salvation. She moved close to Juambo's ear and said:

"*¡Chos, chos, moyón con!*...")

¡Chos, chos, moyón con! salvages their conversation, and changes Juambo. This is the first time that Juambo has heard the exclamation since his separation from his family long ago. The narration emphasizes the corporeal effect the words have on Juambo:

No dijo más. No necesitó decir más. Aquellos sonidos lo explicaban todo. Un escalofrío helado y caliente recorrió la epidermis del Sambito. Algo se le trabucó en la garganta.

(She said no more. She didn't need to. Those sounds explained it all. A hot-and-cold shiver traveled across Sambito's epidermis. Something became lodged in his throat.)

The whispered sounds function as code, like rumour, and with them further explanation becomes unnecessary. Juambo hears the words, experiences them bodily with chills and heat and ultimately something—the phrase?—becomes lodged in his throat. He is possessed by the words in a transmission from sister to brother. The transmission is not a choice made by Anastasia and, likewise, once transmitted, the phrase overtakes Juambo. Again, in contrast with Sansur’s transformation to revolutionary through the bildungsroman, Juambo’s transformation is through possession. Ranajit Guha writes that “rumour is spoken utterance *par excellence*, and speaking, as linguists say, differs from writing not merely in material, that is, by the fact of its acoustic rather than graphic realization, but in function. It is this aspect of the difference which is the ‘more profound and more essential’ according to Valchek. Speech, he says, responds to any given stimulus more urgently, emotionally and dynamically than written utterance” (256-7). This is the way it is with Juambo when he hears the phrase. Unable to do otherwise, he voices the sounds aloud:

¡Chos, chos, moyón con!...

Donde se escuchaban aquellos sonidos el suelo quedaba mojado de lágrimas, de sudor, de sangre...

¡Chos, chos, moyón con!..., nos están pegando...nos están pegando..., manos extrañas nos están pegando!

Eran unos simples sonidos y pesaban como una cadena con retumbo de aguaje de río bravo. (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 61-2)

(¡Chos, chos, moyón con!...

Where those sounds were heard the soil became wet with tears, sweat, blood...

“¡Chos, chos, moyón con!..., we are being beaten, they are beating us..., strange hands are beating us!

They were a few simple sounds and they weighed like a chain vibrating with the current of a white-water river.)

The syllables are spoken, but not addressed to Anastasia. Their magical quality is emphasized: Juambo is affected by them, the soil is soaked with them. This miracle—soil moistened by tears, sweat and blood—at the pronouncement of these words suggests that they have a sacred quality. A series of words—a translation? (“nos están pegando”—we are being beaten)—follows them. But this translation is insufficient. It cannot hold the multitude of meanings attributed to the phrase.³⁰ The final simile instead alludes to the power of these simple—yet weighty—sounds.

Future revolution: Octavio Sansur

Octavio Sansur is the national revolutionary subject, and learns of Juambo through another minor character, Don Nepo. Earlier in the first part Sansur seeks refuge in don Nepo’s house after narrowly escaping the police subsequent to a failed work action on the Atlantic coast. His goal is now to coordinate a strike with the workers on the Pacific coast. In a conversation between the two men, don Nepo mentions the testimony of

una mulata, mi conocida, hija de una de las familias que desposeyeron y echaron de por allá, Anastasia se llama, y si un testigo no hace prueba cabal, con el dicho de Juambo, su hermano, quien también vio cómo empezó la gran compañía robándoles las tierras, quemándoles los ranchos, botándoles los cercos, arrancándoles las siembras, matándoles los pocos animales que tenían... (50)

(a mulatta I know, daughter of one of the families that was dispossessed and thrown out, her name is Anastasia, and if one witness isn’t enough, the word of Juambo, her brother, who also saw how the great company began by robbing them of their lands, burning their houses, knocking down their fences, uprooting their crops, killing the few animals they had...)

Anastasia's testimony is repeated shortly after this synopsis when don Nepo asks her, pointedly, if the victims were paid for their land. She responds, livid:

—¡Ni entonces ni nunca! ¡Usted sí que la amuela! ¡No se convence que nos pegaban, nos pegaban, nos...¿Y quién?... ¡Mejor le contesto como mulata: ...*chos, chos, moyon, con!*³¹

¿Sabe lo que significa?... ¡Nos están pegando..., manos extrañas nos están pegando!... (54)

(“Not then or ever! You’ve got it all wrong! You’re not convinced that they beat us, that they beat us, us...! Who? Best I answer you as a mulata would:...*chos, chos, moyon, con!*

Do you know what it means?... They are beating us..., strange hands are beating us!...)

Anastasia's translation includes her understanding of foreign capital, distinguishing between strange hands (foreign—those of “la gran compañía”) and national ones.

Because Sansur's goal is to orchestrate the downfall of the imperialist banana company alongside that of the dictatorship, he asks Don Nepo to convince Anastasia to find her brother, Juambo, and to coordinate a meeting with Sansur. Reluctant, because of their years of separation and her guilty conscience for her role in propagating the lie that he was abandoned to the tigers, she finally agrees.³²

Juambo and Sansur meet, and Juambo experiences similar physical discomfort when he hears Octavio Sansur utter the words *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* outside don Nepo's house:

—*Chos, chos, moyón con...*—mordisqueó los sonidos, mientras el mulato, con la lengua hecha un nudo, se aflojaba el otro nudo, el de la corbata, para no ahogarse.

Donde se decían aquellos sonidos, el suelo quedaba mojado de lágrimas, de sudor, de sangre, de sangre en movimiento como si perpetuamente bajara de las heridas. (66-7)

("*Chos, chos, moyón con...*" he nibbled on the sounds,
while the mulatto, his tongue in a knot, loosened the other
knot, his tie, so he wouldn't suffocate.

Where those sounds were said, the soil was wet with tears,
with sweat, with blood, with moving blood as if it were
perpetually flowing from wounds.)

Juambo's physical description highlights his tie as a place where his discomfort becomes palpable. The words are not only words, but sounds, and their effect on the soil is repeated, bloodied, a river of blood coming from a continually open wound. The wound referred to is the massacre of the original inhabitants of the plantation land, evicted before the beginning of the first novel, *Viento fuerte*, when Juambo was a child. Within the Banana Trilogy, this massacre is a singular rendition of Marx's notion of primitive accumulation whereby "the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process [capitalistic mode of production]" (713). The connection forged between those words—*¡chos, chos, moyón con!*—and the moment of primitive accumulation means that the words' repetition is a constant reminder of Tropical Platanera, S.A.'s "original sin." Asturias's violent, riverine imagery recalls Marx's own when he writes that "capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (760).³³

At this moment, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*'s historical importance referencing the massacre, and primitive accumulation, is sidelined. Instead Juambo and Sansur talk, riding in the back of a work cart through Guatemala City, and it becomes clear that Sansur wants to recruit Juambo for the revolution on the Pacific coast, in Tiquisate, because of his connection to the banana boss El Papa verde. Juambo remarks:

–Dicen que en Bananera ha habido grandes matanzas; en
Bananera, en Barrios, en todo eso de por allí...

–Desgraciadamente, sí—respondió Sansur a las palabras del mulato—; muchos compañeros cayeron bajo las balas de las tropas que movilizaron para defender los intereses de la Platanera; pero, ahí tiene usted, la huelga continúa, lo que significa que si hay organización, los sacrificios no son inútiles [...] (69)

(“They say there’s been a lot of killing in Bananera; en Bananera, en Barrios, with all that’s going on over there...”

“Unfortunately,” reponded Sansur to the mulatto’s words, “many have fallen underneath the bullets of the troops that were mobilized to defend the interests of Platanera, but, there you have it, the struggle continues, if there is organization the sacrifices aren’t made in vain [...].”)

Sansur’s description of the current state of the strike emphasizes the importance of organization, of useful sacrifice, the continuance of struggle into the future. He contrasts this idea with a description of the massacre from which the words *chos, chos, moyón con* originate

como pasó con ustedes cuando los echaron de sus tierras para hacer las plantaciones; individualmente se sacrificaron muchos, pero nada derivó...—casi no se oía la voz del cabecilla la carreta iba por un empedrado—, nada derivó de allí...

(“like what happened to you when you were evicted from the land to make way for the plantations; individually many were sacrificed, but nothing came of it...” the rebel leader’s voice was scarcely audible as the cart went over the stone pavement, “nothing came of it...”)

Sansur’s description views the massacre in the past, and asserts that no further struggle arose from it. The narrator, too, drowns it out with the noise of the bumpy cart and Sansur places historical memory aside in favor of a trajectory towards the future. But Juambo is quick to respond, having only recently reencountered the power of those words:

–¡El *chos, chos, moyón, con...!* –clamó Juambo, descontento el respeto que aquel grito de guerra encontraba

en todo hombre de pecho de macho que supiera su significado.

—Es cierto, quedaron esos sonidos proyectados hacia el futuro, como una exigencia...

(“The *chos, chos, moyón con...!*” cried Juambo, heedless of the respect that war cry found in every masculine man who knew its meaning.

“It’s true, those sounds remained projected towards the future, as a demand.”)

Sansur’s response recognizes the exigency of the words, and harnesses *chos, chos, moyón con* for the revolution, a demand for the future. In doing so, he dismisses their importance to the past. Juambo, in contrast, will return to the past obsessively, triggered every time he hears the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*

Juambo articulates this question of temporality between the two men as a divide between “before” and “after”:

—En la vida yo soy antes que usted, si se puede decir por el orden en que nacemos que en la vida hay antes y después. Lo cierto, en fin, es que yo soy más viejo y recuerdo que en la costa, abajo, en Bananera, cuando nos despojaron de lo que teníamos, se repetía un dicho así como profético del famoso Chipó Chipó Chipopó. Hablaba de que todo esto que está sucediendo ahora, lo verían los ojos de los enterrados, más numerosos que las estrellas...¡Recobrar las tierras!...—la carreta tropezó con unas piedras cambiando su parsimonioso *toloc toc, toloc toc*, por un *taca toco lon tlac, toco lon tlac, toco lon tlac*, casi ensordecedor. — ¡Recobrar las tierras!...—sacó Juambo la voz (70).

(“In life I come before you, if it’s possible to say from the order in which we’re born that there’s a before and an after in life. The truth, in any case, is that I’m older and I remember that on the coast—the lower coast, in Bananera, when they stripped of us what we had—a kind of prophetic saying of Chipó Chipó Chipopó’s was repeated. It spoke of how everything that’s happening now would be seen by the eyes of the buried, more numerous than the stars...Recover the land!...” the cart tripped on some rocks changing its careful *toloc toc, toloc toc* for an almost deafening *taca*

toco lon tlac, toco lon tlac, toco lon tlac, “Recover the land!” echoed Juambo’s voice.)

The first sentence strikes at the ambiguous linearity of history within the novel. First Juambo declares that he comes before Sansur, that he is, in a sense, Sansur’s history. But the second clause suggests that the linear order of time, of before and after, might be questioned. The following sentence refers to the historical dispossession of Bananera, an event that predates the beginning of the banana company, and a repetition of one of Chipó Chipó’s sayings. Chipó Chipó appears in *El Papa verde* as a wandering, prophetic, folkloric revolutionary, and he disappears into the Río Motagua (the main river that runs through the banana lowlands and marks the boundary between Guatemala and Honduras) along with Mayarí (George Maker Thompson’s fiancée, who flees from him upon discovery of the massacre, and who best symbolizes pure nationalist resistance to imperialism in the Trilogy before the revolutionary Sansur).³⁴ The saying unites the before and after of time by being at once prophetic (pertaining to the future) and historic (pertaining to the past). Prophetic for referring to a future in which the eyes of the buried would see justice, and historic for referring to those buried by the violence of history and to the recovery of the land that was stolen from them. Juambo’s insistence on the past, in this sense, seeks a reversal of primitive accumulation, whereby land is returned to the peasant from which it was stolen. Again, the noise of the cart competes with Juambo’s reassessment of history, as well as with his less enigmatic battle cry: “¡Recobrar las tierras!”

Sansur’s reaction is to ask Juambo to travel to the costa sur (the Pacific) with a message destined for his second in command. He takes over the telling of history,

inserting Juambo into his timeline of revolution. Sansur again claims the right to make sense of *chos, chos, moyón con*, and use of Juambo:

—Si señor, vamos a necesitar de su persona. Ha llegado el momento de romper el cerco. Volver a darle sentido al *chos, chos, moyón con ...*; no con el sacrificio inútil del que opera solo, sino a sabiendas de que en las manos tiene las cartas del triunfo, porque lucha organizado (69-70).

(“Yes sir, we are going to need you. Give *chos, chos, moyón con* meaning once more; not with the useless sacrifice of one who acts on his own, but with the knowledge of one that holds the winning cards in his hands, because he is organized in his struggle.”)

Juambo agrees and their conversation about the revolution and recent strike events is interrupted by a vignette of Sansur’s childhood in the ash-district they travel through.

But at the end of this detour through Sansur’s childhood, Juambo stubbornly resists the temporal enclosure of *chos, chos, moyón con*. Juambo repeats the phrase as he bids goodbye to Sansur on the final page of the first part, reinserting its exclamational markers:

Juambo estrechó la mano sucia de cal y transpiración de Octavio Sansur, al tiempo de pronunciar, enfáticamente, el que seguía siendo su grito de guerra:

—*¡Chos, chos, moyón, con!*... (83)

(Juambo shook Octavio Sansur’s lime-dusted and sweaty hand, while pronouncing, emphatically, the cry that continued to be his war cry:

“*¡Chos, chos, moyón, con!*...”)

At Juambo’s utterance the exclamation is announced, not as a series of sounds, but a war cry that is a continuance of, not a break from, the past.

At this point the significations of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* are multiple.

Expressed by Anastasia *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is a lament for the land and lives lost to the banana empire in a singular moment of primitive accumulation. Heard, embodied

and voiced by Juambo it is a call to the past. Finally, for Sansur it is an exclamation to be used for the coming revolution, and at this point his needs are paramount.

The goals of the revolution require that Sansur harness the cry, and, by extension, Juambo. In the third part Octavio Sansur reiterates his desire to use Juambo for the workers' collective cause:

Juambo debía marchar a Tiquisate lo antes posible. Era la jugada. Mover al mulato como una pieza de ajedrez tallada en ébano y marfil, por su piel oscura y su cabello cano, en el gran tablero cuadriculado de las plantaciones del Pacífico, donde con la huelga se le daría el jaque mate a la Compañía (217).

(Juambo should head to Tiquisate as soon as possible. That was the next move. Move the mulatto like a chess piece carved in ebony and ivory, like his dark skin and white hair, in the checkered playing board of the Pacific plantations, where the strike would check mate the Company.)

Sansur proposes Juambo as a pawn in the intricate checkerboard of the banana coast.

This description resonates with the description of a younger Juambo in *El Papa verde*.

His marginality is emphasized, he is not the main hero, he is not a national subject. But Juambo's dependence to Sansur is trumped by his dependence on the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* That phrase is the backbone of Juambo's resistance.

Juambo's reaction to Sansur's revolutionary reason is qualified. While in part one his resistance is subtle, in that he claims *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* for the past in addition to Sansur's present/future, in the third part his participation is directed by his responsibility to the past. Sansur tries to convince Juambo that he should act as "agente de enlace y espía si se lograba colar en la oficina de la gerencia o en cualquier otra oficina con algún menester secundario, cuidador, sirviente, barrendero... (218)" (liaison and spy if he were able to hang out in the managerial office or in any office holding a

secondary position: caretaker, servant, sweeper...). Yet Juambo's response is not that of easy acquiescence. At first he recognizes Sansur's suggestion, and notes that it will be easy for him, as George Maker Thompson's fosterling, to gain entrance. But he subsequently qualifies:

Sí, sí, todo fácil, si no me agarra el otro idioma y caigo de jalador de fruta." "¿Y qué idioma es ese, Juambo?..." "El otro idioma..." "Pero jalador de fruta no conviene a la causa, Juambo, no conviene..." "Quizás sí. Primero arreglar cuentas con padre, sino torcido yo y torcido todo, la causa, ustedes, todo..." (219)

Yes, yes, it's all easy, if the other language doesn't take hold of me and I have to haul fruit." "What language is that, Juambo?" "The other language..." "But a fruit-hauler isn't useful to the cause, Juambo, it's not useful..." "Maybe it is. First square accounts with father, if not twisted me and twisted everything, the cause, all of you, everything..."

Sansur and Juambo are still in the City, but Juambo's language has changed to a sort of Black Spanish. He will continue to speak in this way for the rest of the novel. Sansur continues to argue with Juambo but Juambo only repeats that he will help "Siempre que no me agarre el otro idioma, que no hablé con mi padre, el idioma en que le hablaré a mi madre, que es parecido, pero solo parecido al que hablo con usted!" (219) (As long as I'm not seized by the other language, the one I didn't speak with my father, the one I will speak with my mother, that's similar, but only similar to the one I speak with you), thereby separating himself from Sansur and allying himself with his family. This separation has temporal tones as well, as Juambo articulates an allegiance to the past, not a commitment to the future.

Past: Mother, father

While in the present the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!* lives a new life as Sansur and the revolutionary movement's password (202 and 283), for Juambo the phrase increasingly calls him to his past. Traveling to the Pacific coast, he reunites with his mother, now an aged woman. Asturias narrates their reunion in a complicated way, as he tells it twice: first in *El Papa verde* and then again in *Los ojos de los enterrados*. The complicated overall structure of the Trilogy is explained by Jorge Alcides Paredes and compared to that of the *Pop Wuj*. Using two different diagrams he illustrates how the Trilogy's timeline initiates not with the first published novel, *Viento fuerte*, but with *El Papa verde*, and ends with the events of *Los ojos de los enterrados*. This reordering does not sufficiently describe the timeline of the Trilogy, however, as certain events overlap in time. Alcides Paredes invents a term—"paralelismo cronológico indirecto"—to contend with this difficulty and defines it as

la actitud [...] de introducir en la narración acciones que se suceden paralelamente en el plano cronológico, en espacios físicos (ubicación en el/los libros) diferentes y sin dar al lector ninguna advertencia directa que le facilite hacerse cargo de dicha realidad" (50).

(the manner [...] in which parallel chronological events are introduced in the narrative in different spaces (location within the book/s) and which are not directly announced to the reader so that s/he may make sense of that reality.)

The event I focus on here (Juambo's reunion with his mother), is a special case of this "paralelismo cronológico indirecto" because it is the same event, even though it is narrated in two different novels.

In both iterations, Juambo's mother reveals that he wasn't abandoned. Instead Juambo was given to Maker Thompson, not rescued by him. She emphasizes her love for him while revealing the truth:

—¿Y cuando uno ha llorado a solas con sus manos?—se interpuso el mulato.

—Juambo, madre te las va a besar, y quedarán miel de caña...

—Me dejaron perdido en el monte para que me comiera el tigre.

—Nunca verdad. Te regalaron con señor norteamericano, Juambo (192 *El Papa verde*).

(“And when one’s cried alone into his hands?” interjected the mulatto.

“Juambo, mother will kiss them for you, and they’ll turn into sugarcane syrup...”

“You left me in the wild to be eaten by the tiger.”

“Never true. They gave you to the North American man, Juambo.”)

In this section of his roots story Juambo reconnects with his mother and begins to assimilate his past. In the quote Juambo’s mother uses the third person, singular and plural, to refer to her and Juambo’s father’s actions. These quotes exemplify the Black Spanish that Asturias created for the Afro-Guatemalan characters in the Trilogy. The use of the infinitive instead of the conjugated verb, the use of the third instead of the first person, etc., are characteristic of this speech and very different from the speech of Asturias’s Maya characters. Some of these traits are also shared with Caribbean *negrismo*, supporting my argument that Asturias’s representation of Afro-Guatemalan characters is imitative of that literary movement. Juambo’s trip to the coast becomes less about the needs of the revolution and more about a return to his parents, “—Padre enterrado aquí, madre viva, hijo volver por los dos, por enterrado y por viva” (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 231) (“Father buried here, mother alive, son return for both of them, for buried and alive”). Juambo’s qualification, earlier, to Sansur’s request is that he will act

on behalf of the revolution as long as he is not “taken ahold of” by the other language, the language of his parents, the language of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*

Language is thus essential to Juambo’s reconnection with his past. The narrator details how Juambo seeks a particular dialect, as part of his effort to completely reunite with his mother:

El mulato se esforzaba por frasear como la madre; hablando así le parecía fusionarse más íntimamente con la cáscara vieja del ser en que fuera creado y al que por culpa del patrón que inventó lo del tigre, tuvo olvidado tanto, tantísimos años. (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 231)

(The mulatto struggled to speak like his mother, speaking that way allowed him to fuse himself more intimately with the old shell of a being in which he was created, and, because of his boss’ invented tiger story, had forgotten so many, many years.)

Juambo intentionally imitates his mother’s speech in an attempt to recover his past, before he became George Maker Thompson’s fosterling and was brought from the coast to the city. At this moment, language is a choice for Juambo, a method to get closer to his mother, and understand his past.

Eventually, however, Juambo’s mother’s language takes ahold of him, much as the exclamation *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!* bodily possessed him when first whispered in his ear. It is the connection between this exclamation and language that is emphasized at the end of this family reunion, when his mother blesses him with a syncretic, version of that same cry:

–En el nombre del Padre, ¡chos!, del Hijo ¡chos!, y del Espíritu Santo, ¡moyón, con! Así aprendimos a santiguarnos, Juambo, para nos libre Dios de esos malditos protestantes, herejes evangelistas, que en la otra costa mataron, quemaron... Atlántico mucho dolor, mucho dolor... (*El Papa verde* 161)

“In the name of the Father, ¡chos!, the Son ¡chos!, and the Holy Spirit, ¡moyón, con! That’s how we learned to make the sign of the cross, Juambo, so that God would free us from those damn protestants, evangelist heretics, those that on the coast killed, burned... Atlantic so much pain, so much pain.”)

This syncretism is a Catholic supplication to God for liberation from the heretic evangelicals—“The Green Pope” and his banana company—that massacred Juambo’s village on the Atlantic coast. This memory of the past—“Atlántico mucho dolor, mucho dolor...”—is represented as a single event, but its repetitions are numerous, interrupting throughout *Los ojos de los enterrados* each time the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* appears in the text.

The pain of the Atlantic coast, the cry *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*, is the reaction to the violent loss of the land that enabled the birth of Tropical Platanera, S.A.—that is, Asturias’s moment of primitive accumulation. Hinted at in Anastasia’s laments, couched in the violence of the mother’s description, the event is narrated at the beginning of *El Papa verde*, pre-Tropical Platanera, S.A.:

Las viejas mulatas, colgadas de sus lágrimas, se revolcaban como si les hiciera cosquillas, gritando, chillando, intentando defenderse con sus manos de higuierillo, heridas, golpeadas sangrantes, para resistir aquel llover de látigo. Y los mulatos tostados de viejos, pelo entrecano sobre los cráneos redondos, salían borrachos de angustia, trastabillando, empujados, golpeados, desposeídos, seguidos de la prole menuda, hijos, nietos que traducían el choque de cuerazo sobre las carnes de sus padres repitiendo, mientras lloraban de miedo bajo un calor de llaga, inarticuladamente: *¡chos, chos, moyón, con...choss, chos moyón con...!* (*El Papa verde* 80)

(The old mulattas, hanging from their tears, rolled about as if they were being tickled, yelling, screaming, trying to defend themselves with their higuierillo hands, wounded, bloodied, trying to resist the rain of the whip.³⁵ And the old mulattos, white hair on their round craniums, fled drunk with anugish, staggering, shoved, beaten, dispossessed,

followed by the smaller prole, children, grandchildren who translated the shock of leather on their parents' flesh repeating, while they cried in fear under the blistering heat, inarticulately: *¡chos, chos, moyón, con...choss, chos moyón con...!*)

The massacre enables George Maker Thompson's acquisition of lands for his banana empire, and the description is the narrator's testimony of primitive accumulation. In this first description *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!* is an inarticulate cry, but, in a following description, it becomes a war-cry made from the swollen flesh and fear of the children:

¡Chos, chos, moyón, con!, grito de guerra hecho de la carne golpeada y el miedo de los niños. (*El Papa verde* 82)

(*¡Chos, chos, moyón, con!*, war cry made of the beaten flesh and fear of the children.)

