

LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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FOUNDATIONAL FICTIONS

The National Romances of Latin America

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Preface

Love and patriotism have evoked or promised the same feelings for me—a simultaneous rush of belonging and possession—ever since my teenage fantasies of passionate bonding became confused with another longing to belong. I mention this emotional tangle because my effort to follow its contours is largely responsible for this book on the relationship between romance and national foundations in Latin America. I therefore feel obliged to share a bit of the intimate history behind my particular focus on the novel construction of a national intimacy. In tracing the turns of one erotic longing into another national one, I come back to a desire that must have begun when I was born without belonging anywhere. It was in something called a displaced persons' camp, a nowhere for nationals, so precisely and perversely utopian. Yet it was a site better than the camps my parents had visited in Poland a bit earlier. In fact, one of the misplaced jokes of my New York childhood (beginning at age four when the United States quota let in one more Jewish family) was to tell friends who asked why I wasn't going off to summer camp that my parents had been there, didn't like it, and decided not to send me.

My most acute memories of being dis-mis-placed and un-identifiable—exhilarating memories in their ontological emptiness—are of an adolescence dedicated to impersonating a range of national “beings,” at the same time that I was trying to get a gender assignment in on time. Much later, on reading Benedict Anderson's aside about how modern subjects “can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality as he or she ‘has’ a gender,” I thought back on playing at to be or not to be. For each language tried or foreign inflection of English mastered, there was another persona. My game was to see how long I could get away with “being” (someone else). It reached tragicomic hilarity when my college applications showed a blank for nationality, since I had nothing original to put down and had wrongly assumed I was automatically “naturalized” when my parents be-

came citizens; so there I was on the dock of Brooklyn, all eighteen years of a young-adult self, swearing-in to "be" what could only be a fiction by then. A more illustrious immigrant, like Hans Kohn (author of *American Nationalism*, 1957), wasn't playing games. He was congratulating himself and us—"the wretched refuse of the teeming shore" where Liberty holds her lamp (a Lady and Light that were fogged over when our boat came in)—for arriving in America, where we were all equally free to be patriots as a matter of civic contract, not ethnic pedigree. But the America that interpellated childish me was no freely entered agreement; it was a cluster of accents with a hollow cultural center. (Need I say that *Zelig* is my favorite film?) Where I grew up, only children spoke English with an American accent, so the occasional adult who spoke that way (say, a teacher) seemed to lack the historico-cultural density that made our Italian, Hispanic, Chinese, Jewish parents so admirably adult—and so embarrassingly out of place. We all wanted desperately to be in place, for America not to be the contractual artifice that Kohn celebrated, but so full it could fulfill us. We wanted it as much as Italians in Argentina wanted to be gauchos, as much as Hungarians in Brazil wanted their children to bear indigenous names. We wanted national fulfillment as much as we wanted to "be" in love, hardly stopping to worry that the wanting was greater than any possible payoff. And yet I already knew enough to feel as relieved as Kohn that irrational patriotism was unlikely here, so that be-longing alternated undecidably with cosmopolitan skepticism. In general, differences in evaluating nationalism may have less to do with which position is right or wrong than with the positionality one occupies: as an aspirant to national identity, for example, or as a disenchanting national. Critiques are made, it seems, from centers of uncontested nations, and disaffection presupposes a romantic prehistory. But my double positionality as a would-be American and a European has-been kept desire and dread in deadlock. The relief was that others were straddling too; un-American as I was, I was no more so than anyone else.

No wonder I learned Spanish early on; it was so familiar and so safely not. Thanks to identifying with/in Spanish, I could belong to America (and vice versa) not as the Other, but as

Another. Spanish kept my alterity in a paradoxically stabilizing schizophrenia and assuaged the immigrant self-hatred by revealing it as structural, repeated, iterable, perhaps essential to Americanism both here and to the South. There, immigrant teenagers often learned to desire their countries and each other by reading national novels. In the next pages I will say that I came to those nineteenth-century books out of curiosity for the tradition new Latin American novelists were so loudly denying. I should add that it was also after writing *One Master for Another: Populism as Patriarchal Rhetoric in Dominican Novels* (1984), where I sensed that *Enriquillo*, the centerpiece of a national tradition, was typical of an entire Latin American canon. I don't mean to contradict that personal scholarly history, but only to add, along with that archi-American Whitman, "This hour I tell things in confidence, / I might not tell everybody but I will tell you" (*Song of Myself*, 19). It is that this nineteenth-century canon speaks to the passionate investment I/we have in nationalism. This may turn out to be a tautology if, as I will suggest, the books construct Eros and Polis upon each other.

Before I venture this speculation in the second part of the introductory chapter 1, I will offer a more narrative and descriptive first part to suggest why it makes sense to read these particular books together and what makes them so hard to resist. Chapter 2 sketches some points of contact between James Fenimore Cooper and his Spanish American admirers, for whom he was a model, or perhaps another pretext for their own plagiarized authenticity. Chapters 3 to 8 explore particular examples of nineteenth-century romances, their projections of national conciliation through lovers' yearnings across traditional racial and regional barriers. The cases, though, are far from inclusive, since on the one hand some of the twenty-one countries did not produce a standard midcentury novel but rather "borrowed" continental classics; and on the other, including each of the classics would have been unwieldy. Chapter 9 reads two twentieth-century reformist novels as populist revisions of romance, that is to say defensive supervisions of transgressive affairs. Their contemporary is a novel written by a woman, to whom I give the last word in chapter 10, where her appreciation for linguistic and historical disencounters

comments coyly on the programmatic fictions that helped to found Latin American nations.

Regarding my references to primary texts, readers will note that quotes appear consistently in English. Where two page numbers appear in parentheses, the first refers to the Spanish text and the second to the English translation; a single reference means that the quoted passage was omitted from the translation and that I have provided it (unacknowledged translations in the notes are mine as well). Consecutive versions in Spanish and English in the body of these essays would have produced a possibly unpleasant reading rhythm between repetitions that are redundant to some and opaque to others. And since an exclusive use of Spanish would have distanced some readers, I reluctantly chose English. Unwilling, though, entirely to excise the Spanish originals in essays attentive to their charms, I opted to include both versions at least in the longer quotes set off by easily visible spaces.

