LOCAL COMMUNITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD:
MIGUEL ÁNGEL ASTURIAS, OTTO RENÉ CASTILLO, LUIS DE LIÓN
AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF REPRESENTING THE GUATEMALAN PUEBLO

Kerri Anderson Muñoz

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Romance Languages (Spanish American).

Chapel Hill
2006

Approved by:
Advisor: María A. Salgado
Reader: Glynis S. Cowell
Reader: Gregory Dawes
Reader: Juan Carlos González Espitia
Reader: David Mora Marín
ABSTRACT

KERRI ANDERSON MUÑOZ: Local Community in a Global World: Miguel Ángel Asturias, Otto René Castillo, Luis de Lión and the Problematics of Representing the Guatemalan Pueblo
(Under the direction of María A. Salgado)

This dissertation examines the effects of global powers upon the local communities of Guatemala at three points in the twentieth century as they are portrayed by Miguel Ángel Asturias, Otto René Castillo and Luis de Lión. Each author denounces his historical moment and each one offers a solution to the problems they present. The primary theorists used to guide this study are Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Edward Said and Raymond Williams.

The introductory chapter serves two purposes. First, it offers a concise overview of the study as a whole. Second, it clarifies theoretical terminology that is used throughout the dissertation.

The second chapter, “Spatial Disparities in Miguel Ángel Asturias’s Viento fuerte,” examines the devastation wrought within Guatemala by the U.S.-based United Fruit Company. This chapter studies the degree to which cultural identity is threatened in the face of economic imperialism.

“Creating a Space for Love and Revolution: The Poetry of Otto René Castillo” is the title of the third chapter. This section reads the militant poet’s work as a call to action. His conversationalist poetry is approached as a protest against the capitalist world in
which he lived; his love poetry is interpreted as an articulation of the Socialist Revolution that Castillo posed as a solution to the problems triggered by the capitalist system.

The fourth and final chapter, “Spatializing Ladinoization: Luis de Lión’s El tiempo principia en Xibalbá,” reads de Lión’s novel as a rejection of the colonial process of ladinoization that he saw as leading to the demise of his Mayan culture. This chapter shows that essential to the novelist’s argument is his criticism of the role the Mayan themselves play in ladinoization and, by extension, the decay of their cultural heritage.

Finally, this dissertation draws the conclusion that even though each author is distinguished by his historical moment and political agendas, all three are united in their belief in the power of community to change the course of history.
To the three most significant men in my life: my grandfather, Peter Bitter, for his unending confidence in me; my father, Ronald Anderson, who would have been so proud; and my husband, Jorge Muñoz Ogáyar, without whose love and patience I never would have finished. Also, this is for my mother, Sharon Anderson, whose strength has been an inspiration to me always, and for my daughter, Estela, who simply could not care less about what I have been doing all this time.
Acknowledgements

Clearly, María A. Salgado is the backbone to this dissertation: her constant support and guidance, her knowledge and curiosity, and, most importantly, her friendship have been with me along every step of this process. I would like to thank my excellent committee, all of whom read with a fine-toothed comb and offered invaluable comments: Dr. Glynis Cowell, Dr. Greg Dawes, Dr. Juan Carlos González Espitia and Dr. David Mora Marín. Finally, I need to thank my friend Erica whose unconditional friendship has been a lovely and necessary retreat from academia throughout the years.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1 The Global World in a Local Community. ........................................... 1

1.2 Miguel Ángel Asturias’s *Viento fuerte*. ............................. 2

1.3 Otto René Castillo’s Poetry. .................................................. 7

1.4 Luis de Lión’s *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* .................. 10

2 Spatial Disparities in Miguel Ángel Asturias’s *Viento fuerte*. .......... 15

2.2 Political and Historical Context. ............................................. 16

2.3 Criticism and Genesis of *Viento fuerte*. ............................ 19

2.4 On the Disempowerment of *El libro del consejo*. ........... 22

2.5 Spatial Disparities. .............................................................. 36

2.6 Rewriting the Local Myth: A Conclusion. ............................ 49

3 Creating a Space for Love and Revolution: The Poetry of Otto René Castillo. ............................................................................. 52

3.2 Informing Words with Actions. .............................................. 53

3.3 Rewriting Social Change. ...................................................... 57

3.4 Rewriting Central American Poetics. .................................... 60

3.5 The Revolutionizing Power of Love. .................................... 69

3.6 Loving the Amada. .............................................................. 77

3.7 Loving the Pueblo. .............................................................. 84

3.8 Love-Born Sacrifice: A Conclusion. .................................... 91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spatializing Ladinoization: Luis de Lión’s <em>El tiempo principia en Xibalbá</em>.</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Nuevo Signo.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>The Cultural Space of Ladinoization.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Recounting the <em>Popul Vuh</em>.</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>On Discounting the <em>Popul Vuh</em>.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>The Prologue: The Beginning of the End.</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>The Severed Self of Pascual.</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Juan Caca and La Concha.</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>The Empowerment of the <em>Pueblo</em>: A Conclusion.</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conclusion: Local Community in a Global World.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
THE GLOBAL WORLD IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY

1.1 Introduction

The global world within the context of Guatemala has manifested itself in various forms, all of which are in dialogue with one another: U.S. imperialism, capitalism, socialism, ladinoization, and the list goes on. The penetration of the local spaces of Guatemala by outside, foreign institutions has consistently resulted in the economic exploitation of the poorer sectors and in fluctuating--or silenced--identities. This is not to say naively that there have not been any positive gains from this encounter because surely there have been even if one only points to the realm of sharing and shaping human knowledge. The degree to which the “bad” outweighs the “good,” however, has been a recurrent theme in Guatemalan literature ever since its independence from Spain in 1821.

In this dissertation, I examine the debilitating effects of global powers within Guatemala in the twentieth century as they are portrayed by three authors from that country: Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899-1974), Otto René Castillo (1936-1967), and Luis de Lión (1939-1984). As will be pointed out throughout this study, these writers and their works that I have chosen are varied in their ideological leanings. There is a unity among these writers, though, that makes sense of my having grouped them together. First, the works I have
chosen are windows to three very specific crises during Guatemala’s national history and they serve to offer documentation that counters the official annals. Second, each author problematizes a particular face of global power and so together they attest to its multiple forms. And third, all three propose a remedy to the problems they present, expressing what Dante Liano has called a “deseo rabioso de otra realidad” (La palabra 183).

I begin this introduction by clarifying my use of certain words: “global,” “local community” and “individual.” In the context of each author, I use the term “global” to refer to outside, foreign influences that disrupt local autonomy. The idea of “local community” has two faces: one, I use the phrase to refer to the current situation of the Guatemalan pueblo the authors are presenting / denouncing; two, I also use it to convey their visions of a better tomorrow. The word “individual” in the second and third chapters is used solely to convey an isolated and alienated existence. These brief explanations I have just given, though, do not suffice. Instead, it is necessary that I convey their meanings within the context of each author so that I can elicit their historical nuances, and I shall do so below.

1.2 Miguel Ángel Asturias’s Viento fuerte

The subject of my second chapter is Viento fuerte (1950), the first of what would later become Asturias’s banana trilogy. In this novel, the author denounces U.S. economic and cultural imperialism in Guatemala. Being an anti-imperialist novel, it is constructed upon a binary opposition that, as Edward Said has shown in Orientalism, cannot be anything but hierarchical. In this novel, the author presents a global world
brought about by the imperial system. It is a universe that thrives upon the unbalanced struggle between the exploiter and the exploited, with these roles lived out by the United States and Guatemala respectively. As a result, in *Viento fuerte*, Asturias does not problematize the coexistence of the Mayan and *ladino* populations in a fragmented Guatemala, a theme that motivates his neo-indigenista works. Instead, as Ángel Luis Morales writes, it is a “novela de las masas . . . de problemas colectivos, no de conflictos personales” (66): Guatemala is presented as suffering as a whole.

In *Viento fuerte*, the global world enters Guatemala via la Tropical Platanera, representing the U.S.-based United Fruit Company that first appeared in the Central American nation in 1870. Due to the economic and political ties that the Company formed with dictators such as Justo Rufino Barrios (1871-1885), Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), and Jorge Ubico Castañeda (1931-1944), United Fruit enjoyed increasingly unleashed access to Guatemala until it was finally slowed down by the 1944 Revolution. On the one hand, Asturias dedicates this novel to presenting the Company’s perpetually increasing economic influence that occurred under the aforementioned rulers. He accomplishes this by portraying a nation that is gradually being consumed by a foreign power. The author narrates this consumption in geographical terms when he elicits images of the Company’s enormous banana plantations, its construction of railways, and its appropriation of ports.

On the other hand, *Viento fuerte* is also a novel that tells of the imperial powers’ consumption of the Guatemalan people, examining “how the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and . . . were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture” (Said, *Culture*
13). Within this framework, Asturias pays attention to the effects suffered by the local community of Guatemala when the global world is forced upon it via U.S. imperialism. In order to communicate the depth to which imperialism had impinged upon the local population, I examine how Asturias uses the first chapter of his novel to subvert the sacred Mayan text -- El libro del consejo -- that he saw as foundational to Guatemala’s national identity. In his subversion, the author incorporates la Tropical Platanera and assigns to it the roles once played by the Mayan gods.

As an aside, and as I explain more fully in my chapter on Asturias, by focusing on this pre-Colombian myth, I am not ignoring the magnitude of the influence the author undoubtedly attributed to the Bible in Guatemala. As is well known, Asturias clearly recognized the dual cultures framed by the national borders. I highlight the Popol Vuh or El libro del consejo, however, for two reasons. First, I establish that the Mayan text is structured upon an ideology of community formed through dialogue. I then show that the central theme in Asturias’s new myth -- the myth that serves as the foundation to the society he depicts throughout the novel -- is a wanting of this community. The author problematizes this lacking to such a degree that its absence becomes as essential to his novel as community is to the Mayan myth. This binding parallel, however, cannot be read as accidental when his neo-indigenista works -- as well as his involved contact with the

---

1 In his controversial thesis, El problema social del indio (1923), Asturias demonstrates an ignorance that stems from the positivist thought of his day when he regards the Mayan as a degenerate, lazy race. After his exile in Paris in 1923, the author began to study the Mayan from an anthropological perspective under the guidance of George Reynaud, with whom he translated El libro del consejo (1939) from French into Spanish. From his studies and translation work, Asturias cultivated a deep concern for the Mayan and began to see them as an essential part of the Guatemalan identity. Breaking drastically from his thesis where he clamored for the Europeanization of the Mayan on biological and cultural levels, from Paris onward, Asturias was to propose a mestizaje that would incorporate the Mayan into the nation instead of erasing them from its map.
Mayan text--are considered. And so, when Asturias refers to the absence of community, he does so to speak implicitly of its presence in *El libro del consejo*.

My second reason for using *El libro del consejo* is that when Asturias subverts this pre-Colombian myth, he writes and warns of an unbreachable power of the United Fruit Company. He portrays it as having the ability to break temporal boundaries and touch Guatemala at its historical, indigenous core. As Roland Barthes has shown in *Mythologies*, through the medium of myth, history is transformed into nature. By converting the history of the United Fruit Company, then, into a myth, Asturias shows--and denounces--how the destruction caused by the imperial power had been naturalized and had gone uncontested.

As I have already stated, in studying Asturias’s new myth, I demonstrate how the author replaces the multiple Mayan gods with *la Tropical Platanera*, portrayed as a singular, omnipotent being that is responsible for the universe described in *Viento fuerte*. The author immediately establishes this responsibility upon opening his novel with images of the construction of a new world, a world that *la Tropical Platanera* is building. The manner in which Asturias narrates the beginning, however, also speaks of a deconstruction because the world is being created anew and not from nothingness: trees are being felled, hills are being chiseled, rivers rerouted. The deconstruction to which Asturias implicitly alludes extends beyond the realm of geography when he introduces the workers, grouped together by the word “*la multitud*.” As I elaborate throughout the chapter, in this new universe, there is neither community nor dialogue; both have been replaced by an ideology based upon the individual. In my chapter on *Viento fuerte*, I use the word “individual” to convey a polar opposite--an inverse relationship--of the idea of
“community” as it is defined in *El libro del consejo*; people are portrayed as living an isolated existence, alienated from each other and themselves.

Asturias devotes the rest of the novel offering snapshots of the society founded upon this new ideology. As such, I show that it is a world fragmented by the conflicting cultures and economies that have gathered together inside Guatemala’s borders. Asturias describes an embittered world unevenly divided between the U.S. North Americans and the Guatemalans. To convey this fragmentation, the author consistently juxtaposes images of superfluous wealth beside those of dire need. Yet, even within these two groups, the author does not endeavor to portray a sense of community. With regards to the U.S. citizens, he generally paints them as soulless beings who gather in the evenings to drink, engage in meaningless gossip about each other’s lives, and live for a momentary material pleasure that is clearly sustained by the exploitation of others. Concerning the Guatemalans--the “others” I just mentioned--Asturias describes a people who are economically coerced to leave their families and communities so that they can work at the coastal plantations. Once there, they are dehumanized to the point of being nothing more than laborers, parts of the imperial machine: their lives are valued only according to their production. Too tired to even try, they rarely speak a word to one another, much less resemble a community.

In this universe, Asturias shows the collective life of community to be inviable through the figures of multi-millionaire U.S. North American Lester Mead and his Guatemalan partners, Cojubul, Lucero, and Ayuc Gaitán. Together, they try to fight against the oppressive power of la Tropical Platanera by forming the Sociedad Mead-Cojubul-Lucero-Ayuc Gaitán, a cooperative of private farms--a community--that
competes with the huge company for buyers. Their efforts fail, though, because instead of depending upon the communal values and struggles outlined in the Mayan text, the Sociedad is essentially an imperial construct that thrives upon the individual: Lester Mead and his wealth. Without Mead’s resources, the Sociedad literally could not exist, showing the reader that community, as it is conveyed in El libro del consejo, cannot survive in this imperial world that Asturias is denouncing.

1.3 Otto René Castillo’s Poetry

In chapter three, I approach the work of militant poet Otto René Castillo. Along with the Salvadoran poeta-guerrillero Roque Dalton (1935-1975), Castillo was one of the most prominent members of La Generación Comprometida, a group of Central American writers whose overall agenda was vindicating the masses in the face of capitalism and denouncing socio-political injustice. Although this literary group was international, the historical moment that sparked its birth was the 1954 U.S.-backed Intervention that brought Guatemala’s Ten Years of Spring to a close. Subsequently, various guerilla focos formed throughout Guatemala trying to resurrect the silenced Revolution, while the state countered their agenda by cowering to brutal military rule that was supported economically and politically by the United States.

One of the primary goals of La Generación Comprometida was to diverge from their artistic predecessors whom they condensed into the elite figures of Nobel Laureates Miguel Ángel Asturias and the Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). According to these younger poets, Asturias and Neruda symbolized an uncommitted posture in that they did
not substantiate their writings with their actions: they fought for the pueblo, yes, but not with it. Their lack of action led Castillo and Dalton to perceive a gap between their predecessors and the masses, a gap these two poets and La Generación Comprometida tried to bridge by fighting along with the people in the Revolution.

Castillo wrote poetry in order to convey his conception of the Socialist Revolution and to call others to action. As both a poet and a guerrillero, Castillo demonstrated a commitment to social change in both areas, and so his dual roles complemented one another. This dialogue, joining his poetry to his militant work as a guerrillero, represents the fusion of word and action--of theory and practice--that Raymond Williams has called a “central thrust of Marxism” (200), and it is precisely this union that these younger writers felt distinguished them from their forebears.

As I examine throughout the chapter on Castillo, the global world against which he is fighting in his poetry reveals itself in the capitalist system, a system that is clearly the result of a deep history of imperial relationships. He does not focus on the roots of the problem, however, so the past is never mentioned. Instead, in his poetry, he concentrates on the present day issues so as to be able to mold it into something new in the future. His concern with the present manifests itself in one vein of his poetry that follows the conversationalist trends instigated by poets such as the Peruvian César Vallejo (1892-1937), the Chilean Nicanor Parra (b. 1914) and the Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal (b. 1925). In these works, I show that Castillo offers snapshots of a pueblo that has been fragmented by exploitation. As with Asturias, the local community Castillo portrays is neither ladino nor Mayan. Rather, the situation he presents is one suffered by Guatemala as a whole. He offers images of a hungry, hopeless, and abandoned people who see no
end to their misery because they are living in a world where each person lives for him or herself. In this sense, I argue that the universe he is portraying is constructed upon the individual, much as is Asturias’s in Viento fuerte. With Castillo, though, the concept is different. Asturias suggests that the Guatemalan pueblo is literally forced into a global world of capitalism based upon an ideology of the individual; therefore, he presents the people as victims. Castillo, however, attributes at least partial responsibility to the pueblo for its current situation when he depicts the society as being complicit in the system through their complacency. By deeming them responsible, Castillo also sees in them the power to change their situation. This vein of his poetry is clearly “resistance literature” as defined by Barbara Harlow, and with these poems, Castillo holds up a poetic mirror to his pueblo so that he might “[mobilize] a collective response” (Harlow 34) in the form of the Socialist Revolution.

Complementing his verse that follows the conversationalist trend is a vast corpus of love poetry. In my examination of these poems, I discuss how the author uses this powerful symbol as a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution. In Castillo, love is conveyed “como sentimiento generador” (Morales, “El amor” 19), the means through which the fragmented society he denounces comes together to imagine a better life--not for one’s self but for the community as a whole--in the future Patria. I look at how, in this poetry, love parallels his conception of the Revolution in that both signify the breaking of spatial boundaries because people are drawn out of themselves and towards someone / something else. Both poetry and love shatter the boundaries of time in that Castillo expresses both in terms of eternity. The poet writes of love and the Revolution as the powers that enable human beings to fashion their own futures because they are no longer
trapped by the traditional conventions of space or time. Through love and the Revolution, Castillo disempowers destiny in that it no longer has its hold over people’s lives and they and their world have the potential to become what they imagine.

Castillo’s love poetry branches off into two categories: that which is written to the amada and that to the pueblo. When I approach his poems addressed to the amada, I suggest that the poet uses her as an incarnation of the Revolution so that he can communicate its meaning on a very personal and real level. In his poetry written to the pueblo, I look at how Castillo incorporates a discourse of sacrifice into his conception of the Revolution when he forces himself to leave his beloved behind in order to go off and fight in the military battles. By reading these types of poems separately, I attempt to elicit the complexities inherent in the Revolution Castillo was envisioning.

1.4 Luis de Lión’s *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*

In my fourth and final chapter, I study *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* (1985) by Luis de Lión.² Hailed by today’s indigenous authors/activists in Guatemala as the earliest Mayan novelist, de Lión was the first to write about the Mayan situation from within that culture. This act of writing is revolutionary in and of itself in that de Lión represents the first Mayan voice to enter—and therefore question—the hegemonic Western world traditionally symbolized in the genre of the novel.³ Prior to his work, the closest

---

² *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* was written by 1972 but it was published only posthumously in 1985 by a group of friends. De Lión was abducted from a public park in broad daylight on May 15, 1984 never to be seen or heard from again.

³ Although de Lión wrote the first published Mayan novel, Luis Enrique Sam-Colop, a writer of
semblance of the indigenous voices that Guatemalan literature had to offer in the form of a novel came from canonical works that are defined as criollista, indigenista and neoindigenista.

Briefly, the criollista movement in Guatemala signified a break with the universal themes and preoccupations of Modernismo to focus on regional topics. Within the context of Guatemala, this necessarily incorporated images of the Mayans as a representation of autochthonous life. Flavio Herrera (1896-1968) is the seminal figure in this trend, being “el primer autor guatemalteco que se ocupa de la realidad social del indio y de hacerlo con una perspectiva honesta” (Liano, Ensayos 39). This “honest perspective” Dante Liano writes about comes from his inherited privileged position in the educated, landed class that gave him a “bird’s-eye” view of the oppressed Mayan population that worked on his large farm. His advantages, though, did not blind him to the social injustices that occurred all around him in that these inequities became the central theme in his most famous novel, El tigre (1932). Looking at the indigenous people simply as an oppressed population, however, did blind him to any agency on their part and so “el indio no aparece como protagonista” (Liano, Ensayos 39). Instead, they are simply acted upon by the finqueros. According to Adelaida Lorand, these criollista writers

no enfocan el problema indígena con entera realidad, ni dan muestras de haberse empapado en la genuina verdad de esta masa anónima. El acercamiento es superficial . . . a pesar de que dan muestras de conocer a cabalidad la realidad del indio guatemalteco. Presentan y reconocen el drama del indígena, saben de la inminente urgencia de integrar a los indios a la cultura nacional pero no ahondan en forma real y decidida para remediar la tragedia del indio. (64)

predominantly Quiché background, published two works that problematize Mayan existence in a ladino-dominated society. His first book is poetry, Versos sin refugio (1978), and his second, La copa y la raíz (1979), is a mixture of poetry and fiction.
Signifying a shift of position, the writers immersed in indigenismo actually try to penetrate and portray the experienced reality of the Mayans. A key figure in this wave of literature in Guatemala is Mario Monteforte Toledo (1911-2003) who relocated to the rural center of Sololá to observe and live with Guatemala’s rural populations and their problems first hand. His novels, among which are Entre la piedra y la cruz (1948) and Donde acaban los caminos (1953), “[draw] on lived experience; his intention is didactic--to enable us to see Indian myths and legends, but also the exploitation and transformation of the Indian population” (Zimmerman 128). Monteforte and the indigenista writers differ from the criollista authors in that they attempted to write from an “inside” perspective stemming from the indigenous cultures.

Despite apparently sincere efforts to convey a “truth” about the Mayan populations, there are restrictions within indigenismo--and even more so with criollismo--that are clearly due to their ultimately empirical nature. With Miguel Ángel Asturias, neo-indigenismo emerges in Guatemala. Signifying an attempt to dismantle the limitations posed by empirical knowledge, Asturias combined his love and first hand knowledge of the Mayan culture with his anthropological training and affinity for Surrealism to try to go beneath the surface and understand what was at the core of indigenous existence. With neo-indigenismo, writers “tratan de penetrar en la psicología y la cosmología indígenas y revelan una conciencia antes inexistente al novelar” (Sommers 247). Asturias’s neo-indigenista work, reaching its apogee in his novel Hombres de maíz (1949), represents, for some, a perceived “authentic” perspective that earned him the title “gran lengua” of the oppressed Mayan peoples of Guatemala.4

---

4 Asturias’s role as “gran lengua” of the Mayan is furiously debunked by today’s Mayan intellectuals in
De Lión’s presence on the literary scene challenges the perspective of all prior portrayals of the Mayans, representing—some would say “finally”—“el indio por un indio” (Morales, “Luis de Lión” 3) who writes of “su experiencia personal, que es la de muchos indios de Guatemala” (Morales, “Luis de Lión” 3), thereby giving his text an authenticity his predecessors’ are lacking. The “personal experience” about which he writes is that of ladinoization, and this is how the global world is felt in his novel. As a term, “ladinoization” is immersed in cultural, geographical, economic and racial discourses—all of which appear in the novel—and it refers to the complex means through which a Mayan becomes a ladino. It is a global influence in that, as de Lión suggests, the process began at the time of the Spanish colonization when the Mayans were suddenly converted into a marginalized people and survival often meant shedding their indigenous identity.

As I explain throughout the length of the fourth chapter, according to de Lión, ladinoization signifies the death of his culture: to become ladino means to die as a Mayan. The author uses the term “ladino” much in the same way as Rigoberta Menchú conveys it in her testimonio: “aquel guatemalteco que—cualquiera que sea su posición económica—rechaza individualmente o por herencia cultural los valores indígenas de Guatemala due principally to his admittedly problematic thesis published in 1923 that I mentioned earlier. Among Asturias’s most fervent critics are Enrique Sam Colop, Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Estuardo Zapeta. As an example of the Mayan posture against the Nobel Laureate, when indigenous poet Humberto Ak’abal was awarded the Premio Nacional of Guatemala in late January of 2004, he refused to accept it simply because it carries Asturias’s name. He explained his reason with the following words: Para mí es una cosa sencilla. Es un premio que tiene dos nombres: se llama Premio Nacional y eso ya es un nombre, y luego, el otro nombre es ‘Miguel Ángel Asturias’. Te digo la verdad, cuando yo conocí la tesis de Miguel Ángel Asturias, ‘El problema social del indio’, a mí me lastimó muchísimo. Él con esa tesis ofendió a los pueblos indígenas de Guatemala y yo soy parte de esos pueblos . . . . (qtd. in Lemus).

My use of the word “authenticity” is problematic in that it can be understood to refer to an essentialist discourse that Edward Said, in Orientalism, has shown to be very dangerous and that is undermined by today’s post-colonial discourses of hybridity. However, to speak of something “essential” is not my agenda. With the word, I simply refer to a proximity lived out by de Lión that his artistic forerunners were denied due primarily to birthright.
origen Maya” (285). This practice of rejecting Mayan values is what I propose as the principal object of de Lións’s denouncement in his novel, the pages of which he dedicates to narrating the repercussions of such a denial.

I begin my study of the text by looking at the four epigraphs introducing the novel’s sections as a concise rewriting of the creation myth in the Popul Vuh. I then observe an ideological shift as I study how the foundational myth read in the Popul Vuh has been replaced by a new one that is based upon death.

In the following section, I focus on the prologue where de Lións paints the Catholic Church as the original source for this myth defined by death. Here, I look at how the author uses the Church as a vehicle to write of the Spanish Conquest and colonization, marking these two historical phenomena as the first steps toward the ladinoization--the disappearance--of the Mayan culture.