Of course, Juambo is one of those children—the future carrier of that past acting in the present.

“Atlántico mucho dolor, mucho dolor...” could also have a broader meaning, referring not only to the violence of primitive accumulation but the violence of slavery, pre-dating Tropical Platanera, S.A.'s acquisition of land. Earlier in the novel *Anastasia*, Juambo's sister, is transported into the early colonial past. Thus, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* could be a container for multiple histories. The fact that *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is not Spanish, not to my knowledge representative of any Maya language, and is articulated mostly by mulatto/a characters, suggests that Asturias meant to assign it a non-Maya, and possibly African, origin. Thus, Juambo's mother could be referring not only to Guatemala's Atlantic coast, but to the Middle Passage. Marilyn Grace Miller notes that the mulatto “usually occupied an ambiguous, overwhelmingly negative, position in narratives of the colony or emerging nation; the mulatto or the mulatta was a threat to unity or coherence, a contaminant, a stain, a temptation, or a force beyond the control of

vested powers” (46). In Asturias’s case the mulatta/o is ambiguous, but not negative. Its function, instead, is interruptive.

¡Chos, chos, moyón con! acts in the present by possessing Juambo, propelling him towards Sansur where the cry is co-opted for the future of the revolution. But the phrase later tugs Juambo away from that future and brings him instead towards his own past, realized with his return to his mother. I read this abrupt turn in the timeline of the novel—this movement away from the future and towards the past—as a signal that the revolutionary trajectory is insufficient to carry the weight of history.

¡Chos, chos, moyón con!, interred

As *Los ojos de los enterrados* progresses, Juambo is increasingly possessed by his history and language, by *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* They overpower him and direct him to the grave of his father:

Y yo, desenterrarlo, hablar con él, pedirle perdón, cerrarle los ojos, sus ojos de enterrado con los ojos abiertos, como todos los pobres que mueren y aun después de muertos esperan...esperan...

(And I, dig him up, speak to him, ask for forgiveness, shut his eyes, his buried eyes with open eyes, like all the poor who die and even after death wait...wait...)

These eyes wait for justice, something Juambo cannot provide with his apology. He cradles his corpse-father before re-burying him

Y, mientras aullaba, fue deslizándolo el cadáver en un agujero, cuidadosamente, para evitar que se golpeará a caer. Sin embargo, ¡qué duro pegó en el fondo! Se oyó el trueno de huesos en el espacio ciego de la muerte. Al desaparecer, se acurrucó en silencio, susurrando para sus oídos: *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!... ¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*, tan bajito que no alcanzaba a oírse lo que decía. (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 389)

(And, while he howled, he guided the cadaver's slide down the hole, carefully, to avoid it getting hit as it fell. Even so, how hard it hit the bottom! The thunder of bones in the blind space of death was heard. As it disappeared, he curled up in silence, whispering for his ears *¡chos, chos, moyón, con!... ¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*, so softly that it was impossible to make out what he said.)

The cry *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* in its textual journey became ever more possessive, climaxing when Sansur intercepts Juambo and attempts to harness him and his “grito de guerra” for the revolution. It propels Juambo in his search for his mother and connects him to the past. By the time of this reunion/exhumation/reburial the cry has become a soft lullaby, disturbed only by the thud of the father's bones as they hit their final resting place.

¡Chos, chos, moyón con! is also buried in this tomb because the Trilogy ends with a triumphant multitude crying out more common—and intelligible—chants like *¡Pan y libertad! ¡Tierra y libertad!* and *¡Fuera gringos!*³⁶ (Bread and liberty! Land and liberty! Out with the gringos!). After all *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is not a cry for the living, but a repetitive lament for the dead, for the buried.

Juambo's presence in the novel ends as it began: he is alone. He witnesses the death of Bobby, the banana empire heir, and the alcoholic death of the prostitute that murdered him, Clara María. Afterwards, Juambo wanders aimlessly:

El mulato cerró los párpados y se puso a llorar a gritos. Luego escapó, los ojos anegados, perdidos en una tiniebla de cristales temblorosos. Nadie. Sólo él en las calles. La huelga era completa. Corrió hacia las plantaciones. Nadie. Sólo él entre los bananales (490).

(The mulatto closed his eyelids and started crying hysterically. Then he escaped, his eyes overflowing, lost in a fog of trembling glass. No one. Only him in the streets. The strike was absolute. He ran towards the plantations. No one. He was the only one in the banana fields.)

In the end, however, the triumph of the revolution abandons Juambo as it abandoned the cry of the past, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*, in the bones of the buried.

The description of Juambo's "ojos anegados" resonates with the power of *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* in the first part of the novel. The phrase soaks the earth with blood, sweat, and tears—echoing Marx's own description of the violent moment when land is appropriated in order to give birth to the capitalistic mode of production. But it also may refer to the unspeakable violences of slavery and the conquest. Indeed, in a later iteration of this imagery, in Asturias's 1969 novel of the Conquest, *Maladrón*, the wounded earth is described in a single sentence: "Sangra todo el suelo herido" (10) (All the land is bleeding). In this last description of Juambo, he, like that soil, is saturated. No longer the porter of those revolutionary sounds he, like his buried father, is bound with the land. This connection between Juambo and the earth is reiterated on the following page with the scene of the revolutionary dawn on the land—"apareció el sol chapoteando en las tierras *anegadizas* (my emphasis)." The repetition of the adjective "anegadizo," land subject to flooding, neatly ties Juambo to the land itself, and by turn to the loss of land that first generated the cry *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*³⁷

The novel's revolutionary triumph dawns with the appearance of the sun, and the canonization and reunification of its two heroes Tabío San and Malena Tabay, in the capital:

Empezó a limpiarse el cielo y apareció el sol chapoteando en las tierras anegadizas, como un corcel de muchas patas con cascos de herraduras luminosas. Y la noticia del triunfo se regó como la luz. La poderosa empresa aceptaba las condiciones. Tabío San, seguido de Rámila, abandonó el edificio de la Compañía, en la capital. Acababan de firmarse los nuevos convenios de trabajo. Malena le esperaba a la puerta, un fusil al hombro, el cabello apenas

recogido en un moño, todos los días de su lucha callejera pintados en su trigueña palidez, y fue hacia él a besarlo y abrazarlo entre las voces y el aplauso de amigos y conocidos que se habían estacionado allí cerca en busca de las últimas noticias. A la 0 hora se levantaría la huelga general. (491-2)

(The sky began to clear and the sun appeared raining down on the drenched earth, like so many luminous iron-shod hoofbeats. And the news of the triumph poured out like night. The powerful company accepted the terms. Tabío San, followed by Rámila, abandoned the Company's office in the capital. They had just signed the new work agreements. Malena awaited him at the door, a rifle at her shoulder, hair barely gathered in a bun, all the days of the street struggle painted in her brown paleness, and she went to him to kiss and hug him amidst the voices and the applause of the friends and acquaintances that had settled close by searching for the latest news. At the 0 hour the general strike would be lifted.)

The introduction to the revolutionary era is sudden and naturalistic, with the sunlight beating down like rain on the sodden earth, and the appearance of a warrior-Malena (with a tinge of schoolmarm bun as a reference to the role of the teacher's unions during the revolution) at Tabío San's side. The fate of the company and dictatorship are detailed after this opening:

La Dictadura y la Frutera caían al mismo tiempo y ya podían cerrar los ojos los enterrados que esperaban el día de la justicia.

(The dictatorship and the Frutera fell at the same time and the eyes of the interred waiting for the day of justice could finally close their eyes.)

An apt conclusion for a novel celebrating the October Revolution, were it published before June 1954. A fitting finale for the Trilogy, and a fitting tribute to the novel's title, but the novel doesn't end here. It continues, qualified:

No, todavía no, pues sólo estaban en el umbral esperanzado de ese gran día. La esperanza no empieza en las cosas hechas, sino en las cosas dichas y si dicho fue "otras mujeres y otros hombres cantarán en el futuro", ya estaban

cantando, pero no eran otros, eran los mismos, era el pueblo, eran los... Tabío San, Malena Tabay, Cayetano Duende, Popoluca, el Loro Rámila, Andrés Medina, Florindo Key, Cárcamo y Salomé, los capitanes, los ceniceros, los maestros, los estudiantes, los tipógrafos, Judasita, los comerciantes, los peones, los artesanos, don Nepo Rojas, los Gambusos, los Samueles, Juambo el Sambito, sus padres, la Toba, la Anastasia, el gangoso, el borracho, el Padre Fejú, Mayari, Chipó Chipó, Hermengildo Puac, Rito Perraj...unos vivos, otros muertos, otros ausentes, ya estaban cantando...

(No, not yet, they were only on the threshold, hopeful of that great day. Hope doesn't begin with actions, but with words and if the saying goes "other women and men will sing in the future," they were already singing, but they weren't others, they were the same, they were the people, they were... Tabío San, Malena Tabay, Cayetano Duende, Popoluca, the Loro Rámila, Andrés Medina, Florindo Key, Cárcamo y Salomé, the captains, the gatherers of ash, the teachers, the students, the printers, Judasita, the street vendors, the peons, the artisans, don Nepo Rojas, the Gambusos, los Samueles, Juambo el Sambito, his parents, la Toba, la Anastasia, the nasal-voiced, the drunk, Padre Fejú, Mayari, Chipó Chipó, Hermengildo Puac, Rito Perraj...some living, others dead, others absent, they were already singing...)

The narration of the revolutionary triumph transitions between a definitive end to the dictatorship and the postponed hope of the threshold. And although the novel ends with a list of rejoicing revolutionaries bound loosely by ellipses, what follows is the extended postscript and irruptive date, 1954, that I analyze in the introduction.

Aftershocks: el 29 de junio

Chos, chos, moyón con is an irruptive phrase disturbing the linear history of the Trilogy, especially in *Los ojos de los enterrados*. First appearing in part one, *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* becomes incorporated into the language of the future revolution at the same time that it drives a recuperation of history. The exclamation becomes important to

Sansur's movements between the capital and the banana plantation, and serves as both password and collective battle cry. Similarly, *chos, chos, moyón con* drives Juambo's reunion with his family in the present—a present told in two separate novels. Finally, the phrase is intimately linked to an event important to the biography of Tropical Bananera, S.A., and integral to the Trilogy: the moment of primitive accumulation symbolized by the massacre and dispossession of Juambo's parents and grandparents.

Alcides Paredes' analysis of Asturias's "paralelismo cronológico indirecto"—the manner in which parallel chronological events are narrated in different novels—focuses on the cataclysmic hurricane that wipes out the banana groves and *Viento fuerte's* hero pair. He emphasizes the Maya referents of the hurricane and proposes it as temporally and thematically central to the Trilogy (55). While I agree that the destructive hurricane is important, I argue that the moment of primitive accumulation narrated first in *El Papa verde* is more essential to understanding Asturias's fictionalization of history. Embedded as it is within the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*, the moment of primitive accumulation is thus referred to more often—though not as explicitly. This narrative structure, whereby this central event is encapsulated, repeated as nexus between novels (the same event told within different timelines), referred to as history, or experienced as a sort of "flashback" in the present is resonant with my reading of 1954 within the postscript following the novel's "FIN." In both cases the irruption is a sort of snag in a linear timeline that inhibits a smooth reading of the Trilogy as a national revolutionary history.

My emphasis on these irruptive elements in the Trilogy returns to historical dates: to "el 29 de junio," appearing in chapters XXXVIII and XXXIX in the fourth part of *Los ojos de los enterrados*.³⁸ It, like the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*, is repeated often.

The repetition of this date indicates that it is important, but its description is ambiguous. Similar to the way that the untranslated phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* is imbued with different characteristics, the meaning of the date changes according to who observes it. Described by the third-person narrator the night of June 29th is insecure and fluctuating, and followed by ellipses:

Nada seguro esa noche del 29 de junio: todo incierto,
fluctuante... (448)

(Nothing sure about that night June 29th: everything unsure,
fluctuating...)

For the novel's hero, Octavio Sansur, the date is interminable, without escape:

Qué noche interminable esa del 29 de junio...interminable,
sin salida... (449)

(What an interminable night that June 29th, interminable,
inescapable...)

For Bobby, the adolescent heir of the Tropical Platanera, S.A. dynasty, the date isn't even the date, even though, as it turns out, it is the date of his death, and significant because the date marks the end of gringo imperialist George Maker Thompson's bloodline:

Era otra noche. No era la noche del 29 de junio. Era otra
noche. (470)

(It was another night. It wasn't the night of June 29th. It
was another night.)

As the night progresses, the date proves even more unending:

No amanecía. No iba a terminar nunca esa noche. (472)

(Dawn didn't come. This night was never going to end.)

These words end the second to last chapter. There is no clear description that translates the historical context of the date for the reader, just repetition, and no clear close of the day.

The last chapter concerns the triumph of the revolution, and no date is mentioned. Actually, dates aren't mentioned at all in the novel, with the exception of this "29 de

junio.” The only other allusion to dates are historic references to events from the end of World War II, references that link the timeline of the novel’s revolution to the October revolution of 1944. But, then, why the insistence on the 29th of June?

In the last days of June 1944 Ubico resigned as president/dictator in Guatemala, after thirteen years in power (June 29th, according to Forster and July 1st, according to Gleijeses and Galich).³⁹ Fittingly, the last chapter opens with a multitude screaming

—¡Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció!

Voceaba, gritaba la multitud; metálicas, de bronce las humildes caras hasta ayer de barro; de espuma negra los cabellos, hasta ayer de hilo; de felino las uñas, hasta ayer de pan y como pezuñas brutales los descalzos pies, hasta ayer de esclavo...

—¡Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció!

Voceaba, gritaba la multitud que iba llenando las ciudades, arrebátandose las al sol bajo su paso de agua enloquecido y su clamor...

—¡Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció! ¡ Reeenunció!

Unos lloraban de alegría, otros reían, otros lloraban y reían al mismo tiempo [...] (473)

“He resigned! He resigned! He resigned!”

The multitude raised its voice, screamed: metallic, bronzed the humble faces that until yesterday were clay, of black foam the hair that until yesterday was string; feline the nails that until yesterday were of bread and like brutal hooves the bare feet, until yesterday of slaves...

“He resigned! He resigned! He resigned!”

The multitude raised its voice, screamed as it filled the cities, taking them over beneath its passage of crazed water and its clamor...

“He resigned! He resigned! He resigned!”

Some cried with happiness, others laughed, others cried and laughed at the same time [...])

The jubilation is contained in Asturias’s characteristic, melismatic, repetitive

¡Reeenunció! and, if the novel ended with the dictator’s resignation and the downfall of

the company postulated at the beginning of the last paragraph it would, as I argued earlier, be the fitting climax to the Trilogy.

But historical circumstances were otherwise. It was also during the last days of June that the military junta took power in 1954, following Arbenz' resignation on June 27th (Gleijeses 318). July was the first month of what was to be a renewal of a long series of military dictatorships, a series that would have been obvious to Asturias as he adds his final postscript to the novel's end— "julio, 1959"—on the fifth anniversary of the coup.⁴⁰ He is in exile in Buenos Aires, finally finishing a Trilogy that celebrates the events that brought Arévalo, and later Arbenz, to the presidency while at the same time mourning the demise of Guatemalan democracy, eulogized subsequently by Manuel Galich as "10 años de primavera en el país de la eterna tiranía" (quoted in Arias, "El contexto," 804).⁴¹ The historical coincidence of the end of two eras—dictatorship and democracy—confuses the novel's referent. Furthermore, Asturias never provides the resigning president with a name (or country), or the date "el 29 de junio" with a year.

The appearance of "el 29 de junio" in the novel's final pages, in accordance with its uncertain, fluctuating and unending description, marks another uncertainty in the revolutionary trajectory of the novel. At an earlier moment in the text, towards the end of the third part, Octavio Sansur muses on the uncertain course of the revolution, at this point far from being realized:

Era el comienzo de un *tiempo de ficción*.

Hubiera querido no decir aquella frase literaria. Pero, ¿cómo designar de otra manera el paréntesis de luz que se abría en el cotidiano vivir de gentes de pan y sueño, sino como un tiempo de ficción democrática, si los trabajadores organizados no le daban un contenido que fuera más allá del arrebato estrujador y embriagante de la libertad altibelisona, haciendo bajar la cabeza a la Compañía,

obligándola a aceptar sus demandas y dando permanencia de futuro a la marcha de campesinos y obreros hacia el poder...

Su idioma era ya el de la arenga...⁴² (399) (emphasis in the original)

(It was the beginning of a *time of fiction*.)

He wished he hadn't said that literary phrase. But, how to name otherwise the parenthesis of light that opened in the daily life of people of bread and dreams, except as a time of democratic fiction, if the organized workers didn't give it a content going beyond the crushing and intoxicating outburst of warring liberty, dominating the Company, forcing it to accept their demands and giving future permanency to the march of peasants and workers towards power...

His language was now that of the soapbox...)

This confession causes an awkward break in the narrative because it is the first time that a character attempts to categorize textual events. Up until this point, and subsequently, a third person omniscient narrator narrates events, always in the past tense.⁴³ Here too, Sansur's reflections are shared in the past tense, but told at a moment when victory against the fruit company and the dictatorship cannot be assured. It is a melancholic foretelling, both celebratory ("paréntesis de luz" "dando permanencia de futuro a la marcha de campesinos y obreros hacia el poder...") and wary of investing too much hope in the budding insurgency ("un tiempo de ficción democrática").

Sansur's reflection opens with the remark, "Era el comienzo de un *tiempo de ficción*," designating revolutionary success as fictional, not real. It hints, also, at a break in time, a beginning. Sansur follows this with a partial negation, "Hubiera querido no decir aquella frase literaria," separating, too, literature from the history-telling/making that he had been engaged with previously. This reflection is only a hiccup in the text at

this point, and the narrative resumes its course to the triumphant first half of the last paragraph of the final chapter.

Conclusions

Clearly, Sansur's observation that revolutionary time is fictional resonates with Asturias's stylized conclusion of suspended hope, of utopia. The irruption of the future—"el 29 de junio," the 1954 of the postscript—into the story of the past is part of the temporal movement of the Trilogy. Sansur's melancholic reflection on the revolutionary actions of students and workers—seeming almost like an interjection made by Asturias himself—foretells that future. Thus, Asturias laces the story of revolutionary triumph with its failure in the novel's final pages and hints at a revolutionary pessimism with the voice of Sansur. The 1944 revolution is utopically crystallized in this eulogy, but incomplete. In contrast, Galich's more contemporaneous 1949 memoir, which also ends with Ubico's resignation, is not utopic, but strategic: "Al día siguiente recomenzamos la batalla: nos esperaba 108 días trágicos. Pero ya sin pánico, sino en pleno ataque" (359) (The next day we again took up the battle: 108 tragic days awaited us. But instead of in panic, in full attack).

Opposing these synopses of the 1944 revolution is the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* Its repetitive irruptions tug the novel's timeline towards the past. The myth that the dead and buried will finally be able to rest their eyes upon the day of justice is not realized. *¡Chos, chos, moyón con!* as a textual element is suspended—an unincorporated remnant of the moment of primitive accumulation and, furthermore, the legacies of the Conquest and of slavery. Asturias's creation of a mulatto character—versus a Maya

one—to carry this important phrase is significant, but ultimately ambiguous. Juambo is a reminder of history, but not a national figure for the revolution or the national future. The mulatto father is re-interred and Juambo fades into the earthen stage of Tabay and Sansur's fictional triumph.

Los ojos de los enterrados does not conclude. The multidirectional irruptions in the text and in the postscript preclude a reading encapsulating it as a memoir of the October revolution, or even as a text denouncing U.S. imperialism. The Banana Trilogy doesn't even end with the bananas of Tropical Platanera, S.A., as *Viento fuerte* did, or with George Maker Thompson as did *El Papa verde*.⁴⁴ Both of these novels conclude with a period. Instead, the ellipses-laden final paragraph fades out with characters—those dead, alive and absent—singing as if they'd entered the final rapture. This Catholic symbolism of communion abounds in Asturias's novels, as shown with the syncretic adaptation of *jchos, chos, moyón con!* by Juambo's mother or in my analysis of *Mulata de tal* (1963) in the next chapter. But the rapture at the end of *Los ojos de los enterrados*, a novel narrating history through triumph and failure, is itself inconclusive, and the novel ends, not with a period, but with ellipses.

¹ Asturias describes his intention in his interview with Luis López Álvarez, stating that in the Trilogía's second novel he shows "precisamente cómo la Frutera había llegado en Guatemala a ser una especie de estado dentro del Estado" (126). Frederick Douglass conceptualized the plantation similarly: "[the] plantation is a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs. The laws and institution of the state, apparently touch it nowhere. The troubles arising here, are not settled by the civil power of the state" (quoted in Gilroy, 59).

² The term "novela bananera" refers to Asturias's three novels as well as other anti-imperialist Central American novels such as Carlos Luis Fallas' *Mamita Yunai* (1941) and Ramón Amaya Amador's *Prisión verde* (1950).

³ Lic. Alfonso Bauer Paiz (a leader directly involved in the revolutionary government from its beginning and the principal informant for contemporary historiographies of the Revolution and its presidencies) characterizes the October revolution and subsequent Arévalo (1944-1951) and Arbenz (1951-54) governments as nationalist-democratic. His is an important counterargument for those, like the CIA, that attempted to characterize the Arévalo and Arbenz presidency's as Communist: "Claro está que no fue una revolución socialista, pero sí un proceso revolucionario de carácter democrático-nacionalista con fuertes matices de índole popular. Decimos esto último porque durante el gobierno de Arbenz las decisiones políticas de importancia no se tomaban en la Junta de Gabinete sino en un organismo integrado por representantes de los partidos políticos de la Revolución, incluido el de la clase obrera [...] El hecho de haber terminado con las reminiscencias de trabajo forzoso y de otras formas de relaciones semi-feudales de producción imperante en el agro, es más que suficiente para definir al movimiento octubrista como revolucionario" (17). (This was clearly not a socialist revolution, but it was a revolutionary process with a democratic-nationalist character and strong popular aspects. We say this because during Arbenz' government important political decisions were made not in the Cabinet but in a body comprised of Revolutionary political party representatives, including the working class [...] The fact that remnants of forced labor and other semi-feudal production relations dominating agriculture were done away with is more than sufficient to define the October movement as revolutionary.)

⁴ Jorge Ubico (1931-1944) and Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) were the dictatorships longest in power during the rise of Guatemala's banana industry. Manuel Estrada Cabrera is the model for Asturias's *El Señor Presidente*.

⁵ *El Señor Presidente* was first published in México by Costa-Amic in 1946—twenty-six years after the end of the Estrada Cabrera dictatorship—and it was subsequently published in Buenos Aires by Losada in 1948 (Martin, "Bibliografía de Miguel Ángel Asturias," 1061).