I could not have written this book without the step-by-step encouragement and advice from Andrew Parker, or without the initial skepticism from Antonio Benítez Rojo, an ideal reader who gradually exacted from me the text his reading demanded. They both have my heartfelt gratitude. I would also like to especially thank Benedict Anderson and Sylvia Molloy for inspiration and encouragement, along with Allen Kaufman, Scott Mahler, Tulio Halperín Donghi, Roberto González Echevarría, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Homi Bhabha, Nancy Armstrong, Josefina Ludmer, Jean Franco, Donna Guy, Stewart Voss, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda, Antonio Cornejo Polar, George Yúdice, Rocardo Piglia, Elizabeth Garrels, Efraín Barradas, Neil Larsen, Norman Holland, Leonard Tenenhouse, Iván Jaksic, Valeria de Marco, Roberto Schwarz, Adolfo Prieto, Julio Ramos, Rubén Ríos, Silviano Santiago, Michael Kasper, Ginny DuCharme, Greta Slobin, Betty Tsafir, Julius Sommer, Adela Sommer, and Anna Kaufman, all of whom generously offered support and suggestions.

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1

PART I IRRESISTIBLE ROMANCE

por encima del distanciamiento del título, de la fortuna y del color de la piel . . . está la atracción de los sexos, el poder irresistible del genio de la especie.

—*Matalaché*, Enrique López Albújar

AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE "BOOM"

When Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Julio Cortázar, among others, apparently burst onto the world literary scene in the 1960s, they told us categorically and repeatedly how little there was worth reading in earlier Latin American fiction.¹ Only now, they said, was the continent gaining cultural independence by Calibanizing the range of European traditions, mere raw material in purposefully naive American hands.² Content, perhaps, with this vindication of our scant information about Latin America, an English-language public hardly suspected the Boom's substantial pre-texts: a whole canon of great novels that elicited disingenuous dismissal by writers who anxiously claimed to be literary orphans at home, free to apprentice themselves abroad.³ This book is written for that unsuspecting public, and also for a generation of Latin Americans who, with justified enthusiasm for the Boom, may have taken the dismissal too literally.

Although some critics argue that the Boom was merely a promotional explosion, hardly a literary phenomenon at all, the new novels do show distinct family resemblances, enough in fact to produce a checklist of characteristics. These include a demotion, or diffusion, of authorial control and tireless formal ex-

perimentation, techniques apparently aimed at demolishing the straight line of traditional narrative.⁴ The epic subtexts about Latin American development that can be read back through the debris now become risible simulacra. If all this sounds like denial, it was. New novelists tried to laugh off the appeal of positivist and populist projects that had, by then, run aground and made history stumble when it should have been going forward. Looking back at Latin American history after reaching a precipitous end, to find that end no longer meant purpose, evidently produced giddiness. In several countries national productivity had in fact been rising from the middle of the nineteenth century to the populist period of Import Substitution Industrialization during World War II when, for a change, foreign powers were too busy to stunt local growth by supplying manufactured goods. But after the war imports flooded the markets again, and Latin American history no longer seemed progressive, no longer a positivist national biography of maturation that was overcoming some childhood or chronic illness. When Western Europe, but especially now the United States, was again free to meddle in Latin American internal affairs and to step up the production and exportation of goods, populist optimism waned. Along with it, the linear logic of economic developmentalism twisted into the deadend of perpetual underdevelopment, while patriotic storylines wilted into the vicious circles that Carlos Fuentes found typical for the new novelists.⁵

Yet the more they protested indifference to tradition, the more they would send me back to the persistent attractions that caused so much resistance. What was it, I would ask, about the notoriously obsolete programmatic brand of Latin American fiction that haunted the Boom? What burden of narrative habits or embedded assumptions could account for so round a repudiation? The attraction is practically visceral and is provoked, I believe, by a rather flagrant feature that has nevertheless gone unremarked. It is the erotic rhetoric that organizes patriotic novels. With each obsessive effort to be free of the positivist tradition in which national projects (were) coupled with productive heterosexual desire, a continuing appeal is reinscribed in the resistant Boom. The straight lines of "historical" novels can fairly be reconstructed from the efforts to bend them. What

would account for the tragicomedy of self-defeating repetition in, for example, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or for the frustration and shame in *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, if not the bad fits between developmentalist assumptions and Latin American history? And we can deduce, for another example, that "positive" reality was a reigning literary ideal from the important departure that the proto-Boom style of magic realism represented.⁶

The Boom's parodies, its fine ironies and playfulness, are the kind of endless denial that is bound to produce the opposite effect of an admission, so that its vicious narrative circles comment on a writerly frustration as well as on disappointments with developmentalism: the more national romance must be resisted, the more it seems irresistible. One way out of circles, it seemed, was the collapse staged by Mario Vargas Llosa at the end of *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977); an earthquake levels the baroque confusion between Vargas Llosa's scandalously modern romance with a scriptwriter's allegedly "realist," ever-escalating, and mutually invading soap operas until the once multiple but now cumulative and mangled project falls on his, their, our, heads.

For those who survived this Boom, including most of its authors, it evidently was not the collapse of history. Time passes and pendulums swing. Some writers who had written circles around history in the sixties and seventies began to experiment with new versions of historical narrative.⁷ This return of a repressed tradition may arouse some curiosity about the fictions the Boom deliberately left behind, perhaps even a capacity to understand and to *feel* the passionately political quality of Latin America's earlier novels. They had, among other things, the charm of promise that has since turned to bitterness at the perceived fraud. We may also notice that the Boom's playfully pessimistic terms were largely accepted as literarily mature, which is perhaps to say flattering to a First World's taste for the post-modern, the almost narcissistic pleasure of having one's ideal notions of literature mirrored back.

My readerly paradox, taking denial as a symptom of unresolved dependence, would not only send me back to the foundational fictions that the Boom was resisting, but also to an

entire tradition of resistances. The paradox borders on a typical irony of writing (in) America, where successive generations may deny literary resemblances to the point that denial itself constitutes a resemblance. If the new novelists imagined themselves suddenly born into full maturity, other American writers had imagined the same.⁸ Jorge Luis Borges jokes about the repetitive circularity and the impossible pride of starting anew in "The Wall and the Books," about the emperor of China who built the Great Wall and burned all books written before his reign only to sense that a future emperor would erase his epoch-founding work with another new beginning. Borges, the American writer, is evidently amused but also fascinated by a tradition written in erasures of the past.