I spend the rest of the chapter examining de Lións portrayal of a town that has been constructed by this new myth, that is, that has been molded by the ladinoization process. As such, I show how the author consistently describes the “local community” through death imagery, referring to the inevitable demise of his culture. Through his two main protagonists, Pascual and Juan Caca, de Lións foregrounds and denounces the active role played by the Mayan people in their cultural decay. By highlighting their agency--however ill-used it may be--the author ultimately empowers the Mayans so that they are no longer simply thought to be victims of hundreds of years of colonialism as they had been portrayed in earlier literature. Instead, they, too, have had a hand in constructing their current situation. Inherent in this responsibility de Lións underscores a power, one that that he hopes the Mayans will use to revitalize their culture.
CHAPTER 2

SPATIAL DISPARITIES IN MIGUEL ÁNGEL ASTURIAS’S VIENTO FUERTE

“En la palabra, todo; fuera de la palabra, nada.”
(Asturias qtd. in López 173)

2.1 Introduction

_Viento fuerte_ (1949), the first of what was to become Miguel Ángel Asturias’s (1899-1974) anti-imperialist _Trilogía bananera_ (_El Papa Verde_ [1954] and _Los ojos de los enterrados_ [1960] would be added later), denounces how the United Fruit Company--the principal vehicle of U.S. imperialism in Central America--had influenced, if not dominated, the Guatemalan nation building project practically since it attained its independence from Spain. Although part of a trilogy, _Viento fuerte_ can be read as an independent novel just as the author had always maintained (Bellini 89). Read as such, it narrates the literal genesis of the United Fruit in Guatemala and its subsequent unchecked monopolies of the banana plantations, the railways and the ports. Conversely, it also tells of the valiant efforts of the small farm owners to maintain their autonomy in a nation more and more dependent upon the Company. This struggle of the local in the face of global powers is, as Edward Said has shown in _Orientalism_, the ultimate dilemma that imperialism presents and is the central theme in _Viento fuerte_. In this chapter, I will examine Asturias’s particular representation of this national predicament.
I start the chapter by giving a brief overview of the political context pertinent to the publication of Viento fuerte. I follow by offering a concise synopsis of the literary criticism that has historically framed readings of this novel. I then examine under which conditions Asturias wrote this work and justify why an isolated reading of the first tome of the trilogy is valid. Following, I begin my literary analysis. To start, I read the first chapter of Viento fuerte as a foundational myth that displaces the pre-Colombian El libro del consejo and naturalizes the capitalist exploitation taking place within Guatemala. I then continue on to study how this exploitation manifests itself in a culturally and economically fragmented society.

2.2 Political and Historical Context

Viento fuerte was published at the time of the presidency of democratically elected Juan José Arévalo (1944-1951) and its appearance corresponded with Guatemala’s October Revolution (1944-1954) or Ten Years of Spring. This decade is characterized by a newfound intellectual freedom in Guatemala that has traditionally been understood as a period of national hope that had been unparalleled in its history.

Since its independence from Spain in 1821 up until the year 1944, Guatemala had suffered multiple dictators, the most brutal of whom were Justo Rufino Barrios (1871-1885), Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), and Jorge Ubico Castañeda (1931-1944). Although to different degrees, all of these dictatorships supported and were supported by the U.S.-based United Fruit Company that first entered Guatemala in 1870. The complicity between the various regimes and the Company and its appendages,
specifically the International Railways of Central America as well as the United Fruit Company’s Steamship Lines, developed a nation defined by government appropriation of indigenous communal lands that led to class and race monopolies of land tenure, polarized ethnic divisions, forced labor, debt peonage, and vagrancy laws. It was under the Ubico dictatorship, a police regime of repressive violence that “strongly favored the expansion of U.S. capital and U.S. priorities” (Adams, “Ethnic Images” 142), that the Company benefited from “immediate and unrestricted access to the president” (Handy, Revolution 170). Through this relationship, the United Fruit Company reached the culmination of its economic and political infiltration into the Guatemalan nation, creating the very state of economic dependency on foreign powers that Asturias narrates in Viento fuerte.

At the end of World War II, Ubico’s political control started to wane. Because his national policies had clearly shown sympathy for the Germans, he began to lose the aid of his economic supporters in the U.S. This turn of events, combined with a series of civic demonstrations by teachers and professionals demanding the restoration of fundamental liberties, prompted the dictator to resign from office in 1944. Ubico remitted his position to one of his generals, Federico Ponce Vaidez, therein trying to conserve his own power. When Ponce refused to hold elections for the office he was given, he faced severe opposition from students and intellectuals that culminated in the October Revolution of 1944: a military uprising headed by Major Francisco Javier Arana and General Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán that removed Ponce from power. Subsequent elections were held that nominated intellectual Juan José Arévalo as president (1944-1951). During this administration important social reforms were undertaken. Significantly, the mandate of
forced labor was abolished. Also, after carrying out a series of strikes against the United Fruit Company, workers received a fifty-percent increase in their salaries, and lands were partially returned to the peasant populations who had suffered dispossession through political intervention and / or U.S. capital.

Under free elections in 1951, Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954) was elected as successor to Arévalo. During his presidency the social reforms accelerated, adopting “un ritmo vigoroso, con la intención de liquidar un régimen anacrónico y de reducir a la observancia de las leyes a la United Fruit Company” (Bellini 67)--a corporation that had strong financial ties to the U.S. government. In 1952 the most radical reform of the Revolution was inaugurated: the congressional decree 900--the pivotal agrarian reform law. In its most extreme aspect, this decree allowed for land that was not directly cultivated by the owners to be expropriated from them and distributed to individual peasants and peasant communities. By the end of the Revolution, nearly seventeen percent of all private property “had been expropriated or was in the process of being expropriated under the law” (Handy, Gift of the Devil 94), consequently disempowering the landed class. The United Fruit Company alone was stripped of close to two hundred and fifty thousand acres. The radical land reforms that were contrary to U.S. interests along with the participation of Communist Party members in the Arbenz administration prompted the U.S. to back the Intervention in 1954 that ousted Arbenz and brought the

---

6 At the time of the Intervention, brothers John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State (1953-1959) and Allen Dulles was director of the CIA (1953-1961). Both were lawyers of the firm that drafted the 1931 and 1936 contracts between the Company and Ubico, consequential to which Allen Dulles accepted a “gift of substantial stock from the grateful company” (Handy, Revolution 173). In 1954, the year of the Intervention, John Foster Dulles was named “Man of the Year” by Life magazine.

Revolution to a halt, marking “the beginning of what would become the most repressive state in the hemisphere--a state responsible for the torture and murder of two hundred thousand of its citizens” (Grandin 198). 8

2.3 Criticism and Genesis of *Viento fuerte*

Commentary on *Viento fuerte* is scarce in relation to the vast scholarly corpus dedicated to studying Asturias’s other writings, and it has received varied criticism. Fernando Alegría reads the novel as propagandistic with very little human dimension, especially in the realm of the U.S. protagonists (226). Enrique Anderson-Imbert has criticized the text as being weighty and underdeveloped, a project that resulted in “aflojarle las piernas [a Asturias]” (213). Luis Cardoza y Aragón judges the banana trilogy as a whole to be mediocre (90). Similarly, Mario Vargas Llosa has written that the trilogy is comprised of “formas convencionales y perecederas de escaso valor artístico y muy dudosa eficacia política” (652). In a more positive vein, Seymour Menton, although he certainly recognizes flaws in the novel, still describes it as “una de las mejores novelas anti-imperialistas” (255). Giuseppe Bellini also looks favorably upon *Viento fuerte*. He writes that in this novel, Asturias “sigue mostrándose dueño de la técnica narrativa y del lenguaje, y siempre con maestría logra transformar poéticamente la realidad, cargándola de sugestiones que operan directamente sobre el lector, sin disminuir la tensión de denuncia, . . . dándonos un testimonio de gran humanidad” (70).

---

8 Clearly there are differing theories as to the motivations behind Dwight D. Eisenhower’s decision to back the Intervention. Some, like Piero Gleijeses in *Shattered Hope* (1991) argue that it was anticommunist sentiment; others, like Stephen C. Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer in *Bitter Fruit* (1982) argue that the motivation was the economic interests of the United Fruit Company.
Reflecting upon the text himself, Asturias has been quoted as saying that the trilogy should be read as “[u]na pintura de la realidad” (qtd. in Campos 4). To read the novel as the author insists implies that within its pages there is a re-presentation of a particular, historical reality. The reality that Asturias narrates for his readers in Viento fuerte is that of the ever-incrementing power of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala and the consequent disempowering of the Guatemalan people.

Upon reviewing the origin of Viento fuerte, it becomes clear that the author wrote a singular text that only later evolved into the beginning of a trilogy. As read in a series of interviews with Luis López Álvarez, the idea for this novel germinated after Asturias had lived in Tiquisate, the Pacific center of the United Fruit Company where he witnessed the inhumane exploitation of the workers. Inspired by his stay at the coast, the author proceeded to go to Guatemala City where he gathered testimonies of those who had been employees of the Company in the past.

Equally important in imagining this novel is Asturias’s contact with Kepner and Soothill’s 1935 account The Banana Empire, a “libro-informe” (Megged 211) written by two reporters who openly investigated and detailed the more than questionable activities of United Fruit’s dealings in Central and South America. The ultimate goal of these two investigators was to make positive changes that would affect not only the Company but the lives of those whom the Company incorporated as well. The modifications that the two propose in their text are far from radical enough to affect a significant change. Asturias, because of his experiences in Tiquisate and Guatemala City, was sensitive to this inadequacy and pointed out that “estos periodistas, que encontraban terrible la forma de explotación en los campos bananeros centroamericanos por parte de la bananera, no
suprimían la explotación del hombre, pero sí pedían que se hicieran menos crueles, que se
hicieran más dignos de la misma compañía explotadora” (Asturias qtd. in López Álvarez
180).

In response to the shortcomings he read in The Banana Empire as well as the
societal injustices he witnessed throughout Guatemala, Asturias wrote a short story that
was later to be expanded into the novel Viento fuerte. In this narrative, the author
combines the Kepner and Soothill account with the oral testimonies he had gathered, and
he re-presents them. Therefore, Asturias literally rewrites history to convert it into a work
of art or “una pintura de la realidad” that, because of its novelistic medium, “permite una
comprensión e interpretación de los pueblos, los hechos sociales, más allá de la historia y
la geografía” (Asturias, “La novela y la sociología” 30). If, as Edward Said has written,
all “representations have purposes” (Orientalism 273), the Guatemalan novelist’s is clear:
“dar a conocer al mundo las necesidades y aspiraciones de [su] pueblo” (Asturias qtd. in
Harss 116). To do so, Asturias creates a multi-leveled narrative space in which we, as
readers, are freed from the chronology of “una serialización donde los hechos nunca
tienen otro sentido que el literal,” and in which the story told “disputa las normatividades
de la historia” (Ortega 171-73). Accordingly, in Viento fuerte, the author expanded the
time encompassed in Kepner and Soohill’s report to cover the life-span of one character,
Adelaido Lucero, and he converted Guatemala into a metaphor for all of Central America
by making it center stage for the United Fruit’s actions. By recontextualizing and
condensing The Banana Empire and his own experiences in this way, Asturias was able
to communicate and convincingly denounce the devastating effects of the Company in
human terms of life and death, straying away from the often dehumanized discourses of
economics and politics. Appropriately, in *Viento fuerte*, “la acción novelesca responde a [esta] intención de denuncia, de protesta, de crítica” (Albizúrez Palma 102) that was fundamental not only to Asturias’s own agenda but also to the ideology upon which Guatemala’s Revolution was built.

2.4 On the Disempowerment of *El libro del consejo*  

Asturias’s primary concern in *Viento fuerte* is portraying the devastation wrought within the national spaces of Guatemala by the United Fruit Company. Apart from focusing on the economic exploitation resulting from the U.S. capitalist invasion, the author aims to reveal a deeper penetration that transforms “los valores, tanto espirituales como materials” (Chen, “Verde y amarillo” 242). To this end, I suggest that Asturias dedicates the first chapter of *Viento fuerte* to subverting the creation story read in *El libro del consejo*, a text the author saw as foundational to Guatemalan cultural identity. In so doing, the novelist necessarily writes of an ideological shift that corresponded to the U.S.  

---

9 I am using the version of the *Popul Vuh* entitled *El libro del consejo* (1939) that Asturias helped to translate from French into Spanish in 1927 when he was in Paris studying with the first French “Americanist,” Georges Raynaud. Although it is considered a controversial edition of the Mayan text today due to newer and more accurate translations, I use it so that I can best understand Asturias’s conception of the Mayan text and more effectively communicate its presence in *Viento fuerte*.

10 By foregrounding the Mayan text, I do not mean to ignore the import Asturias clearly saw in the Bible and Christianity in this same capacity. To do so would be to not only overlook the cultural complexities of Guatemalan society largely defined by *mestizaje*, but it would be to disregard a preoccupation that commanded so much of Asturias’s writings. I am focusing on the Mayan text for two principal reasons. One, as I will show, the central theme not only in his creation myth, but in *Viento fuerte* as a whole, is a lack of community: of isolated, individual existence. Asturias problematizes this absence to such a degree that its lack becomes as essential to his novel as community itself is to *El libro del consejo*, a binding parallel that cannot be interpreted as unintentional when his *indigenista* works are taken into account. And two, when Asturias silences this ideology of community—a framework upon which I will show the Mayan text to be structured—he writes of an unbreachable power on behalf of the United Fruit Company in that the author attributes to it the ability to touch Guatemala at its cultural core. Finally, the fact that he closes the novel with a very direct reference to *El libro del consejo*, as will be examined at the close of the chapter, further justifies my approach.
presence in his country. In the myth Asturias creates, the fundamental values of 
community espoused by the Mayan text are replaced by an ideology of individual, 
isolated existence. In his new myth, the author attributes a pivotal role to the Company. 
By doing so, the United Fruit symbolically becomes a key player in this new foundational 
myth of Guatemala, and the novelist succeeds in creating an allegory that adequately 
communicates the ubiquitous character of the Company’s dealings within his nation.11

Contrary to El libro del consejo, the myth presented in Viento fuerte does not begin before the commencement of time; rather, it opens in medias res, when time is well advanced. Starting the novel in this way allows for two paradoxical interpretations that are in dialogue with one another. First, the displacement of the previous myth by this new one articulates a physical displacement that redesigns not only the national geographies but the ideological maps as well, consequently alluding to a cultural history that existed before. Second, because there is no “beginning” per se, this same material gives a sense of timelessness to that which we are reading. Accordingly, the novel’s opening signifies a loss of memory of what existed before. And borrowing from Roland Barthes’s 
Mythologies, this absence of remembrance denotes the loss of historical memory, making those things that were constructed appear to be destined, therein giving to them a “natural and eternal justification” (143) that is beyond reproach.

---

11 Pablo Neruda did something similar in Canto general (1950) in his poem “La United Fruit Co.” Here, he rewrites the creation story from the Bible, showing God to literally hand out Central American land to U.S.-owned companies:

> Cuando sonó la trompeta, estuvo todo preparado en la tierra
> y Jehová repartió el mundo
> a Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
> Ford Motors, y otras entidades:
> la Compañía Frutera Inc.
> se reservó lo más jugoso . . . (335)
Asturias articulates this silencing of history on various levels in the first paragraph of *Viento fuerte* introducing it as a central theme to the novel. The narrator recounts from a bird’s eye view the literal construction from the ground up of a new world that is replacing what was there before. Also, this same perspective portrays a nameless people that are robbed of their individual histories and identities when they are grouped together with the word “multitud” (*Viento* 9). The novel begins:

Ya no era fuerza que dieran signos violentos de alegría. Toda la desvelada multitud estaba inerte, suelta, esparcida, después de haber pasado días y noches trabajando. . . . [M]anos y equipos mecánicos modificaron el terreno. Cambios en el desplazarse natural de los ríos, elevación de estructuras para el paso de caminos de hierro, entre cerros cortados o puentes o rellenos, por donde máquinas voraces consumidoras de árboles reducidos a troncos verdiones. . . . (*Viento* 9)

What we are witnessing above is the literal formation from the ground up of a new world that tacitly refers to the creation story of *El libro del consejo*. In this Mayan text, the earth and its beings are made by the primordial deities out of nothingness as is perceived in the following excerpt:

No había un solo hombre, un solo animal, un pájaro, pez, cangrejo, madera, piedra, caverna, barranca, hierba, selva. Sólo el cielo existía. La faz de la tierra no aparecía; sólo existían la mar limitada, todo el espacio del cielo. No había nada reunió, junto. Todo era invisible, todo estaba inmóvil en el cielo. No existía nada edificado. (*El libro del consejo* 4)

The world of the novel, however, is being built through a violence that manifests itself most plainly in the manipulation of the environment: the rivers are rerouted; bridges

---

12 There are undeniable similarities between the creation stories in *El libro del consejo* and the Bible. For example, the formation of life from nothingness as it is recounted in this quote brings to mind the same phenomenon told in Genesis, and there are other instances in this chapter on Asturias to which I will allude. The parallels that join these two stories, however, definitively diverge and result in conflicting ideologies when it is noted that in the Mayan text a community of gods creates the world through a dialogic union while, in the Bible, a single god fashions the universe through a monologic power. The resemblances that unite these two texts have clearly contributed to the debate that centers on the question of whether *El libro del consejo* can be read to reveal a Mayan cultural purity or if it needs to be understood as a syncretic document that testifies to years of colonization and transculturation.
are built among chiseled hills; and trees are felled in a rampant act of consumption. Instead of being created out of nothingness, this world is being imposed upon from the remains of an already existing landscape. And the violence with which the world is being built speaks more of a deconstruction than a construction, implicitly lamenting what was there before.

“La desvelada multitud” that describes the sleepless workers above suggests an awakening and, by metaphor, a rebirth, thereby alluding to the series of divine efforts to create human beings that is read in El libro del consejo. In the Mayan text, the world and its creatures are fashioned communally when the primordial gods unite their efforts through dialogue:

Entonces vino la Palabra; vino aquí de los Dominadores, de los Poderosos del Cielo, en las tinieblas, en la noche; fue dicha por los Dominadores, los Poderosos del Cielo; hablaron, entonces celebraron consejo, entonces pensaron, se comprendieron, unieron sus palabras, sus sabidurías. Entonces, se mostraron, meditaron, en el momento del alba; decidieron (construir) al hombre. (El libro del consejo 4-5)

In their endeavors, the deities tried and failed three times before they succeeded in creating human beings until their fourth attempt when they create human flesh from corn. As is read in the following passage from El libro del consejo relating the gods’ first failed effort, humanity was to mimic the deities in that human identity and survival depended upon their ability to form a community symbolized by their engagement in a dialogue both with each other and with their makers:

Estando, pues, todos terminados, venados, pájaros, les fue dicho a los venados, a los pájaros, por los Constructores, los Formadores, los Procreadores, los Engendradores: ‘Hablad, gritad; podéis gorjear, gritar. Que cada uno haga oír su lenguaje según su clan, según su manera.’ Así fue dicho a los venados, pájaros, pumas, jaguares, serpientes. ‘En adelante decid nuestro nombres, alabadnos, a nosotros, vuestras madres, a nosotros
Nevertheless, the animals of this first creation failed to talk “como hombres” (El libro del consejo 8). Instead, “solamente cacarearon, solamente mugieron, solamente graznaron; no se manifestó (ninguna) forma de lenguaje, hablando cada uno diferentemente” (El libro del consejo 8). When the gods heard this, they realized that their project had failed. The gods responded by saying that “no está bien. . . . He aquí que seréis cambiados, porque no habéis podido hablar. Cambiaremos nuestra Palabra” (El libro del consejo 8), thus relegating the animals to an inferior existence upon saying “vuestra carne será molida entre los dientes” (El libro del consejo 9).

The creators proceeded to experiment two more times with making human beings. In their second effort, the deities tried to make human flesh out of mud that “se caía, se amontonaba, se ablandaba” (9). These beings “al principio hablaron, pero sin sensatez” (El libro del consejo 9), communicating nothing. In response to this inability to speak, their makers “deshicieron, destruyeron una vez más su construcción, su formación” (El libro del consejo 10). The third attempt entailed beings that were made of wood carvings. These creations, too, failed to articulate human speech and were consequently destroyed when the deities devised a flood for them: “A causa de esto se obscureció la faz de la tierra, comenzó la lluvia tenebrosa, lluvia de día, lluvia de noche” (El libro del consejo 14). 13

According to El libro del consejo, then, the essence of humanity is its ability to come together in dialogue. Through this dialogue, a community will be formed that will remember and pay homage to their makers: “Hagamos a nuetros sostenes, a nuestros

---

13 The flood recounted in the Popul Vuh parallels the story of Noah in the Bible.
nutridores. ¿Cómo ser invocados, conmemorados, en la superficie de la tierra?” (El libro del consejo 9). Those beings who could not talk to each other were either transformed or destroyed by their creators.

Throughout the first chapter of Viento fuerte, the multitud neither speaks nor hears. Rather, when the novel opens, they are strewn about the ground in silence. As the chapter progresses, this same silence is seen to painfully envelop the workers’ existence: “Los cuadrilleros pasaban uno tras otro o en grupos de cinco, de diez, con toda clase de herramientas, guiados por el caporal hacia las hondonadas en que el silencio se los tragaba” (Viento 10). Also, silence is observed in a deafness that plagues the workers—la multitud—limiting their hearing to the mechanical rhythm of their own breathing as is observed in the following quote: “llegaban a ensordecer después de horas y horas en aquel agacharse y levantarse. . . . Sordos a todo lo que no fuera su propio jadeo” (Viento 11). Reading this image of a voiceless and deaf people in the context of El libro del consejo, la multitud, they come to embody an absence of humanity, warning the readers of their impending demise.

Asturias writes of the inevitable ruin of the workers throughout the novel. In the opening paragraph that has already been cited, the author introduces the theme in paradoxical terms as he equates humanity with hunger in a world of abundance: “máquinas . . . transportaban hombres y cosechas, hambre y alimentos . . . ” (Viento 9). In this parallelism, Asturias conveys the demise of la multitud in terms of atrophy; therein communicating that they have no potential for survival.

The atrophic condition of la multitud is made visual via a single literary portrait that Asturias offers as a representative shot of the group: “A falta de espejo uno a otro se
podía contar cómo estaba de pálido, cómo tenía los pómulos salidos de tan flaco, las orejas allá atrás sin sangre, los ojos vidriosos, los labios resecos, delgados y las encías amarillentas” (Viento 14). With this image, the author clearly points out that these beings are gradually deteriorating; that they have not awakened to a condition of fulfilled humanity as is the definitive hope of the creators in El libro del consejo. Instead, they awaken to a process of dehumanization and it is as if their gods are idly sitting by watching them as they waste away.

Asturias further conveys this process of dehumanization by condensing the bodies of la multitud into the image of their hands: “Manos y equipos mecánicos modificaron el terreno” (Viento 10). Here, with his synecdochic use of the word “manos,” humanity is conveyed in terms of labor and thus likened to the machines. This concept in and of itself is not remarkable because work is indeed necessary to human survival. Asturias conveys this labor in unpleasant terms, however, when he writes that the workload to which these “manos” are subjected is literally never-ending: “No descansaban ni de día ni de noche” (Viento 13). Consequentially, the human experience is reduced to labor: “el trabajo [devora] gente y más gente” (Viento 13). As represented by the following excerpts, the novelist expands upon this idea by offering mechanized images of human biology in which the workers come to mirror the machines in their repetitive, mechanical movements: “Agacharse, levantarse, agacharse, levantarse . . . todas la vértebras de la espalda afuera” (Viento 10). The same relationship is observed also in this additional passage:

Lo que pasaba . . . es que llegaban a ensordecer después de horas y horas en aquel agacharse y levantarse y, como el jadeo les quedaba más cerca de los huesos de la cabeza, sólo se oían el abrirse y cerrarse de su pecho, caer y subirlos brazos y las manos, al clavar dedos y uñas en la tierra floja para
asir las piedras y lanzarlas a lo alto de cada plataforma, abajo, arriba, abajo, arriba, abriendo y cerrando la visagra de la cintura. (Viento 11)

In this myth, Asturias narrates the rebirth and redefinition of humanity in this new world. Community and dialogue are no longer pertinent to human existence; rather, as I will show, individuals are isolated and alone due to exploitation. Human beings are deemed as such so long as they function as a productive part of the machine, a metaphor for the imperial project of the United Fruit Company. Once they are no longer useful, they are expelled from this universe as is seen repeatedly throughout the novel in the image of sick or injured workers that are sent away either to rehabilitate or to die:

Separaron caminos. Cucho empezó a toser. No sólo él, bastantes, y a todos esos bastantes se los llevaron lejos, a botar a la capital, donde el clima más benigno, les dijeron, tal vez los mejoraba. Adelaido Lucero ya en carnes recordaba los brazos huesudos de su compañero cuando lo abrazó para despedirse. Era un muerto que le decía adiós. (Viento 14)

Along side the redefinition of humanity, Asturias necessarily rewrites the primordial deities that populate El libro del consejo. Just as in the Mayan text, in Viento fuerte, there is a similitude between the creator and the created: in the novel, both are structured upon an ideology of modernity that isolates individual beings. The multiple figures of divine, ultimate power are no longer recognized in Asturias. Instead, they are replaced by a singular all-powerful being represented by “el jefe escondido” (11) who resides in this new world in a “caseta improvisada con caña brava y techo de pajón” (11). Asturias likens him to a god when he allows the jefe an unseen but known power, controlling the workers’ every movement with the sound of a whistle from his caseta: “El pitazo del jefe daba la señal de reanudar la tarea. Aún paladeaban la comida; siempre por bien que comieran se quedaban con hambre; y a seguir en lo que estaban” (Viento 12).