⁶ Asturias describes the research and publication of these first two novels in an interview with Luis López Álvarez, citing a trip to the coastal banana town Tiquisate in 1949 (121-124).

⁷ The October Revolution refers to the coalition of civil society (students, workers, unions) and opposition army leaders who together pressured for the resignation of dictator Jorge Ubico in late June/early July 1944 (Bauer Paiz 75). Eventually, a tripartite revolutionary government took power in October 1944 and in March 1945 a member of the tripartite, Juan José Arévalo, was elected president (See Forster; Handy; Rodríguez de Ita; and Schlesinger and Kizer).

⁸ This is the quintessential U.S. Cold War/economic imperialist intervention in Latin America: a C.I.A. orchestrated coup d'état (mobilized in part by United Fruit Co. pressure) that ended with Jacobo Arbenz' resignation and the reversal of his land reform and, with them, a brief interlude of democratically elected presidents in a long series of dictators. See Cullather (1999) for the CIA's recently declassified account of its actions in Guatemala during this time period.

⁹ Many other intellectuals affiliated with the Arévalo and Arbenz governments were also forced to leave Guatemala at this time. President Arbenz died in exile in 1971.

¹⁰ Asturias departed Buenos Aires in late July 1959 at the invitation of Fidel Castro. He attended the July 26th celebration in Havana and visited Guatemala later that year (1899/1999 290, for Asturias's account of this exile see López Álvarez, 130-131).

¹¹ The postscript of *Week-end en Guatemala* reads "*Shangri-lá*", *El Tigre, verano de 1955*" (238). This was one of Blanca Mora de Asturias's residences in Chile, again calling attention to Asturias's exile after the 1954 coup. In Asturias's correspondence archive at Le Fonds Asturias there is also a handwritten poem by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda to him lamenting the 1954 coup, dated October 26, 1954. Neruda visited Guatemala during the early 1950s and supported the Arbenz and Arévalo presidencies (Mellizo 164). Some critics like to group these four texts (the Banana Trilogy plus *Week-end en Guatemala*) together as "thesis" literature (Ana Patricia Rodríguez being the most recent, but see also Richard Callan and Giuseppe Bellini), or, as Stephen Henighan would have it "wooden dogma" (197). I disagree with this categorization primarily because the Trilogy has its own plot and logic distinct from the more immediate reactions to the coup anthologized in the short stories of *Week-end en Guatemala* but also because there is more in *Los ojos de los enterrados* than the protest of U.S. economic imperialism. Regarding *Week-end en Guatemala* Asturias notes, in his interview with López Álvarez, that the idea for the book "partió de la idea que tuvimos todos los que participamos en el equipo de Arbenz de escribir cada uno un libro para dar a conocer al mundo lo sucedido en nuestro país. Así se escribieron veintisiete libros: escribió Arévalo, escribió Manuel Galich, escribió Luis Cardosa [sic] y Aragón, escribieron los economistas, y yo escribí, pues, *Week End en Guatemala*" (131). (took off from an idea all of us who worked with Arbenz had where each of us would write a book letting the world know what had happened in our country. That's how twenty two books were written: Arévalo wrote, Manuel Galich wrote, Luis Cardosa [sic] Aragón wrote and I wrote, well, *Week-end in Guatemala*).

¹² The final date in the postscript, 1959, may in turn reference the Cuban revolution, a new source of hope for Latin America after the travesty of 1954. Asturias, in a 1960 essay in the *Nueva Revista Cubana*, celebrates Fidel Castro by referring to him as having received the revolutionary torch from José Martí (Asturias "Una Revolución" 227).

¹³ “Primera edición: 12-II-1954” (*El Papa verde* 6).

¹⁴ Indeed, Asturias likely felt the financial pressure of exile as well. In a letter to his publisher Gonzalo Losada in late 1954 he asks for a 5% increase in his royalties (letter 20 December 1954).

¹⁵ Asturias’s employs repeated thematic exclamations, usually with melisma, frequently in his novels. Goyo Yic calls for his partner “*María Tecuuuuún!*” in *Hombres de maíz* (1949) just as George Maker Thompson calls for his fiancée “*Mayariiiii*” in a section of *El papa verde*: a critical axis of both of these novels is the goal of heterosexual reunification. A stranger exclamation is that of *Mulata de tal*’s (1969) apocalyptic ending, there “*Al engendroooooo*” (Spawn!!) is ironic and futile because it is directed at a sterile population. These exclamations serve as a structural reminder of a main theme—in *Hombres de maíz* the theme is resolved with the unification of Goyo Yic and María Tecún in an extra-capital paradise, whereas the failure of productive male/female unification is emphasized in the latter novels.

¹⁶ Asturias seldom mentions Guatemala or Guatemala City by name in his novels but refers to it through geographic description, or, as in this novel, refers to it through its smaller communities or geographic landmarks (the Bar Granada in Zone 2 of the capital, Tiquisate and Bananera as coastal banana towns, the Motagua River, el Cerro del Carmen, etc.).

¹⁷ Tabay may be modeled on the much-celebrated martyr of the June 25, 1944 uprisings against Jorge Ubico: the young teacher María Chinchilla (for descriptions of Chinchilla see Forster 85, Gleijeses 25, Galich 309).

¹⁸ Asturias’s character pairs—always male/female—typically accumulate several names throughout a given novel. See, for example, *Hombres de maíz* and *Mulata de tal*, in addition to the earlier novels of the trilogy. Jorge Alcides Paredes compares this character pair with prior hero pairing in the Trilogy and connects them all with the heroic male/female twin pairs of the *Pop Wuj*. For him Sansur and Tabay are the most important of these, “la pareja elegida para hacer realidad el objeto principal de la Trilogía” (81) (The couple chosen to achieve the Trilogy’s principal objective). His book, *El Popol Vuh y la Trilogía Bananera: Estructura [sic] y recursos narrativos*, is a careful and diagrammatic comparison of the novels with the K’iche’ text, but it overestimates Asturias’s understanding and use of the *Pop Wuj* and fails to address the importance of other narrative influences, especially those Judeo-Christian ones that would contradict the “Maya Asturias” stereotype that I describe in chapter one. Furthermore, his conclusion attempts to ameliorate Asturias’s political message within the trilogy, but this is not borne out by his analysis.

¹⁹ There is no chapter XXVII, the day in June 1954 that Arbenz resigned. If this omission was intentional, it constitutes another inscription of 1954 within this novel of the 1944 revolution.

²⁰ See, for example, Monteforte Toledo’s classic bildungsroman-through-ladinization national novel, *Entre la piedra y la cruz* (1948). The narrative is divided into sections named: “Sierra” (the land of the main character’s birth), “Costa” (the site of social and economic exploitation) and “Sol” (the city and revolution).

²¹ Asturias labels this obedience to U.S. interests via puppet governance “la votación mecánica” (López Álvarez 128).

²² Sansur’s adoption of the name Juan Pablo is explicitly linked to Jacobin Jean-Paul Marat, aligning the novel’s revolution with the French Revolution (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 102). Such revolutionary heritage is not further developed in the novel.

²³ Piero Gleijeses and other historians debate the roles of the United Fruit Company, the C.I.A. operative PBSUCCESS, the army betrayal and the Cold War in determining the fate of the Arbenz government. They raise important questions about the strength of internal Guatemalan support for the U.S. intervention.

²⁴ I use “roots story” to reference African diaspora auto/biographical writing about history.

²⁵ George Maker Thompson—“El Papa verde” of the title—begins the novel as a second-class gringo pirate on the Atlantic coast (this pirate letimotiv is undeveloped in the novel, but given the overlap between the geographies of banana shipping and the routes and ports of colonial trade and pirates, would seem to reference the colonial power structures that the development of the banana industry both depended upon and transformed (Chapman 26)). His name, Geo(rge) Maker—Earth Maker—, and his nickname, “El Papa Verde,” underscore his god-like status as the eventual CEO and sole shareholder of Tropical Platanera, S.A. (Alcides Paredes 56-62, Sáenz 183).

²⁶ This is the first description within the Trilogy that acknowledges the presence of diasporic African populations within the banana industry (*Viento fuerte*’s characters are migrants, mostly from the indigenous highlands). Historically these populations—mainly of West Indian and Garífuna descent—comprised much of the work-force (see Euraque (230-240) and also Rodríguez’ commentary on the relative absence of Afro-Central American characters in literature of the isthmus (74)). Representations of diasporic African populations are rare in Guatemalan literature generally, and besides Juambo and his family, the only other Afro-Guatemalan character in Asturias’s fiction is Mulata de Tal. Yet her ethnic identity, in contrast, is indeterminate (in spite of similar racial markers like those Asturias uses to portray Juambo) since she has no origin or family.

²⁷ These locations comprise the Garífuna geography of Central America. Besides this reference, and a reference to a paternal origin of Roatán (*Los ojos de los enterrados* 251), Garífuna geography and ethnicity play no explicit role in the novel. Again, Afro-Guatemalans are generally absent from the “national” until the 1996 Peace Accords where they are included as part of the multi-ethnic nation under the banner “Maya, Xinca and Garífuna.”

²⁸ Panamá and Honduras are other Banana Republics, Asturias references their histories by name at the beginning of *El Papa verde* but focuses solely on an unnamed Guatemala from that point onward.

²⁹ Juambo’s lack of a family history/origin bears similarities to the notion of Africa without history.

³⁰ I have not been able to find any outside reference to this phrase—in literary criticism or social histories of Central America. I doubt, given Asturias’s general tendency to avoid using indigenous languages in his novels (even as literary mayanism makes much of his purported knowledge of *lo maya*), that *jchos, chos, moyón con!* is borrowed from

Garífuna or an African language. Instead, Asturias probably created it to meet his own acoustic requirements: it is rhythmic, with five strong beats, and both the “o” and “s” can be drawn out for dramatic effect. Asturias was in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, associated with Alejo Carpentier, and knew Nicolás Guillen and spent time with him in the 1950s. It therefore seems likely that Asturias is imitating Caribbean *negrismo* through his creation of black characters like Juambo and *Mulata de Tal*. In the 1960s Asturias participated in several European conferences that included *negrista* writers, he corresponded with the Brazilian author Jorge Amado, and saw the European premiere of *Cinema Novo* and began to incorporate other ethnic groups (besides the Maya) into his discussion of the uniqueness of Latin American literature. At the very end of his life, and through his friendship with Léopold Senghor, he began to articulate a connection between Latin American *indigenismo* and *négritude* and participated in a conference in Dakar, Senegal on this subject. See “Asturias and lo maya,” section three, for my discussion of Asturias’s literary philosophy of Latin American language, especially regarding orality.

³¹ Asturias’s punctuation of the phrase is inconsistent.

³² This exchange prompts a strange flashback to the 17th century within the novel, illustrative of the many intercalated stories within the Trilogy: “Siguieron en silencio. No era el silencio de la calle. Silencio con temperatura de claridad que surge milagrosamente. Era un silencio más pegado al hueso, más de ellos, pegado a sus dientes, a sus pelos, a sus uñas, al silencio de la tierra que rodea a los muertos” (55). (Silence with the temperature of clarity that comes about miraculously. It was a silence closer to the bone, more their own, adhered to their teeth, their hair, their fingernails, to the silence of the earth that surrounds the dead.) This silence is followed by the appearance of the hermitage of el Cerro del Carmen on the horizon and an encounter with Juan Corz, the hermit who brought La Virgen del Carmen to the New World. This event is never explained within the novel’s timeline, or even referred to again. It is a narrative loop that abruptly transports the reader to the colonial past, apparently nonsensically, but also one of a series of implicit connections between the conquest, coloniality and U.S. economic imperialism that are central to the novel and to Asturias’s oeuvre.

³³ Asturias’s uses this blood symbolism in a 1960 article on the United Fruit Company published in *El Nacional* of Caracas remarking that the company’s lands are “bloodied” (“¡Good-Bye!” 227).

³⁴ Mayarí, like Octavio Sansur and Malena Tabay, is *ladina*, possessing a paternal European inheritance (her father was a Spanish Republican/anarchist) along with her Maya-inspired name.

³⁵ *Higuerillo* is the name of the castor oil plant; its leaves are palmate, with multiple lobes.

³⁶ In Manuel Galich’s memoir of the October Revolution ¡Viva la libertad! (Long live liberty!) was a prominent chant of the student-worker triumph (332). With his addition ¡Tierra y libertad! Asturias is perhaps again revising history.

³⁷ Juambo is neglected almost entirely by critics. One exception is Lucia Chen’s 2000 book recognizing Juambo’s importance within *El Papa verde* and *Los ojos de los enterrados*. I disagree, however, with her analysis that Juambo symbolizes hope in the

novel (173), perhaps because she erroneously concludes that Juambo and Sansur collaborate in the revolution (182). Juambo's collaboration is anticipated, but he is pulled so strongly by the past that he is unable to fulfill the revolutionary function plotted for him by Sansur.

³⁸ This is also a festival day, for San Pedro and San Pablo (447).

³⁹ In Galich's 1949 memoir he learns of Ubico's fall early on July 2nd while nearing México, D.F., a journey begun after requesting asylum in the Mexican embassy because of his role in the student protests against the dictatorship. He writes that he and his fellow asylees were mulling over their fate when "irrupieron en el tren los voceadores de los periódicos de la mañana. Fué una emoción inefable. Los grandes titulares anunciaban la caída de Jorge Ubico" (355) (the newsboys' voices irrupted in the train in the morning. It was an ineffable emotion).

⁴⁰ At the end of July, 1959, Asturias embarked on a trip to Havana to celebrate the 26th of July at the invitation of Fidel Castro (*1899/1999* 375). Cuba's recent triumph—along with the exigencies accompanying a lengthy trip—may have provided the necessary impetus for Asturias to finally submit the manuscript for publication.

⁴¹ Spring refers to Guatemala's label as "el país de la eterna primavera" for its affable climate. Historians debate this rosy estimation of the Arévalo and Arbenz governments, not in the terms espoused in the anti-Communist tracts like those of Daniel James, but by examining the extent to which reforms reached rural areas, or would have reached them had the Arbenz government not been interrupted by the C.I.A. orchestrated coup.

⁴² "Arenga" is also a label imposed upon Asturias's Trilogy, both by those who would detract from the political content in his novels (Prieto, Alcides Paredes) and by those who would like to label it a "thesis novel" (Rodríguez). Both readings overlook the complicated ambiguity of his texts and concentrate instead on reading solely his critique of U.S. economic imperialism.

⁴³ There is some focalization, but at those points the character or the narrator merely retells previous events without categorizing them.

⁴⁴ The last lines read, respectively: "El tren se fué despacito, rodando sin hacer mucho ruido por un cementerio de banales tumbados, tronchados, destrozados" (The train left slowly, chugging quietly through a cemetery of toppled, crippled and destroyed bananas). and "Krill, el último pececillo de los que alimentan las ballenas azules" (Krill, the littlest of all the fish that nourish blue whales).

Chapter 4

Fragments between hell and heaven: land, the female body and the text in *Mulata de tal*

[...] if one assumes, as both do, that there is such a thing as a historical process with a definable direction and a predictable end, it obviously can land us only in paradise or hell.

–Hannah Arendt *Between Past and Future*

Introduction

The ellipses at the conclusion of *Los ojos de los enterrados* highlight Asturias's hesitance to declare a definitive triumph of the revolution and instead project the hope for justice towards the future. The epilogue of *Hombres de maíz* (1949) also employs ellipses, following an image of many industrious ants: "Viejos, niños, hombres y mujeres, se volvían hormigas después de la cosecha, para acarrear el maíz; hormigas, hormigas, hormigas, hormigas..." (281) (Old folk, young folk, men and women, they all became ants after the harvest, to carry home the maize: ants, ants, ants, ants...) (Martin, *Men of Maize*, 306). In *Hombres de maíz* the ants symbolize the reunification of a central family and the recuperation of corn, that "sacred sustenance of the men who were made of maize" (11). The ellipses thus march towards a more hopeful future.

However, in *Mulata de tal* (1963), published three years after *Los ojos de los enterrados*, Asturias's use of ellipses is striking, inhabiting all parts of the text but

becoming especially prominent in the final chapters. Given Asturias's attention to the word in his novels (neologisms, word-play, euphony, onomatopoeia, etc.), the preponderance of ellipses in *Mulata de tal* is a marked substitution of punctuation for language.

In chapter 2, "Asturias and *lo maya*," I explained how Asturias's literary mayanism (and critics' interpretations of it) is simultaneously tasked with both communicating an essential origin in a constructed Maya Other and also referencing that which is incommunicable, the "mystery" of *lo maya*. The tension between the two is never resolved. *Los ojos de los enterrados*' negrista "*¡chos, chos, moyón, con!*" is an analogous repetition. It carries with it the uncommunicable history of primitive accumulation, colonialism and slavery. However, Asturias's employment of ellipses in these earlier novels is less ambiguous than its use in *Mulata de tal*: its projective function at the ends of *Hombres de maíz* and *Los ojos de los enterrados* repeats what is already understood from the narrative, a list of characters marching towards a future utopia. *Mulata de tal*, however, dwells in a present hell. Ellipsis, instead of signalling a continuity of hope, marks a suspension of language.

The novel begins with a devil pact: a man sells his wife to a corn husk devil named Tazol in exchange for great wealth. This couple, Celestino Yumí and Catarina (sometimes Catalina) Zabala, are key characters, joined by *Mulata de Tal*. *Mulata de Tal* is a sadistic prostitute that Yumí buys with his new wealth in the novel's third chapter. Thus, from the very beginning, the novel's characters are sinful (greed, lust) and devils and demons play a prominent role.

Myth, folklore, fantasy and magic are integral to all of Asturias's novels but *Mulata de tal* trumps them all in the sense that historic events are not part of the primary structure (unlike *Los ojos de los enterrados* which clearly references the banana industry and the national democratic revolution of 1944 or *Hombres de maíz* and its references to agro-capitalism). Magical events perpetuated by supernatural beings take precedence. Asturias's devilish creativity is constantly at play in this novel, to such an extent that the accumulation of episode-like adventures often overwhelms the novel's cohesion around a comprehensible plot or timeline.

With that caveat, *Mulata de tal* is the story of Celestino Yumí and Catal/rina Zabala's transformation from a poor, rural couple in the village of Quiavicús to giant, powerful sorcerers in the urban underworld of Tierrapaulita. Neither place name exists on a Guatemalan map, but many of the accompanying characters—la Siguana, El Cadejo, etc.—are folkloric magical figures native to Guatemala and Central America (and to Asturias's 1930 collection of short stories *Leyendas de Guatemala*).

Mulata de Tal, the title character, appears in Quiavicús as Celestino's concubine and abusively controls both Celestino and Catarina (who has been transformed by Tazol into a dwarf). Mulata de Tal's description resonates with negrophilic representations of the African woman in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s (see Diane Marting for an analysis of Mulata de Tal's sexuality and a comparison of her to women like Josephine Baker) and also with Asturias's previous creation of mulatto characters in *Los ojos de los enterrados*, which I analyzed in the previous chapter. However, she is also strongly aligned with the moon, the earth devil, and, as her character appears out of nowhere, she lacks the historical symbolism pertaining to Juambo and his family in *Los ojos de los*

enterrados. Instead, *Mulata de Tal* is most clearly tied to the sin of lust within the novel's web of venal sins, and, after Yumí and Zabala escape from her, she does not reappear as herself until the novel's second and third parts, where she is decidedly less dominating.

My reading of the novel concentrates on these final two sections, where the novel's main characters, and the space they inhabit, begin to fragment, and the record of their adventures is pockmarked with ellipses. Thus, the actual visual image of "..." on the page disturbs the text in a way that is similar to the gaps and fissures that open up within the novel's plot. *Mulata de tal* is fantastic, populated by mythical, magical and demonic characters and many subplots and linguistic diversions. It is postmodern, darkly humorous and playful in its contestation of social reality.¹ But in spite of all of these elements, its rather linear main plotline—it is the story of a seminal couple's sins, journeys, transformations and deaths. The disturbances to this plotline are geographic and multiple. I center my reading on the three sites that are most disrupted within the novel: the landscape, the female body and the text itself. In turn, I examine the relationship between these sites, to show, for example, how the landscape is incised on the female body (and vice versa). I demonstrate how these fissures in the landscape, the female body and the text relate to the teleology of the novel and how *Mulata de tal*, in contrast with other works by Asturias, marks a temporary break with the eschatological utopia that characterizes his previous novels.

Mulata de tal has been read as a novel about the nation-state, and as an allegory of the end of democracy wrought by the 1954 coup (Prieto *Miguel Ángel Asturias*; Arias "El contexto").² The symbolism of the landscape, shaken to pieces in the novel's final

chapter, resonates with this reading. But the female body is likewise splintered, used in manners both perverse and sacrilegious, and then reassembled. Instead of reading through a central lens—i.e. the history of the end of a democratic parenthesis in Guatemala and the return to dictatorship after the success of the 1954 military coup—I read the novel’s fragmentation in these multiple sites. I read the female body, the landscape and the text simultaneously, noting their interconnectedness, and their relationship to the novel’s almost, but not quite, apocalyptic end. Finally, by reading the fragmentation present in these multiple sites (landscape, female body, text), I draw out strands of thought in Asturias’s work that are overshadowed by reading the novel only as an allegory of the betrayal of 1954. Although that reading resonates with Asturias’s public interpretation of the 1954 coup, it overlooks the ecclesiastic themes of the novel, its analysis of capitalistic production and the connection forged between the landscape, the female body and the text. Furthermore, it does not take into account the novel’s strange ending.

I begin with the fragmentation of the landscape, and the particular imagery of the ravine. I connect this imagery to the female body, concentrating on the strange occurrence of genital excision in the third part of the novel. I analyze the ecclesiastic perversions that follow these genital excisions and propose that Asturias’s denunciation of capitalism is based on his elaboration of the sacred. I read this accumulation of fissures in the female body, the landscape and the text as incomplete allegories of capitalism, nationalism and Christianity. That is, in Asturias’s cosmogeny, capitalism is a sacrilege visited upon the people, upon the nation. They are partial allegories—no one allegory takes over the entire novel. In particular, I argue that the novel’s final chapter actually

reframes the entire plot such that it is no longer just the journey of a seminal couple within a bounded, colonial/national territory. Instead, I read the conclusion of the novel not as a pessimistic allegory of 1954 history but as a complicated amalgam of resurrection and communion. The unity brought about in the novel's final two pages is spiritual, and individual, and is a distinct, perplexing departure from Asturias's previous novels.

The fragmented landscape of Tierrapaulita

*the census, the map, and the
museum: together, they
profoundly shaped the way in
which the colonial state
imagined its dominion—the
nature of the human beings it
ruled, the geography of its
domain, and the legitimacy of
its ancestry.*

—Benedict Anderson
Imagined Communities

The novel's conclusion is the most illustrative of the fragmentary impulse permeating the novel, a chapter entitled “Está temblando en la luna” (“It’s quaking on the moon”). The opening ellipsis signals an ongoing action, like the gerund in the chapter’s title, an earthquake that began some time between the end of the penultimate chapter and the beginning of this one:

...entre casas derrumbadas..., algunas de dos pisos...casas de dos pisos que se sentaban, se quedaban de un piso, avanzaba, le parecía que avanzaba, pero más bien retrocedía, Jerónimo, bamboleándose al compás de los edificios que se separaban de ellos mismos, se iban, se iban de su centro de gravedad, y de golpe regresaban...(366)

(...between fallen houses..., some two stories...two-storied houses that were sitting down, that were becoming one-storied, he was advancing, well it seemed to him like he was advancing, but really he was retreating, Jerónimo,

wobbling to the rhythm of buildings that separated from themselves, they went away, went away from their center of gravity, and then suddenly were returning to place...)