To appreciate this countertradition of repeated denials, it is important to remember how epoch-making nineteenth-century "national novels" seemed for generations of readers. The concept of the national novel hardly needs an explanation in Latin America; it is the book frequently required in the nations' secondary schools as a source of local history and literary pride, not immediately required perhaps but certainly by the time Boom novelists were in school. Sometimes anthologized in school readers, and dramatized in plays, films, television serials, national novels are often as plainly identifiable as national anthems. As for the foundational bonds between this literature and legislation, ties that seemed "unacknowledged"⁹ in Shelley's England, they were no secret in Latin America. One stunning acknowledgment is the page-long list, by the turn of the century, of Hispano-American writers who were also presidents of their countries.¹⁰ A comparable list for lesser offices might seem endless. And despite important parallels, North American writers who were establishing a national literature might assume a metapolitical posture, an apparently disinterested critique that was rare for the South. Latin Americans seemed more integrated into partisan struggles and less available for transcendent social criticism.

By the end of the century, when economic prosperity and "scientific" state policies produced an intellectual division of labor, the literary pendulum had swung writers away from affairs of state. This tended to relieve literati from political re-

sponsibilities and freed them to develop the preciousness of *modernismo*, largely in poetry, or it exiled narrators to the pessimist borders of "naturalism." But in 1941 when Pedro Henríquez Ureña delivered his now classic Harvard lectures on "Literary Currents in Hispanic America," it was obvious that the pendulum had swung back to engagement for many of the continent's writers. The younger generation was split between the poetic vanguard of Borges and early Neruda, who inherited the "splendid isolation"¹¹ of the modernists, and an exalted or rebellious neoromanticism that gradually led back to the "old habit of taking part in political affairs,"¹² though most of these writers seemed no longer to hope for political leadership. Typically, they wrote from a "nativist" or reformist opposition in order to sway opinion about, say, race relations or economic policy. Many dedicated themselves to reform through education, as had Domingo F. Sarmiento and the many positivist nation-builders who followed. Nevertheless, to cite only three examples of the tradition's resilience after the premature eulogy in the Harvard lectures, by 1948 novelist Rómulo Gallegos became Venezuela's first freely elected president; in 1962 novelist and story writer Juan Bosch won a landslide victory in Henríquez Ureña's native Dominican Republic, and in 1990 Mario Vargas Llosa almost won a campaign for the presidency of Peru.

Henríquez Ureña's periodization of committed, precious, vanguard and reformist writers is, of course, very rough. But like so much he wrote, a wealth of detail justifies the boldness. So I won't presume to improve on his scheme, only to add that half a century later it seems that historical romances and romanticized history continue to burden a resistant tradition. By *romance* here I mean a cross between our contemporary use of the word as a love story and a nineteenth-century use that distinguished the genre as more boldly allegorical than the novel.¹³ The classic examples in Latin America are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests, and the like. Their passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts.

To show the inextricability of politics from fiction in the his-

tory of nation-building is, then, the first concern of this study. I am certainly not the first to notice this connection. Leslie Fiedler, for one, uses it to launch his study of the ethical and allegorizing penchants in American novels.¹⁴ And more recently, Benedict Anderson pointed to the continuities between nation-building and print communities formed around newspapers and novels.¹⁵ However astute and provocative these analyses are, though, I cannot manage to make them suggest why Latin America's traditional novel is so relentlessly attractive.

My own suggestion constitutes the second concern here. It is to locate an erotics of politics, to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in "natural" heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at midcentury. Romantic passion, on my reading, gave a rhetoric for the hegemonic projects in Gramsci's sense of conquering the antagonist through mutual interest, or "love," rather than through coercion.¹⁶ And the amorous overtones of "conquest" are quite appropriate, because it was civil society that had to be wooed and domesticated after the creoles had won their independence.¹⁷ The rhetoric of love, specifically of productive sexuality at home, is notably consistent, taken for granted in fact, despite the standard taxonomies that like to distinguish foundational novels as either "historical" or "indigenist," "romantic" or "realist."¹⁸ It will be evident that many romances strive toward socially convenient marriages and that, despite their variety, the ideal states they project are rather hierarchical. Nevertheless, the question of degree and even of style will make all the difference in considering the mixed political and esthetic legacy of romance.

To paraphrase another foundational text, after the creation of the new nations, the domestic romance is an exhortation to be fruitful and multiply. Exhortation is often all we get though, along with a contagious desire for socially productive love and for the State where love is possible, because these erotico-political affairs can be quite frustrating. And even when they end in satisfying marriage, the end of desire beyond which the narratives refuse to go, happiness reads like a wish-fulfilling pro-

jection of national consolidation and growth, a goal rendered visible.

FLESHING OUT HISTORY

Romantic novels go hand in hand with patriotic history in Latin America. The books fueled a desire for domestic happiness that runs over into dreams of national prosperity; and nation-building projects invested private passions with public purpose. This was no simple matter of one genre giving the other a hand, because the relationship between novels and new states has a Moebius-like continuity where public and private planes, apparent causes and putative effects, have a way of twisting into one another. "(T)hese fictions have helped, from the very beginning, to shape the history which has engendered them," as Djelal Kadir has put it.¹⁹ Romance and republic were often connected, as I mentioned, through the authors who were preparing national projects through prose fiction and implementing foundational fictions through legislative or military campaigns.²⁰

For the writer/statesman there could be no clear epistemological distinction between science and art, narrative and fact, and consequently between ideal projections and real projects. Whereas today's theorists of history in the industrial centers find themselves correcting the hubris of historians who imagine themselves to be scientists, the literary practice of Latin American historical discourse had long since taken advantage of what Lyotard would call the indefiniteness of science²¹ or, more to the point, what Paul Veyne calls the undecidability of history.²² In the epistemological gaps that the non-science of history leaves open, narrators could project an ideal future. This is precisely what many did in books that became classic novels of their respective countries. The writers were encouraged both by the need to fill in a history that would help to establish the legitimacy of the emerging nation and by the opportunity to direct that history toward a future ideal.