This figure uses his sole authority to lay plans to control absolutely everything to the
extent that “nada había de arbitrario” (15). Contrary to the gods’ concerns in El libro del consejo, however, his are human and selfish: he focuses on his own economic gains while he idly watches the workers suffer from hunger and exhaustion.

In this novelistic world there is neither a higher power nor a community to whom one can reach out for help. As is articulated in the following quote, chance dictates all destinies:

Son tantos que no sé cómo es que uno está vivo y coleando. Cuestión de suerte. Quién sabe. Pero de lo que uno se convence en estos trabajos es que al que le toca le toca. Con decirte que yo iba con León Lucio, el chino, cuando lo mató la cascabel. A mí me pasó primero por los pies y no me hizo nada. Él fué el bueno. Pobre. Se infló . . . Aquel pobre viejo de las nalgas chupadas que se volvió loco . . . Jobaldo también por poco se muere, después del tuerce que les entró a todos éses que vinieron con él, de Jalpatagua. Tres de ellos pararon aplastados por aquellos paredones de arena que se les vinieron sobre la coronilla, mientras estaban haciéndole el cabe a la peña por debajo. (Viento 12)

The sole tool of human agency in this world is money. This agency turns out to be illusory, though, as it disappears as quickly as the money is spent: “Y para tener pisto, decí vos, porque sin ese señor doradíoso aunque uno quisiera que las cosas salieran, no saldría nada. Voluntá… ¡Mucha podés tener, pero si no tenés brea, se te va el esfuerzo en lo poco que podés abarcar!” (Viento 13).

The speaker of the above quote is Adelaido Lucero, a central character in the novel whom Asturias presents as a prototypical figure in various ways. To begin with, “Lucero” is clearly a derivative of luz, with light being the harbinger of the beginning of human life in El libro del consejo. Additionally, Adelaido’s is the first identifiable voice

---

14 In the context of my reading, this “first man” figure should not be read as representing an “indigenous Adam.” Rather, the character of Adelaido represents the subversion of community articulated in El libro del consejo. Whereas in the Mayan text four men are created, here, Adelaido is alone and he embodies the solitude Asturias represents in the world constructed by the banana company.
to emerge from the fog of the nameless and silent multitud. He is among the earliest workers to arrive to this new world: “fué de los que llegaron cuando todo estaba por hacer” (Viento 26); and nothing is known of the family and community he inevitably had to leave behind to make his arrival possible. By keeping this character’s history silent, Asturias effectively decontextualizes him to the point of removing “all soiling trace of origin or choice” (Barthes 151), and so Adelaido symbolically comes into being in this universe. Finally, he forms part of the original pair who will bear forth the subsequent generations at the chapter’s end. Asturias conveys the character’s words quoted above as foundational to the world that is represented in Viento fuerte. And because he is a “first man” figure, the story of his life can be read as an allegory for the human experience that the author narrates throughout the rest of the novel.

By opting to construct Adelaido as an “original man” figure instead of writing of the “first men” that are created in El libro del consejo, Asturias reiterates the solitude of the individual in this contemporary dehumanized universe. The novelist utilizes the story of Adelaido to portray a life that is predominantly constructed through chance, rather than the divine guidance or predetermination implicit in most creation stories. In the first chapter, the author does so by parodying human agency when he places Adelaido at “una cruzada de caminos” (Viento 15), a traditional Mayan and Christian symbol of choice. Ironically, it is precisely at this crossroads that his future is taken out of his control when he meets up with Ningüento, a man looking for his daughter, Roselia de León, who is hiding from him. He asks Adelaido to pass along the message that he has died if, by chance, he happens to see her, and Adelaido agrees. He does meet up with Roselia and

15 The symbol of “light” also foretells the dawning of life in the Bible, another similitude between the two texts.
immediately proceeds to flirt, frightening her when he grabs her wrist. The girl’s mother, who happens to be in the vicinity, sees the two and screams. Her cry gathers the attention of passersby and draws together a group consisting of Ningüento, numerous soldiers, and, conveniently, a justice of the peace. All of the convened jump to conclusions and literally force the couple to marry so that Roselia, “¡Menor de edad!” (Viento 18), can maintain her honor.

The marriage of Adelaido and Roselia is representative of the absolute lack of agency in the world Asturias portrays. The only decision, albeit unconscious, that Adelaido made was to flirt with Roselia, and Roselia’s decision was to hide from her father. Prior to their forced marriage, the only thing these two characters have in common is time and place: chance. Neither wants to marry and both protest; however, in the very act of protesting what is underscored is their utter powerlessness. Adelaido, to no avail, maintains that his actions do not merit the outcome of a forced marriage. Roselia, try as she might, is equally powerless as she cannot even cry to express her disbelief: “Sin poder juntar dos lágrimas, por más que parpadeaba” (Viento 19). When compared to the Biblical account of the original couple, it is the very incongruity of the consequences to the choices that these two have made that tells of a world where chance rules unmediated by volition.

Asturias uses the bad luck of these two characters to rewrite the symbolic union of the first four men and their female counterparts in El libro del consejo. In the Mayan text, the first women are made to accompany or complete the men, and the coming together is read of as something divinely ordained and sacred: “Entonces existieron también sus esposas, vivieron sus mujeres. Los dioses celebraron consejo. Así, durante su sueño, (los
cuatro) recibieron mujeres verdaderamente bellas. . . . Cuando se despertaron, sus
mujeres existieron; sus corazones se regocijaron al instante a causa de sus esposas” (El
libro del consejo 106). In Viento fuerte, since Adelaido is representative of the “first
man,” Roselia necessarily comes to symbolize the “first woman.”16 Just as Adelaido
represents humanity alienated from community, so, too, does Roselia. Their forced union
only serves to magnify their individual isolation and to make a mockery of the idea of
community in this novelistic world. Their union is brought about by happenstance, not
divine ordination or choice, and it is far from what is traditionally thought of as hallowed.
Upon marrying Adelaido and Roselia, the justice of the peace underscores the unholiness
of the moment when he says, “[p]ues ruineada antes o después, os encontráis en los
momentos más solemnes de vuestra vida” (Viento 19). Representing the first tie between
man and woman, Adelaido and Roselia come to serve as the foundational couple in the
myth Asturias is writing. As such, the secular and unwilling nature of their bond is
emulated by the nameless multitud, conveyed in scenes of sexual play among the workers
and the almuerceras. The laborers are not inspired by desires for eternal unions; rather,
lust is their motivation, the same meaningless stimulus that attracted Adelaido to Roselia
in the beginning:

Las mujeres eran unas crueles embusteras, risa y risa. . . . El olor de las
mujeres era tan pronunciado que los hombres se les arrimaban con la
intención de allí no más tumbarlas y como echar piedra a las plataformas
con la misma voluntad de trabajo en la cintura y el mismo acedido en las
narices; pero las mujeres formaban un nudo ciego de comidas, trenzas,
chiches calientes en las camisas mugrosas, bultos de nalgas, y se les

16 Admittedly, these two figures echo the story of Adam and Eve from Genesis. To be read in this light,
they come to signify the imposition of Western religious ideology upon the Guatemalan nation. This
interpretation is weak, though, within the context of Asturias who clearly understood and portrayed his
country to be one historically built upon a mestizaje of Mayan and Christian cultures. Instead, Adelaido
and Roselia need to be understood as representing a new social structure that is consequent to the U.S.
capitalist system.
escurrían entre promesas y aceptaciones vagas de presente, pero siempre cumplidas como que muchas de ellas estaban bien embarazadas. (Viento 11-12)

These sexual encounters play a significant role in the drama of the myth in Viento fuerte. The original coming together of the first men and women in El libro del consejo signified a true union of two people: with echoes of eternity, they completed and respected one another while they worked together to accomplish a common goal of bringing forth “a los hombres, a las tribus pequeñas, a las tribus grandes” (El libro del consejo 107). In contrast, the meetings between the workers and the almuerteras are self-centered: they represent a brief coming together to satisfy a purely physical, momentary whim, and if there are descendents they, too, are born by chance. In the quote above, Asturias continues to develop the theme of dehumanization when he paints these encounters as animalistic by comparing the women to mammals in estrus that emanate an odor to attract their mates. Once interested, the male sex violently overpowers the female, spreads his genes, and moves on. These meetings are defined by the literal clashing of two people with no aspirations of a union, of community: again, what matters is their isolation.

This first chapter ends with the dawning of a new generation. Not only are the almuerteras pregnant but Roselia is as well: “se regó pino en los pisos de ladrillo nuevo y la Roselia, para completar la fiesta, resultó vestida con la enagua amarilla y la blusa rosada, sólo que ya no le venían, había que darles de adelante, porque estaba preñada” (Viento 20). This means that is a new generation’s lives will be molded by the foundational myth recounted by Asturias in Viento fuerte. As such, the process of dehumanization that is so clearly delineated in the first chapter is propagated into the future.
The myth Asturias presents in *Viento fuerte* is a rewriting of the history of the origin of United Fruit in Guatemala. In order to convert this account into myth, Asturias has decontextualized it to the point of removing “all soiling trace of origin or choice” (Barthes 151). He does so by denying the narrative a temporal orientation when he opens the chapter in *medias res*. Further, we are not privy to the spatial and cultural origin of la *multitud*—symbolized as a whole by the figure of Adelaido—since we encounter them post-relocation and they do not speak of their past. Finally, Asturias depicts a world that is undoubtedly governed by chance and money, not divine will nor community. Through the medium of myth, Asturias “transforms history into nature” (Barthes 129). He shows how that which is read “in the beginning” goes uncontested as it is accepted--and passed on into the future--with resignation, a resignation that is the consequence of not knowing that things can be different because things are perceived as always having been the same.

By opting to concisely rewrite the Company’s beginnings in mythic form, Asturias comments on how the dominant historical processes leading up to the contemporary socio-political situation in Guatemala had been naturalized. And if, indeed, we are to read this novel as “una pintura de la realidad” (qtd. in Campos 4), the creation story of *El libro del consejo* and the values it projects have not merely been subverted. Rather, they have been displaced, and the myth of the first chapter serves not only as a foundation to *Viento fuerte*, but to the society it depicts as well. As such, Asturias dedicates the rest of the novel to demonstrating--and therefore denouncing--how this Banana Company myth has informed the day to day life in Guatemala.

### 2.5 Spatial disparities
The rewriting of the creation myth of El libro del consejo that Asturias narrates in the first chapter of Viento fuerte represents an ideological silencing by imperial powers. It is the ultimate consequence of the physical displacements enforced by the Company that the author develops throughout the novel. One type of displacement is the material imposition of the global forces represented by U.S.-based United Fruit Company upon the Guatemalan landscape, manifesting itself in the enormous coastal plantations and their adjacent towns. Another kind of displacement is that which is endured by the natives who descend from the altiplano in order to work for the Company. An additional displacement occurs metaphorically when the local spaces of the altiplano are altered as they are contaminated by U.S. influence, alluding to the blurring of the geographical boundary that conceivably protected the local from the global world. Throughout the novel, Asturias elaborates upon these examples that he introduces in the first chapter, conveying a sense of the spatial disparities that he sees as resulting from the problem of imperialism. My use of the term “spatial disparities” is to be understood as referring to the physical and ideological fragmentation that Guatemala suffers in Viento fuerte. It is physical as is seen in the literal construction / deconstruction of the landscape throughout the novel. This fragmentation is, at the same time, ideological because it results from the national spaces of Guatemala playing host to two world views simultaneously: that of Guatemala and that of the United States. Consequently, the national space is informed with dual and inconsistent worldviews; and a struggle between the invasive, global forces represented by the Company and the indigenous, local powers, ensues.

Early in the novel, Asturias concisely depicts the fragmented condition of his nation in an episode involving the figures of Leland and Roselia, Adelaido’s wife. Leland
was brought to the tropics from the United States by her husband, John Pyle, a high official of the Company. One afternoon, she decides to visit Roselia at her home that is on the plantation since Adelaido had become a local manager by this point. To get there, she needs to walk through the rather difficult terrain of the banana crops while they are being fumigated. From her very first step, Asturias accentuates Leland as an anomaly that disrupts—or fragments—this landscape. Not only is she elegantly dressed in the harsh environment, she is so in a conspicuously foreign manner, donning attire that likens her to a Japanese doll:

Se aventuró a ir por su propia cuenta. . . . El traje de seda cruda, limón pálido, la hacía verse más joven. Sin ser un modelo, era un lindo traje con mangas de kimono. Un quitasol japonés trazaba un hemisferio floro sobre su cabello de oro verde en madejas recogidas en un turbante del color del vestido. (Viento 32-33)

When Leland arrives, Roselia signals to her in order to offer her a seat but that is the extent of their communication “porque ni ella hablaba papa de inglés, ni Leland palabra de español” (Viento 33). The two sit there in an awkward silence, they look at each other and laugh uncomfortably; the motive behind the visit is thus obscured.

The significance of Leland’s journey in the context of the novel, however, is clarified when Asturias writes, “Leland midió la barrera que el idioma significa entre dos seres humanos que no pueden comunicarse. Cada quien en su propio mundo, en el mundo de su idioma” (Viento 34). Through her incomprehensible language, Leland brings a foreign universe with her when she enters the house. As a result, space is fragmented on an ideological level because even though they share the same locale, through their inability to communicate, the two women undoubtedly exist in different worlds. Since Adelaido and Roselia represent the first couple in this world, their house comes to serve
as a microcosm for the Guatemalan nation that Asturias endeavors to portray in Viento fuerte. In this context, Leland represents the U.S.-based company, and her uninvited arrival to their home is a metaphor for the U.S. invasion of Guatemala. As a result, the fragmentation that she imposes upon their house needs to be understood in terms of a national problem, a problem that the author struggles to remedy by the novel’s end.

The above episode narrating the invasion of a space by an outsider, clearly illustrates Edward Said’s statement that “if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. . . . For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored” (Culture 225). Accordingly, land--and its possession--is underlined once more as a central theme in this anti-imperialist novel through the image of Leland’s uninvited entrance into Roselia’s home.

The construction / deconstruction of the landscape that Asturias narrates in the opening paragraph of Viento fuerte foregrounds the dispossession of which Said writes in the above quote. By beginning with this image, the author implicitly conveys this event as the cornerstone for everything else that follows. As the novel advances, Asturias identifies the creator of this new world as La Tropical Platanera, known by the workers as La Tropicaltanera. Representing the United Fruit Company, everything about it is depicted as foreign, an idea that has already been introduced in the above episode in which Asturias foregrounds Leland’s dress and her language. Along these lines, the author consistently portrays its presence as an invasion. For example, he creates a tension
between the two countries when he juxtaposes technology, representing the U.S.-based company, to nature, representing Guatemala, in the following excerpt:

> El pedido de los caporales a los mandadores y de éstos a los jefes y de los jefes a las oficinas centrales movilizó una serie de resortes secretos en la oficina del telégrafo. Aquellas maquinitas minúsculas en medio de la selva tropical, del desconcertante concierto de una creación que en su esfuerzo de superarse casi al nacer toca la muerte, vive tan rápidamente, recibían del dedo del operador los signos de llamada a otras centrales, para comunicar el pedido de “más hombres,” “más hombres,” y “más hombres.” (Viento 26-27)

The labyrinthine relay of messages from one to another and yet to another gives an image of a world whose center of control lies elsewhere, implying an invasion by a foreign, imperial power (Said, Culture 9). That this world has been invaded is clearly told in the superficial plotting of the telegraph machines in the midst of nature, giving the message that the machinery--representative of La Tropicaltanera--does not belong.

At first, La Tropicaltanera does not appear to be viable within the Guatemalan context. The visual contrast between the tiny machines and the enormous forest that is constantly regenerating itself communicates a defenselessness that will be the company’s downfall. This vulnerability is reinforced when the company begs that more and more men come to help stave off the impending threat that the forest poses. When the men do arrive, they are likened to soldiers as they walk “en formación militar” (Viento 27), introducing a discourse of conflict that sets them against nature and aligns them with the company in its battle to dominate the landscape. The men that appear, though, are not soldiers. Rather, they are Guatemalan laborers--la multitud--that descend from the altiplano in order to work for pay at the U.S. coastal plantations, and their arrival has not been voluntary. Instead, because of the “serie de resortes secretos” (Viento 26) undertaken in the telegraph office in order to mobilize the workers, their descent needs to
be read in terms of a coerced displacement. As a result, the vulnerability that is initially
read in the image of those little machines is dispelled and it is replaced with a power that
is magnified by the tiny source from which it emanates.

Asturias writes in the above quote that the power exercised by the U.S.-based
cOMPANY manifests itself in its ravenous consumption of the Central American nation.
The forest, a spatial representation of Guatemala, generates the wealth that the men,
symbolizing the nation as a people, harvest. The plantations that encroach upon the forest
serve as a metaphor for the U.S. economic invasion and subsequent consumption of the
Guatemalan land while the men-turned-workers signify the literal consumption of the
nation’s people by the United States.

That the Guatemalan people are literally consumed by the United States is
articulated at various junctures throughout Viento fuerte. Asturias alludes to it above
when he hints at their forced displacement. He writes more on this theme when he
describes the poverty to which the Guatemalans are subjected in the altiplano, conditions
that are so miserable that the people are left with no other option than going to work at
the coastal plantations if they want to survive:

¡No seas animal, Bastiancito, de estar trabajando aquí donde la tierra ya no
da! Clavado aquí como tus viejos, sin ganar siquiera para vivir; botando el
encinal para leña. . . ¡Ve qué porvenir! Los ancianos, se explica, ya no
tienen fuerzas, que hagan su leñita para vender por carga; pero vos,
Bastián. . . . No le podía decir que se quedaba porque era de por ahí, pues
según los asegunes de su padrino, se es de donde la tierra es buena con
uno y aquellos terrenos entre precipicios eran ruines con todos; y si le
sacaba que porque allí tenían sus padres algunas propiedades, lo
desarmaba con que eran propiedades que ya no valían nada: tierra
quemada, rocas raspadas, erosiones escrituradas. . . . (Viento 60)

Bastiancito Cojubul indeed decides to descend from the altiplano to work at the coast,
accompanied by his wife, Gaudelia Ayuc Gaitán. When contrasted to the vast wealth of
the U.S. coastal plantations portrayed in the previous quote, the poverty depicted here in the altiplano is made even more stark. Inherent in the story of this couple, Asturias comments on how the Guatemalan government had abandoned its own people while it directed all of its resources—including its own citizens by means of not offering them any other alternative—directly to the United Fruit Company or La Tropicaltanera.

Bastiancito and Gaudelia’s move to the coast, then, is motivated by coercion not by choice; more than as relocation, their move must be read as a displacement. This is plain to see in the following excerpt where Bastiancito unsuccessfully seeks any sign of hope that his land in the altiplano might have to offer, giving him a reason to stay:

Bastián andaba solo por el monte, pero más solos andaban sus ojos por el espacio como buscando en las hondonadas y pequeñas cumbres que se le volvían colindancias, una razón de peso que oponer al dicho de su padrino. Aunque tuviera que arrancar un cerro, lo arrancaría, con tal de poderle decir a su padrino me quedo por aquí... (Viento 60)

The displacement witnessed on a grand scale in the image of la multitud arriving to the coast and then on a narrower scale in the figures of Bastiancito and Gaudelia is equivalent to the “loss of the locality” about which Said warns. Their move signifies the distancing of themselves from “la mítica parcela de tierra heredada de sus antepasados a través de siglos y generaciones y que es el único recurso de supervivencia de aquéllos” (Alcides Paredes 58). Being in the family for years, the distancing from this land corresponds to the loss of their “geographical identity” as explained by Said. In the context of Viento fuerte, where Asturias foregrounds the Mayan cosmology projected in El libro del consejo, the idea of place implied by this “geographical identity” necessarily alludes to the binds of community that are demanded in the foundational Mayan text.
Within this framework, when Bastiancito, Gaudelia and la multitud abandon their families and communities to work at the plantations, they leave behind an integral part of who they are. In so doing, they forsake their cultural identity as they embark upon a precarious process of dehumanization that will mold their future, making their survival suspect as Asturias so clearly delineates in the first chapter and reiterates in those that follow.

The question of survival that Asturias poses needs to be read on two levels: the physical and the cultural. In the course of the novel, the author underscores the ironic presence of death in the midst of abundant life as he plots images of the ailing multitud in the heart of the vibrant tropics. As the novel progresses, this juxtaposition of images comes to serve as a clear metaphor for the near impossible survival of the local culture in the world of a global economy. Asturias personifies this two-faced theme of death most clearly in the reappearing figure of Cucho who, after working at the plantations, returns home to the altiplano because he has come down with consumption, a sickness that has left him rotting: “La tos señalaba el grupo en que estaba el Cucho cada vez más jiboso con los ojos de vidrio hondo, hundidos en los huesos de la cara, los párpados rugosos, colgándole de las cejas, y la nariz con filo de muerte” (Viento 77). Even though his experience has left him “un muerto” (Viento 14), he is the one who advises Bastiancito—his godson—to leave his home, like he once did, in order to try his luck by moving to the coast because “la siembra de banano es lo que más produce” (Viento 76).

The significance of Cucho’s return lies in what he carries with him: a contamination of the local by the global powers on two symbolic fronts. First, he literally brings along with himself an alien sickness, which he not only introduces into the
community but that he actively projects metaphorically upon the individual members of his pueblo—as if he were contagious—when he sends them to the plantations. Second, he arrives inserting into the local dialogue a discourse of production that is hegemonic in the global world from which he has come. His sickness, coupled with his discourse, serve to redefine the physical and the cultural make up of the local space to which he has returned. As a result of this redefinition, the locality is, in essence, lost—even for those who stay—and the geographical identity that went along with it must “be searched for and somehow restored” (Said, Culture 225). Cucho’s illness and journey home come to represent what Asturias read as the cultural decay of the nation that was brought about by the U.S. presence in Guatemala, a presence that was not localized to the coastal plantations but, rather, that was seeping out into every corner of the country.

Asturias dedicates a fair share of Viento fuerte to describing what he interpreted as the cultural decay suffered by his nation. On one level, he does so directly when he makes the reader privy to conversations among the families in the altiplano. On another level, the author conveys the idea indirectly when he presents images of the economically and culturally fragmented society that has resulted from the various displacements outlined above.

Subsequent to Cucho’s return to the altiplano, Asturias presents a discussion between the elders of the society at the funeral of a young mother/daughter figure. Appropriately, the dialogue centers on her death. This conversation, however, extends beyond the moment as it turns into an opportunity for the society to reflect upon its future, a future that they themselves see as unlikely. More than a physical demise, they are commenting upon the disappearance of their culture. As is read in the following
quote, in this society, children are not born solely into their own lives; rather, they come into a cultural identity—represented by the parents—that they are supposed to project into the future: “tener un hijo. . . un progreso continuado sobre uno…” (Viento 76). Seen in the brief passage that follows, the obligation with which children are born here echoes the communal responsibility that is seminal to the ideology of El libro del consejo: “Lo mismo pasa con los hijos, cuyo ser es como la saliva, la baba, la cual, sea de hijos de jefes, sea de hijos de Sabios, de oradores, no se pierde sino que se extiende, se continúa, sin que se extinga, sin que se aniquile la faz del jefe, del Varón, del Sabio, del Orador” (49). The striking parallel between these two quotes speaks of a cultural identity that Asturias sees as having joined countless generations. Within this context, when the mother / daughter figure dies it is assumed that she—and her parents through her—will symbolically live on in her children. Neither she nor her ancestors, however, “se continúa[n]” into the future as is revealed by her father’s words:

Si en mi mano estuviera, me llevaría a mi hija muerta a enterrarla lejos, lejos de estos pedregales, lejos de este funesto talpetate, para que en el futuro, mañana mismo, fuera flor, fruto, hoja, y no adobe, porque los muertos enterrados por aquí no tienen más porvenir que el de ser algún día, parte de algún adobe, de alguna planta raquítica, de algún árbol sin primavera. (Viento 81)

As it turns out, in the society that Asturias is depicting, children no longer hold fast to their responsibility to their forbearers and the culture is not being perpetuated: “El fruto que ustedes, mis yernos, han venido a dar aquí, es fruto amargo, es fruto de la muerte. . . . Nosotros aquí hemos tenido muchos hijos, pero ninguno de ellos puede llamarse hijo en el sentido de lo que debe entenderse por hijo, es decir, un progreso continuado sobre uno. . . .” (Viento 76). So, instead of representing a continuity of the culture, the children come to symbolize its truncation. A clear cut example of this new role assigned to the
children is seen in the already mentioned figures of Bastiancito and Gaudelia who leave their cultural center for economic reasons impossible to ignore. When their families do hear from them again, it is in the form of a letter in which Bastiancito raves about the success they have had at the coast: they have been able to purchase a small plot of land and plan on cultivating bananas to sell to La Tropicaltanera; they have befriended and are working with Adelaído and Roselia, the people to whom Cucho recommended them; and they are forming a business relationship and friendship with Leland and her new husband Lester Mead. Tacitly stated in this letter—but foregrounded nonetheless—is that they have begun a new life and shall not be returning to the altiplano.