The physical fragmentation of the town of Tierrapaulita is clear: buildings are disordered and disordering, the sexton Jerónimo is unable to orient himself within buildings that are pulling apart, reorienting, and coming back together.³ Yet the earthquake has also already disrupted Tierrapaulitan time. There is no beginning or end to the movement and all the verbs are in the imperfect past tense, even “regresaban,” which, following the adverbial expression “de golpe,” would more commonly appear in the preterit past tense. The first preposition in lower case is consistent with the idea of the chapter’s not-beginning, and the word itself—“entre”—emphasizes that the final chapter starts *in the middle of* an earthquake. This is a special case of *en media res* because the beginning is never narrated, and there is no pretension to an actual beginning. Instability, in the movement of the earth, is thus a constant with no beginning, and no defined end. This is furthered by the description of the sexton Jerónimo’s experience of Tierrapaulita’s rhythmic, musical chaos. The lack of a narrated starting point for the earthquake means that the sexton is consumed at once by the movement of the city. Even though he is the witness, the guide, through the cataclysmic landscape of Tierrapaulita, his perspective is never privileged. Instead, he too is already swept into the back-and-forth of Tierrapaulita’s demise. The earthquake does not begin for him either, because he is already shaking along with it.

This absence of fixed perspective is at the heart of the Tierrapaulitan experience, first introduced from afar when Catarina Zabala and Celestino Yumí approach the city. After a betrayal, many trials and a complicated journey the seminal couple arrives in Tierrapaulita, the land of the wizards, where they intend to become powerful sorcerers.

From the very moment of Yumí and Zabala's approach, Tierrapaulita is strange. Yumí and Zabala's first glimpse of "la ciudad universitaria de los brujos" (122) (sorcerers' university) in the distance is panoramic, unapproachable save for a single, narrow bridge spanning a dry moat:

A la distancia, entre cerros abruptos, secos, rocosos, contemplaban un amontonamiento de casas rodeadas de un murallón indígena que con los siglos se había vuelto peña y un foso, parte desnudo y parte sembrado de maicillo, sin más acceso a la población que un puente largo y angosto (117).

(In the distance, amidst abrupt, dry and rocky hills, they observed many houses surrounded by an indigenous wall that, with the centuries, had become a scattering of rocks, and a moat, part bare and part planted with grain, with no other access to the population save a long and narrow bridge.)

The surrounding geography is stark, inhospitable and a crumbling indigenous wall and a dry moat alone protect the collection of houses. Quiavicús, Zabala and Yumí's home, is a rural agricultural hamlet, Tierrapaulita an indigenous, but also colonial, fortress half-fertile ("sembrado de maicillo") and half-barren ("desnudo"). In this short description Tierrapaulita is envisioned as stranded somewhere between its indigenous and colonial past, somewhere between famine and sustenance ("maicillo" is a less expensive grain traditionally planted for animal consumption, only in times of extreme hardship does it replace corn as a staple crop for humans). This view, of Tierrapaulita in the distance, creates the illusion of a definite, fixed geographical point.

As they draw closer, however, Zabala notices that something is amiss, namely that the landscape is twisted, and describes what she sees to her husband:

–Aquí, como mirujeas, no hay nada derecho, como nos lo tenían contado. Las calles torcidas, como costillares de piedra, torcidas las casas, torcida la plaza y la iglesia..., ¡ja!... ¡ja!..., con un campanario para acá y otro para allá, y

la cúpula que ni acordeón..., ¡qué aire la dejaría torcida!
(117)

(Here, as you can see, nothing's straight, just as they told us. Twisted streets like ribs of rock, twisted houses, twisted plaza and the church...haha!...with one bell tower here and the other over there and the dome with more bellows than an accordion...what wind could have twisted it like that!)

Thus, Tierrapaulita-in-the-distance, colonial (the Catholic church, the moat) and indigenous (the rock walls), the campus town of sorcerers, is, upon closer inspection, imperfect.⁴

Celestino Yumí dismisses Zabala's observation, and responds curtly that Tierrapaulita simply is what it is, interrupting her:

—¡Callá—le espetó Celestino—, Tierrapaulita es así porque es así, y a la tierra que fueres...!

—¡Calla lo que vieres, pero es que de aquí, vamos a salir yo con el pescuezo torcido, como la culpa traidora, y vos con las piernas en horqueta...!

—Ya te dije que a la tierra que fueres...⁵ (117-118)

(“Hush!” interrupted Celestino, “Tierrapaulita's this way because it's this way, and to earth with you...!”)

“You hush! because I'm going to leave here with a twisted neck, like betraying guilt, and you with your legs like a pitchfork...!”

“I already told you to go to earth...”)

Catarina suspects that the warping of Tierrapaulita is contagious and will deform their bodies, just as it has distorted the landscape. In his dismissal of Catarina's concern Yumí replaces “earth” for “hell” in his invective. This is because their journey to Tierrapaulita, land of sorcerers, is also a journey to a sort of syncretic underworld populated by indigenous devils, demons, mythical and folkloric beings, Catholic priests and, later, the Christian devil Candanga.⁶ Yumí's “a la tierra que fueres” hints at this indigenous aspect of Tierrapaulita, at that moment it is governed by Cashtoc (defined by Asturias as the

earth devil/demon). Caxtoc is translated as “demonio” (demon) and “diablo” (devil) in the *Vocabulario de lengua quiché* and the examples given are excerpted from Christian texts (de Basseta 124, 134).⁷ In contrast “Cashtoc, diablo de la tierra” (Asturias *Mulata de tal* 101), “el Gran Demonio” (129), “el Inmenso Demonio telúrico” (165), “diablo de tierra, hecho de esta tierra, fuego de esta tierra” (179), “el terrible diablo indígena” (234) in Asturias’s interpretation is ever earthen, always indigenous, and is described as elegant, with long black horns and a stylish black tail that he wraps around his neck (106). He is so powerful that everyone, including the Catholic priest Tiopagruto, invokes the name of Cashtoc instead of that of God (140).

Yet, Cashtoc is not the one directly responsible for the perversion of land and body, illustrated when Zabala and Yumí become just as twisted as their surroundings:

Celestino vio que su mujer ya tenía un ojo más arriba que el otro, y Catarina que su marido andaba con la nariz retorcida y respingada (122).

(Celestino saw that one of his wife’s eyes was higher than the other and Catarina that her husband was walking around with a twisted, upturned nose.)

Instead, the source of the torsion is revealed by a woman they encounter while looking for a sorcerer-mentor. She tells them that

el cura descubrió que el ruido de las campanas torcía más las casas y las calles, y tan torcido han dejado el campanario, que para saber por dónde va, saca la cara por entre las piernas abiertas (123).

(the priest discovered that the noise from the bells further twisted the houses and streets, and has left the bell ringer so twisted that who knows how it’ll end, as now his face appears between his open legs.)

Bell tolls are entwined with the sacraments of the Catholic Church, signalling, for example, the beginning of mass. More importantly, bell tolls are also understood to repel the devil (Cañizares-Esguerra 23). But in the novel the tolling of the bells causes the

perversion of streets and inhabitants. In the political arena of the novel there are three potential actors: the indigenous demons/devils led by Cashtoc, the Christian devil Candanga and the Catholic Church led, at this point in the novel, by Priest Tiopagrito (who will later be replaced by Padre Chimalpín). However, the power dynamics are such that Catholicism and its officiants are more often the setting for opposing devils' battles.⁸ That is, the bell tolls distort, disfiguring the bell ringer so that he appears belfry-like (which is described sexually and foretells bodily distortions and perversions yet to come). As a remedy the priest limits the bell's holy ringing only to midnight. But Catholic presence in Tierrapaulita is limited in other ways as well—the priest suffers from a lack of host and sacred wine. At this point Cashtoc reigns supreme.⁹ When Yumí and Zabala decide to leave Tierrapaulita, the priest warns them that it is impossible to escape Cashtoc's dominion.

Not surprisingly, Cashtoc the earth devil's impediment to their departure is geologically based. Yumí and Zabala make for the bridge that will lead them out of Tierrapaulita:

Tierrapaulita perdida atrás, con sus casas contrahechas como la iglesia, igual que si en un terremoto hubiera quedado la ciudad paralizada, sin llegar a caer, en esa gran apoplejía del apocalipsis, y de pronto, el corazón les dio vuelta, había desaparecido el puente y no quedaba sino el profundo foso (130).

(Tierrapaulita lost in the distance, with its houses turned against themselves like the church, just as if the city had been paralyzed by an earthquake, without falling, in the stroke of the apocalypse, then all of a sudden, their hearts turned over, the bridge had disappeared and all that was left was the deep moat.)

This image of Tierrapaulita poised on the brink of collapse is a repeated circumstance in the text, of suspension, of what is about to happen but has not (yet). It is a textual

example of ellipses, this moment where Tierrapaulita is suspended without completing its fall. Furthermore, the image of Tierrapaulita-in-the-distance, seemingly fixed, is the same as the moment when Zabala and Yumí are “about to” arrive. As they are “about to” depart, Tierrapaulita, colonial and indigenous, appears encapsulated in the distance, twisted and on the verge of falling to pieces.¹⁰

Tierrapaulita is in fact, not fixed, only appearing so in the moments when it is viewed from afar—for example when Zabala and Yumí are “about to” arrive and “about to” escape. In this way, these are cusp moments because the action of arriving or of escaping is in progress, but not yet completed. This is similar to the time frame of the final chapter’s earthquake: already happening, but never begun. It is also similar to the perversion of Tierrapaulita, neverending. The narration emphasizes this cusp moment in the same way it emphasizes the already-begun nature of Tierrapaulita’s earthquake. Zabala notices that Tierrapaulita is twisted from afar but Yumí and Zabala are also informed that the torsion is ongoing, exponential with each toll of the church’s bells, and contagious, altering each of Tierrapaulita’s inhabitants.

The fragmentation in the novel has to do with space—space distorted, expanded and shifted—but it also has to do with time, particularly with an idea of suspended time. Especially in the final chapter ellipses mark this static time to indicate that there is no linear progression from one event to the next, only an accumulation of events in an environs that is not ancestral, historic or modern. Although I disagree with the central emphasis that Dante Barriento Tecún places on the Maya in his analysis I agree with his characterization that

Mulata de tal se ambienta en un tiempo transhistórico,
borra las fronteras temporales y construye un <<tiempo

abierto>>> fusionando tradición ancestral, historia y modernidad. Al fusionar el pasado legendario, la mitología, la historia y aspectos de la época contemporánea, lo que se produce es una destrucción del tiempo lineal, una dilución de la historia cronológica creando una sensación de espacio temporal cíclico, en el cual la resistencia y la pervivencia de la cultura ancestral maya es un constante interrumpida (881).

(Mulata de tal is set in a transhistoric time, erasing temporal boundaries and constructing an “open time” that fuses ancestral tradition, history and modernity. In fusing legendary past, mythology, history and contemporary aspects what is produced is a destruction of linear time, a dilution of chronological history creating a sensation of cyclical space-time in which the resistance and survival of ancestral Maya culture is an uninterrupted constant.)

Barriento Tecún’s accurately describes the fusion of different times in the novel, but his reading of the perdurance of Maya culture is not adequately substantiated by Asturias’s text.¹¹ Instead, relying on multiple biblical references, I argue that the proliferation of ellipses indicates an abandonment of ancestral/historical/modern time and that, by the end of the novel, the focus is on a redemptive, spiritual time.

Again without a fixed time, Zabala and Yumí’s escape from Tierrapaulita is interrupted by a geological feature (they are simultaneously “about to” cross the bridge when it disappears from sight): a deep moat that strands them in Tierrapaulita. A moat is a trench, and, since the moat is dry, a feature similar to an abyss or ravine. These geological features are associated with a female being accompanying the earth demons, encountered during Yumí and Zabala’s first entrance to the city:

Soy la Siguana de los barrancos solitarios, de los abismos sin fondo—habló la tercera de las tres mujeres, se agrandaban y achicaban del otro lado del foso—, la Siguanaba soy, la que pesa menos que el aire, menos que el humo, la que camina en el vacío de su sexo, el más solitario de los barrancos (136).¹²

(I am the Siguana of the solitary ravines, of bottomless abysses—said the third of the women that grew and shrunk on the far edge of the moat—Siganaba, the one that weighs less than air, less than smoke, the one that walks in the emptiness of her sex, the most solitary of the ravines.)

Thus, in Tierrapaulita, the landscape is also the female body.¹³ In the figure of the Siguana the female sex—named simply in the text as “el sexo”—is described as an abyss, an emptiness, a ravine.¹⁴ When the bridge disappears all that remains is the deep, dry moat and Zabala and Yumí are forced to return to Tierrapaulita. The connection between the female and the landscape is not reiterated at this moment, but the female body figures strongly in the remainder of the novel, and is similarly fragmented.

The figure of the Siguana is a precursor, embodying the gap and emptiness of the ravine, of landscape as absence. Thus, like Anne McClintock’s analysis of Haggard’s sketch mapping the route to King Solomon’s mines, the landscape of Tierrapaulita is gendered and sexualized. These connections between the landscape and the female body in the novel are numerous, but they are not all explicit. Instead, the landscape of Tierrapaulita and the female body are repeatedly fragmented—perverted by colonial (Catholic), Maya (Cashtoc and his army) and Satanic (Candanga) rule. These fragmentations are similarly “mapped” onto the text with Asturias’s repetitive use of ellipses.

Female bodies

*La Huasanga,
montada en el Cadejo, el
sexo de Giroma, como una
flor, en el ojo de la solapa de
su chaquetilla de amazona
—Asturias Mulata de tal¹⁵*

*¡El trópico es el sexo de la
tierra!*

After Yumí and Zabala’s thwarted escape, they return to the city. They encounter the earth demons/devils led by Cashtoc and are transformed into giants and sorcerers. The link between the female body and the landscape is repeated in the descriptions of Catarina Zabala, who becomes the powerful sorceress-giant Giroma, and Mulata de Tal, the character who became Yumí’s concubine in the first part of the novel, and who reappears in Tierrapaulita. Their bodily transformations, prevalent in the first part of the novel, multiply here, and are connected to the landscape both explicitly and implicitly as their bodies experience a fissuring mirroring the fissures present in the landscape. Like the site of the Catholic church in Tierrapaulita, these bodies are also part of a system of perverted Catholic rites.

The body of Catarina undergoes multiple transformations—as a dwarf in the first part of the novel, then, in this second part, as a giant and as the powerful sorceress Giroma, “mujer rica, poderosa, madre de todas las magias!” (141) (rich, powerful woman, mother of all magic!). Giroma’s relationship to the earth is narrated in the following description of her violent sexual union with one of the earth devils, Tazol¹⁷:

ella se sentía como decapitada, el cuerpo, sin cabeza, zangoloteándose sobre el suelo, las cimas juntas de sus senos sacudidas por un sismo que echaba abajo pueblos, abría grietas en la tierra, desenterraba árboles, cambiaba el curso de los ríos, hacía rebalsar los lagos, revolcarse las nubes y tomar colo pimienta negra la luna que allí quedaba suspendida en la atmósfera verdeazul (147, sic).

(she felt decapitated, her headless body moving about the ground, the twin peaks of her breasts shaken by a tremor that downed villages, opened fissures in the earth, uprooted trees, changed the course of rivers, overflowed lakes, shook

up the clouds and turned the moon—suspended in the blue-green atmosphere—the color of black pepper.)

The giant Giroma's climax is described as an earthquake, and the topography of her body (her head, breasts) merges with that of the landscape (peaks) as they are both shaken by her orgasm. Giroma and the landscape coalesce in the destruction of Tierrapaulita.

The description of the Siguana's sex—"el más solitario de los barrancos"—inscribes the landscape on the female body. Similarly, the giant body of Giroma is described in the same sentence as the landscape itself, and both are disordered by the tremor. Yet the tremor has its source in Giroma (it is her climax), and the bulk of its violence is visited upon the earth. The female sex is at first metaphorically linked to the abyss through the Siguana (above), and then through the effect of Giroma's climax (which creates an abyss).

Later in the novel the fragmentational impulse switches targets, as the cleavage wrought upon the earth is visited upon the feminine bodies of Giroma and Mulata de Tal. Thus, in the novel, the fragmentation of the landscape is mirrored by the fragmentation of the female body and, later, of the text itself through Asturias's employment of ellipsis.

Zabala/Giroma's sex is removed first, stolen by Huasanga (Yumí's third wife, who is also a dwarf), who "de un tirón le arrancó el sexo, la terrible venganza, lo peor que se le puede hacer a una mujer. ¡Qué desamparo! ¡Qué orfandad!" (168) (with a jerk she yanked out her sex, a terrible vengeance, the worst thing that can be done to a woman. What helplessness! What orphanhood!). Giroma's sex is snatched violently and her emotional state mimics the Siguana's—Giroma is inconsolable as her "sexo era su poder y ahora se sentía débil e infeliz" (her sex was her power and she now felt weak

and unhappy). The Siguana's solitude resonates in Giroma's laments and articulates the fragmentation of the landscape.

This connection between the geological and the physiological is further suggested by the paragraph following Giroma's excision. Celebrating Giroma's injury, dancing giants use drums in their dance: "Tambores de madera, túneles de eco inacabable. Tambores de cuero, barrigas de viento retumbante" (147) (Wooden drums, tunnels of unending echo. Skin drums, bellies of sonorous wind).¹⁸ In the Siguana's description, the emptiness, the void, like that of the drum's interior, is emphasized. The emptiness of the drums, accompanied by the body imagery, is a repetition of the relationship between the abyss in the landscape and the absence of the female sex. The drums also call attention to the relationship between the void—either in its form of the abyss or in the form of the female sex—and sound. Throughout the novel references to the female sex are layered with descriptions of sound by calling attention to music, silence or hollow musical instruments. In most instances, this connection between music and the female sex is subtle, hinted at—like in this instance—with descriptions that are not explicitly related. These instances are numerous however, and their accumulation becomes central to the novel's conclusion where sound and silence alternate in the confusion of the apocalypse.

Another example of the relationship between sound, this notion of a void, and the female sex is that when Giroma's sex is returned to her, also returned is "el timbre femenino de la voz, ya hablaba ronco, al reintegrarle con el sexo, que le había arrebatado, su tono, su animalidad" (223) (the feminine tone of her voice, she had spoken hoarsely, in reuniting her with her sex, that had been taken from her, her tone animality returned).

While she is missing her sex, Giroma loses the music of her voice. This is a complicated metaphor because *el sexo* in the novel is simultaneously described as an absence (an abyss/ a hollow vessel/ an emptiness) and a presence, an actant (the feminine tone).¹⁹ *El sexo*'s function as an actant is increasingly bizarre because when *Mulata de Tal*'s sex is stolen it becomes the focal point for the sacrilege involving the female body. Thus music is tied to Asturias's topographic writing of the female body in the novel's eschatology.

Giroma climaxed, shook the earth, then her sex was stolen by *Huasanga* (but eventually returned to her). Similarly, *Mulata de Tal*'s sex is stolen after her own orgasm, during a black mass marriage ceremony to *Celestino Yumí*. She cries out, “—*Ésta es mi hora de cielo—*,” (263) (This is my heavenly hour) even as she knows she will be punished for betraying the earth devils earlier in the novel. Her cry also contrasts with her location in *Tierrapaulita*: hell. Green shamans (in league with the earth demons) cleave her body, while *Huasanga*, “*enana robasexos, robanexos, sólo el sexo es nexo,*” (sex-robbing dwarf, nexus-robbing, only the sex is the nexus) snatches her sex and turns it over to *Giroma*. *Giroma* keeps “*el sexo de la mulata como una ocarina*” (the mulata's sex like an ocarina), a description that refers to a small, oval-shaped, hollow instrument with a sweet tone. This simile reiterates the connection between *el sexo*, empty space, and music. Music is again emphasized in the paragraph following *Mulata de Tal*'s excision, because the liturgical dissection performed by the green shamans is poetic and musical (266).

The Green Shamans, complementing the excision of her sex, divide her body in two in a desolate chant. The connection between music, the void and the female sex emerges in the following quote, where the arrangement and repetition of words produce

an echo (which in turn references the geographical feature of the abyss). This is illustrated in an eerie, desolate antiphony whose lyrics are visually divided on the page in an anatomical catalogue of parts:

¡Dos ojos, no!

¡Que le quede un ojo!

¡Que le quede un ojo!

¡Que le quede un ojo!

¡Dos labios, no!

¡Que le quede un labio!

(Not two eyes!/ One eye!/ One eye!/ One eye!/ Not two
lips!/ One lip!)

“Que le quede un labio” reverberates twice more, and the list continues, accelerating in cadence to a rapid-fire: “¡Que le quede una pierna!/¡Que le quede una oreja!/¡Que le quede un pie!” (One leg!/One ear!/ One foot!) as an abrupt, truncated end of the chapter that conveys the violence of Mulata’s deconstruction into unequal parts. One half, including her sex, ends up floating in Zabala’s cauldron of a water tank. The other half, which includes her heart, clamors for the recuperation of “aquella perfección que no es pintada entre los muslos, sino esculpida bajo montes de negrura” (326) (that perfection which isn’t painted between the thighs but sculpted under mountains of blackness).²⁰ The description of Mulata de Tal’s sex, “montes de negrura,” reiterates the connection between land and the female sex. With the repetitive theme of the loss of the female sex, Asturias is referring to the alienation of the land. As with the history of *jchos, chos, moyón con!* this alienation is violent. In *Mulata de tal* Asturias’s allegory of alienation is embodied by two women: Catalina Zabala (who, earlier in the novel, is associated with rural/indigenous culture) and Mulata de Tal (associated with Afro-Guatemalan culture,

but only through her appearance—she, unlike Juambo, is portrayed without family or community).

This alienation is described in tandem with a void, not only the physical abyss of the ravine, but the void of silence:

La mitad de la mulata completada por la mujer osamenta
barría el ruido de sus lamentaciones. [...] La escoba,
barrido lo real, barrida la luz, barrido el ruido, empezó a
barrer el sueño, la sombra, el silencio, y en redor y dentro
de la casa de los grandes brujos se hizo el vacío total,
imposible de imaginar por mente humana. Ni ruido, ni
silencio, ni luz, ni oscuridad, ni realidad, ni sueño... (320)
(Half of the Mulata completed by the bone woman swept
the noise of her laments. [...] The broom, with the real
swept, light swept, noise swept, began to sweep away
dreams, shadow, silence and all around and inside the great
sorcerers' house became a total vacuum, impossible for the
human mind to imagine. Not even noise, silence, light,
dark, reality, dreams...)

Asturias ends his description of this void, absolute silence, absolute absence with ellipses, marking it, paradoxically perhaps, with the punctuational presence of ellipses that mark gaps in language.

Again, the void is linked to “el sexo” with a litany between the conjoined women, and to an absence of music: silence. The skeleton woman asks Mulata de Tal eleven hypothetical question beginning with “¿Si te devuelven el sexo, si te lo devuelven envuelto en...” (If they give you your sex back, if they give it back to you wrapped in...) and her questions are interrupted by parenthetical exclamations and questions about the nature of “el sexo.” The wraps hypothesized include elements that reiterate the connection between the female body and the landscape (soil, water), its reproductive role (the spouses' path, man), irrealities (dream, eternity) and substantialities that allude to Maya cosmology (a ring from the ball game, hummingbird blood, words, smoke).²¹ All

the wraps propose a resolution to Mulata de Tal's condition (incomplete without her sex), a return to a perfect whole.