Andrés Bello, the Venezuelan poet, legislator, grammarian, and educator who became one of Chile's most important cul-

tural arbiters, suggested the necessary connection between fiction and history in an essay he called "Historical Method."²³ The apparently conservative defender of standardized Spanish (whose widely adopted *Gramática* did more to preserve the continent's coherence than did Bolívar's political ambitions)²⁴ was polemicizing here against what others (mis)took as modern historiography. In their passion for progress, Bello alleged, young radicals like José Victorino Lastarria and Jacinto Chacón were leading themselves and their students astray by courting foreign models, French models in this case, which focused on the "philosophical" patterns of history.²⁵ To replace Spanish habits with French fads made no sense to the judicious old man. In France it might well make sense to develop a "scientific" history—meaning codifiable in predictable rules—on the basis of painstaking inquiry and documentation, the kind of preliminary work yet to be done for the Americas. Not that it was invalid to search for the "spirit" of events, but that it was inappropriate or hasty on a continent where even the most basic historical data were lacking. Instead, Bello supported a narrative option that would delay explanations until after the facts were in, perhaps indefinitely. "[W]hen a country's history doesn't exist, except in incomplete, scattered documents, in vague traditions that must be compiled and judged, the narrative method is obligatory. Let anyone who denies it cite one general or particular history that did not start this way." Then the cautious chronicler does something daring: he advocates self-consciously personal (even self-interested) narrative over the pretense of objectivity. One writer's worries, another's colorful memories or fabulous legends, all seemed to deliver more autonomous and more accurate pictures than those offered by a still unformed "science" of history. "Do you want to know, for example, what the discovery of America was like? Read Columbus's diary, Pedro de Valdivia's letters and those of Hernán Cortés. Bernal Díaz will tell you much more than Solís or Robertson."²⁶ It is easy to see that Bello's endorsement of the narrative method in history could be construed as more than simply a defensive modesty that falls short of explanations. Without the presumption of scientific truthfulness, narrative had a freer hand to construct history from private passions. So, we can

extrapolate a paradoxical boldness from Bello's warnings: narrative becomes necessary, not only because the gaps in our historical knowledge make more "modern" methods unfeasible, but also because the filler can then be taken for an origin of independent and local expression. Perhaps this is why Bello's essay has been renamed and often reprinted as "Cultural Autonomy of America."

Other Latin Americans might have been reading into Bello's authorization of narrative in history when they went so far as considering narrative to *be* history; and several issued calls to literary action as part of the nation-building campaign. In 1847 the Argentine future historian, general, and president, Bartolomé Mitre, published a manifesto promoting the production of nation-building novels. The piece served as prologue to his own contribution, *Soledad*, a love story set in La Paz shortly after the wars of Independence. In that prologue, he deplores the fact that "South America is the poorest region in the world when it comes to original novelists." More than an esthetic deficiency, this signals social and political immaturity, because good novels, he says, represent the highest achievement in any nation. So, in the idealist spirit of enlightened reform that assumed rational legislation could effect rational behavior, it followed for Mitre that good novels could promote Latin American development. Novels would teach the people about their history, about their barely formulated customs, and about ideas and feelings that have been modified by still unsung political and social events. They would be what they already were in Europe and in Cooper's America: "a loyal mirror in which man contemplates himself as he is with all his vices and virtues, and which generally wakens profound meditation and healthy criticisms."²⁷ Then, with perhaps feigned but nonetheless fitting humility, Mitre offers his own story as a mere stimulus for others to write.

José Martí, another notable propagandist for nation-building novels—along with Alberto Blest Gana and Ignacio Altamirano to whom we'll return in chapter 6—admired European novels.²⁸ But Martí worried that their ironies and pessimism would do more harm than good at home.²⁹ America needed edifying and autonomous stories, the kind Manuel de Jesús Galván wrote for

the Dominican Republic (*Enriquillo*, 1882) and to which Martí responded in a rapturous letter: "How sublime Enriquillo is, so much like Jesus! And his Mencía is a bride more perfect than Fray Luis ever imagined! . . . This is no historical legend [Galván's subtitle] but a brand-new and enchanting way to write our American history."³⁰ By contrast, he fretted over the sorry state of literary dependence elsewhere in the Americas, in Mexico for example: "Can there be a national life without a national literature? Can there be life for local artists in a scene always taken up by weak or repugnant foreign creations? Why in this new American land should we live an old European life?"³¹

All this assumes that literature has the capacity to intervene in history, to help construct it.³² Generations of Latin American writers and readers assumed as much. But since the 1960s, since Latin America's post-Borgesian Boom in narrative and France's self-critical ebullience in philosophy and literary studies, we have tended to fix on the ways that literature undoes its own projects. This is, of course, a healthy antidote for our centuries-long habit of ignoring or dismissing the gaps and the absences that partly constitute literature.³³ To notice this shift in emphasis, though, is also to acknowledge that earlier writings/readings managed the tensions differently.³⁴ In the particular case of Latin America's nineteenth-century "historical" novels, the nagging insecurities that writing produces only peek through the more patent and assertive inscriptions. Tensions exist, to be sure, and they provide much of the interest in reading what otherwise might be an oppressively standard canon. But what I am saying is that those very tensions could not be appreciated if the overwhelming energy of the books were not being marshaled to deny them. When the job of writing America seemed most urgent, the question of ultimate authority was bracketed in favor of the local authors. They didn't necessarily worry about writing compensatory fabrications as fillers for a world full of gaps. Empty spaces were part of America's demographic and discursive nature. The continent seemed to invite inscriptions.

Given this imagined lure to write and the enthusiastic responses just sampled, some critics have wondered at the late appearance of novels in Latin America. The most obvious rea-

son is probably the best one: Spain had proscribed the publication, and even the importation, of any fictional material in the colonial dispositions of 1532, 1543, and 1571. Whether for its own Catholic utopian vision of the new world, or for reasons of security, Spain tried to police the creole imagination. But the rapid repetition of edicts and the surviving records of a lively business in forbidden fiction show with what frustrated insistence Spain tried. The unwieldy, literally unmanageable bureaucracy of the empire was a network in Dr. Johnson's sense, that is a system of holes held together by a string. Administrative negotiations and economic deals regularly slipped through, along with fiction from Spain, including *La Celestina*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Amadís de Gaula*, *Belianís de Grecia*, *El Caballero del Febo*, *Comedias* by Lope de Rueda, most notably abundant copies of *Don Quijote* from its first 1605 printing on, and followed by books like the satire *Fray Gerundio de Campazas* (1758) by Padre José Francisco de Isla, the translator of *Gil Blas*.³⁵ There were also imaginative excesses written inside the colony, in texts that negotiate the ban on fiction by way of decorous paraliterary genres, including the travelogue, (auto)-biography, and history.³⁶