The world the couple enters is the one that is introduced in the first chapter: it is an imperial universe that is the meeting place of the two cultures presented in Viento fuerte. As such, it is structured upon non-cohesion: there is a rigid and uneven division between the haves and the have-nots, a division that corresponds to that of exploiter and exploited respectively. The word “community,” the foundational concept of the Guatemalan culture Asturias is describing, becomes meaningless as the society is fragmented into countless alienated beings, each struggling to survive in the world.

Filling his novel with unfinished thoughts and time lapses communicated through an abundance of ellipses, Asturias begins to convey a sense of the non-cohesion that informs this society. The author further imparts this fragmentation by building his novel upon harshly juxtaposed images of the people that inhabit this new world. For instance, Asturias follows the chapter in which he narrates Cucho’s return and describes the utter misery suffered by the local population in the altiplano with another chapter that opens
describing the comfort and luxury of the “other half” that makes up this world, explicitly, the U.S. imperialists:

Los amigos de Leland Foster, esposa del John Pyle, siguieron siendo los amigos de Leland casada con Lester Mead; entre otras cosas, porque era novedoso irlos a visitar a un sitio en que la mesa de la costa, tenía espumararajes de mantel de fiesta y, el paisaje, siempre brillante de sol, altas palmeras, aves marinas, crepúsculos, sin faltar, en el saloncito confortable, un piano, whisky, cigarillos, libros, revistas. (Viento 82)

Just as the author is consistent throughout the novel in his portrayal of la multitud as an exploited people, so, too, is he in his portrayal of this segment of the population. In contrast to the workers, the U.S. imperialists are described as wealthy, carefree people that meet daily for latenight bacchanalian festivities comprised of drunkenness, plentiful food, card games, song, gossip, and other insignificant chatter. They are seen as being completely uncommitted and having an irresponsible and privileged penchant for escaping the weight of reality.

The only exception that stands out in the crowd is Lester Mead, a philanthropic American who struggles to help assert the rights of the Guatemalans in an imperial world. To this end, he motivates three other private farmers to form a union--a community--called Sociedad Mead-Cojubul-Lucero-Ayuc Gaitán, that will stand up to La Tropical Platanera. Lester envisions their fight resulting in fair prices for the private growers’ crops that will allow them to escape the poverty that Asturias depicts throughout the novel. Also, he teaches them to branch out of the limiting single-crop system when they venture into making banana flour. Finally, Lester tries to sway his partners to abide by what he calls an indian ecomomy: “Volveremos, pues, amigos, a la economía de los pistos con nudos en el pañuelo. El indio para gastar saca el pañuelo y tiene que desanudarlo a fuerza de uña y dientes, y por eso no gasta tan fácilmente como nosotros
Lester’s intentions are respectable and earnest, indeed, but his methods are flawed. First, he approaches the community he has co-formed with a paternalistic attitude as is summed up in the following words Lester directs toward his partners: “Antes que yo hable pido que me hagan una promesa: obedecerme ciegamente” (Viento 98). By dealing with the community in this manner, Lester tacitly creates a hierarchy--intentionally or not--in which his voice is the most powerful. As a result, his partners become too dependent upon him and do not act without his guidance. Time and again, they are seen running to Lester for answers when they encounter a glitch in their plan. Thus, at one point in the novel, Lester returns home to find his partners panicking when La Tropical Platanera ridiculously lowers their paying price: “El racimo lo están pagando a veinticinco centavos oro, de nueve manos” (Viento 86); he is expected to resolve to the problem:

Lester volvió su caballo. Al entrar en su casa, por los pasos lodosos que se veían en las grandas, supuso quienes estaban. Los Luceritos, Lino y Juan, Bastiancito Cojubul, los Ayuc Gaitán. Todos ellos conversaban con Leland animadamente. . . .

Todos hablaron. Lester los detuvo en seguida, anunciándoles que había dispuesto ir a hablar para que mejoraran el precio. (Viento 86-87)

When his associates do try to act on their own will, they do so trepidatiously. In the following quote, Bastiancito Cojubul--who forms part of the Sociedad--questions Lester’s plan with an uneasiness that is expressed in his eyes: “Pero mientras usté va y habla, la fruta se nos vuelve una carambada--dijo Bastiancito, consultando a sus compañeros con los ojos” (Viento 87). In the end, Lester wins--as he always does--and they do not sell.
The associate’s lack of voice coupled with Lester’s overpowering influence place whatever progress the group does enjoy in a dubious light, making it appear to be more of an imperialist imposition than a communal solution with local roots. The imperial basis to the Sociedad is made clear when it is found out that Lester, instead of simply being the supplier of “todo lo indispensable para el costurero” (Viento 34) as he had feigned to be early in the novel, is really a multi-million dollar stock holder of La Tropical Platanera.

Lester’s wealth comes to be the second error in his approach because it belittles his struggle in what he sees as a strictly economic war: “Ésta no es una lucha a machetazos; tampoco es una lucha que se va a ganar con discursos tratando de convencerlos; no, es una lucha económica” (Viento 99). The sacrifices he makes to this end are insignificant because he simply cannot lose, and the discourse of sacrifice he propounds is, in the end, vacuous: “Pues ustedes harán lo que quieran, yo no vendo, a mí se me madura el alma, pero no el banano…pero no vendo ni un racimo, y no porque tenga cómo esperarme; estoy ensartado hasta la coronilla, pero el hombre en este campo debe defenderse contra los que le quieren imponer leyes injustas” (Viento 87).

Lester guards his wealth as a secret throughout the course of the novel: the third and final flaw to his method. When he hides his resources, Lester allows his partners to think that whatever advances they have made are due to their hard work and sacrifice. In the course of the Sociedad’s struggle, however, Lester secretly and consistently falls back on his financial means to help the group avert failure. Through his secretive actions, Lester commits the crime of allowing his partners to form false hopes or expectations with regards to the power of the Sociedad--or of community in general--in their global world.
Fundamental to Asturias’s rewriting of *El libro del consejo* in the first chapter of *Viento fuerte* is the silencing of true community in a global world. This collective life is painted as impossible because the imperial world is fragmented by the conflicting cultures and economies that have gathered together. Lester and his partners pose the Sociedad as an effort to build a community that mirrors the one proposed by the first four men in *El libro del consejo*. Together, they try to counter the destructive power of La Tropical Platanera, however, their effort fails. It fails because instead of depending upon the communal values outlined in the Mayan text, the Sociedad is an imperial construct that thrives upon the individual Lester Mead and his wealth. Without these resources it literally could not exist, showing the reader that community, as it is conveyed in *El libro del consejo*, cannot survive in this globalized world.

### 2.6 Rewriting the Local Myth: A Conclusion

The last chapter of *Viento fuerte* opens with the brewing of the hurricane by the Chamá, Rito Perraj, an agent of local lore, as requested by Hermenegilo Puac. Puac, one of la multitud, had tried to fight against the omnipotent Tropical Platanera “para salvarse de la ruina, de la que, por fin, no se salvó” (*Viento* 190). Instead, “murió porque, cuando no tuvo con quien pelear, se le paralizó el corazón. ¡Por eso murió! Y no tuvo con quien pelear, porque, cuando iba resuelto a matar al Gerente, alguien le dijo: ¡Matás a este Gerente y ponen otro Gerente, matás a ese otro Gerente ponen otro Gerente! . . .” (*Viento* 190). At a loss as for what to do, Hermenegilo went to see the Chamá, asking for retribution in the form of “una fuerza incontrastable. . . . Una fuerza que nada debe en
pie” (Viento 190). In return, the Chamá asked for his head and Hermenegilo acquiesced. The Chamá then invoked the hurricane, symbolic of the strongest of the gods in El libro del consejo. The storm comes and destroys the entire coast: “nada iba quedando en pie, todo por el suelo machacado convertido en miseria vegetal inmóvil” (Viento 191); and all the “gringos hijos de puta” (Viento 190) that were there—including Lester Mead and his wife, Leland—die. The imperial world has conceivably been overcome by local powers. Or has it?

In the epilogue, Asturias narrates the Meads’ funeral attended by the three partners of the Sociedad and their families. The image that resonates is one of community, again suggesting that the imperial world has been defeated by the local:

“Toda la familia Lucero y las familias de Cojubul y Ayuc Gaitán, ya listas para el entierro, acompañaron los cadáveres de Lester Mead . . . y Leland Foster” (Viento 202). This notion is quickly proven faulty, however, when “de uno de los bultos asomaba un mechón de pelo color de oro verde” (Viento 202). The use of gold and the color green immediately alludes to the American dollar and then the reader recalls that prior to his death, Lester had named the members of the Sociedad as his beneficiaries in the event of his and Leland’s death. Therefore, the image of community with which Asturias closes the novel is in truth an illusion because the seed of its destruction in the form of capitalist wealth has already been planted. These men will become rich and inevitably continue the imperialist economic system that Asturias presents as having been imposed upon Guatemala by the United States. 17

17 In effect, Asturias was to prove this to be the case in Los ojos de los enterrados where he follows the trajectory of these characters. Also, in “America and Guatemala in the Anti-Yankee Novels of Miguel Ángel Asturias: A Love-Hate Relationship,” María A. Salgado argues that the banana trilogy along with Week-end en Guatemala (1956) can be read as an “accusation that Guatemala has become a de facto
The last sentence of *Viento fuerte* portrays the aftermath of the hurricane, presenting a world that begs for reconstruction: “El tren se fue despacito, rodando sin hacer mucho ruido por un cementerio de bananales tumbados, tronchados, destrozados” (*Viento* 202). By placing the three men and their families at the frontier of this new world, it seems that Asturias designates them as its creators. By doing so, the author warns that what has just been read in the novel is bound to repeat itself because they have not truly learned how to live outside of the imperial system, nor will they be given the chance.

Hermenegilo Puac, then, gave his life in vain and the local myth he, the Chamá and the hurricane represent have proven to be futile in the context of the capitalist world. Asturias’s overwhelming message in *Viento fuerte* is clear: if the local is to survive in a global world, the myths that sustain it must be rearticulated. Community, as it was once conceived in *El libro del consejo*, is no longer a viable option in this universe where dialogue is scarce. Instead, it needs to be restructured to fit into its new context. It is not until *Los ojos de los eneterrados*, however, that Asturias reveals his vision of how “community” as an ideology is to evolve. In this final novel of the trilogy, the solidarity of militant socialist revolution is how community manifests itself in the twentieth century.

colony of the United States thanks to the shameless cooperation of the many Guatemalans who have sold out to the Yankee dollar” (79).
CHAPTER 3
CREATING A SPACE FOR LOVE AND REVOLUTION: THE POETRY OF OTTO RENÉ CASTILLO

“Enorme es la importancia de cada gesto en nuestro tiempo”
Otto René Castillo (“Conmigo a pesar de todo” 263)

3.1 Introduction

The foremost message I read in Viento fuerte, the subject of my preceding chapter, is that the myths that once sustained the local spaces of Guatemala need to be rewritten if the local is to survive in an imperialist world. For Miguel Ángel Asturias, this implied restructuring community to make it fit in its new, global context, albeit against the current. In the poetry of Otto René Castillo, as well, the theme of community is resounding, and it manifests itself in the Socialist Revolution. In this chapter, I will study how Castillo conveyed his vision of the Revolution, that is to say, of how Guatemala should fit into his vision of a new world-wide order.

I open this study by placing Castillo’s poetry in its artistic context and outlining his agenda that advocated that words be supported by actions. Next, I offer a brief biography that demonstrates how the poet-revolutionary lived out his agenda by committing himself to the military struggles of the Revolution. I then begin my literary analysis of his poetry. I start by studying Castillo’s political commitment as he articulated it in verses that followed the conversationalist trends instigated by poets such
as those of the Peruvian César Vallejo, the Chilean Nicanor Parra and the Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal. In these poems, Castillo offers images of the imperialist world against which he was struggling. Then, I look at how the poet used the metaphor of love for its generative qualities to speak of the Revolution’s inherent promise of a better world. This section is followed by a close reading of the poetry Castillo wrote specifically to his amada where I focus on his particular development of the traditional poetic symbol. Complementing the personal love conveyed in this poetry is a collective love in the verses Castillo dedicated to his pueblo. I examine these poems in the last section of this chapter, showing how the poet develops a theme of love-born sacrifice in order to communicate it as the keystone to the Revolution.

3.2 Informing Words with Action

In his essay entitled “Otto René Castillo: Su ejemplo y nuestra responsabilidad,” Roque Dalton quotes Miguel Ángel Asturias as saying that “el poeta es una conducta moral” (xxv). This phrase, Dalton writes, served as a springboard from which Castillo and his generation, La Generación Comprometida, fashioned not only their poetry but their identities as well, committing both to their political ideology: that of militant Communism. In appropriating Asturias’s phrase, however, Dalton shows that Castillo was not paying homage to his artistic predecessor. Rather, this act is to be understood as a symbolic break with the past that allowed him to free himself of the chains that linked him to an imperial world, therein allowing him to imagine something different and project it in his poetry.
The Marxist writers of “La Generación Comprometida” criticized Asturias for having accepted the position of Guatemalan Ambassador to France under the government of Carlos Castillo Armas, the U.S.-backed regime that overthrew the left-winged government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, therein ending the hopes the Guatemalan people had placed on the October Revolution. This criticism, however, served only as the immediate pretext for their disapproval of Asturias as their repudiation of the author had deeper roots. According to “La Generación Comprometida,” Asturias’s willingness to work for the government of Castillo Armas—an act that went against his own politically charged writings—signified a hypocrisy that questioned his allegiance to the social commitment he proposed in his work. For these young writers, Asturias’s words, “el poeta es una conducta moral,” alluded to a compromise that, for him, did not extend beyond the written page. The authors of this new generation, however, took these words to heart, making their writings and their lives command one another, consequently underscoring what they felt to be Asturias’s non-committal position. Further, it is important to note that by criticizing Asturias, these writers were also going beyond him in order to denounce the ambiguous, “middle-class reformist perspective” (Zimmerman 273) that they felt he represented and which they blame for the ultimate failure of Guatemala’s Ten Years of Spring, reinstating with Castillo Armas what Dalton calls el “oscuro pasado” (xxviii).

Responding to what he read as Asturias’s empty words, it is evident throughout the poetry of Otto René Castillo that he believed that it is only through one’s words combined with one’s willful actions that identity is fully voiced. Stemming from a Marxist perspective, these actions needed to be communal and the identity of each
individual was intertwined with that of the pueblo. Castillo clearly expresses his conviction in the following poem addressed to his mother, where the hands, a traditional symbol of community action, serve to define a people’s biografía, their common identity:

¿Por qué ponerse trágicos entonces? Mataremos, pues, mi dulce viejecita, porque solos con nuestras manos estamos en el mundo. Y lo que ellas hagan será, por fin, la biografía de nosotros. (18)

The connection the poet builds between action and identity necessarily questions the role he attributed to words, to poetry in his particular context. In his poem, “Antonio, el poeta,” Castillo wrestles with this subject and concludes that the importance of words lies in their power to inspire. Antonio, “poeta de la más honda / estirpe” (107), approaches the figure of Spartacus during the slaves’ revolt against the Roman imperial system, and commits himself to fighting along his side. Spartacus answers by emphasizing the need to fight with words rather than with the sword:

Enséñanos mejor tu canto, Antonio, luchar lo puede hacer cualquiera, pero nadie como tú, para hacer de las palabras las alondras azules que necesitan aún nuestros hermanos. (108)

Here, a generative power is associated with words, and it is made clear that it is only through them that one of human beings’ most basic needs is created: hope, signified by the alondras that announce the dawning of a new day, a new beginning. Azul, a color
traditionally associated with poetry and the totality of the universe--an image expressed later in this poem as “el cielo ancho y celeste” (108)--represents a freedom without boundaries. By using the color blue, the poet molds his use of the concept of “hope” to signify a hope for political and economic freedom, a freedom from the imperial world against which Spartacus fought in the past and against which Castillo was still fighting in the twentieth century.

Speaking through Antonio, though, Castillo makes it clear that the hope generated by words will not suffice. Antonio answers Spartacus’ words asserting that for freedom to be realized, something more is needed, and this something more carries us back to action:

Las aves de más dulce canto,
Escarabajo
defienden su libertad
también con garras. (108)

Words, symbolized by Antonio’s poetry and the birdsong he creates through it, are essential in that they give form to the hopes for which human beings must fight. In Castillo, like in so many other Central American revolutionary poets, this struggle is certainly--but not merely--an intellectual debate; rather, it is also hands-on combat, it is armed “con garras.” Antonio, then, the poeta-guerrillero, comes to represent the perfect fusion of word and action--of theory and practice--that Castillo tried to forge of his own life and communicate through his poetry. And that is, as Raymond Williams has written, a “central thrust of Marxism” (200).
3.3 Rewriting Social Change

What little is known with regards to Otto René Castillo’s life comes from his fellow poet and revolutionary Roque Dalton’s essay that I cited above, and that is the primary source for the information given below. The reader comes to know the Guatemalan poet at the beginning of his political awakening and his subsequent revolutionary / military commitment. Undoubtedly, the foremost purpose of Dalton’s essay is to demonstrate the arduous “unidad del pensamiento y la práctica” (xxiii) that Castillo’s life represents. He makes an example of the poet that counters the hypocrisy read in the preceding generations of so-called engaged poets and that can--and should, he argues--be used to create a new, revolutionary identity that consequently becomes the responsibility of the future Marxist generations to carry on.

Born in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala in 1936, Otto René Castillo witnessed both the rise and fall of his country’s October Revolution. At the age of seventeen, he became one of the central youth leaders of the Communist Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT) when the Revolution was silenced in 1954 by local powers lead by Castillo Armas supported by U.S. imperial interests. After this year, he lived in exile in El Salvador, “buscando la proximidad a la patria que haría más eficaz la continuación de la lucha” (Dalton xix). There, he met and worked with the militant Salvadoran poet, Roque Dalton and instantly joined the Communist Party of El Salvador. Within the Party structure, he worked nonstop to educate the other young artists he met “sobre los problemas de la responsabilidad social-revolucionaria del creador” (Dalton xx). During this period, Castillo’s literary work, as well as that of his compañeros, was published prolifically in
local newspapers and magazines. Additionally, these artists gave readings where ideas of social responsibility were debated and elaborated upon within the public realm. Also during this time, Castillo proved himself to be resolutely linked to the Revolution, risking his own life for its idea by crossing the Salvadoran border incognito various times in order to contribute to the propagation of Communism in nearby Guatemala.

In 1957 Castillo officially returned to his homeland where he continued to study the law and social sciences that he had started in El Salvador. On scholarship he traveled to the German Federal Republic where in 1959 he continued his education in Leipzig. Inspired by Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Castillo left his formal schooling behind in 1962 in order to collaborate with Joris Ivens, the Communist film-maker who was forming a brigade to make documentaries about the Latin American liberation struggles. Castillo returned to Guatemala in 1964 where a popular armed rebellion had already begun. The poet became the director of El Teatro de la Municipalidad de Guatemala while simultaneously participating in the armed struggle. In 1965, he was climbing a mountain to record a documentary of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) when he was captured and sent into exile once again. In exile, he was appointed Guatemalan representative in the Comité Organizador del Festival Mundial de la Juventud, under which title he traveled to, among other places, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Cuba. Upon completing these duties, he returned permanently to Guatemala in order to join the FAR, a group that put Castillo in charge of Party propaganda for the eastern region.

In 1967, Otto René Castillo was wounded in combat. He was captured along with his compañera Nora Páiz, tortured and burned alive. Even under torture, Dalton writes,
Castillo never broke, reaffirming his conviction to such a degree that even his executioners had to admit the strength of his will. Dalton continues:

murió como un indoblegable luchador revolucionario, sin ceder un ápice en el interrogatorio, reafirmando sus principios basados en el marxismo-leninismo, en su ferviente patriotismo guatemalteco e internacional, en su convencimiento de estar siguiendo--por sobre todos los riesgos y las derrotas temporales--el único camino verdaderamente liberador para nuestros pueblos, el camino de la lucha armada popular. (xxii)

Having only lived from 1936 to 1967, in his thirty-one years of life Otto René Castillo actively contributed to reconstructing the avenue of political and social change as has been shown above. He was crucial in the development of armed struggle in Central America. According to Iván Uriarte, prior to Castillo’s struggle, “el poeta y el intelectual centroamericano habían jugado un rol pasivo, ya sea en el exilio, o en el propio país, plegándose al sistema o sirviéndole indirectamente” (37). With Castillo, the boundary between intellectual and guerrillero--between theory and practice--was broken and the two merged into one.

As mentioned above, Castillo’s exile and work in El Salvador linked him with other Salvadoran compañeros and permitted him to develop his convictions to such a degree that he became “un nuevo tipo de salvadoreño y un nuevo tipo de guatemalteco . . . un centroamericano revolucionario” (Dalton xxvi). This fused transnational identity enabled him to re-imagine the national construct within the new context of a world that, at least for him, had been erased of arbitrarily drawn political boundaries and where all were equal without exception, as he states in “Tu hombre se despide, amor mío:”

Y como mi vida entera
luché contra toda excepción,
porque quiero siempre
que la misma sea la regla
tengo que irme, así de común
barato de egoísmos. (178)
But, the world in which he was living was one that had not yet been realized; rather, it existed in the form of a hope or an idea that is unmistakably articulated in his poetry and for which he fought until his end.

Dalton writes that between 1954 and the year that Castillo was assassinated, the fever to erase these boundaries and build a world unified in liberation had spread among the Central American pueblo: “los centroamericanos comenzamos a ver hacia dentro de nuestra realidad, de nuestra nacionalidad común, de nuestra historia” (xxxi-xxxii). As Dalton writes in his essay, the only plausible response to this common history defined by the systematic suppression and coercion inflicted by the imperial process was militant Communism: “es necesario encarnar en cuerpo y alma la nueva vía de la revolución: la de la lucha armada, nacional, centroamericana, revolucionaria” (Dalton xxxi). In other words, joining the Revolution was synonymous with sacrificing oneself entirely for the Party, as Castillo articulated when he wrote: “Ante todas las cosas soy la lucha misma” (“Keineswegs allein” 45).

3.4 Rewriting Central American Poetics

The spiritual incarnation of the Revolution that Dalton describes is what Otto René Castillo left to history through his poetry. With Castillo, Central American poetics were rewritten as the genre became a direct form of communication, of Communist propaganda, meant to elicit participation from the pueblo in re-imagining and subsequently liberating and reconstructing the nation. This communal effort defines the spirit of the Revolution and it is repeatedly invoked in Castillo’s poetry, a body of work
that follows two clearly differentiated aesthetic roads. One avenue of Castillo’s work concerns openly political themes through which he bitingly denounces the socio-political crises that defined his historical moment. To this end, Castillo contributed to the development of conversationalist trends also cultivated by Roque Dalton and Ernesto Cardenal, “his two peers in Central American revolutionary poetry” (Beverley and Zimmerman 157). The second direction of his work at first appears to be less political as he speaks at a more intimate level invoking the various powers of love. This vein, however, was just as politically charged as the other and through this poetry he imagined alternate, future realities instead of simply denouncing that which already surrounded him. These two aesthetic roads, both of which write of the same Revolution, part only to merge at their joint destination: the place of his imagined Guatemala.

In order to speak directly to the people, Castillo’s poetry is, at times, denuded of the ornate complications frequent in the genre. He rejected “the grand rhetorical and narrational Nerudian mode of political poetry” (Zimmerman 281). Instead, he cultivated a style that moved toward the conversational trends of César Vallejo and Nicanor Parra that were, as Zimmerman writes, “emerging as hegemonic in the Latin American literary ambience in the years after the Cuban Revolution” (281). Implicit in this denunciation of Neruda’s poetics is an echo of his rejection of Asturias. Castillo and his contemporaries--most notably Roque Dalton and Ernesto Cardenal--read in the figure of the Chilean poet the stand of an intellectual whose literary acts of socio-political resistance and denouncement were not enough to affect a change. The dissatisfaction these younger poets felt with their historical circumstances motivated their own agendas. In an interview with Mario Benedetti published in 1972, Roque Dalton, in rejecting what he
describes as the Nerudian “poesía canto,” says that “no era suficiente la expresión admirativa o condenatoria, sino que precisaba un análisis más profundo” (19), an analysis that he most clearly articulated in his collage-epic Las historias prohibidas del Pulgarcito (1974).

Representing his own rejection of this mere “expresión admirativa o condenatoria,” Castillo wrote “Intelectuales apolíticos.” Considered to be a “poetic manifesto of his generation” (Zimmerman 274), this poem foretells the day when all comfortably uncommitted intellectuals will be interrogated and held responsible for their lack of action by “los hombres sencillos” who

nunca cupieron
en los libros y versos
de los intelectuales apolíticos,
pero que llegaban todos los días
a dejarles la leche y el pan,
los huevos y las tortillas,
los que les cosían la ropa,
los que les manejaban los carros,
les cuidaban sus perros y jardines,
y trabajaban para ellos,
y preguntarán,
¿Qué hicisteis cuando los pobres sufrían, y se quemaba en ellos,
gravemente, la ternura y la vida?
Intelectuales apolíticos
de mi dulce país,
no podréis responder nada. (145)

Iván Uriarte writes that with Castillo Central American poetics were revolutionized: “la poesía centroamericana recibe un baño de pureza: simplificando el lenguaje, eliminando todo adjetivo ampuloso distorsionador de la idea; con él la poesía se impregna del pueblo, único modo de denunciar la miseria y la injusticia cotidiana” (37).