An analysis of one of these exchanges reveals the productive duty of el sexo, and its potential perversion. The skeleton woman asks Mulata de Tal:

–Si te lo devuelven (¡poblar la tierra su oficio, crear creadores su oficio!), si te lo devuelven envuelto en agua, te lo llevarás? (320)

(“If they give it back to you (its duty is to populate the earth, create creators!), if they give it back to you wrapped in water, will you take it back?”)

Mulata de Tal affirms that she would, and the parenthesis provide a moral responsibility for el sexo which is perverted by lust, the fourth of the seven deadly sins, in the following query:

–Si te lo devuelven (¡lascivia su empleo, perversidad su empleo, desvergüenza su empleo deshonesto!), si te lo devuelven envuelto en el hombre, te lo llevarás? (320-1)

(“If they give it back to you (its use is lust, its use is perversity, its dishonest use is shameful!), if they give it back to you wrapped in man, will you take it back?”)

The contrast between these two is portrayed as a moral dilemma, which is what a venal sin is: a choice towards God or away from God. El sexo is postulated as neutral territory in the next parenthetical definition which questions “(¿de quién es?...de Dios, no es...; del Diablo, no es...; tuyo, no es)” (whose is it?...it's not God's...it's not the Devil's...it's not yours) (321). This query is one of the few times that God is mentioned in the novel, and the answer is an aporia: el sexo is not the domain of either God or the Devil but it, like the land, can be profaned.

Mysteriously, el sexo also does not pertain to Mulata de Tal—either because it has been stolen from her, or because it is an actant apart from her character. In any case Mulata de Tal accepts each of the skeleton woman's offerings no matter what the

covering. Their conversation is a parody of the ritual of confirmation, and with each vow Mulata de Tal commits to becoming “whole” once more, even as she is only half herself (320-2).²²

Mulata de Tal not only continues to lament her loss, she becomes concerned that Catarina Zabala, driven by jealousy (because Yumí, their husband, continually lusts after Mulata de Tal), will extinguish the power of her sex by swallowing it. In a conversation with the same skeleton woman Mulata de Tal expresses her fear:

—Pero inútil querer apagar el fuego hechicero del sexo que me robaron, si no se lo traga la Zabala por consejo de la Huasanga. Sólo tragándose la esposa el sexo de la amante, acaba con él. Y ése es el peligro. No poder impedir que la bruja de esa mujer que tuvo un hijo del diablo por el ombligo, se lo coma como una ostra viva, y se adueñe de mi atractivo sexual... (320)

(It's useless to want to extinguish the spell-casting fire of my sex that they stole from me, unless Zabala swallows it on Huasanga's counsel. Only by swallowing the lover's sex can the wife finish it off. And that's the danger. Not being able to keep that witch of a woman who had a son with the devil by way of her bellybutton from eating it like a living oyster, and acquiring my sexual attraction...)

Giroma's sex was her power as a sorceress, Mulata de Tal's her power of attraction. Their separation from their sexes is a temporary alienation, initially, but Giroma's threatened consumption of Mulata de Tal's sex is permanent. If Giroma succeeds in swallowing Mulata de Tal's half sex, Mulata de Tal would be eternally condemned to her half-self.

“El sexo” is thus a potent, variable symbol in the novel. For Giroma, the loss of her sex is linked with a loss of her magic, for Mulata de Tal the loss of her sex is a devastating dispossession. In the chapter “La escoba mágica” (The Magic Broom), Mulata de Tal describes her mutilated self as incomplete, “sin estar completa y sin mi

gracia de mujer, mi nombre oculto, que sin él, sin sexo, soy innominada, no tengo gracia!” (318) (without being complete and without my woman’s grace, my hidden name, well, without it, without my sex, I am unnamed, I have no grace!).²³ Missing the female sex Mulata de Tal experiences a loss of power, a void, but her name is also removed. In a sense, she is unbaptized. Recalling the dwarf medium Huasanga’s description as “enana robasexos, robanexos, sólo el sexo es nexo,” the role of el sexo is multiple. It is the center, certainly, of Giroma and Mulata de Tal’s bodies, necessary to their completeness, but it is also a link between the void of the apocalypse (and its echoes in the geography of the landscape and silence) and the presence of female body in the novel. The void and its opposite, presence, alternate in the novel. What Asturias does next further complicates el sexo’s symbolism, as Mulata de Tal’s sexo serves as a potential link between the two women in a bizarre perversion of the Catholic rite of communion.

This connection, between the void, the textual void and el sexo, is established through a series of perverted sacraments that begin with a wedding/mass.²⁴ The female body is central in each of these sacramental rites, and the perversions are multiple and repetitive. All of the perverted rites are somehow related to human reproduction, and Asturias takes that theme up again with the figure of the Christian devil, Candanga, tying it to his analysis of capitalism as a profanation of the nation through the loss of the land.

Mulata de tal is a “perverse” novel in multiple registers—references to farting, sadism, and sexual deviations like bestiality are frequent. However, the perversions of religion—sacrilege—are what concern me here. This perversion is present from the novel’s beginning, because Yumí’s part of his devil pact with Tazol requires him to attend mass with his fly unzipped. The display of his sex tempts the women present to

think unpure thoughts, to sin. In this second part of the novel *Mulata de Tal*'s orgasm occurs following a black mass wedding in which she is "vestida de novia muerta" (dressed as a dead bride) and the groom, Celestino Yumí, incarnated as a porcupine (262). In the moment after the rite of matrimony, described later as performed "en misa muerta, en misa de fenecidos" (356) (in a black mass, in a mass of the perished), at the call of "¡Al engendro hoy!" (Spawn now!!) a blasphemous consummation is realized as Yumí:

la enterraba todas las púas del deleite en la carne prieta, en plena iglesia, durante la misa de esponsales que era funeral, punzadas a las que la mulata, bella como la espalda de la luna, respondía con un pasear los ojos blancos por los rostros de los brujos masticadores de ajo [...], asida a la bestia marital que no suavizaba sus cerdas, sino las endurecía más y más punzantes en el refirafe del juego amoroso, en que, para ella, de los huesos áureos de Yumí, salían las espinas luminosas...de qué sol tan interno..., de qué luz tan profunda... (263)

(buried all his pleased quills in the dark skin, in front of the whole church, during the betrothal mass that was a funeral, pains to which the Mulata, beautiful as the back of the moon, responded by rolling her eyes over the garlic-chewing sorcerers, clinging to the marital beast that didn't soften his bristles, but instead made them harder and sharper in the *refirafe* of the amorous game in which, for her, from Yumí's golden bones sprouted luminous thorns...from what sun so internal..., from what light so profound...)

Mulata de Tal and Yumí (who is already married to Zabala and the dwarf Huasanga) pledge themselves to one another for all of *death*, instead of all of life, in an act of profanation that goes beyond all the other profanations because it has occurred in the house of worship itself. Finally, Mulata de Tal's fear—that Zabala will consume her sex (a sex stolen during the black wedding mass)—is ritual. Mulata de Tal's sex is the host and Zabala intends to swallow it in a communion of power.

The threat posed by Zabala's consumption of Mulata de Tal's sex is pivotal in the novel, securing the break between the second and third parts.²⁵ Zabala, jealous of Yumí's obsession with Mulata de Tal's sex as it circles in her cauldron, contemplates the unthinkable:

Era una cobardía sin nombre lo que se proponía. Una cobardía y una suciedad. Tragarse aquello... Pero era la única forma de acabar con el atractivo del sexo de la amante, tragándose lo...

(It was an unnameable cowardice what she proposed. A cowardice and a filth. Swallow that... But it was the only way to eliminate the attractiveness of the lover's sex, swallowing it...)

The female sex is a central symbol, once again, in the desecration of a holy rite. Earlier in the novel, Giroma's sex was affixed to a coconut containing holy water (which is used in the religious sacraments of baptism and confirmation). The earth demons, led by Cashtoc, set out to contaminate the holy water that Priest Tiopagrito has smuggled into Tierrapaulita hidden inside coconut vessels. The dwarf Huasanga's idea is repeated by one of the demons: “—¿Pegarle un *lox* a cada coco?—se preguntó en español y quiché un diablazo escupidor de copal ardiendo, entre risas y jeribeques—. ¡Ja! ¡Ja!, ¡un *lox* a cada coco...buena idea...buena idea..., buena idea!” (175) (“Stick a *lox* on each coconut?” a burning copal spitting devil asked in Spanish and Quiché, amidst laughter and grimaces. “Ha! Ha! A *lox* per coconut...great idea...great idea..., great idea!”).²⁶

Here, instead of defiling the holy water, Mulata de Tal's sex replaces the sacred host. In Roman Catholic theology the host, during the act of the Eucharist, is the body of Christ, and within the context of the Eucharist, all of him.²⁷ Thus, the recipient communes with Christ wholly. Similarly, in this first paragraph, Giroma understands the act of swallowing Mulata de Tal's sex as a way of sharing her sexual power. But this

scene is also a perversion of the sacrament of communion because swallowing Mulata de Tal's sex has a destructive function as well.²⁸ Swallowing el sexo will allow Giroma to extinguish Mulata de Tal's attractiveness and acquire it for herself.²⁹

Giroma's decision to swallow Mulata de Tal's sex is foreshadowed earlier in this chapter when Mulata de Tal laments the loss of her sex to the skeleton woman, analyzed above. In that conversation she defines the consumption of her sex by Giroma as a simultaneous extinguishment of her power, "Sólo tragándose la esposa el sexo de la amante, acaba con él," (only when the wife swallows the sex of the lover can she finish it off) and a transfer of that power, "se adueñe de mi atractivo sexual" (320) (she'll acquire my sexual appeal). In another moment Mulata de Tal describes the threat of Giroma's consumption of her sex with even more violence, "hay el peligro de que por consejo de la enana robasexos [Huasanga], se lo engulla [...] para adueñarse de todo mi misterio" (326) (there's the danger that on the sex-robbing dwarf's advice, she'll swallow it whole [...] in order to acquire all my mystery). The verb "engullir" describes how a snake consumes its prey in its entirety, emphasizing the consumptive violence of the action and in keeping with Asturian symbolism connecting the female with the serpent. Here her sex contains all her "mystery," wording that resonates with Roman Catholic theology about the trinity (the mystery of God's simultaneous presence in three sites: Father, son and the Holy Spirit), just as the sex holds her power, attractiveness, etc.

The narrative focalization switches from Mulata de Tal to Giroma as the sorceress debates the gravity of the act that she is about to commit:

Temío. Titubeó. Como estrella titilante se le sacudió del pensamiento, que alargóse en piquitos de sudor helado sobre su frente. Tazol la embarazó por el ombligo. Le dejó a Tazolito. Y Yumí no tuvo celos, porque el embarazo fue

de ombligo. Y si ahora quedaba embarazada por la boca de embarazo de hembra y nacía... ¿qué podía nacer de dos hembras?... (327)

(She was scared. She hesitated. Like a twinkling star she shook it from her thoughts, and it extended over her forehead in peaks of frozen sweat. Tazol impregnated her through her belly button. She got Tazolito. And Yumí wasn't jealous, because it was a belly button pregnancy. And if now she was impregnated through the mouth by a female pregnancy and she birthed a... what could be born from two females?...)

As she contemplates the act another potential consequence emerges: Mulata de Tal's sex might have the power to impregnate her, that in consuming her sex (her power, her mystery, her woman's grace, her hidden name) she might also receive her fecundity and reproduce.

In this second part of the novel the ellipses build suspense, and the paragraphs end similarly, for example stating that upon Huasanga and Yumí's return, "no lo encontrarían, lo buscarían en vano, ya ella lo tendría en la barriga..." (327) (they wouldn't be able to find it, they'd look for it in vain, and she'd already have it in her belly). These concluding ellipses continue a pattern of escalation in this section, postulating an end to the struggle over Mulata de Tal's sex. In this sense Mulata de Tal's body, like the Tierrapaulitan landscape, is the contested ground. Candanga and Cashtoc struggle for dominion over Tierrapaulita. Zabala and Yumí struggle for possession of Mulata de Tal.

Giroma, finally overcoming her indecision, prepares to complete the action:

Sacó los ojos por una de las ventanas al resplandor cegante del sol. Necesitaba cortarse los ojos en la claridad, que chates de luz la hirieran las pupilas, para ir, ciega de ella, a tientas, hasta el sitio en que estaba...; tanteó en el vacío con las puntas de los dedos en el recipiente de barro lleno de agua donde lo tenía, y sólo encontró el sapo, el sapo en lugar del sexo de la Mulata de Tal... (328)

(She looked out through one of the windows to the blinding brilliance of the sun. She needed to cut her eyes on the clarity, let the light beams wound her eyes, to go, blind to herself, feeling her way, to the place where it was...; she felt around in the emptiness of the water-filled clay jar with her fingertips where she kept it and only found the toad, the toad in place of Mulata de Tal's sex...)

The ellipses in these paragraphs build from suspense to climax. The powerful Giroma has ritually prepared herself for the sacrament, blinding herself with light, grasping for the host in the bottom of an earthen jar. But it has disappeared. The fact that it has been replaced by a toad is significant because in medieval writing about host desecration witches replace the Catholic host with a toad, a turnip or a piece of dry flesh (Rubin 370, Summers 158-60). In this case, Mulata de Tal's sex functions as host in Asturias's bizarre fabrication of the transfer of female power. A rite mimicking holy communion—where the female sex is then replaced by a medieval symbol of host desecration—is only one more in a series of perversions.

Ultimately the communion whereby Giroma would ingest Mulata de Tal is not realized, and the second part ends with ellipses that signal the novel's climax. The ellipses also mark the continuance of Mulata de Tal's sex in the third part of the novel. Asturias's preoccupation with the loss of the land—fictionalized previously in *Los ojos de los enterrados* with the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!*—is taken up again, but through the vehicle of the female body. A unique series of sacrilegious rites explores that alienation and hints at its spiritual repercussions. In this second part of the novel the metaphor of the female body/land turns into an analysis of production—not of bananas—but of human souls.

Profane Reproduction

*Pero cómo dar la vida
aquella noche si Dios estaba
muerto...
–Asturias *Mulata de tal*³⁰*

Giroma wonders what would be born of a union between two women, yet births are notably absent in the novel, and the one birth that does occur is not a human one. Instead, the only birth of the novel is the offspring of the destructive earth devil, Tazol, who impregnates Zabala through her belly button. The female sex is completely bypassed in the pregnancy because Tazolito is born from Zabala's anus:

El vástago de Tazol que llevaba en la panza le hablaba por entre las nalgas, con la voz apretada, como si no pudiera expresarse bien entre aquellos enormes cachetes inseparables de tan gordos" (137)

(She was carrying Tazol's offshoot in her belly and he spoke to her from between her buttocks, with his voice squeezed, as if he couldn't express himself well amongst those enormous cheeks, so fat they were inseparable)

Luce Irigaray connects two of Freud's theories ("money is anal" and "children believe they are born from the anus") in her discussion of women, reproduction and exchange (83-5). Thus, when Zabala gives birth the connection between money and reproduction is underscored. The absence of vaginal births is perhaps Asturias's way of reserving a female utopic space. *Mulata de tal* and Zabala are both narrated as "masculinely" powerful because of their sexes (Zabala uses her power to "dwarf" her husband and *Mulata de Tal*'s sex is not wholly female). Asturias often opposes male/female in such diametric terms and treats the female utopically. In *Mulata de tal* the "masculine" sides of both Zabala and *Mulata de Tal* are consistently aligned with evil, and this devil's birth reiterates this connection.

Thus Tazolito is born to Zabala, an infertile woman, because demons need sterile wombs:

Lo que necesitan son vientres de mujeres estériles donde depositar sus engendros, porque la población del mundo aumenta y no hay suficientes espíritus malignos. Y eso sí. Diablito que nace no se muere más (140).

(What they need are sterile women's wombs where they can deposit their devil spawn, because the world's population increases and there aren't enough bad spirits. And yes. Little devil born doesn't ever die.)

But the earth devils are not much concerned with their own reproduction; instead their focus is destruction, in the form of hurricanes and earthquakes. In an almost moralising sermon, Cashtoc presents the earth devils' rationale, contrasting it with the Christian devil Candanga's project.³¹ His missive is an uncited interpretation of the *Pop Wuj*, where humans are created in a series of experiments, and destroyed if unsatisfactory. His voice is doubly earthen with Asturias's neologism "aterronada" (earthed up) as he lays out the differences between their tactics, and those of the Christian devil:

Y con la voz aterronada en la garganta de costra terrestre:

—¡Una polvareda fue la creación y una polvareda queda de las ciudades que destruimos! ¡No más ciudades! ¡No más hombres que no son sino apariencias de seres, como el formado de barro, que se deshizo solo, y el de madera, colgado como simio, de los árboles! ¡Los hombres verdaderos, los hechos de maíz, dejan de existir realmente y se vuelven seres ficticios, cuando no viven para la comunidad y por eso deben ser suprimidos. ¡Por eso aniquilé con mis Gigantes Mayores, y aniquilaré mientras no se enmienden, a todos aquellos que olvidando, contradiciendo o negando su condición de granos de maíz, partes de una mazorca, se tornan egocentristas, egoístas, individualistas...¡aj!, ¡aj!, ¡aj!...—desmoronó su risa hacia adentro—, ¡individualistas!..., ¡ja!, ¡ja!, ¡ja!...—rió hacia afuera—, hasta convertirse en entes solitarios, en maniqués sin sentido!

¡Otra, muy otra la estrategia y la táctica desplegada por el demonio cristiano, hijo de la zorrería! ¡Este taimado extranjero concibe al hombre como carne de infierno y procura, cuando no exige, la multiplicación de los seres humanos aislados como él, orgullosos como él, feroces como él, negociantes como él, religiosos a la diablo como él, negociantes como él, religiosos a la diablo como él, para llenar su infierno! [...]

¡Para *su* infierno que confunden con el fuego de los volcanes que mantiene encendido mi Gigante Cabracán; no nuestro Xibalbá, nuestro infierno, el de la tiniebla profunda que venda los ojos, el del olvido blanco que venda los oídos, el de ausencia verde que venda los labios (213-5).

(And with his voice earthed up in earthen crust: —Creation was a cloud of dust and a cloud of dust remains from the cities we destroyed! No more cities! No more men that are only the appearance of being, like the one formed from mud, who dissolved himself, and the wooden one, hanging like a simian, from the trees! True men, the ones made of corn, stop really existing and turn into fictitious beings when they stop living for the community and that is why they must be eliminated! That's why I annihilated with my Great Giants, and will annihilate as long as they don't mend their ways, all those who forgetting, contradicting or denying their conditions as grains of corn, parts of a whole, become egocentric, selfish, individualist...ah!, ah!, ah!...his laughter eroded internally—, individualists!..., ah!, ah!, ah!...—he laughed out loud—, until they become solitary entities, senseless mannequins!

Different, very different, the strategy and tactics employed by the Christian demon, son of a bitch! That sly foreigner conceives of man as meat for Hell and he manages, when he's not demanding, the multiplication of isolated human beings like him, proud as he is, fierce as he is, businessmen as he is, religious as hell like he is, to fill his Hell!

For *his* Hell that they confuse with the fire of the volcanoes that my huge Cabracán keeps lit; not our Xibalbá, our hell, the one of the deep darkness that blinds the eyes, the one of white oblivion that blinds the ears, the one of green absence that blinds the mouth.)

Cashtoc leads his troops in a punitive voice reminiscent of the Old Testament by referring to destruction. But his long speech outlines two territories superimposed on the

Tierrapaulitan landscape: that of the collective (reiterated by the adjective “nuestro”) Xibalbá and the individual (“su”) hell. The conflict between the two devils, Cashtoc and Candanga, and their territories—Xibalbá and hell—thus oscillates between these politics of holy destruction and profane production.³²

The second part of the novel opens with Candanga’s intention in the chapter “Candanga, demonio cristiano, en tierra de infieles” (“Candanga, Christian demon, in the land of infidels”). In the novel he is introduced as “Candanga, de ojos azules, siempre con espuelas que daba rienda suelta a sus instintos de macho cabrío, sin engendrar, porque el demonio carece del licor que da la vida” (233) (Blue-eyed Candanga, always spurring on his own horny instincts, without siring anything, because the demon lacked that life-giving fluid) and “Candanga, ese demonio mestizo, mezcla de español e indio en su encarnación humana” (234) (Candanga, that mestizo demon, mix of Spanish and Indian in human incarnation). These descriptions of Candanga indicate that he, unlike Cashtoc and his earth demons, is not Maya, but foreign. Thus the battle between demons reenacts a particular interpretation of the Conquest whereby Asturias echoes Bartolomé de las Casas, who repeatedly denounced the Spanish conquerors as “the precursors of Anti-Christ and imitators of Mahomet, being thus only Christian in name” or as men “governed and guided by the Devil” (Cañizares-Esguerra 27).³³

Candanga’s conquest politics are subsequently voiced as the cry

Al engendroooo! ¡Al engendroooo hoy!...¡Al engendroooo!... (227)

This repetitive cry echoes through the last part of the novel.³⁴ Gregory Rabassa translates this as “breeding time,” most likely relying on the verb “engendrar,” meaning to procreate (Rabassa, *Mulata*, 185). However, the noun “el engendro” has a much darker

meaning, more in keeping with the perversion that Candanga perpetuates, of malformation. I have chosen to translate it as “Spawn!!” because that better reflects the non-human/de-humanizing quality of his commandment and also because Asturias uses “engendro” to refer to the reproduction of the land devils as well as to Candanga’s plan of the mass production of human souls.

This plan is outlined in Candanga’s own chapter, “El diablo del cielo propone asegurar la paz,” (“The devil from heaven proposes insuring peace”) which is also an autobiography whereby he recalls his own journey from heaven, and then to the New World. He tells how the conquerors acquired the sacred tobacco plant and began exploiting it for profit, before explaining the reasoning behind “al engendroooo!” Candanga clarifies his position, arguing first that “sólo los primeros padres fueron auténticos, todos los demás hombres y mujeres son fotografías tomadas del espasmo en espasmo en base a aquellas fotografías e imágenes paradisíacas” (287) (only the first parents were authentic, the men and women that followed are photographs taken from orgasm to orgasm based on those photographs and paradisaical images). Candanga’s ideas of modernity—in the form of the salesman, the photographs—also include a subservient cadre of highly technological *robots* (replacing evil spirits) “con calefacción propia a base de carnes incandescentes, radar como los murciélagos, polvo atómico para lavarse los dientes de fuego que consume todo los metales, hasta el titanio...” (288) (self-heating with incandescent flesh, bat-like radar, atomic dust for brushing the fire teeth that can consume all metals, even titanium...).³⁵

Following these descriptions of modernity, which interrupt the more mythic time of the novel and replace folkloric figures with modern ones, Candanga outlines his own

population project for Tierrapaulita. Michel Foucault analyzes population as a modern economic and political problem beginning in the eighteenth century, but population management was also a tool of colonialism (25).³⁶ Similarly, Candanga is a wedded symbol of modernity and colonialism. His population project bears this out:

¡Carne, hueso y alma son necesarios para impulsar la máquina del mundo en la guerra como en la paz..., yo le quise asegurar las dos cosas, el no cese de fuego y la paz, y me parece que es más hacedero asegurar la paz!...¡Aspiro a convertir esta Tierrapaulita en una fábrica de hacer gente, que es la mejor industria de las naciones (305)

(Flesh, bone and soul are necessary for propelling the world machine in war as in peace..., I wanted to insure them both, neverending fire and peace, and it seems more worthwhile to insure peace!...I aim to convert this Tierrapaulita into a human-making factory, that is the best industry of nations!)