Defiantly fictional novels as such started to appear along with and as part of the movement for emancipation that was triggered in 1808 by Napoleon. His threatened arrival in Lisbon sent the Portuguese court packing to Brazil, where in 1822 the visiting monarch decided to go home and the creoles insisted on substituting him with their own emperor and their own empire. Napoleon's army did force the abdication of Charles in Spain; it exiled his heir Ferdinand VII, and gave the colonists a legitimate excuse to rebel. There was a venerable Spanish norm that granted her subjects local self-rule in the event of a failure in the monarchy. And through this handy Spanish framework, which was made to accommodate French and English republican philosophy, France's usurpation made Americans responsible—so they alleged—for popular sovereignty. What is often considered the first novel published in the Spanish-speaking New World was a good example of the cultural and political amalgam. *El periquillo sarniento* (1816, completed 1830) by Mexico's José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi has

a Spanish picaresque shape and an enlightened spirit, a book that seems to come at the end of a literary tradition running from *Lazarrillo* to Lesage rather than to initiate a new one. What was novel about Lizardi's work was the very fact that it was scandalously imaginative and that it earned a small but heterogeneous readership, despite the public's preference for short and informative newspaper articles over the books they associated with colonial power. Part of his writerly challenge was to create "a public who could not help liking his novel," as Umberto Eco says of Manzoni.³⁷

More modern novels, sometimes called romances, came at midcentury, after independence had been won (everywhere but Cuba and Puerto Rico), civil wars had raged for a generation, and newspapers had become the medium for serialized European and American fiction.³⁸ The local romances did more than entertain readers with compensations for spotty national history. They developed a narrative formula for resolving continuing conflicts, a postepic conciliatory genre that consolidated survivors by recognizing former enemies as allies.³⁹ In the United States, it has been argued, the country and the novel practically gave birth to each other.⁴⁰ And the same can be said of the South, as long as we take consolidation rather than emancipation to be the real moment of birth in both Americas. Perhaps, then, in addition to the colonial ban on fiction there was another reason for the late appearance of romantic novels; it is their pacifying project. National romances would have been politically and socially premature before the mid-nineteenth century. That was when leadership passed into the hands of young men who were trained to respect Natural reason in the postcolonial liberal schools. They were also trained to desire Nature's most passionate alliances in the novels they read so ardently.

ROMANCE REALIZED

After three centuries of Spanish imperial politics, inquisitorial Catholicism, and economic monopoly, Nature meant a general relief from counterproductive constraints. The wars of Independence, fought roughly from 1810 to 1825, were led by

American-born whites, the creoles who were routinely denied the best administrative jobs and often coveted business opportunities too. Private initiative had few outlets in the empire's unnatural "corporatist" state, in which groups rather than individuals were recognized in a rather strict hierarchy of color and caste.⁴¹ The new societies experimented with liberalism adapted from examples in Great Britain (Bentham was a great favorite), the United States, and also France; that is, they experimented with a representative constitutional government (constitutional monarchy for some) that banished the "artificial barriers" to individual initiative and expression. Latin American nation-builders, privileged as they were, selected what they would from liberalism. They wanted, for example, unrestricted international trade yet refused to abolish tariffs. They got rid of Spain's monopolies (sometimes to fall prey to England) yet held on to domestic cartels, land entailment, and coercive labor systems. For those who were typically called "Conservatives," liberalism often ended with the elimination of Spanish and Portuguese intermediaries. "Nevertheless, in the period from independence to the late nineteenth century, it did come as close as anything to serving as a dominant ideology," with the result that the area was far more egalitarian after independence than before.⁴²

In the third quarter of the century, as if synchronized, countries were clearing away the special privileges, including church rights to land and taxes, left over from the colony. Between 1851 and 1854, slavery was abolished in Venezuela, New Granada, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay. Other countries (except for Brazil and Cuba) preceded or followed within a few years. The refusal of authoritarian habit and the increased private initiative might have added up to a loss of state power, but there were gains from appropriated church lands and jurisdictions, buoyant foreign trade, and from passing civil and business codes to regulate private decisions.

Another place to notice this peak of liberal reform and optimism is in the midcentury novels that were daring to realize the romantic and utilitarian dreams of the European genre. The Latin American elite wrote romances for zealous readers, privileged by definition (since mass education was still one of

the dreams) and likely to be flattered by the personal portraits that were all the rage in bourgeois painting and in narrative local color, the *costumbrismo* that became a standard feature of the novels. Perhaps as much in Spanish America as in the Spain that Larra spoke for, the function of costumbrismo was "to make the different strata of society comprehensible one to another," that is to promote communal imaginings primarily through the middle stratum of writers and readers who constituted the most authentic expression of national feeling.⁴³ Identifying with the heroes and heroines, readers could be moved to imagine a dialogue among national sectors, to make convenient marriages, or at least moved by that phantasmagorical ideal. Despite their variety, the romantic conciliations seem grounded in human nature, variously interpreted in this optimistic period but always assumed to be rational and constructive. Erotic passion was less the socially corrosive excess that was subject to discipline in some model novels from Europe, and more the opportunity (rhetorical and otherwise) to bind together heterodox constituencies: competing regions, economic interests, races, religions.⁴⁴ In Europe too, love and productivity were coming together in the bourgeois household where, for the first time in the history of the family, love and marriage were supposed to coincide.⁴⁵ But America was Europe's ideal, imaginary,⁴⁶ realm for the bourgeoisie's project of coordinating sense with sensibility, productivity with passion. It was, to cite the specific example of Jeremy Bentham, a realizable utopia, the place where his reasonable laws (solicited by American admirers like Bolívar, San Martín, Rivadavia, and del Valle) could bring the greatest good to the greatest number.⁴⁷ This America aspired to a modernity metonymized from the other, Northern, America. And no one was more dedicated to the possibility than the transplanted Europeans whose dreamwork was making them American. Theirs was the space to fulfill the desires of a corrupt and cynical Old World, the space where domestic "novels" and ethico-political "romance" could marry.

We might remember that after winning independence, the creoles hoped for internal conquests. The uncompromising and heroic militarism that expelled Spain from most of America was now a threat to her development. What America needed now

were civilizers, founding fathers of commerce and industry, not fighters. Juan Bautista Alberdi, whose notes for Argentina's 1853 constitution became a standard of political philosophy throughout Latin America, wrote that, "glory has ceded its place to utility and comfort, and military heroism is not the most competent medium for the *prosaic* needs of commerce and industry" (as if to say the prose of domestic fiction should now replace grandiloquent epic verse).⁴⁸ He and Domingo F. Sarmiento agreed, if on little else, on the need to fill up the desert, to make it disappear. What sense was there in heroically reducing warm bodies to dead ones, when Alberdi pronounced that in America, "to govern is to populate."⁴⁹ Few slogans have caught on and held on so well as this one. Husband the land and father your countries, he was saying. They have already yielded and now they must be loved and worked.