The simple, quotidian language Castillo used --amply exhibited in “Intelectuales
apolíticos,” quoted above--is a good example of the sencillez toward which he was striving: a simplicity that allowed for a direct form of communication unconfused by the traditional elaborate language used by Neruda and Asturias. The “lowering” of language in the realm of poetics is not to be understood as a condescending effort to speak to the pueblo but, rather, as an act of reverence toward the common people. The poet’s use of language signified an inclusion of those who had traditionally been excluded and alienated from the genre: the underprivileged, uneducated pueblo.

Castillo incorporates the pueblo on the thematic level as well. The central theme of the “Intelectuales apolíticos” is unconventional for poetry: it is illustrated in the litany of menial jobs for which the common people are responsible and to which they are limited, representing the unambiguous exploitation to which they are subjected every day. That which was previously silenced, then, that which was never mentioned “en los libros y versos,” becomes that which is voiced, and the pueblo, previously marginalized from the genre, is now its subject, and it consequently becomes the center of poetic discourse.18 Consequential of this poetic relocation, Castillo symbolically gives the pueblo its voice.

With this voice, Castillo portrays the common people interrogating the apolitical intellectuals, as is seen in the questioning quoted above. At a loss for words--because Castillo has symbolically stripped them of their voice--the said intellectuals are left to rot in their silence, a silence with which the poem climactically comes to an end:

Os devorará un buitre de silencio
las entrañas.

18 Neruda does speak of the workers in his poems, particularly Canto general (1950), but he does it within the more elitist discourse of traditional lyrical poetry whereas Castillo is actually indicting Neruda’s--and other similar intellectuals--who accuse the bourgeoisie without questioning their own bourgeois life style.
This vein of Castillo’s poetry branches toward what was developing into exteriorism, Ernesto Cardenal’s foundational contribution to world poetry. Defining his poetic technique in the religious compound of Solentiname in 1972, the Nicaraguan poet writes:

El exteriorismo es la poesía creada con las imágenes del mundo exterior, el mundo que vemos y palpamos, y que es, por lo general, el mundo específico de la poesía. El exteriorismo es la poesía objetiva: narrativa y anecdótica, hecha con los elementos de la vida real y con cosas concretas, con nombres propios y detalles precisos y datos exactos y cifras y hechos y dichos. En fin, es la poesía impura. (Cardenal 9)

A good deal of Otto René Castillo’s work reflects this tendency to incorporate the impurity of the “mundo exterior” of which Cardenal writes and which played such a key role in Dalton’s writings as well. In so doing, the poet necessarily posits the exterior against the interior, therein creating a corresponding binary that, as Edward Said has shown in Orientalism, separates the objective from the subjective. In poems such as “Asesinados en junio” (115), “Los fusilados” (118), “Lo más importante de todo” (125) and “Obreros de algodón” (151), Castillo aims to reconcile the two, showing to his readers that the exterior and its cohort, known as objectivity, are simply myths that have been perpetuated to condone complacency. This integration of the “real” or the exterior world into his poetry lends to Castillo’s work a testimonial feel as he offers snapshots of the suffering and injustices to which the pueblo is subjected.

---

19 Cardenal was obviously aware that Pablo Neruda was the first to mention a poesía impura in his essay, “Sobre una poesía sin pureza” (1935). The Nicaraguan’s exteriorismo should then be understood as yet another response to his generation’s poetic ancestors.
The poem that most clearly illustrates this thread of Castillo’s work is “Informe de una injusticia” (148). The poet begins by prefacing in the style of an epigraph from Radioperiódico dated June 10, 1964: “Desde hace algunos días se encuentran bajo de la lluvia los enseres personales de la señora Damiana Murcia v. de García de 77 años de edad quien fue lanzada de una humilde vivienda situada en la 15 calle ‘C’ entre 3ª y 4ª avenidas de la zona 1” (148). Castillo accomplishes two tasks by introducing the poem in this manner. First, he bestows credence onto what he is about to tell, communicating to his readers that what they are to read did actually happen, he is merely relating the facts. Second, the quote from Radioperiódico slyly allows the reader to slip into his or her complacency that the distance of news broadcasts all too often permits. This turns out to be a trick, however, as the poem begins with a jolt to the reader that wakes him or her out of his or her complacency transporting readers from their comfortable spot where they are reading to the very place in which this injustice is happening. Castillo realizes this spatial maneuver by addressing the reader directly with the second person tú from the position of first person and by bringing in the shifter aquí. Through this rhetorical device, and, as Emile Beneviste has shown in Man and Language, he erases any potential temporal or spatial distance that the third person pronoun may have created aided by the impersonal allá typical of news stories. The location of the poem thus becomes the here and the now of the reader as the distance of objectivity has been erased:

Tal vez no lo imagines
pero aquí
delante de mis ojos
una anciana
Damiana Murcia v. de García
de 77 años de ceniza
recibe
sobre la curva de su espalda,
toda la injusticia
maldita
del sistema de lo mío y lo tuyo. (149)

At the end of this first stanza, Castillo does not project the blame for the widow’s situation upon a foreign political body. Instead, he places the responsibility for the injustice upon himself and his readers when he claims the capitalist system as their own creation with the words “lo mío y lo tuyo.”

The injustice to which Castillo refers in the title is twofold. Firstly, he is obviously condemning the unjust eviction of Damiana Murcia from her home that throws her into complete “soledad / abierta al cielo” (150) simply because she cannot pay the rent. In being evicted, Damiana Murcia is also dehumanized by those who turn her out of her house because they see no other worth in her apart from the money she can or cannot produce for them. Secondly, Castillo is also denouncing the dehumanization that those who evict Damiana have undergone due to the capitalist system they are perpetuating, a system that conditions them to witness what has happened to Damiana without so much as thinking twice about it. Castillo communicates this complacency in the following excerpt, where he ironically depicts life as going on as normal in the face of such blatant tragedy:

Pero lo peor de todo
es la costumbre.
El hombre pierde su humanidad.
Y ya no tiene importancia para él
lo enorme del dolor ajeno.
Y come,
y ríe,
y se olvida de todo. (150)
The world, then, according to Otto René Castillo, seems to be ruled by a fragmented and
dehumanized system structured upon a polarized binary that separates the evicted from
the evictors, clearly a division that also corresponds to one of victim and perpetrator. This
binary, however, just like the world in which he was living, is malleable. Castillo’s
choice in drawing upon the case of Damiana Murcia among innumerable possible
texts is crucial in the message of this poem. That he chooses her and accentuates her
feebleness, solitude and old age, means that he wanted to relay the message that the
system in which she, the readers and Castillo were living was one to which anybody
could fall prey, and so anybody and everybody— even a helpless figure like Damiana—is a
potential victim. And, unless each person actively does something to change the course
that this unjust society is taking—specifically, join him in the Revolution—he or she,
through his or her complacency, becomes just as responsible as the active perpetrator for
what is taking place.

By the end of the poem, the significance of Damiana Murcia is double. On the
one hand, as is signified by her old age, she is unmistakably a representation of the
capitalist past from which the society must free itself and which has led up to the moment
that is being narrated. On the other, Damiana simultaneously comes to represent the
threat of a capitalist future, in that she symbolizes the readers’ own old age or the future
that they themselves will have fashioned through their complacency if they do not act
now.

The tú in “Informe de una injusticia” then, refers to those who have not yet joined
the Revolution. It is directed specifically to these people in an effort to heighten their
awareness: to snap them out of their complacency and invoke their active participation.
The use of the singular tú reflects the ideology of the capitalist world where the individual takes precedence over the community, and to communicate this situation Castillo starkly contrasts the singular tú with the plural and communitarian nosotros: “No te imaginas / lo que duelen estas injusticias. / Normales son entre nosotros” (150). In this juxtaposition, the poet succeeds in alienating the solitary “tú” and the ideology in which she or he resides from this new, communal world he has envisioned.

In “Informe de una injusticia,” Castillo narrates the dehumanizing binaries of a capitalist world that separate the perpetrator from the victim, the public from the private, the objective from the subjective, the exterior from the interior. At the same time, he imagines a future without these binaries and offers the Revolution as the means--the only means--to the singular end of attaining the community he has envisioned. Clearly, bringing about the Revolution necessitates action and he is openly calling for it. First, however, the Revolution requires an imagination that can picture a world in which there will be no more Damiana Murcias. This is where Castillo’s poetry fits into the struggle. For Castillo, this future is what he wistfully calls Guatemala--his Patria--throughout his work, and it is a world that has yet to be realized. To make his Patria real, the love that leads to the compassion, action and community that is wanting in “Informe de una injusticia” and that, for Castillo, goes hand in hand with the Socialist Revolution must be found and nurtured. This is the ultimate search that Otto René Castillo undertakes in his poetry. Through the love he envisions, people will be brought together and the binaries that fragment society with finally be broken.
3.5 The Revolutionizing Power of Love

Love is a fundamental theme in Castillo’s work. The poet appropriated this topic for its implications of inter-personal union and its generative qualities. As such, in his poems, love ultimately becomes a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution, the means through which the pueblo would come together to re-imagine and subsequently re-build the nation. Therefore, whereas the one vein of Castillo’s poetry is clearly political and associated with the work of his contemporary revolutionary peers, particularly Cardenal and Dalton, this other avenue of his work speaks of a continuity with the Modernista movement led by Rubén Darío (1867-1916) at the turn of the twentieth century.

Love is a central theme in Darío’s poetry and it is a means to an end: it is a tool used to re-imagine the world. According to Cathy Jrade, the Nicaraguan poet used the genre to confront “feelings of fragmentation and alienation by attempting to rediscover a sense of belonging and ‘wholeness’” (Rubén Darío 4). In his writings, Darío presents love as something that endures and it is all-encompassing: “amar se convierte para Rubén en la razón de vivir” (Núñez Rey 11). Most importantly, love is human and it is of this world, the earth and the sky:

Amar, amar, amar, amar, siempre, con todo
el ser y con la tierra y con el cielo,
con lo claro del sol y lo oscuro del lodo;
Amar por toda ciencia y amar por todo anhelo.
Y cuando la montaña de la vida
nos sea dura y larga y alta y llena de abismos,
amar la inmensidad que es de amor encendida
¡y arder en la fusión de nuestros pechos mismos! (“Amo, amas” 249)

Jrade reads Darío’s use of love as the channel through which the historical moment is penetrated: it is “the human solution to the problems that one must confront during life’s
long, uphill journey” (Rubén Darío 102). She adds, “through it [love] individuals forget mundane anxieties and are transported outside themselves as they fuse with their beloved and with the cosmos” (Rubén Darío 102), therein reconciling the fragmented world and healing the feelings of alienation that is astutely pointed out in her study. Love, then, is equivalent to a union of the self with something bigger, something other than itself. And in Darío, this union is powerful in that it comes to be the keystone of “un mundo más habitable” (Núñez Rey 21) that he struggled to create through his poetry. It is to this same constructive end that Otto René Castillo used the symbol of love: as a tool through which he re-imagined his world--in particular his Patria.

Paradoxically, even though love is the central theme in Castillo’s poetry, he at the same time promotes violence through armed struggle as the only method through which the future will be realized. This combination of love and violence would at first seem to be a grave contradiction; nonetheless, this contradiction is reconciled, even if the violence is neither forgiven nor comprehended, when one understands Castillo’s appropriation of violence as an act worthy of Caliban. Just as Shakespeare’s character was forced to learn his colonizers’ language only to turn it around on his oppressors, Castillo does the same with violence. His moment in history was one in which the state communicated primarily

20 In “Rubén Darío: lengua de Nicaragua,” Tomás Borge writes of Darío’s influence not only on the revolutionary poets but on the Revolution itself:
Darío planteó y concretó, en su obra y con su obra, una gran exigencia estética. Señaló para los pueblos de América la altura de su humanidad y de su historia. Trazó un destino que volverá por el hombre, para que el hombre vuelva a ser hombre; es decir, para que el amor sea la única relación entre los hombres y la poesía su único medio de comunicación. Para que el hombre habité el paraíso que hasta entonces había permanecido en estado de deshaucio. Esta es la tarea del Frente Sandinista, de los revolucionarios nicaragüenses, de los revolucionarios de América Latina que Rubén Darío anunció” (173).

21 Huberto Alvarado, Roberto Morales and Rita Navarro Barberena have all explored the theme of love in Castillo’s poetry.
through violence, converting daily life into a nightmare, leading the Guatemalan poet to write:

Nos ha tocado vivir  
el minuto más hiel  
de todos los siglos.  
Si pudiera dar nombre  
al siglo veinte, le pondría:  
combate. (“Frente al espejo” 234)

Castillo appropriated the violence that governed his world only to subvert it. Whereas the repressive state used violence out of hate to perpetuate an ideology of fear that prevented change, Castillo converted it into a symbol of love through which he aimed to promote hope for the construction of a new Patria. Highlighting this unification of love and violence in the figure and writings of Otto René Castillo is essential to my study because I consider it the first step towards understanding his use of love as a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution.

In his poem, “Romeo y Julieta,” Castillo concisely outlines his complex conception of this human emotion. Just as in the play, and mirroring Castillo’s own agenda, “Romeo y Julieta” is a poem that narrates violence--here in the form of a suicide-necessitated by love. The poet begins at the moment just after Julieta awakens from her feigned death only to find a fading Romeo who tragically expires:

Y la dulce señora  
reclina su suave cabeza  
sobre el pecho aéreo  
del gran intranquilo. (187)

The image of Julieta placing her head on Romeo’s chest after he kills himself symbolizes the physical coming together of two individuals through the power of love. Additionally, the eventual suicide of both protagonists, due to neither one wanting to endure life
without the other, attributes to love a power that diminishes the importance of their individual existence while enabling them to take control of their own destinies.

In the final stanza, Castillo rewrites the ending of the play: “Pronto trinará / para ellos / la alondra del día” (188). The poet changes the story of Romeo and Julieta with these words from a tragedy that ends when the curtain falls to a message of hope that extends beyond death. Again, the alondra appears—as it did in “Antonio, el poeta,”—and with it comes its song of joy, heralding a new day, a new beginning. This new day is to be interpreted as a future in which the two protagonists will live on together beyond their deaths, beyond violence, therein defeating the limitations of time and space.

As “Romeo y Julieta” suggests, Castillo used love “como sentimiento generador” (Morales, “El amor a la vida” 19) to speak of something new in the future. Love leads to breaking spatial boundaries as it draws people out of themselves and towards someone / something else; love shatters the boundaries of time and is deemed eternal. Challenging these restrictions, love is to be understood as a power that enables human beings, just as it enables Romeo and Julieta in his poem, to mold their own futures because they are no longer trapped by the traditional conventions of space or time. Destiny, then, no longer has its hold over people’s lives and they and their world have the potential to become what they imagine.

In “Mañana triunfante,” a poem specifically about the Revolutionary process, Otto René Castillo concisely relays the Revolution through the essential elements of love that I described above. He begins the poem abruptly and assertively: “Estoy seguro” (101). The juxtaposition of the title with the curt opening verse communicates from the
very beginning the poet’s unflinching certainty in the future. Castillo continues the stanza by drawing an image of what that tomorrow will look like:

Mañana, otros poetas buscarán
el amor y las palabras dormidas
en la lluvia
Puede ser que vengan
con las cuencas vacías a llenarse
de mar y paisaje. (101)

The future is defined by hope because these “otros poetas,” like Castillo and Antonio before him, will unrelentingly continue the search for justice. What they seek is the communal unification of practice and theory that is essential to the success of the Revolution and that is symbolized by “el amor y las palabras” respectively. Castillo guarantees that the search is not futile when he writes that the objects of desire, “el amor y las palabras,” have not disappeared. Rather, they have been dormant, waiting only to be wakened. Castillo’s placing of the poets in “la lluvia” is significant on two fronts. One, the author suggests with the symbol of the rain that the journey will be a process of purification and renewal for humanity. And two, the poets are steadfast in their conviction because they persevere on their travels through the rain. This conviction-inspired perseverance converts the poets into migrating pilgrim figures, people whose life’s journeys are sculpted by their beliefs.

In “Mañana triunfante,” it is clear that the poets / pilgrims will undergo a time of trial and poverty before reaching the land that has been promised in the preceding verses, where “el amor y las palabras” have been nesting. Castillo equates this time of trial and utter poverty with the “today” of the poem when he writes:

Hoy, la amargura y la miseria
rondan mis bolsillos
abiertos en la noche
The bitterness and misery that envelope the poetic voice--a synecdochic representation of the revolutionary pueblo--is augmented by a solitude that is symbolized by the night sky. All is not lost, however, as Castillo ruptures the night’s darkness with the light of the stars, symbolizing hope.

Following these verses, the poet leaves the “today” behind in order to dedicate the rest of “Mañana triunfante” to projecting his visions of the tomorrow. What he sees in this future is a world in which he and the poets mentioned above have found what they were seeking, “el amor y las palabras.” Love and words have redeemed the universe of the fragmentation that had led to the misery and isolation that is briefly narrated in the first stanza and that the poet had already represented in “Informe de una injusticia.” This redemption is voiced through repeated symbols of love that serve to define this new world while simultaneously negating the old.

The first picture that opens the new world is that of a novia. Symbolizing human union through love, this image challenges the misery and solitude evoked previously by offering sounds of reverberating joy that fill in the silent void of the night sky:

Mañana, para mi júbilo repicando
en las paredes
la novia tendrá su más bella
campana hecha de mar y arena
de lluvia y panorama. (101)

The following stanza continues elaborating the concept of love while explicitly alluding to the political engagement of the poetic voice, which is linked to the natural elements of the land:

Mañana me amarán los ríos
por haber pegado propaganda
en la noche de la patria:
ellos se encargarán de recordar
mi nombre. (101)

The intimate human union represented by the figure of the novia is echoed in the union of love that binds the poet to the pueblo, symbolized in the personification of the ríos. On a literal level, the rivers are the central veins that provide and sustain the life of the geographical space of the Patria. Symbolically, however, they appropriate their traditional significance of the human experience. Read at these two levels simultaneously, the rivers come to be a metaphor for the pueblo as it is the pueblo that provides and sustains the spiritual life of the Patria. And because the poet is clearly part of the pueblo, the love between him and the ríos comes to speak of a love among the people that proves to be seminal to the creation and sustenance of the Patria.

Castillo then narrows his gaze in order to focus on portraying individual snapshots that serve to illustrate the constitutive parts of this pueblo. He shows it to be far from destined to the “amargura y miseria” that is characteristic of another time:

Y con su rostro de sonrisa
la más humilde campesina
escribirá la poesía de amor
que no salió de mi garganta.
El rostro de un niño alimentado
escribirá lo que detuvo
un grito de combate en mis arterias. (101)

The individuals that make up this pueblo are the new world poets. Thus the Poetry that was once Castillo’s, no longer belongs to him: he has handed it over to the pueblo. In this new epoch, though, the meaning of Poetry itself will change. It will no longer represent the hope of a “mundo más habitable” (Nuñez Rey 21) as it did in the hands of Castillo; rather, it will come to signify the very life the pueblo is living: “la vida / es la poesía más
alta” (Castillo, “Holocausto del abrazo” 240). Life, being equal to poetry, is turned into an art form, a conduit for human creativity that empowers the pueblo to become what they have imagined and so their life lies in their own hands. And when the poem that is their life comes to an end, they will be the ones who “firmarán su canto” (“Mañana triunfante” 102) because they will have been the authors of their own destinies. The implement with which they will take final possession of their canto, however, is not a pen. Rather, it will be a rosebush, “firmarán su canto con rosales” (“Mañana triunfante” 102), a symbol of the Socialist Revolution. With the “rosales,” Castillo closes his poem foregrounding his agenda, writing that this new life—or this new poetry—will manifest itself only through the Revolution.

Upon close examination, “Mañana triunfante” undeniably shows the parallels that Castillo drew between his conception of the Revolution and his understanding of love. With the title, Castillo initiates an engagement with the future and a break with the past that he solidifies throughout the poem by offering images of what this new world will look like and by writing his verse almost solely in the future tense. By evoking repeated images of love, Castillo privileges communal over individual will. And, finally, by converting the pueblo into the new world’s poets, he alludes to what is at the core of Marxist theory, that is, he places “an extraordinary emphasis on human creativity and self-creation” (Williams 206).

As I have demonstrated, in the poetry of Otto René Castillo, love symbolizes the fusion of action and theory that characterizes the Revolution and it serves as the keystone to what he had envisioned Guatemala, his Patria, to be. Love, then, defines his imagined place; and to get there, he was willing to sacrifice everything.
3.6 Loving the Amada

The amada is a powerful and recurring symbol in Castillo’s work, and because of the mystic tradition it is a symbol charged with meaning within Hispanic poetry. The poet uses her to articulate--on a very personal level--the power of love in his life and writings. In these poems, Castillo borrows from canonical love poetry as he describes an intimacy that reveals physical as well as spiritual union and passion. The loved one portrayed in these works serves as a catalyst through which the poetic voice sees, understands and acts in this world: she serves as his eyes; she acts as his muse; she re-defines time and space.22 Ultimately, as I will argue in this section, the beloved represents the incarnation of love and, by extension, she is a symbol of the Revolution.

The intimacy in these poems is articulated on many levels. Castillo narrates the physical coming together of himself and his loved one through the traditional poetic symbols of human contact: the kiss and the embrace. These symbols signify, as in “Romeo y Julieta,” the bodily coming together of two individual beings. Through the power of love, however, this physical union evolves into something greater. Thus, the poem, “Nuestro deseo,” is ostensibly about physical desire. By its end, however, this desire is converted into a metaphorical engine for the re-imagining of the nation.

“Nuestro deseo” begins:

A mis manos
sube tu cuerpo

---

22Among the criticism dealing with Castillo’s poetry, mention is never made of a historical woman to whom these love poems would have been written. This is not to say, however, that there was not one. The ignorance regarding the matter is clearly due to the fact that very little is known with regards to Castillo’s life.
This moment just prior to contact is conveyed with a timeless purity. The woman is beseeched to climb into the speaker’s empty hands offering a still image of a man who--represented by his empty hands--is unencumbered by any past or present burden, literally and metaphorically: he is all hers. Likewise, the nudity of the loved one can be interpreted as a metaphor for purity that symbolizes the total, unmediated giving of herself to him: she is all his. The emptiness of his hands, accompanied by her bareness, suggests that the two will come together after having shed their individual histories. Time, for them, has stopped and has yet to carry on. This is seen in the verse “en esta ola de tiempo,” that bears the sensation of that timeless and silent moment felt in the welling of a wave just prior to its breaking on the shore. This moment of purity is given transcendence when Castillo compares the lover’s body to “un río / de fuego” (206), symbolizing not a clichéd, impassioned “burning love” that survives for the moment, but a purification through death and renewal.

Castillo’s use of hyperbaton in these initial verses emphasizes the image of the manos. Here, as in the rest of his poetry, manos serves as a synecdochic symbol of the self that represents human creativity and self-creation as I already pointed out in his poem “Madre dolorosa.” When the speaker first appears with empty hands, he is, as of yet, undefined. At the closing of the stanza, the speaker and his world are turned into blank
slates through the purification process, and it is understood that the speaker, along with his lover, are about to embark on a journey of self-definition.

In the following stanza, Castillo makes it known that this journey will not be easy:

\[
\text{Mientras tanto,} \\
\text{un viento lejano} \\
sopla \\
salvajemente la ribera \\
del lago \\
donde se alza nuestra casa. (206)
\]

The wind, symbolizing violence and the passing of time, threatens the stillness represented in the preceding stanza, a stillness that is further encapsulated and threatened in the image of the wind-beaten house in the final verse. The discord that arises from this conflicting imagery of stillness and movement is symbolic of the struggle that the two protagonists will face on the journey they are about to undertake: the potential for creation that is inherent in the stillness represented in the first stanza will be challenged every step of the way by destructive forces that lie outside of their control.

Castillo closes the poem, nonetheless, by writing that the two, because they are united in their desire, will prove to be victorious. The second and final stanza begins when she reaches his hands, signifying the recommencement of time for the lovers and the beginning of their journey together:

\[
\text{Tu cuerpo} \\
\text{sube, entonces,} \\
hasta las llamas de mis manos, \\
y juntos ardemos y ardemos. (206)
\]

Through this physical union, a catalyst of death and rebirth, transcendence and creation, symbolized by the fire imagery, they jointly embark upon a voyage of self-definition that necessarily begins by imagining a different and improved world:
A lo lejos,
el agua es más azul
que nunca,
y más hermosa su mirada. (206)

This new world that they imagine is the first fruit of their desire: it is a Patria where the tranquility that is symbolized by the blue water will replace the turbulence of the wind-beaten choppy waters that lie right outside their door. The words “a lo lejos,” then, are to be understood as a temporal rather than a geographical projection and the world they imagine is one of the future.

Castillo finishes this stanza with the following verses:

¡Amor--te digo--
nuestro deseo tiene
su andar en incendio!” (206)

Their desire, manifested in this new world that they have imagined, begins at the precise moment in which, freed from the limitations of the past and the present, they are able to construct their future. At this crucial point, after their desire has been consummated, Castillo introduces love into the poem, therein demonstrating it to be the essential building block upon which they will construct this new world.

The love of which Castillo writes in “Nuestro deseo” is a channel though which the poet imagines the future. It serves as a metaphor for the creation / construction of a new world therein implying the destruction of the old. This motif of creation consistently converts the amada into a muse-like figure who serves not only to inspire his poetry, but also provides the inspiration the poet-revolutionary needs to continue his labors toward the formation of a better world.