Thus, in Candanga's estimation, reproduction is the work of the nation. Candanga pushes for increased production in a territory that he now controls, because the earth demons have left. The appearance of technology in the novel—in the form of robots, atomic substances and photographs—is itself tied to this nation work.

The theme of production tied to the nation is certainly present in the Banana Trilogy, where bananas are commodities sold in an international market. In those novels the bananas, a national product, are marketed by the gringo imperialist George Maker Thompson. The production of bananas on national soil is aided by the military and the president, who are portrayed as puppets of Tropical Platanera, S.A., a foreign company. This presentation is built around multiple instances of "treason" where Guatemalan characters betray their country and aid either Tropical Platanera, S.A. or George Maker Thompson, mainly in the second novel *El papa verde* (1954). *Hombres de maíz* (1949) distills this relationship between commodity and the nation while also addressing the spiritual center of the nation. Asturias's choice of corn as the commodity in the novel is

paramount. The events *Hombres de maíz* narrates—forced labor, migration, the novel’s center in the highland village of Ilóm—reflect the historical consolidation of coffee plantations in the late nineteenth century.³⁷ Asturias chooses corn precisely because it is a sacred symbol central to Maya cosmogeny. The novel’s title borrows from the *Pop Wuj* and identifies the national citizen-subjects, the community of the nation, with *lo maya*. One of the novel’s central critiques, therefore, is that the selling of corn for profit is a betrayal of the nation and a violation of the sacred. This philosophy is outlaid at the novel’s opening:

El maíz empobrece la tierra y no enriquece a ninguno. Ni al patrón ni al mediero. Sembrado para comer es sagrado sustento del hombre que fue hecho de maíz. Sembrado por negocio es hambre del hombre que fue hecho de maíz (9).

(The maize impoverishes the earth and makes no one rich. Neither the boss nor the men. Sown to be eaten it is the sacred sustenance of the men who were made of maize. Sown to make money it means famine for the men who were made of maize (Martin *Men* 11)).

That the commodification of the sacred corn violates the nation and the national citizen-subject is made clear later in the novel when an old man guide explains that selling corn is as profane as selling flesh (179-180).

Mulata de tal builds on these novelistic antecedents with Candanga presenting an extreme version of the commodification that Asturias had fictionalized previously with corn and bananas. The commodity produced is people, and capitalist accumulation is not measured in corn, bananas or dollars. Instead the accumulation is on a spiritual plane: souls for Candanga’s hell. *Mulata de tal* thereby intensifies the schema set up in *Hombres de maíz* whereby commodification is a betrayal of the nation (more like *El papa verde*), articulated through the sacred. In *Hombres de maíz* the sacred is framed within Asturias’s own conception of *lo maya*, via his reading of the Pop Wuj. In *Mulata de tal*

the violation of the sacred is brought by the enemy of Catholicism and the Maya Cashtoc: the devil Candanga. His profane commandment, “al engendroooo,” echoes through the final pages of the novel, producing citizens for hell.

Towards the end of *Mulata de tal* the Maya demons fade from view, even as they are the ones that presumably set the destructive earthquake in motion. Candanga becomes central towards the end of the novel, but in the final chapter he is replaced by the sexton, the reintroduction of the novel’s other characters, and, finally, the priest. Only his cry, “Spawn!,” continues to echo in the text. Like the excision of the female body in the novel, capitalism is portrayed as perverting the body (and the landscape as a whole) with the cry of “al engendroooo.”

Resurrections and Redemptions: Fragmenting the text

The final chapter opens with the sexton in the midst of the landscape fractured by the earthquake. The sexton's impressions of his surroundings are disrupted as well and his description is syncopated, jumping between smell, time “exactos..., los relojes exactos, exactísimos, parados a las...,” (367) (exact..., the watches exact, perfectly exact, stopped at...,) and vision. He loses all orientation, to time, to space:

“orientarse..., llegar..., llegar pronto a la iglesia..., pero ¿orientarse sin calles?..., se..., se..., se quedó en el aire..., agarrarse..., pero de qué si todo se caía..., no había ya dónde poner los pies..., no había suelo estable..., el piso estaba y no estaba..., y no estaba y estaba..., se echó a tierra..., frío..., mareo...,” (368-9)

(figure out where he is..., arrive..., arrive soon to the church..., but, how to figure out where his is?..., he..., he..., he stayed up in the air..., grab hold..., but to what if everything was falling..., there wasn’t anywhere to put his feet..., there was no stable ground..., the floor was there and

it wasn't..., and it wasn't and it was..., he threw himself
down to the earth..., cold..., dizzy....)

Asturias's entropic style of ellipses and grasping verbs (“llegar..., llegar pronto” and “se..., se..., se quedó”) convey the sexton's dizziness, his seasickness caused by a land that moves up and down under his feet. They also mark his desperation for a hitching post, an anchor, something to grab on to.

As noted earlier, this last chapter opens with ellipses and the final pages of the novel are so populated by them that they visually overwhelm the words. Furthermore, the ellipses halt the narrative to such a degree that the sexton, whose voice is narrated here, never finishes a thought. He also never arrives at his destination, the church, because of the extreme vertigo—movement while stationary—that the earthquake provokes. The ellipses are followed by a comma, adding to the accumulative nature of the narrative that never seems to advance, only repeat itself. Although the sexton's journey through Tierrapaulita describes the devastation that surrounds him, it never advances to a conclusion.

The land is similarly destabilized. The earthquake described is not only this halting movement of back and forth but the rise and fall of the undulating earth, likened to serpents on a sea:

“..., serranías y valles en ondulaciones jabonosas resistidas a contrapelo por ondulantes sismos serpentarios que confluían por caminos arrancados como pedazos de cuero cabelludo, a reventones de agua aborrollante que corría a esconderse de la luna...<<¡Tan, tan, tan, tan..., sacristán, las campanas, dónde están!...” (371)³⁸

(..., ridges and valleys in soapy undulations resisted backwards by waving, snaky tremors that flowed together through roads seized like bits of scalp, bubbling water that ran to hide itself from the moon... “Ton, ton ton, ton..., sexton, the bells, where are they!...”)

Here, and in other works by Asturias, the serpent stands in for the female, most immediately referencing the previous chapter where the sexton sought a cure for the priest's leprosy by visiting a virgin "doncella".³⁹ He attempts to have sex with her (part of the priest's cure), but instead she transforms into a monstrous serpent.⁴⁰ He flees the serpent/doncella in only a sheet, arriving in the quaking street. This description continues the relationship between the female body and the landscape as the snake-like movement of the earth. The quaking land morphs into the body of an undulating serpent, just like the female body.⁴¹ Thus, the snake-like land is re-feminized. In addition, because of the serpent's role in tempting Eve in Genesis (the first sin), this repetition of the link between the female body and the land is also demonized.

The sexton continues in his quest for the church, emphasized with the tolling rhyme of the bells—"¡Tan, tan, tan, tan!"—and the last syllable of the sexton's title, "sacristán." The church, like the landscape, is distorted in Tierrapaulita and, furthermore, the sounds of its belfry twist and distort even more. The sexton is unable to reach the church, and there is no space untouched by Tierrapaulita's earthquake. The whole scene is as if taken from the biblical apocalypse of Revelations, one of the books that the priest Chimalpín brings with him when he is assigned to Tierrapaulita (210).⁴² Revelations references the end of time, and, accordingly, all the Tierrapaulitan clocks are stopped. Yet the bells toll on in the novel, incoherent within the overall framework of the end of days.

The nation is again referred to: "..., ¿otro país?... no, el mismo, pero bajo la luna parecía otro mundo..." (377) (... , another country?... no, the same one, but beneath the moon it seemed like another world...). Tierrapaulita is so mixed up that the sexton does

not know where, or when, he is. The text, too, is disordered by the ellipses and suspended in time: the chapter has no beginning and the end is endless. The sexton (and then the priest) wanders through the ruining of Tierrapaulita.

As the borders between the landscape and the female body blur with serpentine movement, the narrative continues to fracture with ellipses. Asturias again references sound and silence with the image of many incipient snails eager to be born. These are the beings engendered by Candanga's "Al engendroooo" politics. The priest observes them⁴³:

"..., las caracolas más pequeñas se movían con conducta de rocío..., y otras más pequeñas..., y unas casi invisibles..., las quebras del terreno los obligaban a moverse con pasmosa lentitud por el silencio quebradizo que rompían sus toqueteos musicales estrambóticos, percutiendo, silábicos...,” 378-9

(..., the smallest snails moved like dew..., and others smaller still..., and some that were almost invisible..., the collapse of the terrain made them move with a wonderful slowness through the brittle silence that broke up their strange musical touch, tapping, syllabic...,)

These snail beings behave like dew and their movement is similar to the movement of the ellipses within the narrative: accumulative, musical and slow. They are so many, and varied, as to be infinite (smaller, even smaller, almost invisible) and their voices, and bodies, claim the priest by sticking to him.

The priest dismounts the carnivorous mule (the second therapy proposed for his smallpox) and the snail beings transition from their dew-like cohesive movement to adhere to his skin:

..., turutric, turutric..., turutric..., y babosas que lo cubrían con una capa pegajosa..., [...] ..., imposible arrancárselas..., [...] ..., queremos nacer..., cerró los ojos para oír mejor..., [...] ..., rututurotric..., rututurotric..., queremos nacer..., queremos nacer...somos..., qué somos..., los que somos..., pero queremos ser..., queremos ser..., (379-80)

(..., turutric, turutric..., turutric..., slimy they covered him with a sticky layer..., [...] ..., it's impossible to yank them off..., [...] ..., we want to be born..., he closed his eyes to hear them better..., [...] ..., rututurotric..., rututurotric... we want to be born..., we want to be born...we're..., what are we..., we're what we are..., but we want to be..., we want to be...,)

These incipient snails' repetitive clamor is described as music, another example of musical language in a novel that is at times more poetry than narrative, and suggest a link between the snails and the novel's other fractured symbols (the female sex and the land):

“..., mientras viviera jamás olvidaría aquellas que no eran voces..., una música..., una música..., qué dulce exigencia querer nacer..., qué justa..., qué divina...,” 381

(..., while alive he'd never forget those not-quite voices..., music..., music..., what a sweet demand wanting to be born..., how just..., how divine...)

The repetitive punctuation, the repetitive and perhaps existential cry expressing the desire to be born, to be whole, echoes the fragmentation of Tierrapaulita and the disjointed *Mulata de Tal*. The priest hears their onomatopoeic cry as repetitive, timed, and rhythmic, emphasizing their musical nature:

“..., ¡tuturutric!..., ¡tuturutric!..., ya iba lejos y aún escuchaba la relojería lejana de los caracoles estelares, esos en que la vida está latente, hialina..., espectral...,” 381

(..., tuturutric!..., tuturutric!..., he was a ways off now and yet he still heard the far-off clockwork of the astral snail, those beings in which life is latent, transparent..., ghostly...)

But their musical lament hints at a different time than that of the novel—a celestial, ghostly, spiritual time.

This snail section is a significant part of the chapter, and the tone contrasts with the death and destruction described in other parts of the sexton and then the priest's meanderings through the tumult of *Tierrapaulita*. The cries of the snails are judged, by

the priest, as sweet and just. Although the incipient snails are the sacrilegious work of Candanga, the Christian devil, their desire to be born is described as divine.

Their function is not clear, but the section recalls the “confirmation” of Mulata de Tal earlier in the novel. While the skeleton woman asks whether she would take her sex back, one of the final parenthetical definitions of *el sexo* reads “¡caracol de la tierra, ocarina del mar, ofrenda de todas las horas!” (321) (the earth’s snail, the sea’s ocarina, the offering of all the hours!). It is clear that the female, reproduction and music are intertwined in the incipient snails, and they are the only beings that the priest encounters with life and beauty. He is surrounded by destruction, the fragmenting landscape and the deaths of the sexton, Celestino Yumí and Catarina Zabala. The incipient snails—not yet born—promise birth and regeneration. They promise wholeness, a contradictory but sole hope in the fragmented moment of the apocalypse.

Similarly, Mulata de Tal reappears in this last chapter as “aquella vieja vuelta joven, aquella madre de ella misma, desustanciada como progenitora y vuelta a formar como hija” (385) (that old woman become young, that mother of her own self, desubstantiated as a progenitor and re-molded as daughter). Mulata de Tal is resurrected as her own daughter, as young as a phoenix, the new moon, and aware of her contradictory existence: “<<Sí, soy hija de ella, de ella, que soy yo..., soy hija mía..., mi madre soy yo...>> (383)” (Yes, I am her daughter, hers, that is me..., I’m my own daughter..., I’m my own mother...). She is re-born pure and whole, as a doncella, and her voice is clear. This description suggests a redeemed Mulata de Tal, a messianic figure. Hers is the final birth in the novel, and although her birth also bypasses the female sex she, like the incipient snails, is a startling appearance of life in the last chapter. Even

though she is subsequently dropped from the narrative, her resurrection heralds the novel's final, hopeful twist.

The novel's bizarre ending concludes with another Catholic ritual. The focalization of the priest, delirious and elephantine in the modern other-world of the hospital where he has been transported post-cataclysm, centers on his memory of preparing children for their first communion in Tierrapaulita:

aunque viera poco, casi no veía, su oído mejoraba y se podía dar el gusto de perderse en las catedrales de sus tímpanos, gótico florido puro, mientras los médicos barajaban radiografías y consultaban análisis, y oír el coro de niños y niñas que había preparado para la primera comunión, en Tierrapaulita...

¡Yo soy feliz,
yo nada, nada espero,
porquieee el azul
del cielo, es ya mi casa! (395-6)

(although he could see little, he almost couldn't see, his hearing improved and he gave himself the pleasure of losing himself in the cathedrals of his eardrums, pure flowery gothic, while the doctors shuffled x-rays and talked about test results, hearing the choir of boys and girls that he'd prepared for their first communion, in Tierrapaulita...

I am happy!/ nothing,/ there's nothing I hope for/
becaaaause the blue/ of the sky,/ is now my home!)

The novel ends in the priest's memory, within the sacrosanct cavity of his own eardrum.

The shape of the eardrum is a spiral, echoing the form of the incipient snails from earlier in the chapter. Likewise, the soprano voices of the boys and girls drown out the technical voices of the hospital. Thus, the novel ends with another beginning (in addition to the prophesied birth of the incipient snails and the resurrection of Mulata de Tal), because it ends with the sacrament of the very first communion.

The priest's memory of these children does not correspond to any previous part of the novel. Tierrapaulita's human inhabitants, aside from the priest, the sexton and a handful of other warped adults, are described anonymously, as the men and women heeding Candanga's call to spawn. There are no human children. Similarly, there is no previous communion, aside from Giroma's suspended, blasphemous communion with *Mulata de Tal*'s sex standing in as host.

Mulata de tal's conclusion is a strange twist. One possible interpretation is it has all been a dream, a crazy priest's feverish smallpox dream driven by a sinning couple (Yumí and Zabala) and the conflict between two devil contingents—ladino and Maya—over Tierrapaulita. However, the structure of the novel—its splintered strands and bizarre subplots—does not fit with such a tidy resolution, nor is there a declared victor. In contrast with *Hombres de maíz* and the Banana Trilogy there is no “righting” an injustice, even prophetically. The tactic of the Maya devils, led by Cashtoc, is destruction, while the tactics of the Christian devil, Candanga, are a profane reproduction. Neither prevails: and the priest alone survives.

Mulata de tal enacts a transformation from movement through space to movement through time. *Mulata de tal* opens in rural Quiavicús and ends in urban Tierrapaulita. It moves from a sort of folkloric time that constitutes the novel's first part (the story of how Yumí sells his wife to the devil Tazol) to the abbreviated history of the conquest encapsulated in Candanga's autobiography. The different objects that pop up in the latter part of the novel—robots, nuclear ingredients, the census, photographs—are artifacts of modernity. Yet, the novel is so twisted up by religion that linear time—folkloric time,

historic time, modernity—is eclipsed by a third time: the spiritual time of the incipient snails and the end of days.⁴⁴

Lois Parkinson Zamora’s statement that novelists employing apocalypse as a narrative structure are less likely to focus on character development is borne out by this novel. The novel’s characters seem undeveloped, with the focus centering on “the complex historical and/or cosmic forces in whose cross-currents those characters are caught” (3).⁴⁵ In *Mulata de tal* the battle is between the Candanga and the earth demons, led by Cashtoc, but these legions have abandoned the Tierrapaulitan battlefield at the novel’s conclusion.

Instead, the priest ends the novel as the sole survivor of Tierrapaulita’s destruction. Yumí, Zabala, and the sexton are dead and *Mulata de Tal* has disappeared from the novel’s final pages. The boys and girls too, if they existed, would have been annihilated by the sulfuric ash obscuring the town. The musical earthquake, the destruction, is reminiscent of Revelations, while the atomic references are relevant to the post-nuclear context of the 1950s and 1960s. The darkness of the novel, present even in the comedic episodes, contrasts with the light purity of the children’s communion song. The absence of character development, and fullness, of the novel’s main characters—Yumí, Zabala and *Mulata de Tal*—does not apply to the final description of Padre Chimalpín. The priest’s psyche is, albeit briefly, cradled and fully narrated as he recalls children’s voices.

These contrasts are not irony. Instead they resonate with the conclusion of *Los ojos de los enterrados*, where the 1954 failure of the revolution meets the novelistic 1944 revolutionary triumph. Unable to reconcile post-1954 despair with the 1944 victory

Asturias projects the hope for justice towards the future and the characters end in song. That conclusion too, is impregnated with a religious spirituality as the dead join the surviving in the celebration of future justice. After an accumulation of sacrilege and perversion, *Mulata de tal*, ultimately, looks past the historical destruction of Tierrapaulita and towards God, using the metaphor of children preparing for their first communion.

¹ Arias, in his description of the novel, emphasizes the playfulness of Asturias's postmodernism ("El contexto" 807).

² In his most recent reading of the novel, Arias eschews an allegorical reading, preferring instead to read the novel's many symbolisms. He maintains, however, that the apocalyptic ending historically references 1954 (*Taking* 41).

³ In a 1970s interview with Rita Guibert, and in other retrospectives, Asturias remarks on the catastrophic 1917 Guatemala City earthquake's importance in prompting his writing career (161). Earthquakes are a dominant Asturian theme.

⁴ Luis Pérez notes that Asturias plays with Tierrapaulita's name (christening it "Tierramaldita" (Asturias 195)). Pérez likens this to the name "Guatemala," resonating with readings of *Mulata de tal* as a national novel, even though Guatemala is never once mentioned by name (782).

⁵ The couple generally uses "vos" when conversing with one another and their speech is stylized to imitate rural Guatemalan speech (archaisms, "mis"pronunciations, etc.)

⁶ Manuel Ariza states that the word "Candanga" is of aboriginal Mexican origin (641).

⁷ Dante Liano notes that K'axtook' refers to the devil, but is also used generically to refer to any malevolent entity. According to him it comes from the K'iche' word "k'ax," which means "harm" (858).

⁸ Literally so when the sexton's body is possessed by Cashtoc in an inquisitory battle with Candanga in the chapter "Lucha entre dos alumbrados por demonios contrarios."

⁹ Later in the novel there is a "cambio de guardia demonial" (change in the demonic guard), that occurs once every thousand years. Candanga, the Christian devil, enters Tierrapaulita and the earth devils/demons abandon it (221). Candanga is represented consistently without allies, while Cashtoc has giants, spirits and other devils on his side.

¹⁰ Cinematographically this might be compared with the mirage-like appearance of the Emerald City on the horizon in the film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), when Dorothy and company are first approaching from the yellow brick road.

¹¹ Unfortunately, the criticism written for the 2000 critical edition of *Mulata de tal* in large part shares this bias of reading solely *lo maya* in the novel. At times this reading is overly generous, imbuing the novel with the post-Peace Accords idealism of an instantly realized pluriethnic nation.

¹² La Siguana is not one of the mythical figures narrated in Asturias's *Leyendas de Guatemala* but in Central American folklore, where she is also called La Siguanaba or La Sigamonta, she appears to men who have illicit relationships with women, and terrorizes them (Pérez, "Notas," 784, Prieto *Miguel* 113). The Siguana, along with aspects of Zabala and Mulata de Tal, are thematically similar to the threat of the "vagina dentata," or women "devoradora de hombres" (devourer of men) like Doña Bárbara (Pérez Botero, "Las imágenes," 188).

¹³ See Michael Taussig for an analysis of anti-colonial and colonial reckonings of America as woman (*Mimesis and Alterity* 176-182).

¹⁴ In Guatemala, especially in the highlands (and including Guatemala City), ravines and cliffs are prevalent topographical features. *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960), *Hombres de maíz* (1949) and *Maladrón* (1969) also connect Guatemala's particular geology to their narrative structure. In *Los ojos de los enterrados* a cave system connecting the

highlands with the coast is the site of Mayan mythology and permits Octavio Sansur to escape military surveillance and lead the strikes on the coast. In *Hombres de maíz* a particular rock ridge of the western highlands, María Tecún, is also the name of the main female character, integrating the female with the landscape, and with a mythical Mayan heroine who threw herself from that place rather than be captured by Pedro de Alvarado (Guibert 141, Camacho Nassar 146-7). Finally, *Maladrón*—Asturias’s novel of the conquest—revolves around the search for a tunnel cave connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Once again, Asturias is able to reference Guatemala with these descriptions, and with his inclusion of K’iche’ words, without ever naming it.

¹⁵ (212) (Huasanga, mounted on Cadejo, Giroma’s sex, like a flower, pinned to the lapel of her Amazon jacket.)

¹⁶ (14) (The tropics are the sex of the earth!)

¹⁷ Tazol is the first land demon/devil to appear in the novel, persuading Yumí to sell Zabala to him for riches in the first chapter, “Brujo Bragueta le vende su mujer al diablo de hojas de maíz” (“Sorcerer Fly sells his wife to the corn-husk devil”) (Rabassa *Mulata*). Zabala’s union with Tazol is unconsummated at that point, but the event, and Yumí’s subsequent relationship with Mulata de Tal, has many repercussions. During the failed escape from Tierrapaulita, Tazol (who was bound at Zabala’s waist) impregnates her through her belly button and she gives birth, anally, to Tazolito. This event converts her into the sorceress Giroma. In Tierrapaulita Tazol is subordinate to Cashtoc. I was unable to find any reference to a Maya demon by this name in other sources.

¹⁸ *Mulata de tal* is also full of comedic references to flatulence and the anus. The description of the instruments, especially “bellies of sonorous wind,” may be a nod to that theme. However, because the anus is not tied to the landscape in the way that the female sex is, nor is it the object of excision, it is not my focus here.

¹⁹ Diane Marting, in her analysis of the novel, reads the sexual woman type through three “games” within the novel (the Money Game, the Mayan Game and the Domination Game (65)). Her reading is provocative, especially her emphasis on the female characters Giroma and Mulata de Tal and her notion of the female sex as actant. At times, however she (like René Prieto, and, to some extent, Arturo Arias) assigns moral vectors to the novel—for example that Mulata de Tal is “a danger to traditional Mayan societies and to an all-important sense of community” (58) or that “Asturias’s literary strategy in the Domination Game transmits a mythologizing and invented version of the history of Indian resistance and survival” (117)—that are not borne out over the novel’s expanse.