Alberdi didn't stop at slogans. He glossed them with practical programs for increasing the population, not only through the immigration policies for which he is remembered but also through marriages between industrious Anglo-Saxons and Argentina's "army" of beautiful women, eminently equipped for the eugenics campaign to "improve" local and "inefficient" Spanish stock. In chapter 3 I'll return to the dalliance Alberdi prepares between affairs of the heart and affairs of state. During the twenty years that Alberdi was matchmaking through these political *Bases*, luring the sword-wielding Joshuas of Independence to reform their tools into Isaiah's ploughs, we have seen that novelists were also reforming one thing into another: valor into sentimentalism, epic into romance, hero into husband. This helped to solve the problem of establishing the white man's legitimacy in the New World, now that the illegitimate conquerors had been ousted. Without a proper genealogy to root them in the Land, the creoles had at least to establish conjugal and then paternity rights, making a *generative* rather than a *genealogical* claim. They had to win America's heart and body so that the fathers could found her and reproduce themselves as cultivated men. To be legitimate, their love had to be mutual; even if the fathers set the tone, the mothers had to reciprocate.

For barely more than a generation, roughly from 1850 to 1880, romances were projecting civil societies through patriotic

heroes who were remarkably feminized. Almost Werther-like, without losing reason to passion, idealized young men shared enough delicate looks and sublime feelings with idealized young women to create intimate bonds with them. Their brand of productive heroism, in fact, depends on it after death-dealing machismo became a thing of the past in many countries, at least in those that produced lasting "national novels" of consolidation.⁵⁰ We will notice Daniel Bello's lovely hands in *Amalia*, the feminine fragility of Rafael San Luis in *Martín Rivas*, and the heroes' penchant for tears throughout. This gender (con)fusion also produced remarkably principled and resourceful romantic heroines who stand up to police, conspire to escape oppression, and rescue their refined heroes.⁵¹ The equally admirable male and female lovers counterpoised in romance threaten to upset the top-down logic of hegemonic projects for hundreds of suggestively democratic pages, before the women dutifully submit to their men. And although the young women readers who would be drawn to these sentimental novels were arguably being trained in the limiting virtues of republican motherhood (sometimes by pseudonymous men such as Guatemala's José Millas who signed "Salomé Gil"), the books should complicate our notion of the feminine ideal at midcentury, specifically the assumption that domestic passions seemed trivial to patriotic imaginings.⁵²

The French and English models, admired so by Latin Americans, were improved or corrected by disciples, since the tragic—extramarital and unproductive—love affairs that the masters called romance were risky bases for national constructions. Just as Sarmiento's respect for Europe's cities goaded him to imagine Argentina surpassing them, American novelists saw their laconic or future history as a chance to bring Old World flirtations to happier or more promising conclusions.⁵³ Bartolomé Mitre, for example, presumed to outdo Rousseau in *Soledad*, where a young bride reads and identifies with *Julie* in order to avoid spending time with her aged royalist husband. The desire she learns from reading is about to launch her on an adulterous adventure with an unworthy visitor. But she is saved from the double bane of boredom and betrayal when her cousin and childhood sweetheart comes home as a hero of Independence.

He stays to marry her after the repentant old husband blesses the couple and conveniently dies. Julie's impossible and incestuous dream to combine propriety with passion comes true for Soledad.⁵⁴

Martín Rivas by Alberto Blest Gana (Chile, 1862), is one more of several cases where the romance is set right. It rewrites Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* by having the provincial secretary Martín actually marry his boss's genteel daughter. Probably indebted to Balzac's wish-fulfilling allegories where ideal marriages between legitimacy and power can at least be imagined, Blest Gana's book celebrates the wish fulfilled.⁵⁵ In these American versions (as in Europe's more conventional love stories and in what one might call "Americanized" utopias such as George Sand's *Indiana*),⁵⁶ love is sentimental; it is neither a jaded *Bovarysme* that desires to desire, nor is it romantic in the sense of the unrequitable and unilateral that describe important European literary affairs of the same period, or of any period according to René Girard. Futility, Girard says, is constitutive of desire: "Romantic passion is . . . exactly the reverse of what it pretends to be. It is not abandonment to the Other but an implacable war waged by two rival vanities."⁵⁷ When, for example, Stendhal's aristocratic heroine finally admits her passion for Julien, the struggle for recognition between them ends and his ardor cools, just as she had once become indifferent with his declaration of love. This instance of what Girard calls triangulated desire (imitative of the desire imputed to an idealized, more successful rival and therefore cut short once the heroine prefers the hero) seems familiar too from more recent Latin American novels written during the brilliant phosphorescence of national projects. *Hopscotch* and many of Cortázar's short stories come to mind, especially "Manuscript Found in a Pocket." Here, subway romances begin with a triangulated flirtation as protagonist and prey both fix on her reflection in the car window, and they end with despair and relief every time the escalator disappears a new conquest.⁵⁸

The nineteenth-century national novels insist on simplifying the triangle; they straighten and flatten it out into a dyad where no mediation is necessary or even possible for lovers who know they're right for each other. Tensions that inevitably exist and

drive the story on are external to the couple: the counter-productive social constraints that underline the naturalness and the inevitability of the lovers' transgressive desire. Triangulation is produced, then, in a strangely fecund rather than frustrating way, since the lovers must imagine their ideal relationship through an alternative society. Once they project that ideal as an image that looks like a wedding portrait, their union—rather than the rival who comes between Girard's lovers in order to join them—becomes the mediating principle that urges the narrative forward like a promise.

Mere erotic power play was decidedly un-American during those formative years. The object is not to tease but literally to engender new nations, just as it was during the exaltedly optimistic moments of the French Revolution. "Now is the time to make a baby," read one of its slogans.⁵⁹ Fathers of nations couldn't afford to simply lord it over mothers if they hoped to produce legitimate bourgeois children. And whereas Europe's favorite romances risked the sterile trap of narcissism,⁶⁰ American domestic desire tries to keep the lovers interdependent. If authors such as Rousseau and later Balzac, along with the Richardson of *Clarissa*, showed the strains and finally the cracks in the ideal of the bourgeois family, the Latin Americans tended to patch up those cracks with the sheer will to project ideal histories backward (as a legitimating ground) and forward (as a national goal), or with the euphoria of recent successes.