“Lo privado también cuenta” is another poem that elaborates this idea of the amada as a muse:
Tal vez
sean tus ojos
lo más privado
que tenga
sobre el mundo […]. (235)

By condensing the beloved into the image of her eyes, the poet converts her into a symbol of vision. Just as the muses are responsible for creative vision, the amada guides the poet’s gaze as is symbolized when he appropriates her eyes in the above verses. The creative vision bestowed traditionally by the muses on the poets is echoed here in that his “muse” is the motivating force behind this poem as she is its subject. As the verses continue, though, it is clear that the image of the poet and his empty page, that which serves as the proverbial blank slate, correspond to the revolutionary and his world, respectively. Therefore, the vision the amada provides becomes the inspiration that is essential to Castillo’s revolutionary struggle and so she, his poetic muse, also becomes the compañera that struggles by the guerrillero’s side:

    pero ellos [tus ojos] aumentan,
    como nadie todavía,
    mi deseo de luchar
    para cambiar al mundo….(236)

This jump from amada-as-muse to amada-as-compañera is not a far leap; for just as the muse accompanies the poet along his journey so, too, does the compañera accompany the poet’s counterpart--the revolutionary--on his. And since both, the poet and the revolutionary are united in their common objective of creating a new world, the muse and the compañera are likewise united in their goal of providing adequate vision and inspiration along the way.

    To this end, the compañera never abandons the revolutionary in his struggle. He carries the image of her eyes, or her inspiration, with him, guiding and protecting him in
his trajectory: “tus ojos van conmigo, / atentos / a que nada me pase” (237). She is a song in the revolutionary’s most silent and loneliest hours, reminding him that he is not alone on his journey:

> tus ojos
> son un siempre estupendo
> que canta en mí
> a la hora más noche
> de todas
> cuando estoy cansado ya. . . .(236)

In addition to watching over him, his muse carries other meanings. When he writes that her eyes are “dos astros, muy dulces y lejanos, / que me anuncian / . . . / la pronta llegada del alba” (237), Castillo likens her to the morning star, thus converting her into the promise of a new and better world that he suggests to be his Patria when he concludes that this promised alba is “para todos” (237).

As I have pointed out, in “Lo privado también cuenta,” Castillo initially draws the image of an amada as a muse, who then evolves into a compañera only to escalate into a symbol of hope, a symbol that is a constant throughout his poetry. In “Ayuda a vivir tu risa,” the poet conveys this feeling of hope by portraying the amada through a discourse of youthful rejuvenation: “Tu risa de mundo en primavera. / Tu suave alegría, abriendo / su amanecer en rostro tuyo” (221). At the poem’s closure, Castillo uses this hope--muse--to construct the future:

> De muy cerca, tu risa
> colabora conmigo,
> amor mío,
> a convertir en amistoso
> el planeta
> para los hombres que vienen! (221)
In “Invernado,” another poem in which Castillo equates the amada with hope, the speaker prepares to say good bye to his amada as he heads toward “el sur / a combatir / junto a [su] pueblo” (281), and as he does so he describes her laughter as a star that will accompany him:

Ríe para mí,
ríe,
y que tu risa
sea la última
estrella
que guarde mi memoria
alma mía. (283)

By repeatedly writing of the amada as hope, he constructs her as a symbol of the Revolution. This analogy is given credence when his “love poetry” is read in the greater context of his work as a whole. There he has written that “la palabra revolución / va siempre unida / al vocablo esperanza” (“Lo más importante de todo” 127). These verses suggest that the amada, symbolizing hope and, by extension, the future, necessarily speaks for the Revolution. As a consequence, she comes to articulate the hope for the new world for which the poet-revolutionary is fighting: she is abstracted into an ideal.

The parallels that Castillo draws between his feelings for the amada and the Revolution offer the reader dual avenues from which to approach his poetry. On the simplest level, this love poetry is clearly that: verse written to a loved one. On a more profound level, Castillo converts her into a symbol for the Socialist Revolution. It is when this poetry is approached by both readings simultaneously and the amada is understood as a dual signifier that its richest meanings become clear: for the Revolution to succeed, the human element of love must be the essential motivation behind every step
and every breath taken. And conversely, in order for love to succeed, the Revolution must be that which binds:

Hermosa encuentra la vida
quien la construye hermosa.
Por eso amo en ti
lo que tú amas en mí:
La lucha por la construcción
hermosa de nuestro planeta. (“Comunidad” 192)

3.7 Loving the Pueblo

In his poetry written to the pueblo, the poetic voice denies himself a union with his amada when he leaves her behind in order to go off to fight for and with the people. This separation from her is voiced, again and again, as the greatest abnegation he can make in poems such as “Carta de amor constante” (33), “No estar contigo, se llama viernes” (60), “Tu voz” (175), “Conmigo, a pesar de todo” (263), “Te llamarás ausencia” (283) and “Alto en mi corazón, arde tu nombre” where he writes: “tú, la más aguda renuncia / que haya hecho mi corazón / sobre el planeta” (259). This personal sacrifice for the public good is essential to the message that Castillo wanted to convey in his poetry because it is a manifestation of the fusion of theory and practice that was central to his political agenda. His joining the Revolution and subsequent departure from his beloved, signify the first step toward the fruition of the ideal world that the two, the poet and the amada, had imagined together.

That the beloved must be abandoned in order for this new world to be realized opens a space in Castillo’s poetry for a discourse of sacrifice. Within this sacrificial paradigm, outlined by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss in Sacrifice: Its Nature and
Function, the militant poet is converted into the “sacrifier” (Hubert 10) who offers his amada—clearly his greatest earthly treasure—as the chosen victim to be sacrificed to a higher power, in this case not a god, but his Patria. Inherent in this paradigm, there is a rebirth that converts the profane victim—the beloved—into her sacred essence (Hubert 35): the Revolution. Through this sacrificial process, the profane and the sacred are drawn together (Hubert 10), and Castillo’s profane actions that make up the Revolution are consequently instilled with sacredness. The sacredness that Castillo attributes to the Revolution allows him to offer it to his pueblo as a road to their Patria where they will be redeemed. This said, the redemption he is offering will not come from divine but, rather, human agency in the form of extreme personal sacrifice. That the Revolution is synonymous with love still holds true in the poems directed toward the pueblo. Here, however, the love that is described is fraternal. And in these poems written to the pueblo, Castillo offers the Revolution—or love—as a new religion or ideology through which humanity—his pueblo—will be reborn into the future in the place of their Patria.

As I have already explored above in the context of the poem “Informe de una injusticia,” a significant amount of Castillo’s poetry exposes the day-to-day sufferings to which his pueblo is subjected. These poems are most fully understood when they are approached as an effort to prove the validity of his political actions—the “why”—and they seem to function in order to “[mobilize] a collective response and [serve] as a repository for a collective memory and consciousness” (Harlow 34). To this end, Castillo challenges the monologue established by the hegemonic historical records again and again by incorporating “el mundo exterior” (Cardenal 9) into his poems. In Castillo, “el mundo exterior” is manifested in a series of “dialogized images” (as Mikhail Bakhtin uses the
term [46]) that work together to create a sort of poetic photo album of his pueblo. Castillo, then, converts the genre of poetry into a historical record, saving the people’s unwritten history from oblivion. In so doing, the poet uses literature as a means to the end Bakhtin had imagined: Castillo ensures the “the future memory of [the] past” (Bakhtin 19) by bringing it up to the present moment where it can be accounted for and responded to accordingly.

In “Conmigo a pesar de todo,” Castillo poeticizes in order to condemn it the 1954 CIA-backed military coup that marked the end of Guatemala’s Ten Years of Spring. He writes: “Aquí, en mi país, se levantaron ellos contra la vida; / contra la ternura de las gentes más pobres. / Y enterraron el amor solemnemente” (261). In this world the speaker describes, life is threatened and love is buried, death wins and hate and its perpetuators reign supreme: “Los que inventaron la muerte del amor deben morir. / Pero los inventores del odio no murieron; ellos tenían el poder” (262). This post-1954 world is the unifying backdrop—Bakhtin’s chronotope—against which to read the suffering Castillo portrays in this vein of his poetry. These poems narrate a particular global place—his Guatemala—that is defined by “días terriblemente amargos, / días nacidos más allá del llanto / días de malos y negros sentimientos” (“Los albañiles” 114).

Castillo takes up this theme of death again in “Sabor a luto,” a poem in which life is constantly threatened as death literally waits around every corner to strike at will:

Si alguien toca a la puerta,
nunca sabes si es la vida
o la muerte
la que pide una limosna.
Si sales a la calle,
puede que nunca más
regresen los pasos
a cruzar el umbral
Here Castillo poses a binary separating the private from the public by incorporating the image of the house, suggesting the private space it represents to be a safeguard against the dangers that lie outside its doors, an idea reminiscent of what has already been seen in “Nuestro deseo” where the lovers are momentarily protected from the brutality of the world that is represented by “un viento lejano / [que] sopla / salvajemente” (206).

“Los fusilados” is precisely a poem about the moment in which death had decided to strike: “Los llevaron lejos de la ciudad / y no volvieron a llorar sus ojos / sobre las grises calles de mi país” (118). The streets are grey, implying a lifelessness that runs deeper than a physical death, one that is lived out on a daily basis by the “limosneros, / prostitutas” (“Invernado” 281) that populate the streets and constitute what Castillo refers to as his “pobre pueblo” (“Invernado” 281). In this same poem, Castillo writes about the “niños / sin la rosa del pan / sobre la mesa. . . .” (“Invernado” 281). Presenting a table wanting of bread, Castillo suggests that the lifelessness is not only in the streets but it has penetrated the homes as well, therein unveiling the false security of the doors that separate the public from the private in “Sabor a luto” and “Nuestro deseo.” Central to this image are the children, representing the future of the pueblo. That Castillo specifies them as being without bread, without life, suggests that the pueblo is essentially being born only to die.

When the pueblo does fight for its bread--symbolic of its life--as in “Lo más importante de todo,” it appears to be of no avail. The national army “desbarató la huelga / de los ferrocarrileros / por más pan” (125). In these poems in which Castillo transposes the “real world” onto the page, there is an overwhelming sense of destiny that paints the
pueblo as a people resigned to their situation, living only to prepare for death. As one of Castillo’s poetic personas, “un fagonero,” notes:

‘Uno se acostumbra
tanto a sufrir,
que nada puede dolerle más
de lo que ya le duele.
Será mejor ahorrar
para el entierro.’ (“Lo más importante de todo” 125)

The destiny to which the pueblo has resigned itself involves a process of dehumanization by the hegemonic system that has already been explored in the context of “Informe de una injusticia.” It is a process that victimizes the pueblo but, again, it is also perpetuated by the pueblo when they see no other option:

Para poder comer y dormir
mejor
se despojaron de sí,
se convirtieron tristemente
en el gusano que odiaban. . . .
(“Retorno al dolor de todos” 22)

In these poems, Castillo aims to open alternatives to this vicious cycle and to do so he begins by holding up a poetic mirror to his pueblo so they can see what has become of them. In so doing, it seems that the poet hopes to spark awareness that their situation is not predetermined. Rather, it is a historical product made of time and space and, most importantly, of human agency, their own as well as others’. Once this is communicated and understood, Castillo can proceed to offer hope for a change. The hope he provides is clearly the Revolution, and it is conveyed in terms of new beginnings that construct for the pueblo the road that they need “para buscar la luz / después de haber errado / en la tiniebla” (“El milagro hecho por el hombre” 37).
The most concrete image of hope that Castillo offers the pueblo is provided through the example of the success of Socialism in Germany. He writes a series of poems on this theme that have been grouped together, albeit posthumously, under the title “El milagro verdadero alemán.” In these poems, Castillo pays homage to the “enormes sacrificios / de humanidad” (“Ahora que comienza a invernar” 93) that the East German people made in order to break with their “destino doloroso” so that they could build a “futuro . . . de gloria” (Todo Berlín está en tus ojos” 73) if not for themselves, for those that were to come afterwards. Castillo narrates the selflessness that was required for the change in Germany to succeed, a selflessness that often resulted in one’s own death.

Through this death, however, life continued on:

Dresden es alzada desde la ceniza,
desde la muerte misma es alzada.

Y flores
que crecen entre las ruinas,
como pequeños cantos infantiles,
que no se deben apagar.
(“Con el alba, en Dresden” 80)

And so in these poems there is a reversal of that which is presented above in the poems dealing with Guatemala. Instead of living to die, one dies so that life may continue: “Y sin embargo sé: hay tantas formas / de dar la vida por la vida. Lo importante es: / darla como se tiene que dar!” (“Distanciamientos” 163).

In reading Castillo’s poetry, it becomes evident that there is a dialogue between the poems that illustrate the suffering of the pueblo and those that offer a vision of a different new world. The fusing of the two results in a message that is a call to action, an entreaty for a whole-hearted commitment to the Revolution that will, in the end, lead to
the pueblo's redemption in the Patria. The redemption that Castillo foretells for the pueblo is one through which they will don the humanity that they are currently wanting: “y nació el hombre, / lo único bueno de mi tiempo” (“Holocausto optimista” 242). They will live in a world in which the children, instead of going hungry, “crecen y sonríen” (“Los nuevos amaneceres” 135). This redemption, however, is pricey as it entails sacrifice of enormous proportions. As an example for his pueblo, Castillo sacrifices the amada but he is also willing to sacrifice his own life as he repeatedly proclaims throughout his poetry, the most powerful example of which is found in “Viudo de mundo:”

Compañeros míos,  
yo cumplo mi papel  
luchando  
con lo mejor que tengo.  
Qué lástima que tuviera  
vida tan pequeña  
para tragedia tan grande  
y para tanto trabajo.  
..............................  
Sabéis,  
me hubiera gustado  
llegar hasta el final  
de todos estos ajetreos  
con vosotros,  
en medio de júbilo  
tan alto. Lo imagino  
y no quisiera marcharme.  
Pero lo sé, oscuramente  
me lo dice la sangre  
con su tímida voz,  
que muy pronto  
quedaré viudo de mundo. (291)

So, when Otto René Castillo asked for a commitment to the Revolution that could very well result in the giving of one’s own life, he did not ask for something that he himself was not willing to give.
3.8 Love-Born Sacrifice: A Conclusion

Whereas for his artistic predecessors, social commitment was limited to their writings, for Otto René Castillo and his generation, these writings corresponded to a pledge to action. This union of word and action is at the heart of Castillo’s poetic and political agenda.

His poems, when read as a whole, are in dialogue with each other. One vein of Castillo’s work problematizes his historical moment that was defined by U.S. imperialism and structured upon a capitalist ideology. Resonating from these poems are images of solitude, misery and death. The poet counters these images of suffering and destruction in his love poetry where he re-imagines the world as one being based upon dialogue and community where human life is valued. In these verses, love—and its incarnation in the form of the amada—ultimately serves as a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution and Castillo presents both as the only feasible road to the future—his Patria—that he has envisioned. In his poetry, love and, by extension, the Revolution is infused with sacrifice. And it is only through this love-borne sacrifice that the Revolution demands that his pueblo will finally come into being.
CHAPTER 4

SPATIALIZING LADINOIZATION: LUIS DE LIÓN’S
EL TIEMPO PRINCIPIA EN XIBALBÁ

“Bueno, difuntos han sido siempre. Así los hicieron.”
Luis de Lión, “Los hijos del padre” (13).

4.1 Introduction

Central to the works of Miguel Ángel Asturias and Otto René Castillo is the displacement of the local communities into the global context. In both authors, this juxtaposition results in a community defined by fragmentation and exploitation, and each writer offers his own particular solution to the problems they present. Asturias advocates the rewriting of local myth to restructure the Mayan concept of community so as to make it viable in its new, global context. Castillo remedies his pueblo’s suffering through a discourse of love that serves as the foundation for the Socialist Revolution he envisions in his poetry. Luis de Lión (1939-1984), penname for José Luis de León Díaz, also problematizes community in a global world. In his novel, El tiempo principia en Xibalbá (1985), de Lión denounces the colonialist process of ladinoization that he sees as resulting in the death of his Mayan culture. In this chapter, I will examine de Lión’s representation of his community--and its future--within this context.
I begin by locating the author temporally and artistically as I look at his work within the context of the literary group Nuevo Signo. I then propose de Lió’s writings as signifying a politically committed exposure of ladinoization, couching my reading of the novel within this context. I look at the introductory epigraphs of each section as a rewriting or an echoing of the creation story read in the Popul Vuh. Next, I observe an ideological shift as I study how the myth presented in the Mayan text is seen to be silenced by the arrival of a new one, a myth that is based upon death. In the following section, I focus on the prologue where de Lió proposes the Catholic Church to be the original purveyor of this new myth. I demonstrate how he uses the figure of the Church to make subtle and not so subtle references to the Spanish Conquest and colonization, marking these two historical phenomena as the first steps toward the ladinoization of the Mayan culture. For the duration of the chapter, I examine how de Lió portrays the Mayan pueblo as taking an active role in the decay of their culture.

4.2 “Nuevo Signo”

Luis de Lió, considered to be the first Mayan novelist, was born in 1939 in San Juan del Obispo, Guatemala. He obtained his teaching credential in 1959 and subsequently dedicated himself to elementary education in rural schools throughout the country. As a teacher, de Lió was innovative—“impulsaba mejoras en cada escuela donde laboró” (Montenegro)--, doing what he could to ensure the integrity of the school: “que todos los niños tuvieran una escuela digna” (Montenegro). In this role, de Lió came into intimate contact with the nation’s poorest sectors—both indigenous and ladino--
and he developed a keen sensitivity to the grave social disparities that plagued Guatemala. Through his teaching experiences, the author came to realize that

la escuela rural . . . está divorciada de la realidad. Los contenidos programáticos están alejados de la experiencia vital de los [educados]. Están concebidos, supuestamente, para “incorporar al indígena a la vida nacional y a la cultura nacional”, enfoque totalmente erróneo, porque es etnocentrista: porque ignora que las culturas indígenas también son nacionales; pero, fundamentalmente, es un enfoque erróneo porque el hombre ladino, habitante de las áreas urbanas, es [individualista] y competitivo—tiene una idea del éxito que se opone diametralmente a la cosmovisión del indígena, a su integración con la naturaleza y el cosmos. (Arango 21; emphasis in original)

In response to this system that he saw as tunneling the Mayans into the ladino world, de Lión worked to teach the students--from both ends of the spectrum--that “se deben respetar las ideas y creencias de los demás” (Arango 21). To this end, the author organized literary workshops for his primary school students. Through these meetings, de Lión encouraged his pupils to express themselves in their own terms, signifying a tacit protest against the agenda of homogenization that he saw as inherent to the Guatemalan education system.

In tandem with his teaching, de Lión wrote poetry and prose through which he gave testimony to the deep-seated wrongs he witnessed as an educator and experienced personally as a Mayan. He was loosely associated with Nuevo Signo, a literary group that was founded by Francisco Morales Santos after the 1954 Intervention and that endured into the 1970s.²³ The objective of this group was to resist the increasing censorship of the post-revolutionary period by writing and dispersing verse, and they did so by any means possible (Morales Santos, “Poesía” xxi-xxii). The political implications inherent in their

---

²³ The following poets were consistent members of Nuevo Signo: Julio Fausto Aguilera, Luis Alfredo Arango, Antonio Brañas, Francisco Morales Santos, Roberto Obregón, Delia Quiñónez, and José Luis Villatoro.
mere act of writing at a time of state-imposed censorship was strengthened by the political commitment that they voiced in their poems, texts that adhered to a “testimonial and denunciatory function” (Beverley and Zimmerman 160). Through their poetry, these authors questioned the corrupt and demeaning environment in which they found themselves living, a society that José Luis Sierra has described as “amenazante, violenta, represora, militar” (83).

The work of these writers of Nuevo Signo is related to that of Castillo in that they continued the political and aesthetic break that the militant poet and his generation had initiated from the more canonical and—in their eyes—less committed authors such as Asturias and Neruda. José Mejía writes in his introduction to Las plumas de la serpiente (1970), an anthology of Nuevo Signo’s poetry, that these verses are composed of slices of life: “los litorales de la realidad que te rodea y es concreta como el pan que te alimenta y verídica como la sangre de los asesinados. Poesía, historia interna de los hombres y de los pueblos, que es familiar a ti como los labios de tu amada y terrible y sola como tu muerte” (5). In concordance with Mejía, Otto Raúl González writes that the poems of this literary group are taken from real life: “se inspiran en la cruda, la terrible realidad que . . . ya vivía el pueblo de Guatemala . . . desde el derrumbamiento de la democracia guatemalteca en 1954” (174).

Diverging from Castillo and his generation, however, Nuevo Signo emerged as an alternative to the militant left that had suffered multiple defeats under a state that was increasingly controlled by the military. For these writers, “poetry was not an individual bohemian act, nor a chance for agitprop pamphleteering, but a space for teaching and

24 Roberto Obregón was the only member of Nuevo Signo who was involved in militant resistance. Born in 1940, he disappeared in 1971. It was found out later that he was captured by counterinsurgency forces, tortured and brutally assassinated.
understanding” (Zimmerman 300). Unlike Asturias, Neruda and perhaps even Castillo, these new authors wrote from and about their own experiences: they came from the dispossessed classes and they were speaking for themselves, not on behalf of a “voiceless” people as their precursors had presumed to do. In their poetry, Nuevo Signo endeavored to “cantar la verdadera esencia de su pueblo y de su tiempo” (González 174), so that they might portray “the actual situation of the Indian communities and ladino poor peasants” (Beverley and Zimmerman 160). Read in this manner, the texts of Nuevo Signo should be approached as alternatives to the official annals of Guatemalan history. And by taking control of their own past in this way, these writers were appropriating a power over their future, “mapping out a critical, cultural space that would pose alternatives to the norms prevalent in a period of military repression” (Zimmerman 289; emphasis in original).

4.3 The Cultural Space of Ladinoization

Author of poetry and short stories, Luis de Lión wrote one novel, El tiempo principia en Xibalbá (1985). Published posthumously, Xibalbá was finished by 1971, making it the first novel written about Mayan life from a Mayan perspective. The following year, it earned de Lión first prize at the prestigious Juegos Florales de Quetzaltenango.25

---

25 There is confusion as to whether de Lión won first or second place. According to Arturo Arias, in “Asomos de la narrativa indígena maya,” de Lión won first prize; however, Montenegro reports him as having placed second.
Consistent in all of his literature and with the ideology of Nuevo Signo is a “compromiso vital con su pueblo” (Morales, “Luis de Lión” 10), a commitment with the people for which he was “disappeared” by the government-supported death squads in 1984. In Xibalbá, de Lión’s textual “compromiso” manifests itself in the claustrophobic portrayal of his indigenous pueblo, San Juan del Obispo.26 The space de Lión depicts is defined by the imperialist project of ladinoization, the process through which a Mayan assimilates into the Guatemalan nation by “becoming” a ladino.

Revisionist historians such as Greg Grandin (2000) and anthropologists such as Carol Smith (1990), Diane Nelson (1998) and Kay Warren (1998), show the terms “ladino” and “Mayan” to be historically unstable labels fueled by biological, cultural and economic discourses and practices. These scholars convincingly argue that the identities signified by the words “Mayan” and “ladino” refer to constructions that are “continually reinvented and reimposed” (Warren 74), making identities shift.

This constructionist perspective reflects what has been observed at the core of Mayan thought: the power of memory to fix what is fleeting. As noted in my first chapter, the Popul Vuh tells of the primordial importance of dialogic memory in the formation of human identity. Miguel León Portilla echoes this concept in his study Tiempo y realidad en el pensamiento maya, where he articulates the Mayan concept of reality to be rooted in dialogue. In her testimonio, Mayan activist Rigoberta Menchú repeatedly alludes to the role of dialogic memory in the construction of her indigenous identity as in the following excerpt where she recounts the rituals of dying:

Y, en el momento en que va a morir . . . llama a la persona que más quiere . . . para hacerle las últimas recomendaciones y transmitirle a la vez, el

---

26 Francisco Morales Santos and Rafael Gutiérrez both write that the town that de Lión portrays in Xibalbá is his own, San Juan del Obispo.
Menchú speaks of the Mayan concept of life as a duty. The rite of passage she details defines this duty as an obligation to not only practice the culture but to ensure its perpetuation into the future. If the transmission she narrates were not to happen, the Mayan cultural memory and the accompanying identity that is passed along with it would disappear—through its silencing—upon the testifier’s death.

The idea that culture survives through practice was adhered to by de Lión as is evidenced in his following words: “No puedo participar del llamado mestizaje precisamente porque lo hispano es la negación de mi lengua, de mi cultura” (qtd. in Montenegro). By this logic, if he had denied his culture, he would have contributed to its ruin. It is this cultural silencing that he refers to—and about which Menchú warns—that is at the root of the Guatemalan ladinoization project. Aiming to impose the dominant society upon the Mayan peoples by means of assimilation, ladinoization represents a break in time because its ultimate goal is to erase a cultural memory. Ladinoization is inherently violent because the cultural silencing it seeks—when that same culture is understood as something dynamic, lived, and practiced—is tantamount to a death.
4.4 Recounting the Popul Vuh

El tiempo principia en Xibalbá is divided into four parts, each of which is titled with an epigraph. When read together, these epigraphs succinctly recount the creation story that is told in the Popul Vuh. The first section of the novel is prefaced with “Primero fue el viento…” (Xibalbá 1), the wind reflecting the chaos of the gods’ repeated attempts at forming human beings and their subsequent sweeping away of these failed creations.27

In the Popul Vuh, the gods are finally successful in their endeavors to create human beings when they mold human flesh from ground corn. Once the first four beings are created, however, they enter a state of waiting--of stagnation--in a world where time has yet to begin: “In unity they waited there for the rising of the great star named sun carrier. ‘It will rise before the sun when the dawn comes,’ they said, and they were in unity there. . . . There was no sleep, no rest for them” (Popul Vuh 159). De Lión echoes this step in the Mayan text in his second epigraph: “La otra mita [sic] de la noche ya no durmieron. . .” (Xibalbá 31).