²⁰ Aside from the repetition of her name—Mulata de Tal—racial references like this are not as frequent as in the Banana Trilogy. Asturias stated in notes about the novel that he sent to Italian critic Giuseppe Bellini that that he chose her name because of its aural recognition with “Fulana de Tal,” anybody (Asturias “Algunos” 1005). Still, her representation in the novel is highly eroticized, fitting with 1920s-era fascination with the mulatta (See Marting for further analysis of the figure of the mulatta within the novel).

²¹ Asturias wrote erotic descriptions of the female sex in earlier novels as well (see, for example *Hombres de maíz*, pages 247-8).

²² Curiously, Yumí is able to see her as whole, but multiplied, with the aid of thirteen mirrors. Mulata de Tal is told this by a toad, who describes that “el perverso de Celestino

Yumí se imaginaba que sí, que en los trece espejos, eras tú multiplicada por muchas otras, porque él te veía, o las veía enteras; alrededor de tu sexo, o de los sexos multiplicadas en los espejos, miraba trece mujeres completas!” (326) (that pervert Celestino Yumí imagined he could, that in thirteen mirrors it was you multiplied by many more, because he saw you, or he saw them whole; around your sex, or around the mirror-multiplied sexes, he saw thirteen complete women!). This quote hints at the theme of production that is examined later in the chapter.

²³ There is an interesting transformation with regard to Mulata de Tal’s sex. In the first part of the novel, in Quiavicús, she is observed by Zabala to be anatomically hermaphroditic: “Para hombre le falta tantito tantote y para mujer le sobra tantote tantito” (65) (For a man she’s missing a little and for a woman she’s got a little too much). Yet, in the second part “su sexo” is her “gracia de mujer,” and her gender exclusively female—this is emphasized in the last chapter where she is both daughter and mother to herself (383). This may be due to Asturias’s practice of writing novels in parts.

²⁴ This is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church (and other Christian religions): baptism, confession, holy communion, confirmation, holy orders, marriage, and last rites.

²⁵ Here I limit my analysis to the sacrilegious aspects of this act. However, it is also a potential homosexual union between the Zabala and Mulata de Tal (and Zabala herself wonders what such a union might produce). Coupled with the male homoerotic references in the novel this episode obviously has broader significance.

²⁶In this case “lox” (or any orthographic variances I could think of) does not appear to mean the female sex, according to Telma Can, a K’ichee’ linguist at the University of Texas Austin. In another instance Asturias uses the work “kak” as fire (246), and according to Can this is an accurate translation of the K’ichee’ word q’aaq’. Asturias does not generally use Maya words in his novels, and only uses them, singly, in a handful of instances in this text. He remarks on this specifically in an interview with Rita Guibert, “I avoid native words in my books as far as possible, because they exclude the reader from the text” (146).

²⁷ As a perversion of the Eucharist, Zabala’s proposed act would only consume the body of Mulata de Tal, not the blood.

²⁸ Asturias’s version pales in comparison to the Marquis de Sade’s versions of host desecration as described by Hugh B. Urban (196-7). See Byron A. Barahona for a discussion relating Asturias to French writers Rabelais, Sade and Bataille. Prieto (1993), Arias (2007), and other critics have also analyzed the novel’s sadist and masochistic references, mostly through the male character Yumí.

²⁹ Nora E. Jaffary describes allegations of host desecration during the trials of the Mexican Inquisition. The charges against Ana Rodríguez de Castro y Aramburu involve sexual host desecration similar to Giroma’s attempted transgression (2). It is possible that these accounts, along with medieval texts, are the sources for Asturias’s invention here.

³⁰ (255) (But how to give life that night, if God was dead...)

³¹ Here Asturias analyzes colonialism via a Maya—not a Spanish—spokesperson. Daniel T. Reff notes that colonial Jesuit authors “cast their New World experience largely in

terms of a battle between the Jesuits, favored and aided by God, and the devil and his Indian familiars, “the shamans” (239).” Asturias changes this dynamic by pitting Maya devils against the Christian Devil and Catholic priests.

³² Yumí, Zabala and San Zacarías are the only ones to guess his true name (226); Cashtoc refers to him simply as “el demonio cristiano.”

³³ Asturias also referenced de las Casas’ thought in a published play, *La audiencia de los confines*, celebrating de las Casas in 1957. *Maladrón*, published in 1969, similarly characterizes some of the Spanish conquerors as diabolical.

³⁴ See the previous chapter for my analysis of how repetitive cries structure other novels by Asturias.

³⁵ Italics and English in the original.

³⁶ Another interruptive “modern” scene in the novel actually involves a population census, and Zabala and Yumí are interviewed.

³⁷ Ilóm, a village in the Quiché department, was a central site of land expropriation for the formation of coffee plantations in the Maya highlands of Western Guatemala (Talomé, *Ixiles: la pérdida de Ilóm*).

³⁸ The first earthquake of the novel, begun when Mulata de Tal escapes the cave where Zabala and Yumí have imprisoned her, is also described as serpentine: “ondulaban igual que si por ellas corriera el temblor hecho serpiente” (78) (they undulated exactly as if a tremor turned serpent ran between them).

³⁹ “Doncella” is a colonial category for virgin (Few). Asturias’s inclusion of smallpox perhaps references the epidemic that was especially virulent in Guatemala during the last half of the nineteenth century. That time period is crucial for the history of capitalism in Guatemala as it also saw the rise of coffee as an export commodity.

⁴⁰ Asturias associates the female with the serpent as early as his “Leyenda del Cadejo” where the female character lets down her braid and “ya no era trenza: se movía, ondulaba sobre el colchoncito de las hostias regadas en el piso” (17) (it was no longer a braid: it moved, slithering above the scattering of communion wafers blanketing the floor). Gerald Martin links serpents with matriarchical societies in his notes on *Hombres de maíz* (344).

⁴¹ Mulata de Tal is also described in snake-like terms in her first interaction with Yumí: “tan pronto era culebra como mujer” (47) (she was just as soon a snake as a woman).

⁴² Although critics acknowledge the Christian elements in the text, they are always positioned as subordinate to perceived Maya elements. A Maya element claimed by many critics is the novel’s references to the lunar nature of Mulata de Tal. Yet, Revelations also references the moon, as in Revelation 6:12, “there was a great earthquake; the sun turned as black as dark sackcloth and the whole moon became like blood” (1677).

⁴³ There is a shift in focalization from the sexton to the priest partway through the final chapter that is also not clearly narrated. At one point the priest looks back and the sexton is dead.

⁴⁴ I am drawing here on Anne McClintock’s critique of “postcolonial” where she reveals its linear, developmentalist roots. Asturias seems to have recreated such a progressive

historical timeline, critiqued it in what can perhaps be characterized as a post-colonial fashion, and then abandoned it altogether in favor of a spiritual timeline.

⁴⁵ Gerald Martin describes the characters as cartoonish in his article “*Mulata de tal: The Novel as Animated Cartoon.*”

Chapter 5

Crosses, Origins, Communion

This dissertation began with an analysis of Miguel Ángel Asturias's creation of and claim to a Maya origin. This origin was central to his concept of himself as author but also, more generally, to his definition of what Latin American literature is and can do. In his words Latin American literature has an indigenous origin, a unique, telluric language, and reflects political commitment. Those aspects are what differentiate it from European literature. A created, borrowed and repeated Maya origin was at the core of his creation from at least the early 1920s until his death in 1974.

Asturias's use of repetition is central to my understanding of his work. In the case of a Maya origin, I show how he transitions from borrowing from Maya texts like the *Pop Wuj* to creating a Maya identity by the 1960s. Each iteration of *lo maya* acquires new traits, connecting with social concerns, critiques, and, finally, with universal humanism. This connection between Asturias and *lo maya* has been sufficiently—and, I would argue, excessively—emphasized by other critics. Thus, I focus here on other Asturian repetitions.

My close reading of *Los ojos de los enterrados* analyzes Asturias's repetition of the phrase *¡chos, chos, moyón con!* within his novel of the 1944 Guatemalan revolution. This phrase carries with it historical moments that are left out of the story of revolution. Likewise, I have proposed that Asturias's use of dates complicates a reading of a

definitive, linear history. Through my analysis of a mulatto character, Juambo, I have highlighted aspects of Asturias's work that are overshadowed by his reputation as a "Maya" author.

My reading of *Mulata de tal* also seeks to complement studies of the Maya influences in his work with an analysis of how the female body and the land are perverted in a complicated schema of sacrilege. I tie Asturias's analysis of capitalism in *Hombres de maíz* and *Los ojos de los enterrados* in order to this novel to show how the novel is more than a moral allegory of 1954. I end my analysis with an examination of Asturias's fragmentation of the text through his repetition of ellipses and argue that the novel's final pages move from a history of sacrilege and perversion through linear time and towards an abandonment of that timeline in favor of spiritual redemption.

In this final section I would like to further my analysis of *Mulata de tal*'s final pages with a close reading of Asturias's last work, *El árbol de la cruz*. In 1993 Colección Archivos published a slender volume with Miguel Ángel Asturias's last novel sketch before his death in 1974 ("pre-texto" in the words of Amos Segala and Eliane Lavaud-Fage) (Janquart *Nota* xvi). Handwritten some twenty years prior, *El árbol de la cruz* is a five-part composition of twenty-four pages as transcribed and pieced together by the volume's coordinator, Aline Janquart. Although the volume includes a reproduction of an original manuscript, few details are provided about the writing timeline or about potential publication during Asturias's lifetime. The paragraph on the back cover, authored by Amos Segala, asserts that it is the last text, "el texto que efectivamente concluye y despide al escritor" (the text that effectively concludes and bids goodbye to the writer). The volume's brevity concentrates the characteristic Asturian elements of

word play and inventive language. At the same time it distills the central tensions that tend to be overwhelmed by the volume of Asturias's earlier works.

The sketch's central dilemma is the alienation from God versus the possibility of redemption. This is its ideological structure—the pull between separation and union—and it is played out through a simplified Asturian heterosexual couple. The sketch is thus centered on religious spirituality, but it lacks the *Mulata de tal*'s comedic and profane bends. I read *El árbol de la cruz* through Asturias's other novels, first in order to untangle the mechanics of communion, the sketch's almost end point, and later to propose a reading for the title (The tree of the cross). The title describes an origin, making the flux between beginning and ending another tension within the text.

My close reading of repetitions in *Los ojos de los enterrados* and *Mulata de tal* depended upon analyses of others of Asturias's novels that connected common themes and symbols. With *El árbol de la cruz* this method is even more necessary, as the text is very brief and the theme of an origin, suggested by the sketch's title, entirely undeveloped within the narrative. I rely mostly on Asturias 1960s novels—*Los ojos de los enterrados* (1963), and *Maladrón* (1969)—for this work, but I also refer to earlier novels as I read the many cumulative references in the sketch.

Redemption is not entirely alien to the earlier novels *Hombres de maíz* and *Los ojos de los enterrados*. Instead, their redemption is more secular. The conclusions of these previous novels posit a deliverance from economic and political exploitation. In *Hombres de maíz* the image of a utopic family of ants carrying corn after the harvest conveys the idea that the world is restored: “Viejos, niños, hombres y mujeres, se volvían hormigas después de la cosecha, para acarrear el maíz; hormigas, hormigas, hormigas,

hormigas...” (281) (Old folk, young folk, men and women, they all became ants after the harvest, to carry home the maize: ants, ants, ants, ants...” (Martin *Men* 306)). That sacred crop, corn, is no longer exploited for profit but instead is used for subsistence. In *Los ojos de los enterrados* the projected day of justice is when “ya podían cerrar los ojos los enterrados que esperaban el día de la justicia” (492) (the interred waiting for the day of justice could finally close their eyes). Although this goal is not fully realized by the novel’s conclusion, the hopeful prophesy of that day coming ends the novel.

In both these novels redemption is collective: restoration of the sacred order for the men of maize, redress for the many buried seeking justice. And, although the collective is not described in religious terms, Christian tones course through the narratives. The selling of corn violates sacred codes (even though these codes are constructed as Maya, the framing is Christian). Likewise, *Los ojos de los enterrados* refers to a day of judgment, part of the revolution led by Octavio Sansur. And Juambo, in his interaction with his mother, connects this revolution with Christianity in the syncretic trinitarian formula—“En el nombre del Padre, ¡chos!, del Hijo ¡chos!, y del Espíritu Santo, ¡moyón, con!” (161) (In the name of the Father, ¡chos!, the Son ¡chos!, and the Holy Spirit, ¡moyón, con!). But neither novel speaks as directly to the messianic meaning of redemption, a spiritual reunification with God, as *Mulata de tal* does in its final pages.

Mulata de tal presents an analytical difficulty in addition to the one posed by its multiple story lines and fantastical characters, and that is that the novel ultimately switches direction. A community of devils—Mayan devils—is set against the Christian devil. A barren couple—Catar(l)ina Zabala and Celestino Yumí—seek power and,

alongside another character Mulata de Tal, violate numerous Christian sacraments. These characters (devil factions, Yumí, Zabala, Mulata de Tal) disappear or die within the chaos of the apocalypse, however, and its sole survivor is the priest, Padre Chimalpín. In the previous chapter I explain how the story of the end of days metamorphizes into a story of beginning and fellowship. The priest's memory of children singing for their holy communion and the happiness they experience suggest the ultimate communion: heaven. While the image is one of community—a multitude of children singing—the narration of Padre Chimalpín is singular as he is the only Tierrapaulitan still alive. Both Padre Chimalpín and the narrator of the song that the children sing—"Yo" (I)—are individuals and the fellowship experienced is directly with God, and personal.

I read *El árbol de la cruz* as a continuation of *Mulata de tal*'s final pages and its focus on a single character's relationship to God. I'll begin, as Asturias does, with

Anti, el guerrero, Anti-Dios, Contra-Cristo, Anti-humano,
Anti-pueblo (3)

(Anti, the warrior, Anti-God, Counter-Christ, Anti-human,
Anti-pueblo)

Anti is a warrior, and his political power is infinite. In this introduction his name, Anti, also serves as a prefix in the catalogue of his enemies (Dios, Cristo, humano, pueblo, familia) immediately establishing the theological nature of the text, much like the conclusion of *Mulata de tal*. This beginning, in a sketch provocatively titled *El árbol de la cruz*, suggests that Anti is alienated from God, but also from humanity and from the concept of the people, el pueblo. He opposes fellowship with man, with community, just as he opposes communion with God.

In the sketch the political power of Anti and his alienation from God are combined. As governor, Anti

ejercía el más anti de los poderes, en aquel anti-país, anti-nación, en períodos presidenciales anti-tiempo, porque su gobierno contra todo y contra todos no tenía fin, era antifin (3).

(exercised the most anti- of powers, in that anti-country, anti-nation, in presidential periods of anti-time, because his government against everything and everyone was without end, it was anti-end).

The description is simple, absurd. Anti, who is anti-everything, rules with anti-powers in an anti-country and anti-nation. His governance is anti-time, and without end. His is an absolute, fantastical dictatorship.¹ As sovereign, his anti-power permeates everything and is endless.

As sovereign power, he is like God. In this first part of the sketch Anti's separation from and absolute opposition to God is emphasized alongside his rejection of humanity.

Si, como Dios, este anti-él, está en todas partes, él, que es anti-tirano, porque es más que tirano, goza de la ubicuidad de la tiranía, y está también en todas partes. Inconcebible, él o yo, porque si no yo dejaría de ser único. ¿Y él? ¿por qué él? Jamás. Anti-él, como soy, lo haré desaparecer (4).

(If, like God, the anti-he, is everywhere, he, the one that is the anti-tyrant, because he's more than a tyrant, enjoying the ubiquity of tyranny, he is also everywhere.

Inconceivable, he or I, because if not then I would stop being unique. And him? Why him? Never. Anti-him, as I am, I will make him disappear.)²

Anti's power is limitless, like God's, and he declares "el fin de la Era Cristiana, y el inicio de la ERA Anti-Era, sin más anuncio que la quema de millones de Cristos, cruces y crucificados, Ecce-Homos y Cristos yacentes" (4) (The end of the Christian Era, and the beginning of the Anti-Era ERA, with no more announcement then the burning of millions of Christs, crosses and crucifieds, Ecce-Homos and budding Christs).³

While this sketch is extreme with its infinite list of antitheses, this sort of word and concept play is prevalent in Asturias's novels. Exceptional, however, is Asturias's immediate fusion of politics and theology in a single character. The relation between politics and religion is present in other novels—Candanga and the Catholic Church's twisted politics of reproduction in *Mulata de tal*, for example, and the Catholic Church's front for the dictatorship in *El Señor Presidente*.⁴ Anti, however, is an individual, not an institution, and the sketch's emphasis is on his intimate connection with God.

This intimacy is a negative one and Anti's opposition to everything begins with his opposition to God. He vows to destroy the only "Anti-Anti que existe, Dios y Hombre, antítesis inadmisibile, mimetismo de mestizo, de divino mestizo en el que hay el anti-Dios, si se dice hombre, y el anti-Hombre si se dice Dios" (4) (Anti-Anti that exists, God and Man, inadmissible antithesis, mestizo mimesis, divine mestizo in which exists anti-God, if one says man, and anti-Man if one says God). Anti's target is a fusion of God and Man, a divine mixture that he describes as a replica of the mestizo. Instead of the mestizo celebrated by Asturias in his writings about Latin American literature, or the mulatto/as of *Los ojos de los enterrados* and *Mulata de tal*, Asturias has created a divine mestizo of God and Man, replacing the racial Other with a divine one.

Anti's auto-de-fé consists of destroying and burning all of God's defenseless images—more than 36,000 wooden Christs and a million smaller ones. His only opposition, his enemy, is his concubine, Animanta. She longs for the Christs he has destroyed and pleads with him. She addresses him as Daimon, and although the Greek word for demon is Daimôn, Anti has none of the ethnic and racial markers associated with Candanga or the Maya demons that Asturias created in *Mulata de tal*.⁵ Because she

opposes him he has her killed with an arrow. When she dies her arms fall open to form a cross, opposing him even as she is defeated. He tries to destroy this bodily image of the cross by folding her arms over her chest

pero ella acaso con un resto de vida los volvió a abrir y la rigidez evitó que de nuevo él deshiciera aquella cruz, formada por un cuerpo de mujer, y tuvo la visión de una serpiente que subía por el cuerpo desnudo de Animanta, hija de la luz. Con los brazos rígidos abiertos, nadando Santo-Cristo, se perdió en el mar (7).

(but with perhaps a bit of life she opened them again and the rigidity prevented him from undoing that cross, formed by the body of a woman, and he had a vision of a serpent that climbed up the naked body of Animanta, daughter of light. With her arms spread rigidly open, a swimming Saint Christ, she became lost in the sea.)

Her corpse, like all of the cadavers of the “anti-país, anti-nación,” is thrown into the ocean, metaphorically uniting the female body, the cross and the sea (7).

Animanta and Anti’s separation ends the first part, the separation of heterosexual couples also being a common Asturian theme. Their natures are contrary and before her death, Animanta and Anti’s oppositional union is described in a single sentence:

“Maridado con Animanta, mezcla de animal y manta, siempre parpadeante y afligida, era tan espantoso copular con aquel ser venático, antitodo y guerrero” (5) (Wedded to Animanta, mixture of animal and manta, ever flickering and afflicted, it was so awful copulating with that mad, anti-everything and warrior being). The phrasing is awkward, confusing because it transitions from a description of Anti, to a description of Animanta, to a reflection of their life together. This is also because part of the description of Anti has been crossed out, recovered by Aline Janquart in a transcription of the manuscript as “de esperma helado, glacial—de beso helado, glacial” (of frozen, glacial sperm—of frozen, glacial kisses) (46-7). That sexual description is recuperated at the end of the

chapter, when Anti has Animanta killed—“Su ira helada como su esperma” (7) (his rage frozen, like his sperm). These descriptions suggest a characteristic common to many Asturian heterosexual couples: their infertility. The sexual alienation evidenced in the iciness of Anti’s sperm affirms their separation as a couple and mirror Anti’s own separation from God.

Animanta’s description of her body during and following her murder is similarly suppressed. Anti’s vision of a serpent “que subía por el cuerpo desnudo de Animanta” (that slithered up Animanta’s nude body) recalls the female symbolism of *Mulata de tal*. It is followed by a description of her body as “bella como una fruta dorada, le abría en el cuello la carótida para chuparle la sangre, mientras un sapo le *comía* devoraba el sexo y dos *alacranes* escorpiones corrían por sus senos dándose batalla” (italics in the original, 64, perhaps referencing Asturias’s process of word selection) (beautiful as a golden fruit, he opened her carotid in her neck to suck out her blood, while a toad *ate* devoured her sex and two *scorpions* scorpions ran about battling on her breast). This description, crossed out by Asturias, is also reminiscent of the sexual violence and sacrilege of religious rites in *Mulata de tal*, and further marks the division between female and male.

Anti’s dominion on his island surrounded by the sea is absolute and his edict—the absolute eradication of crosses—is enforced. Anti’s opposition to God thereby extends to the cross, and, through the body of Animanta, to the female. The cross, as representative of Christ/God, and the female body are one in the sketch. This connection between the female body and the cross is reminiscent of *Mulata de tal*, where the female body and land are connected through visual images and blasphemed in a series of perverted rites. The image of the snake coursing up Animanta’s body also recalls the serpentine

movement of the earth in *Mulata de tal*. The accumulated meanings (female body, serpent, land) from *Mulata de tal* merge with the meanings in *El árbol de la cruz* (female body, serpent, sea, cross) to construct a feminine Other that Anti opposes as the final step of Anti's separation from God. The separation began with the opening lines, continued in his inquisition of crosses, and culminated with the murder and expulsion of Animanta. Thus, the violent division of the heterosexual couple is a material repetition of the alienation from God.

In the second part Anti consults with his warriors about a sea-being that resembles a manta (covering), “una manta temeraria que navega cerca de nuestras costas. Se la contempla ir y venir sobre las aguas, como una sábana blanca, y recoger los cadáveres que nosotros arrojamos, envolverlos como un sudario y desaparecer con ellos” (8) (a fearful manta that swims close to our shores. One can see her come and go on the waters, like a white sheet, and collect the cadavers that we throw into the sea, wrap them up like a shroud and disappear with them).⁶ Animanta functions as a shelter for these dead. Her name is toyed with constantly—the play between covering and sea creature, her function as a shroud, the sort of tmesis of “ánima” contained within her name (ánima, furthermore, refers to the soul that has passed in popular religiosity, thereby connecting her figure with the dead she bears).⁷

Additionally, Anti himself recognizes his name in hers, “Estúpido de mí, si una letra le faltaba para ser lo que era, una Anti, Anti-Anti, su verdadero nombre era Antimanta” (8) (Stupid me, since only one letter was missing to spell out who she was, an Anti, an Anti-Anti, her true name is Antimanta). Although she is Anti's antithesis, her

compassionate, enveloping nature is able to hold his as well. In this way her name may also refer to the Christian significance of shroud as a sacred “shelter.”

As a sheet-shroud Animanta collects the discarded corpses, and Anti sends a soldier-spy to discover where she takes them. When the spy fails to return he sends out twelve rowers who report that she takes the corpses to a far off island, and deposits them in the tombs of ruins covered with crosses and Christ-figures.⁸ The sea is populated with more islands than the one under Anti’s domain and the ruins suggest a past preceding Anti’s anti-nación. This other island, with its crosses and Christ-figures, is another affront to Anti’s absolute opposition to Christ and God.