The successes should not be underestimated.⁶¹ They sometimes have more than a metaphoric relationship to the project of coordinating love and marriage in the foundational novels. The marriage metaphor slips into, or out of, a metonymy of national consolidation if we stop to consider how marriages bridged regional, economic, and party differences during the years of national consolidation. I am referring to data specifically about Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Central America which suggest a pattern for other countries too.⁶² If the love matches in *Amalia* (1851), binding the agricultural interior to the commercial port city, and in *Martín Rivas* (1862), where Chilean mining interests marry commerce in the capital, or in Mexico's *El Zarco* (1888) about a mestiza's unconditional love for the Indian hero, are indications of historical accuracy be-

cause they coincide with data on regional alliances, economic diversification, and racial coalitions, other novels may also reveal something about the project—and also the process—of bourgeois consolidation through literal and figurative marriage. In the nineteenth century, notable families were both public and private affairs, making strategic bonds that were stronger than merely political affiliations. They filled the "relative vacuum of sociopolitical structures" to construct a social organization preliminary to public institutions including the state itself.⁶³

Before Independence, these were typically merchant families.⁶⁴ With the new republics and the constitutional separation of powers in the 1820s and 1830s, the next generation seized the opportunity to coordinate executive, legislative, military, and financial powers through the existing structure of personal alliances. Those respectable citizens (*gente decente*), whose excessive decorum or deficient drive resisted the opportunities, demoted themselves, in effect, to become clients of the "notables" and would later figure in oppositions to the oligarchic state, in the Mexican Revolution for example. At midcentury, while state institutions were being invented, rather bold family bonds (in which marriageable women often represented investment, or risk, capital) were also the springs of new and dynamic economies.⁶⁵ The merchants who lent money (formerly an ecclesiastical business) to promote the circulation of capital, to diversify from commerce into industries, and for government spending made private deals with consistently public consequences. And even in the third generation, when state institutions were being established, principal families continued to coordinate their diversifying interests through leadership in banks, government, army, and schools. These private deals were apparently more flexible, relatively informal, and open to the racial and class mobility described (or imagined in phantasmagoria of conciliation) by national romances, than were the fourth-generation contracts. These were made after public and ideally impersonal institutions had solidified, and after the liberal optimism of founding fictions was replaced by grimly deterministic positivism. For several countries, cross-over dreams had by the 1880s become the nostalgic stuff of an originary

prehistory (see chap. 8), not a project of alliances. Once the family network congealed, economic and political deals were struck between oligarchic men, not through the risky inclusions called marriage.⁶⁶

It would seem, to follow the historians, that families were a stabilizing force, a "cause" of national security. But we may also reckon the high seriousness attributed to family ties as a possible "effect" of the nation. Without the goal of nationhood, alliances and stability would be perhaps less transparently desirable than they were. Seen from either angle, the mutual dependence of family and state in Latin America (the reciprocal allegorization to be considered in part II of this chapter) could and sometimes did mitigate the tension between private and public allegiances which has dogged Western political philosophy. From Plato, whose solution in *The Republic* was to abolish the family along with its divisive gender roles, and Aristotle, for whom the public man/private woman distinction was useful so long as it was hierarchical, through, for example, the English contract theorists and Rousseau's more radical but still incomplete dismissal of family as the natural model for society, political philosophy has had to consider what was "natural" about the family. One result has been so much debate about nature that the concept is continually exposed as a social construction.⁶⁷

And the variety of "natural" families celebrated in national romances offers such radically different social programs that to say the novels are romantic reconciliations may register only their general contour. Read individually, the foundational fictions are very different indeed. It seems difficult, in fact, to talk of the books' commonality when the projects they advocate are so varied, ranging from racism to abolitionism, from nostalgia to modernization, from free trade to protectionism. In *Amalia* (José Mármol, 1851), civilization, associated with the city-based free-trading and Europeanizing Unitarian Party, opposes the barbarism of gaucho-like Federalists who dominated the interior, just as the white skin of the intercity lovers contrasts with the dark skin of untutored Federalist masses. *Martín Rivas* (Alberto Blest Gana, 1862) attempts to mitigate oppositions by matchmaking across class and regional lines. Determined to convince Santiago's banking families that their disdain for the

"radical" mining bourgeoisie in Chile has been less pleasant and less profitable than fiscal cooperation would be, the son of a ruined miner finally marries the banker's daughter.

But mitigation depends on more radical change in tragic Cuban novels, written before Independence and with hopes perhaps of raising multicolored armies to win it. Failure to bring the racial (love) affair to a happy ending accounts for the tragedy of *Sab* (Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841) in which the racially amalgamated hero (also Cuba) is desperate for the love (and legitimacy) his creole mistress could give him. Sab's hopes are obscured by the dazzle of a blond English rival who marries the mistress and proves how indifferent foreigners are to both women and slaves. Compared to these bold tones, the frustration in *Cecilia Valdés* (Cirilo Villaverde, 1882) is endemic to a system of subtle color coding which the lovers never unlearn. Racial difference produces exploitative privilege in one and a vengeful yearning for privilege in the other. Racial disencounters are also the cause of tragedy in *Birds Without a Nest* (Clorinda Matto de Turner, 1889)—an important Peruvian novel I refer to only briefly⁶⁸—this time between Indians and whites. By contrast, those relations are the hope of national regeneration in Mexico's *El Zarco* (Ignacio Altamirano, 1888), where an Indian hero learns to love his mestiza admirer during the same years that Mexicans were learning to admire their Indian president Benito Juárez. And though color never seems at issue in *María* (Jorge Isaacs, 1867), Latin America's most popular nineteenth-century novel, racial distinction haunts the book in the fissured identity of originally Jewish María, a figure for the incestuous self-destructive aristocracy and for the racially unassimilable blacks.

Brazilian slavocrat José de Alencar was evidently writing about blacks too when he wrote about conveniently submissive Indians. *O Guarani* (1857) is Brazil's possible idyll once Indians and Europeans learn to love each other; and *Iracema* (1865) is a more pessimistic Pocahontas-like story where the indigenous princess makes the greatest sacrifices for her Portuguese lover. In a similar sleight of hand, writing a simulacrum that stuck as a racial reality, *Enriquillo* (Manuel de Jesús Galván, 1882) replaces rebellious blacks for peace-loving and long-extinct na-

tives who become putative ancestors for today's "Indian" masses in the Dominican Republic. Spain's first conquest in the New World becomes a love story here between an indigenous prince and his mestiza cousin (the Chactas who gets his Atala), fights to protect her honor, and finally defers to Charles V's magnanimous authority. By an inverted displacement, *Matalaché* (Enrique López Albújar, 1928), significantly subtitled *Novela retaguardista*, would substitute long-emancipated black slaves as personae for the Indian peons who concerned him in order to highlight continuing racial abuse and the redemptive capacity of crossover-romance.⁶⁹ As a rhetorical solution to the crises in these novels/nations, miscegenation (an unfortunate translation for *mestizaje*, which is practically a slogan for many projects of national consolidation) is often the figure for pacification of the "primitive" or "barbarous" sector. Yet sometimes the terms of desired amalgams slip from synecdochal figures for different races to metaphoric representations of color-coded factions among the creole elite. The legitimating alliances announced by the racial alchemy may therefore have less to do with race relations than with the political flirtations between "liberal" dark horses and "conservative" ruling sectors. This can be argued for Brazil's romances as well as for Ecuador's *Cumandá* (Juan León Mera, 1887), where the Indian heroine turns out to be the missionary's lost daughter, and probably for Uruguay's *Tabaré* (Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, 1888), in which the lovable Indian hero, possibly associated with imperializing Brazil, must be resisted if white civilization is to survive.