In the Popul Vuh, the prosperity of human life is dependent upon the defeat of the evil gods of Xibalbá. These lords are beaten through a series of challenges undergone and conquered by the divine savior twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who turn into the morning star and the first full moon, respectively. Once the twins achieve victory, Hunahpu rises as the morning star, portending the long-awaited dawning of the sun and instilling hope in the human beings. Then the sun rises:

27 As Arturo Arias has mentioned--but only in passing--in “Asomos de la narrative indígena maya,” these first words seem to pick up from Asturias’s Viento fuerte. I agree that there is an artistic and technical continuity / evolution here but I will not be addressing it in this dissertation.
And then the face of the earth was dried out by the sun. The sun was like a person when he revealed himself. His face was hot, so he dried out the face of the earth. Before the sun came up it was soggy, and the face of the earth was muddy before the sun came up. And when the sun had risen just a short distance he was like a person, and his heat was unbearable. . . .

There was great happiness in the hearts of Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar. They were overjoyed when it dawned. The people on the mountain of Hacaultz were not yet numerous; just a few were there. Their dawning was there and they burned copal there, incensing the direction of the rising sun. They came from there: it is their own mountain, their own plain. (Popul Vuh 161)

In the Popul Vuh, the rising of the sun symbolizes the commencement of time that, for the Mayans, represents the “life and origin of all things” (León Portilla 86). This being the case, the emergence of the sun necessarily corresponds to the dawning of humanity. De Lión captures this confirmation of life in his third epigraph: “Y de verdad estaban vivos” (Xibalbá 55).

“Y llegó el día…” (Xibalbá 73) is the fourth and final epigraph. With the word “día,” de Lión alludes to the victory of life over death represented by the defeat of Xibalbá. In the Popul Vuh, life’s triumph is seen in the symbolic fertility of human beings: “and they began their increase on that mountain” (161). Within the context of Mayan thought, this fertility is both literal and metaphorical, referring to both their biological as well as their cultural dissemination into the future. In the preceding quote, the active role given to people in their survival concurs with Menchú’s conception of life as an obligation to ensure the perpetuation of the Mayan cultural identity through its practice, without which it cannot exist.

In El tiempo principia en Xibalbá, each epigraph is cut off by an ellipsis that suggests its union with the others as well as its continuity through time. They are evenly dispersed throughout the novel, lending it a unifying, thematic thread that is fundamental
not only to the text but to the town and its people that de Lión is portraying. These epigraphs, however, do not reflect a similitude. Instead, de Lión shows that they represent a distant voice that parodies the existence described in the novel in that they serve to mimic a foundational memory and a communal identity from which the Mayans—about whom de Lión is writing—have been dispossessed. To communicate this dispossession, the author rewrites the creation myth summarized in the four epigraphs. He does so by introducing each section of the text with a tangent that occurs prior to the time narrated in the novel. When read as a sequence, these departures turn the myth summarized in the epigraphs upside down and present the readers with a new basis from which to understand the characters. Contrary to the *Popul Vuh* that constructs a creation myth supporting life and its regeneration, *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* develops a mythology that has death and degeneration at its core.

### 4.5 On Discounting the *Popul Vuh*

In the *Popul Vuh*, a strong hurricane is brought about by the Mayan gods to rid the world of its faulty beings so that they may try again at creating human life. De Lión borrows this wind at the outset of his novel with the words already cited above: “Primero fue el viento” (*Xibalbá* 1). In so doing, the author implicitly states that what follows are shots of the initial moments of humanity just subsequent to its creation. In the first pages of his novel, de Lión paints the world into which the beings are placed as one based upon death, suggesting that Xibalbá has yet to be defeated. The author first conveys this idea through imagery of silence:
The suffocating silence depicted above constitutes another allusion to the Popul Vuh. As I have already written in the first chapter, according to the Mayan text, humanity is defined through its ability to speak and enter a dialogue, and those human creations who fail to do so are doomed to obliteration. Within this context, by portraying a mute people, the author implies their imminent death. The symbolism and implication in the preceding quote are made explicit when de Lión brings Death to life in the excerpt that follows. Here, the author portrays Death as a woman pushing her cart to reap in the harvest:

"TRA-CA... TRA-CA... TRA-CA... La carretilla caminó las dos cuadras que había del cementerio al pueblo y paró.... La carretilla se detuvo en la puerta de la calle de la primera casa. Entonces, la que la llevaba, después de mirar para adentro con los soles negros de sus ojos, se puso a bailar otra vez. (Xibalbá 6-7)"

The sense of impending demise is felt by those who populate these initial pages and it manifests itself in fear. De Lión effectively represents this fear through the image of women hiding their children, wishing that they had never been born so as to protect them from the inevitable: “Las mujeres metieron a los patojos debajo de sus naguas deseando regresarlos al lugar de donde los habían sacado (Xibalbá 5).

Just as in the Popul Vuh, the second stage in de Lión’s creation myth depicts a restless people awaiting the arrival of the sun:
Todos estuvieron atalayando . . . los pasos del día sobre la joroba del cerro del Cucurucho . . . para que no se les quedara adentro ni un pedacito de esa noche en cuanto la luz llegara. Pero los minutos eran de hule y la noche un viernesanto de chispas parado eternamente de lo pesada y grande . . . Y mientras desvelaban, se sentaban, se paraban, se sentaban otra vez y otra vez se paraban, desesperado porque nunca amanecía. (Xibalbá 33)

Like their counterparts in the Mayan text, these people look for the sun to confirm the triumph of good over the evil of Xibalbá, a feat that will allow them to fulfill their existence. Until it rises they cannot be sure that they are truly alive, an uncertainty articulated in the words, “creyeron que tal vez ya estaban muertos desde hacía tiempo” (Xibalbá 34).

The third step in de Lión’s myth mirrors that of the Popul Vuh as he constructs a hope of impending life with this quote: “Y de verdad estaban vivos…” (Xibalbá 55). In the introductory pages to this third section of the novel, the author narrates the “dawning and the showing of the sun” (Popul Vuh 160), symbolically demonstrating the world to be created anew: “Pero no era el mismo de todos los días sino otro, uno totalmente nuevo porque llegó sin anuncios de pájaros y de repente” (Xibalbá 57). Diverging from the Mayan text, however, de Lión constructs a world that is backwards when he writes that the “sol de cobre nació del lado contrario a donde siempre nacía” (Xibalbá 57). By raising the sun in the west, de Lión converts it from a symbol of life into its opposite, one of death. Nonetheless, as it is in the Popul Vuh, in this novel, the coming of the sun corresponds to the dawning of humanity. In the following quote, de Lión echoes the first moments of human life read in the Popul Vuh when the original beings “burned [the copal] as they incensed the direction of the rising sun” (Popul Vuh 160): “Sin embargo, de un sólo golpe como árboles quebrados por un rayo invisible todos se hincaron,
agacharon la cabeza y con el aliento lo incensariaron…. Después, empezaron a buscarse, a verse, a reconocerse” (Xibalbá 57). Just as the placement of the sun signifies a reversal of the natural order, the dawning of humanity is reversed. Instead of being redeemed into life as the sun in the Popul Vuh promises, these people are born into death. For them, time, or what León-Portilla understands as representing Mayan reality, begins in Xibalbá, the “place of fear” (Tedlock 34) defined by death. As a result, human existence is limited to eternal threat and looming demise.

The final section headed by “Y llegó el día…” (Xibalbá 73) parallels the last stage of the creation story told in the Popul Vuh in that it portrays the first steps taken toward the future by these new beings. The author begins by narrating a powerful moment of self-awareness when the people realize that the images of death surrounding them define their reality, that they are, in fact, alive: “se dieron cuenta de que no estaban muertos” (Xibalbá 75). De Lión then mimics the fertility of the mythic beings in the Popul Vuh when he writes: “principiaron a reconstruir la aldea, a querer reinventarla exactamente igual a la imagen que tenían de ella en el cerebro desde hacía siglos” (Xibalbá 75). The fertility of the people, however, is immediately truncated when the author concludes his myth with the following words: “Pero se dieron cuenta que había que hacerla de nuevo… Pero ya no hicieron nada…” (Xibalbá 75).

Remembering that de Lión is writing about his own Mayan village--San Juan del Obispo, a physical space that continues to exist--the lost aldea of the novel cannot be understood simply in terms of geography and architecture; instead, it needs to be read as underscoring the cultural dimension of the aldea. When he writes, therefore, that the characters begin to reconstruct and to want to reinvent their aldea, the author suggests
that they are embarking upon a process of cultural resurgence. By introducing the theme of culture in this way, the death imagery central to de Lión’s myth necessarily speaks of a cultural loss. The fight his characters instigate, however, is lost when the author portrays them as lacking the volition to carry out the hard work such an endeavor would entail: “Pero ya no hicieron nada” (Xibalbá 75). With these words, de Lión concludes the myth, pointing out that the people of the novel who are born into death are the very perpetuators of their own destiny because they do nothing to change its course.

The wind in de Lión’s myth is a metaphor for the ladinoization process. It represents, according to Morales, an “escisión ontológica” (“Luis de Lión” 4) that cuts into the core of being: “el viento…mordía la carne y sobaba su lengua áspera y roma hasta más allá del corazón, en el mero fondo de la vida” (Xibalbá 3). The wind erases and makes the world anew, redefining human existence, as Sagrario Castellanos has written, in terms of “la muerte, el hambre, los complejos, . . . el rompimiento con las costumbres y rituales” (28). The consistent imagery of people being born into death is a metaphor for the cultural loss that is the ultimate repercussion of ladinoization. The author tells how through this process, people are robbed of their existence; they experience a metaphorical death in that they and their world down to its very nature have been changed, redefined: the sun now rises in the west.

4.6 The Prologue: The Beginning of the End

De Lión strategically closes El tiempo principa en Xibalbá with its prologue. By employing this maneuver, the author tacitly presents the beginning as the end, converting
the physical book into a metaphor for the novel’s central theme that subverts the opposition between life and death. In these final pages, de Lión recounts the origin of the Catholic Church in his textual town. By writing of it at the novel’s closure, the author implies that the beginning of the Church speaks of an ending. And, in effect, de Lión makes this particular message clear upon concluding his prologue by suggesting a direct link between the Catholic Church and the death of Mayan culture.

The author begins the prologue by attributing an agelessness to the Church when, comparing it to a fossil, he places it in the town before all else: “Porque, desde que poco a poco, como un pájaro inmóvil y sin nombre, venido al mundo sin necesidad de huevo y al que le nacieran, primero, sólo los huesos, luego la carne y finalmente las plumas hasta quedar parado como fósil vivo” (Xibalbá 101). The author continues: “la iglesia fue emergiendo de sus cimientos hasta quedar pintada de blanco como paloma de Castillo y a su alrededor aparecieron, como pichoncitos de paloma espumuy, los ranchos, en este pueblo nunca había ocurrido nada” (Xibalbá 101). The bird imagery just cited likens the Church to a dove thus imparting onto the Church the dove’s Biblical significance as a promise of rebirth in the story of Noah. This sense of beginning is articulated in the following quote, where time seems to commence when the tolling bells break the silence: “Y sólo de repente, el doblar de las campanas rompía el trapo detenido del aire” (Xibalbá 101). This beginning, however, is a rebirth that is consequential of a death: “Y sólo de repente…el avemaríapurísimasinpecadoconcebida detrás de algún ataúd como empujándolo para que navegara pronto en el polvo” (Xibalbá 101).

The author gives credence to the sacred promise conveyed through the image of the dove when he describes the world that has sprouted up around the Church. The
readers witness copious harvests of beans and corn, signifying an environment of abundance that fixes the insufficiency of a previous existence:

Y un año, sobre los surcos, en donde siempre las matas de milpa y la plantillas de frijol decrecían como si en lugar de elevarse hacia el cielo se hundieran más en la tierra, de regreso a la semilla, las cañas engordaron y se alzaron en vicio, verdes hasta casi lo azul, hasta casi la oscuridad, y las matitas de frijol se explyaron en los espacios que había entre cada surco, de tal manera que la gente no tenía ni dónde pasar porque los bejucos y las hojas llenaban todos los terrenos como si fuera una invasión verde. Y cuando fue la cosecha, todos tuvieron que auxiliarse para recoger tanta mazorca. . . . (Xibalbá 101)

The dialectic between the two situations quoted above poses the Church as a saving grace that, by its mere presence, miraculously delivers the hungry and suffering into a state of plenitude. In this new world, trees symbolize life as is seen in the following quote where they produce more fruit than can be eaten: “Y los árboles de anona, árboles chiriviscudos, esqueletos de árbol, siempre con sólo dos o tres frutas, se poblaron de tantas. . . . Y los pájaros también se daban gusto, pasaban día y noche empachándose, empollando pajaritos por montones para que también consumieran todo lo que había en abundancia en los árboles” (Xibalbá 102).

De Lión shows the Church’s promise to be short-lived, however, when the prosperous new world is changed inexplicably from one day to another:

Y, entonces, éstos dejaron caer sus frutos, pero no poco a poco como debiera ser conforme maduraran, sino como una lluvia, de pronto, y de un día para otro se quedaron desnudos. Y en los surcos, también de un día para otro, sólo quedaron pepitas, semillas que se podrían, que se volvían tierra, que anunciaban que nunca se convertirían en árboles. (Xibalbá 102)

The waste and hunger exhibited in this quote converts the world that was once seen as a fertile, giver of life into one that is plagued by death. De Lión shows the inevitability of
demise in this world by littering the landscape with death imagery in the form of trees that no longer bear fruit, and corn and beans that have withered away in their skins:

Y sobre los terrenos los árboles se veían desolados como pintados de negro sobre el cielo, como cadáveres. Y, entonces, en las trojas las mazorcas de maíz se pusieron a hervir de palomillas que las convirtieron en poco tiempo en puro polvo y los toneles de frijol se llenaron de gorgojos que dejaron de los granos sólo cáscaras. (Xibalbá 103)

The apparent opposition between the two situations described above--the one being fruitful, the other one fruitless--is reconciled as de Lión tacitly shows them to be one and the same. The author achieves this effect by linking his descriptions of the disparate worlds in one paragraph, symbolically showing the two to share the same space, separated by time but just barely: “de pronto, de un día para otro” (Xibalbá 102).

Through communicating a spatial and temporal proximity in this way, de Lión suggests that the Mayans who partake of the life the Church offers simultaneously play a part in their own death.

The manner in which de Lión interweaves life with death in the figure of the Church allows him to reveal it as the primary engine behind ladinoization. In writing of the Church’s origin through the primordial image of the fossil, the author emphasizes its role in shaping human life by symbolically placing it at the beginning of history. This temporal placement of the Church serves as a metaphor for the arrival of the Spaniards in the “New World.” Their presence initiated complex historical episodes involving the Conquest, religious conversion and subsequent colonization. This “encounter” entailed not only the Spanish appropriation of geographical territories but the charting of a new “ideological map” (Said, Culture 25) that endeavored to write over what was there before, setting the stage for what was to be termed ladinoization. In order to speak of the
momentous ideological and cultural changes that were about to occur in the centuries to come, de Lión appropriates the Church’s discourse of rebirth symbolized by the dove. His use of this symbol, however, is ironic because he quickly shows that the rebirth the Church promises is not contingent upon the transitory nature of death but, rather, its permanence. De Lión communicates this last point through a series of images ranging from the “ataúd” and the “polvo” to the barren trees, culminating in the withering of the traditional crops of corn and beans, two concrete signifiers of a vanishing Mayan life and culture.

In the prologue, de Lión presents the arrival of the Church in America and its accompanying discourse of life as signifying the death of Mayan culture. As a result, when the author places the Church at the beginning of history, he does so to imply that the Mayan cultural past and its accompanying identity has been silenced into oblivion. For this reason, the remnants of the Popul Vuh that he salvages in the epigraphs are illusory at best because they echo a past that has long since been forgotten. Now there is a new foundational myth brought by the Church that fills in the void where the Popul Vuh once was. For the Mayans, however, this myth signifies death and destruction because it represents what they have lost. De Lión shows the roots of this myth to be steeped in close to five hundred years of lived history that have gradually carried the Mayan cultures further and further away from their origin to a place in time where the Popul Vuh is nothing more than “un libro raro” (Xibalbá 16). However, the fact that de Lión posits the Popul Vuh as a book that, albeit rare, still exists, allows him to offer a glimmer of hope that the Mayan people might “dis-cover” themselves if only they were to seek it out.

28 Mayan intellectual, Luis Enrique Sam Colop, wrote Jub'aq onay kuchum k'aslemal = Cinco siglos de encubrimiento : a propósito de 1992 (1991) precisely to reveal the historical and cultural violence that the Mayan people have suffered consequent to the arrival of the Spaniards in 1492.
The principal characters in de Lión’s text, however, do not embark upon the search, and this is his primary message.

Throughout the rest of the novel, the author portrays a town he calls Xibalbá through the life experiences of Pascual Baeza, La Concha and Juan Caca. In developing these characters, the novelist denounces the ramifications of ladinoization upon the Mayan peoples of Guatemala. However, instead of simply painting them as victims as traditionally has been the role of “the colonized” figures in history, de Lión shows that they, too, are responsible for their situation because they have not resisted the cultural, ideological and economic impositions that are slowly erasing differences while converting them into “the other.”

4.7 The Severed Self of Pascual

The story of Pascual Baeza, a central figure in de Lión’s novel, recounts, according to Morales, “una de las realidades más lacerantes de la población maya-quiché de Guatemala: la del indio reclutado por el ejército, la de su deformación ladina y la de su marginamiento y discriminación en la comunidad india” (“Luis de Lión” 7). Through this character, de Lión narrates the flight from and ultimate return to the Mayan town, a journey that has been experienced by many indigenous people in Guatemala. De Lión

---

29 This journey from and return to the Mayan village is a recurring theme in Guatemalan literature. It has been narrated by Wyld Ospina in his indigenista novel Los lares apagados (1939) and by Monteforte Toledo in Entre la piedra y la cruz (1948). Although Wyld Ospina and Monteforte Toledo both had contact with the Mayan, they were essentially outsiders in that they were not Mayan. These writers’ cultural and economic distance allows Post-Colonial thinkers room to debunk their stories in light of more “authentic” narrations. De Lión’s own recounting marks a switch of perspective in that he was writing from within the Mayan culture that he lived, granting him the “authenticity” perceived as missing in the aforementioned writers. Gaspar Pedro González’s La otra cara (La vida de un maya) (1998), marks yet another version of the same story told from a Mayan perspective.
uses Pascual to communicate the painful duality of Mayan / ladino that results from this experience and shows that instead of leading to a fusion, it signifies the severance of the self into conflicting realities. Pascual is to be understood as representing “una colectividad” (Arias ii), and his story should be read as that of generations of Mayan people who have had their lives redefined by ladinoization.

Pascual is introduced after the wind has come and gone. His name, symbolic of renewal in the Christian tradition, gives voice to the “rebirth” that the Mayan people have experienced as a consequence of ladinoization. The significance of his name becomes especially poignant upon reading about how and when he enters the world:

Si se hubiera muerto desde el momento mismo en que se asomó al mundo. Traía enrollado en el cuello el cordón umbilical y hubiera perecido ahorrado pero la mala hierba nunca se muere. Siempre lo acompaña su ángel, su diablo de la guardia. Amoratado, sin esperanzas para la vida. . . . Era un huesito. Un pequeño hueso apenas cubierto por un arrugado pellejo, dos ojos saltones como pegados, como cosidos a las órbitas y una boquita chupada como remiendo de grandes puntadas. . . . Eran las dos de la mañana del día dos de noviembre, día de difuntos. (Xibalbá 37-38)

His sickly condition coupled with the fateful day--día de difuntos--and place of his birth, Xibalbá, conveys the message that instead of emerging into life, Pascual is born into death. De Lión develops this character through narrating a shockingly violent childhood in Xibalbá, where he aggressively commits a series of horribly senseless crimes that speak loudly against life and perpetuate the cycle of death into which he is born.

The ferocity of Pascual’s adolescent crimes culminate at the moment in which he cuts off the finger of a boy who is pointing to a vulture in the sky: “El dedo estaba solitario, recostado sobre la mesa del cielo cuando de repente, zas, algo brillante se levantó del suelo, y zas, el dedo voló por el aire y el muchacho se tiró a la tierra revolcándose del dolor, la mano empapada de sangre. El Pascualito se rió de su travesura
The town’s people go to Pascual’s house demanding justice, and his mother pleads for his life: “Dejen a mi muchachito. Llévenme a la casanueva a mí pero no le hagan nada a él.’ Sus ojos eran de madre y la gente tuvo piedad de ella” (Xibalbá 43). When she is imprisoned, Pascual misses her only when he experiences hunger. To escape his suffering, Pascual joins the army.

Pascual returns to Xibalbá after an absence of many years. Revealed by his thoughts upon seeing the town once again, his homecoming is consistent with the contemptuous familiarity with which he left: “Sí, la misma babosada de siempre. . . . Pueblo de mierda, ni siquiera una nueva calle inventa, ni un nuevo apellido, ni una nueva cara, ni una nueva manera de enamorar, ni de chupar, ni de vestir” (Xibalbá 27). His time away had been spent as a Mayan in the city where he distanced himself from this aspect of his being while he attempted to appropriate a new ladino identity. De Lión gives voice to this double self when he divides Pascual in two. In the following soliloquy, de Lión poses Pascual’s conflicting selves face to face, placing the character’s ladino side outside of his body in order to speak directly to his Mayan side using the vos pronoun: “Y a este pueblo vos regresaste; vos, el que aquí dejó enterrado su ombligo y se llevó su vida, el que regresó por su ombligo para morir junto a él pero dejó en otro lado lo mejor de su vida; vos, el que regresó con los ojos llenos de mundo, mundo odiado, mundo ladino en donde fuiste discriminado” (Xibalbá 27-28).

The fact that de Lión first gives voice to Pascual’s ladino self is indicative of the “discriminación de la comunidad indígena” (Morales, “Luis de Lión” 7) suffered by many Mayans who make the journey to the city and back only to find themselves no
longer quite fitting in. In effect, upon his return, Pascual is instantly read as an outsider when his clothes and language instantly mark him as a ladino:

Cuando Pascual regresó al pueblo traía, además de los años que lo habían llevado de niño a hombre, una cara como si ya fuera de otra parte; traía en los dientes, en lugar de algunos de ellos, pedazos de oro que trataba de mostrar con orgullo cuando reía o hablaba; traía palabras raras, desconocidas como de hombre que ha aprendido otros idiomas; traía en los pies zapatos en lugar de caités. . . . Ya no era de aquí. Así parecía. (Xibalbá 45)

The reciprocal glances that de Lión narrates, Pascual’s toward the town upon his return, and the town’s toward Pascual, serve to initially distance this character from the community. De Lión challenges this ladino façade with which Pascual returns by momentariliy giving voice to a side of his Mayan self, in the form of a coyote, presumably his nahual. 30 The following selection reproduces a conversation between this coyote and a gallina, another nahual. Through this dialogue, a different level of truth is approached that turns the reciprocal glances above into an act of self-awareness for Pascual. The coyote--Pascual’s animal form--begins: “Sí he vuelto. Tenía necesidad de volver, de poner mis pies otra vez sobre esta tierra, de respirar otra vez su aire, de beber su agua” (Xibalbá 50). The gallina responds: “Yo pensé que ya nunca volverías. Quien que se va de aquí vuelve a esta tristeza, a esta miseria de pueblo. Es increíble” (Xibalbá 50). The coyote continues:

Así parece. Pero aunque te odien, el calor de tu rancho no lo vas a encontrar en ningún lado, sobre todo si sos indio. Sí, te abren las puertas pero en cuanto miran tu color, tu cara, tu pelo piensan que no sos hombre sino su remedio, que más te parecés a un animal, que tu condición es ser menos que ellos y te cierran la puerta y te abren la otra, la de la calle, la de la cárcel…. No, aunque te odien aquí, este odio parece amor porque si te

---

30 According to Rigoberta Menchú, “nahual” signifies “el doble, el alter ego animal o de otra naturaleza que, según la tradición indígena, posee todo ser humano. Está en correspondencia con la personalidad de las personas. La atribución del nahual conlleva el reconocimiento del recién nacido como parte integrante de la comunidad” (285).
morís te entierran, no te dejan para comida de los zopes, te lloran, te recuerdan, te ponen tu cruz. (Xibalbá 50)

The disparaging comments with which Pascual initially greets the town, then, parrots the dominant, ladino discourse that discriminated against him to the point of conditioning him to see in the same manner. As a result, what was projected onto him, he is now projecting onto this community, once his own. However, it is a projection that bounces back to him when, converted into a coyote, he is disrobed of his ladino mask and consequently recreated as a Mayan. This painful self-deprecation that we witness in Pascual is produced by ladinoization yes, but it also perpetuates the process: it is a cycle of stagnation.