Anti next sends a commando of frog-men to investigate the water below the island and the one able to return is barely able to speak of what he saw, a Christ on the cross. But

No un cristo como los nuestros. Un pulpo. Un pulpo gigantesco de ocho tentáculos de 70 metros cada uno, clavados en una cruz alta como catedral, de seis y seis brazos en abanico a cada lado (14).⁹

(Not a christ like ours. An octopus. A giant octopus with eight tentacles, each 70 meters long, nailed to a tall cross like a cathedral, six arms by six arms fanned out on either side.)

The octopus’ struggle to free himself from the cross occasions numerous earthquakes on the island above it. However, this island is not quite an island but Animanta: “una isla viva que ya se extendía, ya se recogía, que no era tal isla, sino una manta” (15) (a living island that expanded and contracted, it wasn’t quite an island, but a sheet). Again, the female body is linked to land, and, as in *Mulata de tal*, it is not firm ground, but land that quakes and pulsates.

Animanta cradles the dead, who are then inexplicably bound to an octopus on the cross. The octopus is a Christ figure struggling for release. Though fraught—the text does not explain if this is an enactment of Christ’s suffering—the image seems to suggest the redemption of the dead that Anti has thrown into the sea, and Animanta as a compassionate mother-shroud, weathering earthquakes with her collection of corpses.

Anti and his second in command discuss the difficulty of their enemy, and here is where the sketch’s theological importance is evident. Cucucucún, leader of the frog-men soldiers reflects:

–Qué problema, absolutísimamente nuevo, sin precedentes militares: desembarcar en una isla que se encoge y se alarga.

A[nti] añadió, pensativo:

–¡Qué problema militar, problema religioso: un pulpo en la cruz! Sólo faltaba una Magdalena sirena, un San Juan pescado gato, y un San Pedro pez-espada. (15)

(–What an absolutely novel problem, without military precedent: disembark on an island that shrinks and stretches.

A[nti] added, pensive:

–Not a military problem, a religious problem: an octopus on a cross! The only thing missing is Magdalene mermaid, a Saint John catfish, a Saint Peter swordfish.)

Anti decides on a treaty, a brokered peace that would permit the island cult of crosses and Christs and the “Jesucristo de las aguas profundas,” (Jesus Christ of the deep waters) in exchange for the prohibition of crosses, crucifixions and the dead on Anti’s firm land (18). Anti’s commander, the giant Cucucucún, refuses to understand and instead desires to capture the island and tear the octopus from the cross. But he is abruptly transformed into a tunnel, perforated from back to chest by a train in a bizarre interruption of

modernity into the sketch's mythical time.¹⁰ Anti's truce is unrealized and Anti is left alone.

The fifth part begins with Anti's many questions for Animanta as she carries him off. Whether he is dead and Animanta is carrying him off or if this is his dream is unclear, but the two have come together again. He asks what he can return to her—life, voice, light—all that he took from her. He asks what she can give back to him—her death, her silence, dusk—all that he gave her. Her response is immediately intimate, as she calls him Daimon and reminds him of their nights together. Their reunion is dreamlike:

Una mancha de luna navegaba a favor del movimiento de las olas con un guerrero dormido. La ondulación del oleaje repetíase en el olear del gigantesco pez-sudario que recogía de las aguas embravecidas o tranquilas los cadáveres de los muertos de cada día arrojados al mar y que ahora lo llevaba a él...¿dormido? ¿despierto?

–Daimon (soñaba la voz de ella) [...]

–Te dejé vestida de novia, vestida de blanco...

–Una novia loca, con el traje de bodas hecho de manta...

–Y de quién, sino de ti, Animanta, nacen las mitologías.
(20)

(A moon-stain with a sleeping warrior floated in the direction of the waves. The rippling of the waves repeated itself in the rippling of the giant fish-shroud that collected from rough or calm waters the cadavers of the dead that were thrown into the sea each day and that now carried him...asleep? awake?

“Daimon” (he dreamt her voice) [...]

“When I left you, you were dressed as a bride, dressed in white...”

“A crazy bride, with a wedding gown made of manta...”

“And from whom, only from you Animanta, are mythologies born.”)

Anti is no longer contrary, no longer waging war on Animanta and crosses. Their reunion is accompanied by the movement of the sea and the image of Animanta as a virginal bride. Animanta, more than any of Asturias's female characters, is correlated to the sea. This connection—between the sea, the female—is articulated by Animanta in her response to Daimon/Anti's statement about the origin of mythologies:

—No sólo de mí, Daimon, las mitologías nacen de la mujer, y pude ser Sirena-pájaro, Sirena-pezu, Tritona, pero me quedé con el traje de loca, de novia vestida de manta, partido el corazón, a la orilla del mar y a la orilla de Cristo, porque en él y sólo en él, Señor de la vida, la muerte toca fondo (21).

(“Not just from me, Daimon, mythologies are born from woman, and I could have been a Mer-bird, a Mer-fish, Tritona, but I stuck with my crazy woman's gown, bride dressed of manta, with a broken heart, on the shore of the sea and the shore of Christ, because in him and only in him, Lord of life, does death hit bottom.”)

Animanta embodies the mythology of all of Asturias's heroic female characters. She inherits the water-qualities of female characters in other novels—Mayarí who is the national martyr sacrificing herself in her bridal gown to the Río Motagua in *El papa verde*, the unattainable mermaid-love interest of union leader Lino Lucero in *Viento fuerte*. Anti and Animanta's reunion, too, is a repetition of the longings and reunions of the many Asturian pairs: María Tecún and Goyo Yic, Octavio Sansur and Rosa Gavidia, Celestino Yumi and Catar(l)ina Zabala. Significantly the only product of their union is myth, another origin.

Animanta becomes the central figure of the sketch, and thwarts Anti's ability to be contrary. She is sea and land at the same time, an island “mezcla de animal y manta” (5) (mixture of animal and covering). The feminine sea-space of Animanta overcomes

Anti's firmness, she envelops him in her shroud and Asturias's language is vaginal, simultaneously erotic and maternal:

En los pliegues y repliegues jabonosos de música y sueño,
confundidos con los repliegues y pliegues de la manta que
lo envolvía, cuán pequeñito sentíase Anti, el guerrero, qué
no ser nada (21).¹¹

(In the slippery pleats and folds of music and dream,
confused by the folds and pleats of the manta that swaddled
him, Anti felt so small, the warrior, as if he were nothing.)

Anti is so consumed that when Animanta tries to wake him he replies “—No, no quiero despertar. Estoy tan a gusto dentro de ti” (“No, I don't want to wake up. It feel so right inside you”).

Anti cedes to the softness of Animanta. This surrender suggests a return to the utopic female, a sort of fluid earth. Animanta shelters Anti, because she has become the island and carries him in his sleep towards the crucified octopus. He is content, better like this than as his old self—“perseguidor endiablado de muertos y cristos” (diabolical pursuer of the dead and of christs)—because it is

Mejor dormido, fuera y dentro de Animanta, isla y manta,
mejor deshecho en un sueño que te permite existir, si existir
es ese tu chocar con lo inalcanzable, disgregar tu ser en un
transmundo coloidal, sin disolverte. Doble, doble estar,
adentro y afuera de Animanta (22).

(Better asleep, outside and inside Animanta, island and
manta, better undone in a dream that lets you exist, if
existing is this coming up against the unattainable, this
parsing of your being in a colloidal afterlife, without
dissolving you. Double, double-being, inside and outside
of Animanta).

Anti is content with this double-being, double location, experiencing communion with (inside of) and separated from (outside of) Animanta.

“Doblestar,” double-being, is Asturias's neologism, but one having roots in a much earlier novel. The verb, combined with the adjective “mal,” appears in the second

line of *El Señor presidente*, describing the tolling of the bells at dawn: “[...] maldoblestar de la luz en la sombra, de la sombra en la luz” (7) (maldoblestar of light in the shadows, of shadow in light). In the 1946 novel, as John Kraniauskas explains, the verb multiplies the significance of the bell tolls (referred to with the verb “doblar”) as an agent of evil, as a source of sound, and, metaphorically as the carrier of both the political and the aesthetic in Asturias’s fiction (735). But the sounds of the bells also carry with them light and dark, and it is that double being—“de la luz en la sombra, de la sombra en la luz”—that is also present in *El árbol de la cruz*. “Sombra,” in Asturias’s lexicon, always refers to evil. On the one hand, Anti’s communion with Animanta represents Anti’s union with God, with light. Asturias even suppressed a line from this quote, “en su sagrado vientre” (in her sacred womb), that definitively equates the female with the divine in the sketch (198). Still, Anti celebrates both union with that sacred light and separation from it with the verb “doblestar.”

Anti’s subsequent encounter with the Christ-octopus is terrifying. Its tentacles are covered with suckers where the many dead fuse with it: “Abrazados al pulpo ensagrentado en raptos de entrega total, susurrando sin parar: <<¡En tus llagas escóndeme! ¡En tus llagas escóndeme!>> aquél les aplicaba sus benditas llagas-ventosas para sorberles el pensamiento y el alma” (23) (Clinging to the bloody octopus in rapturous moments of complete surrender, endlessly whispering, “Hide me in your wounds! Hide me in your wounds!” and that being applied its blessed wounds-suckers in order to suck out their thought and soul).¹² Anti is carried closer and closer by the waves to this Christ-octopus. He resists at first but then “-<<En tus llagas escóndeme!...>> –oyó Anti, el guerrero, una de sus oraciones de niño—escóndeme, Jesús

mío, en la llaga de tu costado, en las llagas de tus pies, en las llagas de tus manos...” (25)
 (“Hide me in your wounds!” heard Anti, the warrior, one of his childhood prayers, “hide me, Jesus, in the wound at your side, in the wounds of your feet, in the wounds of your hands...”). The double-being is expressed here in Anti’s simultaneous attraction to and rejection of the Christ-octopus.

Anti is thus moved away from Animanta and apparently overcome by the animal.

He tries to escape,

Pero era una lucha sin esperanza y en su total derrota, aceptó que debía entregarse, él, Anti, el guerrero, a su enemigo, a Cristo en la odiosa imagen de un Cristo pulpo, todos los brazos de todos los cristos clavados y otros tentáculos haciendo de piernas y pies, clavados abajo. Araña monstruosa. Arbol crucificado por las raíces. Gelatinoso, llagado de corales. No cerró los ojos. Sentíase lanzado, impelido hacia los brazos del pulpo que se retorcián en un supremo y último esfuerzo por liberarse de las clavaduras. Pero no, no chocó con cuerpo alguno. El pulpo había desaparecido y en lugar de golpearse contra él, penetró a una sombra de polvo de tiniebla diluída en el agua, tan exacta al Cristo-pulpo que parecía el pulpo mismo (26).

(But it was a hopeless struggle, and in the totality of his defeat he accepted that he should surrender, he, Anti, the warrior, to his enemy, to Christ in the hateful image of an octopus-Christ, all of the arms of all of the nailed christos and other tentacles playing the part of legs and feet, nailed below. Monstruous spider. A tree crucified by its roots. Gelatinous, coral wounded. He didn’t close his eyes. He felt that he was thrown, driven into the octopus’ arms, arms that flung about in a supreme and ultimate attempt to free themselves from the nails’ piercings. But it wasn’t so, he didn’t collide with any entity. The octopus had disappeared and instead of crashing into it, he penetrated a dusty shadow of darkness diluted in water, so like the Christ-octopus that it seemed just like it.)

Strikingly, Anti’s double-being is not resolved. There is no definitive communion— either with the Christ-octopus or otherwise—and Animanta has been pulled away from

him, in another direction. Aline Janquart writes: “estamos a todas luces en una especie de Nuevo Testamento apócrifo, un nuevo Evangelio según Miguel Ángel, en el cual la Pasión de Cristo se desarrolla a veinte mil leguas bajo los mares...” (“Reproducción facsimilar,” 240) (we are clearly in a sort of apocryphal New Testament, a new gospel according to Miguel Ángel, in which the Passion of Christ takes place twenty leagues below the sea...). Anti is witness to the Christ-octopus’ suffering but there is no subsequent union with the divine. Anti is alone again, and more importantly, spiritually lost in the murky shadows of the deep.

In the sketch’s final lines Anti is caught in the whirlpool with the Christ-octopus in a dream/nightmare until he wakes up. The dream is, cryptically, another unrealized communion, this time in the form of the host, or, possibly, the Viaticum: the Eucharist of last rites. “Y todo su sueño, su pesadilla hecha galleta, una galleta salobre que le ponían en la boca al despertar, para que la mordiera” (And all his dream, his nightmare turned wafer, a brackish wafer they put on his tongue when he woke, so that he would bite it). The saltiness serves as a reminder of the sea, of Animanta. He tries to reject the reality surrounding him, but he can’t, searches for his dream amongst the pillows, but doesn’t find it. The sketch ends with a comma following his final actions: “Juntó los párpados, apretadamente, clavó la cabeza entre los almohadones en busca del sueño, seguir soñando, pero inútil, el sueño es como la fortuna, se niega al que lo [ansía,] y va al que no le llama. Se echó los almohadones encima,” (He closed his eyelids, tightly, dove between the pillows in search of his dream, to keep dreaming, but it was useless, dreams are like fortune, denied to those who seek them and called to those who don’t. He covered himself with pillows,). This anti-conclusion repeats the hesitation for a

definitive outcome of salvation, mirroring the hesitation in narrating a definitive historical outcome in previous novels like *Los ojos de los enterrados*. Thus, Asturias hesitates, even in the final lines of his final text.

Beginnings: Lo mestizo

*apocalypse is an
emphatically inclusive
mythical history: Christ's
statement, "I am the Alpha
and Omega, the beginning
and the end, the first and the
last" echoes throughout
Revelation.
Lois Parkinson Zamora 34*

The title, *El árbol de la cruz* (The Tree of the Cross), suggests, however, that endings are not the sole preoccupation of the sketch.¹³ The Cross itself is a symbol for the mystical union with Christ, or communion. But the Tree of the Cross is the precursor to that communion, and its origin is in the earth. When Anti and the Christ-octopus lose themselves in the deep the description is that of a "Árbol crucificado por las raíces" (tree crucified by its roots). This image tangles up endings with beginnings.

The cross of Christ is not the only meaning for "cruz." "Cruz" is, literally, the intersection of two lines, and, as Alain Sicard notes, "No resulta entonces excesivo decir que el personaje de Anti lleva, en su nombre, esa cruz que se niega a ver y que sólo la regresión onírica al seno de Animanta, a través de la figura del pulpo crucificado, le permitirá contemplar y reconocer" (290) (It's not excessive to say that the character Anti carries, in his name, that cross that he refuses to see and that only in the dreamlike regression to Animanta's breast, through the figure of the crucified octopus, will he be permitted to see and recognize). The cross is also referenced in Asturias's 1969 novel

about the conquest: *Maladrón*. In that novel, “cruz” is not as the cross of the Christ but the cross of the thief crucified alongside Jesus, Gestas:

¡Menos ángeles y más tejuelos de oro! ¡Menos indios
conversos y más esclavos en las minas! ¡Menos Cristos y
más cruces del Maladrón, Señor de todo lo creado en el
mundo de la codicia, desde que el hombre es hombre! (68)

(Fewer angels and more gold plate! Fewer Indian converts
and more slaves in the mines! Fewer Christs and more
crosses of Maladrón, Lord of all that’s created by greed in
the world, since man is man!)

Thus, the cross is not just the domain of Christ, but also of the others who died by crucifixion and embody the venal sin of greed.¹⁴

Later in *Maladrón* another meaning of “cruz” becomes important, gestating in the body of María Trinidad (Mary of the Trinity), also known by *Titil Ic*.¹⁵ She accompanies the Spanish explorers and conquerors as an interpreter and is the mother of the first mestizo:

La india se estremeció al oír el habla de dos razas en una
sola voz que le decía:

—¡Cruce de cruces en tu vientre...la cruz de Cristo y la cruz
del viento, el trueno, el relámpago y el rayo y todo a
comenzar en tu ser habitado! (109)

(The india trembled upon hearing the language of races in a
single voice that said to her:

“Intersection of crosses in your womb...the cross of Christ
and the cross of wind, thunder, lightning and thunderbolt
and all that’s beginning in your occupied being!”)

The complicated amalgam of the Christian cross and the cross of races recalls the sketch’s only use of the word mestizo, articulated as Anti’s enemy: a divine fusion of God and Man. This adjective, “mestizo,” is the only hint of race/ethnicity in the sketch wherein Asturias’s typical nods to Guatemalan geography, speech and Maya heritage are

notably absent.¹⁶ The sketch's title, *El árbol de la cruz*, could thus refer, additionally, to the origin brought about by the Conquest.

The sketch is so brief that it is impossible to offer a more complete reading of the beginnings and endings addressed by Asturias. However, the novel's epigraph, "Philosophes, vous êtes de votre Occident," is provocative. The quote is from Arthur Rimbaud's poem *Une saison en enfer* (A season in hell), in the section "Mauvais sang" (Bad blood). In Aline Janquart's transcription and annotation of the manuscript she remarks on how this epigraph introduces a double dichotomy: that of philosophers/poets and Western/non-Western. She notes that

Asturias pertenece obviamente al segundo grupo: es un poeta, y no se reconoce como <<occidental>>. Al ocaso (sentido segundo de la palabra <<occidente>>) de la filosofía, a su incapacidad de dar cuenta del mundo, se opone la potencia de la poesía, creadora de mundos nuevos ("Reproducción facsimilar," 32).

(Asturias is obviously part of the second group: he is a poet, and he doesn't recognize himself as "Western." As the sun sets (second meaning of the word, "West") on philosophy, on its incapacity to make sense of the world, the power of poetry rises up, creator of new worlds.)

What is unclear is whether there is a representative "Occident" in the sketch that Asturias is responding to, or whether the sketch as a whole is conceived as a creative response to those philosophers. In either case, Asturias's creative play with both the European and Maya symbolism of the cross—of Christ, of Gestas, of contact, of the female—seems beyond the dichotomy of West/Other.¹⁷ Indeed, given my earlier discussion about Asturias's complicated position as *ladino* and self-promotion as Maya this tension of West/Other resonated with Asturias himself.¹⁸

I read *El árbol de la cruz* through Asturias's other novels in order to highlight how his symbolism accumulates meaning with repetition. *Lo maya*, Asturias's created

origin, makes a final appearance in this text even as the narrative drives, asymptotic, towards the finality of divine communion. Lois Parkinson Zamora, in writing about other authors' fixation on the apocalypse, states that they

present dilemmas which they cannot, and do not want to resolve: They believe neither in answers nor in endings. In their very different ways, each uses the mythic vision and narrative structures of the apocalypse to embody this postmodern skepticism about the very possibility of conclusion (5).

Asturias's dilemma is similar, as he seems unable to conclude. Instead he alternately grasps for an origin, and for an end, that he ultimately finds impossible.

Asturias's last text ends with the frustration of the insomniac. Anti covers himself with pillows in an attempt to reclaim a dream denied. The inconclusive comma is similar to Asturias's use of ellipses in his 1960s novels. *Los ojos de los enterrados* flips between definitive revolutionary triumph and suspended hope while *Mulata de tal* transitions between an apocalyptic nuclear fallout and a rapturous first communion. Asturias's use of the comma, of ellipses, expresses his hesitance in definite conclusions. But his novels' endings also hint at new beginnings, dreams begun anew.

¹ Asturias's famous novel of Guatemalan dictatorship is *El Señor presidente*. Fictional, it references the Estrada Cabrera dictatorship of Asturias's childhood and adolescence, and

is confined exclusively to the labyrinths of central Guatemala City. Although not explored here, Asturias's meditation on politics and religion is provocative, because Anti in some sense represents the impossible realization of a secular state (Carl Schmitt remarks on the theological underpinnings of modern theory of the state in *Political Theology* (36)).

² This is a difficult translation as "he" and "anti-he" seem to switch referents.

³ "Ecce homo" is from the gospel of St. John, when Pilates presents Jesus to the crowd and judges that will condemn and crucify him. It could also refer to Nietzsche's work, a provocative connection that is not within the scope of this dissertation.

⁴ For a political analysis of the state and the Catholic Church in the novel see John Kraniauskas, "Para una lectura política de *El Señor Presidente*: notas sobre el <<maldobestar>> textual" (734-745).

⁵ The original Greek, daimon, refers to a "deified spirit with supernatural qualities" but in the first translations of the Old Testament was used to refer exclusively to evil spirits (Van Scott 83). A Catholic monk named Damián also appears in *Maladrón (Epopéya de los Andes Verdes)* (68). There are many similarities between the 1969 novel and the undated sketch.

⁶ The image of a sheet also resonates with the last part of *Mulata de tal*. The sexton, after his visit to the maiden-that-turns-into-a-serpent escapes to the streets of Tierrapaulita clad only in a sheet. In the final chapter his name is sometimes substituted for sheet, "Sábana."

⁷ Aline Janquart classifies Animanta's name as polysemic, and explores the aspects pertaining to manta ray (sea creature) and manta (covering). She stretches a bit to consider the "praying mantis" as another animal "avatar" for Animanta, but her overall analysis discards these diversions in favor of the combination of woman and fish, yet another link between the female and the sea ("Un inédito" 266-268).

⁸ This, too, suggests *Mulata de tal* and the ruins surrounding Tierrapaulita.

⁹ This is the only description of the octopus with eight tentacles, in subsequent descriptions it has twelve, perhaps in reference to the twelve apostles.

¹⁰ This is also reminiscent of *Mulata de tal*, where the all-time of myth is broken by references to modernity: photographs, robots and hospitals.

¹¹ In a footnote to the manuscript Janquart asserts that the diminutive marks Anti's infantilization and return to the maternal (184). But, in a variation, Asturias writes the "manta amante que lo envolvía," emphasizing the sexual nature of the encounter (192).

¹² This is one of many biblical citations in the text, particularly, as Aline Janquart notes, to the Book of Psalms ("Reproducción facsimilar," 204).

¹³ Stories about the origin of Jesus' cross are not part of the Bible but are common in Spanish medieval literature and in popular religiosity (for example, the planting of a tree next to the chapel as a symbol of the cross). In Felipe Calderón's texts the wood is three or four-part, composed of palm, cypress, olive and cedar (Arellano 35). It is possible that Asturias draws on these texts, especially since *Mulata de tal* also has many medieval resonances, and further research is needed to flesh out these influences.

¹⁴ Jimena Sáenz notes Asturias literary preoccupation with Gestas (Mal Ladrón), and traces it back to his first work, *Leyendas de Guatemala* (224).

¹⁵ For an analysis of “Titil Ic,” meaning eclipse in K’iche’, see Lucrecia Méndez de Penedo, 37.

¹⁶ Aline Janquart’s annotations of the manuscript suggest possible references to *lo maya* in other works by Asturias, and to Maya ruins (see, for example, page 42 footnote 54, page 50 footnote 82 and page 230 footnote *). Still, none of the in-text references are overt, nor do they form an integral part of the plot.

¹⁷ Gerald Martin’s notes to his English translation of *Hombres de maíz* analyze earlier syncretic symbolism of the cross, drawing on an accounting of Maya and other Mesoamerican uses of that symbol (*Men of Maize*, 352).

¹⁸ Nicole Asquith, after summarizing the meaning of the section of the poem that Asturias has quoted, clarifies in a footnote that “‘Votre occident’ is ambivalent—the West of your philosophy but also of your privilege. It is ironically the colonizer’s success, his dominance in particular of the imaginative space, that confuses him” (307). It seems that Asturias, also occupying that Western philosophical space, was wholly unaware of the irony of his chosen epigraph.

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