Pascual’s disdain for his community as well as himself is substantiated by his physical desire for the church’s wooden effigy of la Virgen de la Concepción: “mujer blanca, ladina, mujer de otro lado” (Xibalbá 65). His longing begins with an attraction he feels upon seeing the effigy and culminates in his absconding with it. Subsequently, Pascual forces himself upon the Virgin as he attempts to have intercourse. During his efforts, the wooden Virgin comes to life, giving voice to his knowledge that he can never really have her or, rather, what she represents, when she derisively calls Pascual, as well as the men that have found them together, “inditos” (Xibalbá 72).

The desire that Pascual demonstrates toward the Virgin simultaneously represents his rejection of the Mayans—both the women as well as the men, including himself—that surround him. She is the archetypical ladina woman. Ultimately, she is unreachable, symbolized by the fact that she is made of wood. She represents, therefore, a world where Pascual— the Indian—will never be permitted. Yet knowing of its existence shall haunt him wherever he goes as is evidenced in his following words:
Linduras abundan en otros lugares. Pero no son tuyas. Lo único que podés hacer es que se te caiga la saliva. Y de repente te juntás con una mujer, una cualquiera pero de un color diferente al tuyo. Y esa mujer te da de todo lo que puede dar una mujer menos un hijo porque no quiere que ese niño sea como vos. Te quiere porque le das dinero. Te llenás de odio. Y entonces, mejor volvés a tu pueblo pero no a juntarte con nadie, ya estás muy viejo, ya no podrás cuidar a tu hijo. Podría volverse un bandido por falta de padre. Sí, volvés. ¿A qué? Tal vez a morirte. (Xibalbá 51)

Pascual is narrating his experiences that have carried him home; however, these words also seem to echo what little is known of his father. De Lión lets it be known that when Pascual’s father married his mother, he was old and lonely: “[u]n hombre que no necesitaba de belleza sino de compañía. Y por eso se juntó con ella. Pero su edad era mucha…. Y sólo tuvo tiempo de engendrar a su hijo y se murió” (Xibalbá 38). Upon dying, he left Pascual without a father, thereby setting him up to become the very “bandido” (Xibalbá 51) cited above, resulting in unmentionable acts of violence against his community before he leaves, then joining the army in order to escape the wrath of the town. Years later, Pascual returns to Xibalbá, aged, in order to die: “Vine a morirme” (Xibalbá 50). What the author denies with respect to the father is the history that led up to his old-age. Nonetheless, the parallels drawn between the father and son suggest that he, like Pascual, had left the town in search of another life, only to return, a defeated indito.

The environment into which Pascual is born is one that has been infected by ladinoization: a process that leads to cultural stagnation because it is structured upon self-deprecation. Pascual, a microcosmic representation of the Mayan culture, is born under extremely inauspicious conditions, signifying the struggles that the culture faces within the context of ladinoization. The crimes he commits during his youth can now be explained as an expression of the disrespect toward his culture that has been handed down to him by his father. By extension, this disrespect turns into an act of self-hatred.
because Pascual serves to represent the Mayan people. This theme of self-deprecation is reiterated in the dialogue between the coyote and the gallina, and it culminates in Pascual’s yearning for the wooden effigy of la Virgen de la Concepción. Pascual’s sex with her represents his impossible desire to penetrate the ladino world while it consequently symbolizes his contribution to the stagnation of his culture. By wanting the Virgen, a woman who by definition will not bear his child—despite her name, Concepción—Pascual assures himself that he will not project himself or his culture in the generation to come: his line ends with him.

4.8 Juan Caca and la Concha

Through the figures of Juan Caca and la Concha de Lión reformulates the story of Pascual. Uniting the two male characters is an unrealizable desire for admittance into the ladino world. La Concha represents Juan Caca’s futile effort to construct that forbidden universe with himself as its center.

Juan Caca left Xibalbá when he was only a boy and returned an adolescent. Like Pascual, Juan’s departure signaled his exposure to the ladino world and upon his return he was marked with a difference: “Se había ido niño indio, aunque su tata tenía dinero, y había vuelto adolescente, cargado de otro mundo, de otras costumbres” (Xibalbá 81). Whereas Pascual’s channel of escape was the army, Juan Caca left to attend Catholic seminary, where he was taught that human flesh was filthy: “su carne es sucia” (Xibalbá 85). The “otro mundo” Juan was exposed to in the seminary was the ladino world. There, he learned what it meant to be Mayan in a ladino-dominated society: he learned that he
did not fit in. That Juan Caca did not belong is evidenced when he comes home not having completed the seminary. Although mention is not made as to why, it is assumed that he simply was not allowed to do so because he was merely a Mayan in a ladino world. When de Lión writes that he comes home “cargado” with this other world, he suggests that it is now an integral part of him and that it has molded his vision, and, in effect, it has. He returns with a realization of his “Mayanness” that he had not had before. When, in a dream, he remembers the words repeatedly preached in the seminary, “su carne es sucia” (Xibalbá 85), he hears them with a new awareness and takes them to be directed at his own, brown, Mayan flesh. Through obsessive “maneras higiénicas de ser” (81), he tries to erase his indigenous identity, to wipe off the cultural soil--the “caca”--that stains his skin. When this does not work, Juan refuses to look at himself in a mirror for fear of seeing what he has been taught to denigrate: “se acercó al espejo pero no quiso mirarse” (Xibalbá 54).

When Juan Caca arrives home, he refuses to “rozarse con las cosas del mundo” (Xibalbá 81), exhibiting a conscious effort to distance himself from the Mayan world and people to which he has returned and which he has learned to disparage. The town’s people are like a mirror to him: when he sees them, he confronts a side of himself that he is trying to escape. In this effort to “huir de sí mismo” (Xibalbá 54), Juan isolates himself from the pueblo cultivating a ladino identity in which he can believe because it will go uncontested.

Juan’s self-imposed isolation is most concretely symbolized in his abstinence from sex. In a dream, his mother approaches him begging him to marry; she reminds him that he can have any woman he chooses: “Juan hay tantas mujeres en el pueblo. Jóvenes,
solteras, viudas, hasta viejas. Cualquiera de ellas se moriría por venir a vivir a tu lado. Lo sé, me lo han dicho” (Xibalbá 89). He responds: “No, nana, no” (Xibalbá 89). He does not reveal the true reason behind his solitude, he only says that “no nací para tener mujer” (Xibalbá 88). The reason behind his self denial is revealed earlier, though, in an episode where de Lión gives voice to Juan’s ladino half. Just as he does with Pascual, the author posits the two facets of Juan side by side. In the following soliloquy, Juan also articulates his desire for la Virgen de la Concepción and what she represents:

Porque recordás que vos también te enamoraste de ella, que varias veces estuviste tentado a salir de tu aislamiento, de ingresar a la cofradía para que te eligieran principal y tener la oportunidad de llevártela a tu casa. Recordás que durante mucho tiempo la visitaste a solas . . . que ya en tu casa la soñabas desnudita en tu cama, que la sentías . . . y no pensando en si era virgen o madre o puta sino mujer blanca, ladina, mujer de otro lado, de la otra raza a la que vos te querías integrar por tu dinero, por la blancura de tu casa, de tu alma, a pesar de la indiez de tu cara, de tu rabadilla, de tu pelo. Recordás que una vez dijiste que con ella tú tendrías un hijo, un hermano de madre del invasor de estas tierras, un divino mestizo aunque después te negara a vos. (Xibalbá 65-66)

Juan’s self-denial is clearly rooted in his mindful desire to not be a part of--to not penetrate or procreate--the Mayan culture. The only human contact he will allow himself is that which might occur with a ladina woman: his only feasible portal to the “otro lado.” This meeting, however, occurs only in his dreams: “Y la mujer avanzaba. Y él estaba inmóvil, como atado a su cama del ¿miedo? o ¿sueño? La mujer llegó junto a él, levantó las chamarras, se tendió a su lado, dejó caer las chamarras sobre los dos, se voltió hacia su cuerpo y entonces sí que cerró los ojos, entonces sí que fue puro sueño” (Xibalbá 86).

When Juan wakens from this dream, “un olor nuevo…de ¿la mujer?” (Xibalbá 87) lingers in his room, convincing him that this encounter was real and transforming him “en perro en brama” (Xibalbá 87). He immediately dresses to go on the hunt for “la mujer que lo
había violado tan ricamente” (Xibalbá 87). Her scent guides him to the plaza where he catches sight of the woman he had met in his dream: “los hombres del pueblo . . . sacaban en hombros de la iglesia una rara procesión en cuya anda venía… no puede ser… pero… venía…” (Xibalbá 88). Clearly, what he sees is the wooden effigy of la Virgen de la Concepción carried by her cofradía. To tell the readers that this is indeed the woman who visited Juan Caca in his dreams, de Lión conveys Juan’s surprise by cutting his speech short with ellipses.

Subsequent to his meeting with la Virgen, Juan decided to go to the city to find her incarnation in a ladina woman: “Bajó a la ciudad. Vestido con sus mejores ropas. A caminar por todas las calles. A mirar a las mujeres. A saludarlas. A tratar de abordarlas” (Xibalbá 90). In his search, though, he encounters the same racism, ridicule and rejection suffered by Pascual: “A soportar sus risas, sus burlas. A ir a las cantinas. Pero no a beber. A platicar con las putitas que sí lo escuchaban, pero que también se reían de él, también se burlaban. Durante días. Meses. Un año” (Xibalbá 90). In resignation, he thinks about looking for compañía” (Xibalbá 38) in the pueblo, just as Pascual’s father had done:

Y compró un cuaderno para anotar en sus páginas el nombre de cada una de las que podían ser sus posibles mujeres. Se puso a averiguar sus historias, saliendo todas las tardes a platicar por primera vez con los hombres, mirando para adentro de todas las casas, husmeando, olfateando, calculando, comprando, meditando. (Xibalbá 90)

He cannot bring himself to it, however, because he can only see the Mayan women through his ladino eyes: “llegando a la conclusión, a cada regreso a su casa, de que todas eran como él las había visto siempre: o fuertes, hombrunas, o chiriviscudas, secas, simples, o ambiciosas, necesitadas, hambrientas, feas” (Xibalbá 90).
Just when Juan Caca renounces his search, he discovers a young woman called la Concha who shares an uncanny resemblance “a la que amaba en secreto” (Xibalbá 91):

Se parecía a la Virgen de la Concepción que había en la iglesia y de donde le venía su apodo: el mismo pelo, la misma cara, los mismos ojos, las mismas pestañas, las mismas cejas, la misma nariz, la misma boca y hasta el mismo tamaño, con diferencia nada más de que era morena, tenía chiches, que era de carne y hueso y que, además, era puta. (Xibalbá 10)

La Concha is the closest Juan will ever get to the only woman he can love. For him, her promiscuous habits around the town for which she is called a “puta,” matters only to the degree that it makes her human, tangible. Of greater importance is the fact that she is barren: “no puede tener pollitos” (Xibalbá 91). This combination of humanity plus infertility convinces him that she “es la que [le] conviene” (Xibalbá 91), and so they marry but only because she is a promising substitute for his ideal. At the ceremony, Juan insists that she wears her white wedding dress that she donned for a previous marriage. Obviously an outward sign of virginity, the dress also symbolically paints her Mayan skin, “su carne . . . sucia” (Xibalbá 85), white. In her inability to produce children, Juan Caca is able to silence--or deny--her indiscretions, symbolically converting her into la Virgen in flesh and blood, an image he sustains by never consummating his marriage.

Juan’s union with la Concha symbolizes his ultimate effort to enter the forbidden, ladino world by securely constructing it for himself. This universe proves to be untenable, though, when la Concha abandons him because she--“una puta” (Xibalbá 10)--cannot exist in his frigid world. Upon leaving, la Concha essentially vanishes when she takes away almost everything that belongs to her:

Recogeré todo. No le dejaré nada de lo que traje: este vestido viejo, este calzón, estos listones, estos caítes, este fustán, este cotón, esta gabacha. Y cuando llegue a la puerta me sacudiré los pies para no llevarme ni siquiera un poquito de polvo. Lástima que no pueda llevarme la tierra que traje.
Her disappearance reveals to Juan that this world was nothing more than an impossible fantasy imagined in his head. La Concha’s departure, then, forces Juan to come face to face with who he really is, as is read in the following quote:

> Para consolarse, buscó a su otro. La irrealidad de él, la falsedad de su carne. Buscó el espejo que era otra de las únicas cosas que le había dejado la Concha. Quería que siquiera el otro lo acompañara. Se paró frente al pilar, pero con miedo, sin mirarse todavía, sólo asomando la cara poco a poco. Cuando creyó que ya estaba todo él del otro lado, entonces atravesó [sic] los ojos para saludarlo. . . . Pero del otro lado sólo estaban sus huesos, sólo su calavera recién muerta, con algunos pedazos de carne todavía, pero muy mínimos, apenas retacitos podridos. (Xibalbá 98)

When Juan looks at his reflection in the mirror what he sees is his Mayan self that he had spent his life denying because he was taught as a boy in seminary to hate this aspect of his being. By holding up the reflection of a skull in the mirror, de Lión shows that Juan is dying. Having suffered the cultural distancing and consequential self-denigration that ladinoization imposes, the story of Juan becomes the story of many. As a result, he comes to represent--along with Pascual--the Mayan culture that has been affected by this process for countless generations. The imminent demise of Juan Caca, then, clearly speaks of the impending death of the Mayan culture due to ladinoization.

### 4.9 The Empowerment of the Pueblo: A Conclusion

> El tiempo principia en Xibalbá is structured upon four discreet planes. First, de Liôn condenses the creation myth read in the Popul Vuh in the epigraphs introducing
each section of the novel. Next, he tells of an ideological shift when he replaces the myth in the Mayan text with one that is based upon death. The author then fleshes out the novel by narrating a story depicting the world built upon the death myth he has delineated. Finally, at the end of the book, de Lión offers a prologue that reads as a historical backdrop to everything else that had been recounted. As a history, the prologue serves to explain the reason for the sequences previously narrated, in particular, for the subversion of the Popul Vuh, and de Lión clearly points his finger to the Catholic Church showing it to be the originary steps in the ladinoization of the Mayan culture. In assigning blame to the Church, however, de Lión does so only to a certain degree because he also attributes responsibility to the Mayan people for the dire situation of their culture.

The three figures that stand out of the crowd are Pascual, Juan Caca and la Concha. Together, they allow de Lión to reveal the essential part the Mayan pueblo plays in the ladinoization process that is killing their culture. The author communicates this active role through the yearning that both Pascual and Juan Caca feel for la Virgen de la Concepción, a feeling that is shared by all the men of the pueblo. Symbolic in their attraction towards her, “mujer blanca, ladina, mujer de otro lado” (Xibalbá 65), is their desperate, learned desire to escape from their Mayan selves and belong to a world that is not their own: “el otro lado” (Xibalbá 28). In their longing for la Virgen, then, these men are really revealing a desire for death in that they want to erase who they are. To make this message explicit, towards the end of the novel, de Lión shows the men substituting the figure of Death that he introduces earlier in the novel--and that “no se había regresado al cementerio” (Xibalbá 75)--for la Virgen de la Concepción:

se llegaron al camarín en donde estaba la otra, la de Concepción, y la sacaron, la despojaron de su corona, de su manto de su vestido y luego la
escupieron, la ultrajaron con palabras de puta aquí puta allá, la 
machetearon, la tiraron en un rincón con las demás cosas viejas de la 
iglesia y después, procedieron a ponerle el vestido, el manto, la corona a 
ella [la Muerte], la nueva virgen, la colocaron sobre el anda, la adornaron 
con luces de huesos, con flores de huesos, con aserrín de huesos y la 
sacaron en procesión. . . . Era ella y su cofradía, la de la Muerte. (Xibalbá 
76-77)

As the following quote shows, this new queen is the articulation of what these men are 
really seeking: “había una nueva reina que los miraba, que iría a darles, ella sí, felicidad 
eterna con el cielo que traía entre las piernas e hijos eternos porque estarían llenos de 
muerte y no de vida. Y había que festejarlo” (Xibalbá 75). Their desire for her is so 
strong that they fight to the death in order to be near her:

empezaron, primero, a empujarse para ocupar el lugar más cercan a la pila, 
y después, sacando machete y escopetas, empuñando las manos, agarrando 
piedras y palos, formando grupos de padres contra hijos, de compadres 
contra compadres, de hermanos contra hermanos, de amigos contra 
amigos, se pusieron a pelear como bestias. . . . Cuando por fin terminó la 
batalla . . . sólo se escuchaba el silencio de los que habían muerto . . . el 
adiós de las vidas . . . el llorar de las mujeres que desfilaban buscando 
cada quien el cadáver que les pertenecía, el cansancio, la muerte, el 
silencio final. (Xibalbá 78-79)

The next to the last section of the novel is called “Epitafio.” By definition, an 
epitaph characterizes a deceased person. In this case, de Lió uses it to describe a dead 
culture. The men have all died—all except for the essentially sterile Juan Caca—and the 
women and children are literally starving to death: there is no future. Soon, there will be 
no survivors and the town will become a cemetery.

The recurring theme of death in El tiempo principia en Xibalbá alludes to the 
gradual and imminent erasure of Mayan identity through ladinoization. By foregrounding 
the active role played by the Mayan people in this process in the primarily in the figures 
of Pascual and Juan Caca, de Lió empowers them in that they are no longer simply
victims of hundreds of years of colonialism. Instead, they, too, are responsible for their situation. Inherent in this responsibility is a power that the Mayans can use to change the perceived fate of their culture and work towards its resurgence. This power is the principal message de Lión conveys in El tiempo principia en Xibalbá.
CONCLUSION

LOCAL COMMUNITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

In this study, I have examined the destructive effects of the global world upon local communities as they have been portrayed by three Guatemalan authors of the twentieth century. The writers I have chosen are not grouped together by chance; rather, they are drawn together by various factors. First, I have selected authors who express key historical moments in their nation’s identity. Further, each one problematizes the survival of their pueblo in the face of world powers that influenced the time in which they were living. Finally, all strive to re-envision their community within the context of a globalized world.

In chapter two, I look at Miguel Ángel Asturias’s Viento fuerte as a denouncement of the long imperial history of the U.S.-based United Fruit Company in Guatemala and the consequent repercussions of its dealings. In order to communicate the depth to which the banana company has affected the country, Asturias converts United Fruit’s history into a foundational myth in the first chapter of his novel. Upon doing so, the author implicitly states that the Company’s presence and abuses within the nation have been naturalized and, therefore, have gone uncontested. Woven into Asturias’s creation of a new myth is repeated imagery of destruction, referring to an unspoken erasure. When scrutinized closely, the myth reveals itself to be a deconstruction of El
libro del consejo, tacitly unveiling this text to be that which has been erased. This substitution of myths corresponds to an ideological shift that redefines the world. Whereas the foundational thought stemming from El libro del consejo conceives the universe as being constructed upon dialogue and community, the new myth with the United Fruit Company as its core brings forth a world that is structured upon the selfishness of the individual.

Resulting from this new ideological base, the society Asturias depicts throughout Viento fuerte is one that is unequally divided between conflicting classes and cultures. The U.S. citizens that arrive to Guatemala with the Company are described, for the most part, as capricious, well off people who live irresponsibly without regard for the consequences of their actions. Affected by these careless people are the Guatemalans as a whole for they suffer coerced relocation to a place where their humanity is measured solely in terms of labor. Within these two groups, each person is seen as living for him or herself.

In this hostile environment, Asturias reiterates again and again that community--as it is defined in El libro del consejo--is impossible. The author elicits this idea most clearly in the figures of the exorbitantly wealthy American Lester Mead and the poor Guatemalans Cojubul, Lucero, and Ayuc Gaitán. Together, they form a cooperative--a community--through which they challenge the oppressive power of the U.S.-based banana company; however, they lose the battle. They are defeated because instead of forming a true community as it is imagined in El libro del consejo, these men depend upon the individual Lester Mead and his money for the Sociedad’s survival. Without Mead’s capital, then, the cooperative literally could not exist, showing the reader that
community is antithetical to this imperial world structured upon capitalism. With the impossibility of community established, I close the chapter by writing that Asturias’s overwhelming message in Viento fuerte could not be clearer: if the local is to survive in a global world, the myths that sustain it must be rearticulated to fit its new context. In Los ojos de los enterrados, the last book of the trilogy, Asturias writes that “community,” in the twentieth century, was to be resurrected in the form of militant Social Revolution.

The subject of my third chapter is a poeta-guerrillero, Otto René Castillo, who fought and died in the same Revolution Asturias foretold in Los ojos de los enterrados. Reacting to what he saw as an uncommitted position on behalf of Asturias who simply wrote about the need for social change, Castillo and La Generación Comprometida, informed their words with action. This union of word and action---of theory and practice---is the engine behind Castillo’s poetic and political agenda.

His poems, when read as a whole, are in dialogue with each other. One tendency of Castillo’s work is clearly political, serving to contest the present moment that had been structured by capitalism. Following the conversationalist trends of Nicanor Parra and César Vallejo, and in line with Ernesto Cardenal’s exteriorismo, Castillo rejects the traditional elitist literature handed down from canonical writers such as Asturias and Pablo Neruda. In this vein of his poetry, Castillo incorporates slices of real life, presenting a society fragmented by individual greed through images of misery, solitude and death.

Castillo challenges the fragmented society through his love poetry. In these poems, Castillo appropriates the powerful symbol of love for its generative qualities and he poses it as the means through which people will come together to imagine a better life.
He does this by showing that love breaks spatial boundaries as it brings people out of themselves and directs them toward a bigger cause. Also, in Castillo, love is conveyed as defeating time because he expresses in terms of the future and eternity. Through love, Castillo imagines that people are no longer confined by space and time; therefore, they break free of destiny, and they and their world can become whatever they dream.

Ultimately, love—and its human embodiment, la amada—comes to convey on a personal and real level the idea behind the Socialist Revolution. When Castillo abandons his beloved in order to fight alongside the pueblo, he expresses his departure in various poems as the greatest sacrifice he could make, posing himself as an example to the rest of his pueblo. At the end of the chapter, I argue that Castillo presents this theme of love-inspired sacrifice as the fundamental keystone to the success of the Revolution.

Following my reading of Otto René Castillo’s poetry, I study Luis de Lión’s El tiempo principia en Xibalbá in my final chapter. Recognized today as the first Mayan novelist to challenge the colonialist discourses of criollismo, indigenismo and neoindigenismo, de Lión serves as a model for today’s Mayan activists / writers who are fighting for indigenous rights and resurgence in Guatemala.

El tiempo principia en Xibalbá is structured upon four planes. First, de Lión condenses the creation myth of the Popul Vuh into the epigraphs that introduce each section of the novel. Next, the author writes of an ideological shift as he shows that the Mayan text has been replaced by a creation story based upon death. De Lión then fleshes out the novel by describing a world that has been designed by this new myth. Finally, the author ends his novel with a prologue that portrays the Catholic Church as the original
source for the myth that has silenced the Popul Vuh, signifying beginning of the end of the Mayan culture.

The death to which de Lió refers is an allusion to ladinoization, the complex processes through which a Mayan becomes a ladino. The author presents ladinoization as a global influence that began at the time of the Spanish colonization when the Mayans were relegated through power struggles to the margins of society, and survival often depended upon homogenization. Throughout El tiempo principia en Xibalbá, de Lió equates ladinoization with the end of his culture, and so the novel is replete with death imagery. For him, to become a ladino meant to die as a Mayan. The author, however, does not paint a black and white image of the Mayans as victims of a metaphorical genocide who are being forced to shed their identity. On the contrary, through two primary figures, Pascual and Juan Caca, the author focuses on the ways in which the Mayans themselves are contributing to the disappearance of their culture. By foregrounding the active role played by the Mayans in ladinoization, de Lió emphasizes an agency and responsibility on their part. Inherent in this responsibility is a power, one that the Mayans can use to revitalize their culture and make it viable in global world. Opening his pueblo’s eyes to this power is, I suggest upon ending the chapter, de Lió’s ultimate agenda in El tiempo principia en Xibalbá.

Miguel Ángel Asturias, Otto René Castillo and Luis de Lió all problematize the survival of their local community in a global world. Asturias looked at Guatemala as it was turned into a state of oppressed workers in a world market defined by U.S. economic imperialism. He suggested Social Revolution as a response in Los ojos de los enterrados. Castillo examined his fragmented pueblo in the face of capitalism. He, too, advocated
Social Revolution in his writing, but he went a step further than Asturias: he literally
joined the fight. Speaking from within a Mayan context, de Lión denounced the
ladinoization process that was leading to the death of his native culture, and in response,
he tried to awaken his pueblo to their ability to save their heritage from oblivion.
Though Asturias, Castillo and de Lión share a common interest in the effects of global
influences within Guatemala, their historical moments and political agendas serve to
mark their works as distinctly their own. Uncannily uniting all three, however, is a belief
in the power of local community--their pueblo--to change the course of history.
Bibliography


Gutiérrez, Rafael. “Luis de Lión; Más allá del Xibalbá ladino.” *Conversatorio: homenaje imaginario a la obra literaria de Luis de Lión*. 33-35.


Morales Santos, Francisco. “Luis de Lión, poeta de la cotidianidad y de la tierra.” Conversatorio: homenaje imaginario a la obra literaria de Luis de Lión. 29-32.


---. “Luis de Lión: El indio por un indio.” Conversatorio: homenaje imaginario a la obra literaria de Luis de Lión. 3-10.