With *Doña Bárbara* (Rómulo Gallegos, 1929), the authoritarian father who had stepped aside during nineteenth-century negotiations takes the center again. This anti-imperialist novel was neither ready for conciliation nor desperate enough to defer sovereignty as *Enriquillo* had done. Instead, it apprentices the hero to the "un-naturally" powerful woman he will replace. Her irresponsible eroticism is not only immoral, it is as unpatriotic as was the lechery of villainous men in the earlier romances, men like Mariño (*Amalia*), Loredano (*O Guarani*), Ricardo (*Francisco*), Valenzuela (*Enriquillo*), repeated in *Bárbara's* ally Mr. Danger. They are almost always the brutish bosses, macho rather than manly and lustful rather than loving.

In militant "populist" revisions like this one, where romance's gender confusion is cleared up as a matter of national defense, a sensuous and resourceful woman is degenerative by definition (the characters of Doña Bárbara and Zoraida in chap. 9).

If the difference between masculinity and machismo is somewhat vague, the vagueness should suggest at least one trap in romance. In its revised expressions, possibly as a response to the dour positivism that followed the fictive amalgamations of midcentury, nationalist romance valorizes virility as a self-evidently male attribute while it tries to distinguish between good and bad men. By the time a new imperialism threatens to overtake what national alliances there have been, the erotic figuring of politics often loses the flexibility that facilitated founding partnerships. In *Doña Bárbara*, the father's comeback makes sharing power seem unpatriotic or economically irrational. From the 1920s on, nativist or populist novels that share similarly defensive features would coincide with the popular fronts of newly founded Communist parties (and of right-wing populism?). And, to some degree, the patriarchal culture of populism is prepared in narratives that recast foundational romances to bring the soldier-citizen back into history. He had been the hero of the wars of Independence, and even of the civil wars that followed. Then the fighters had been called home to be fathers; manly independence had given way to the negotiated domesticity of notables who had traded diplomatic daughters in cross-sectoral alliances to secure the peace. But the men could not stay home long, not after the shocking 1898 intervention of the United States in Cuba's war of Independence, recast as the Spanish American War for Cuba and for Puerto Rico as well. And the geopolitical reality of U.S. control makes a new homecoming seem remote. Spain had finally given up her fight in the Americas and gone home; but the United States assumes that the Americas are home. Populism, therefore, has an important narrative career in Hispanoamerica, and a long afterlife even when the political culture changes its name.⁷⁰

One might assume that the diversity of national contexts and the range of partisan programs in nineteenth- and twentieth-century patriotic novels overload any common structure to the point of crushing it. Chile's vertical integration, Cuba's

racial integration, Argentina's color-coded campaigns, Colombia's retrograde idyll, Ecuador's Jesuitical paternalism, Venezuela's vamp-raiding, what possible ground could join them? One very general answer is America, the space for Bolivarian dreams of continental unity. This would explain, for example, how Andrés Bello could write about Chile and sustain an argument about cultural autonomy for the continent; and why Mitre set his story in Bolivia while writing about his native Argentina; or why Cuban Martí celebrated a Dominican novel as the model for American writers in general. But the answer I have been getting at is rather more specific than the goal of developing neighborly nations on Pan-American principles. The novels share a particular kind of intimacy. Read together, they reveal remarkable points of contact in both plot and language, producing a palimpsest that cannot derive from the historical or political differences that the novels address. The coherence comes from their common project to build through reconciliations and amalgamations of national constituencies cast as lovers destined to desire each other. This produces a surprisingly consistent narrative form that is apparently adequate to a range of political positions; they are moved by the logic of love. Whether the plots end happily or not, the romances are invariably about desire in young chaste heroes for equally young and chaste heroines, the nations' hope for productive unions.

To call their books romances is, then, hardly to understate a public function. In the United States, at least, the label has traditionally distinguished an ethico-political character of our most canonical books of fiction. And in Latin America, romance doesn't distinguish between ethical politics and erotic passion, between epic nationalism and intimate sensibility. It collapses the distinctions. In Spanish America the two are one, Walter Scott and Chateaubriand in the same pot-boilers, *pace* Georg Lukács.⁷¹ In *The Historical Novel* (1937),⁷² Lukács set historical Scott apart from sentimental Chateaubriand by an unbreachable esthetic and political distance. During the Popular Front Lukács was reducing his own earlier distinction between epic and novel in order to defend the novel's construction of social coherence as no less binding than that of epic.⁷³ Novels, he now maintained, could be just as objective and historical. And

Scott came closest to the "great historical objectivity of the true epic writer" (Lukács, 34) who respects and even celebrates historical necessity as progress (Lukács, 58). Chateaubriand, by contrast, "chopped and changed his material at will" (Lukács, 290), "tr[ying] hard to revise classical history in order to depreciate historically the old revolutionary ideal of the Jacobin and Napoleonic period" (Lukács, 27). Like other sentimentalists, he was writing the nostalgic tales we might now call romance when, Lukács implies, he should have been writing novels. Scott looks ahead; Chateaubriand looks back; Scott's heroes are average participants in historical change; Chateaubriand's are uniquely sensitive victims of history. How could the two possibly be reconciled?

The possibility seems even more remote from our Anglo-American tradition of criticism that opposes novel to romance in terms that now appear to be inverted. Novel was the domestic genre of surface detail and intricate personal relationships, whereas romance was the genre of boldly symbolic events. The tradition probably originated with Dr. Johnson's definition of romance as "a military fable of the middle ages; a tale of wild adventures in love and chivalry," whereas the novel was "a smooth tale, generally of love." But Walter Scott adjusted these definitions in his own article on romance (1823), stressing the novel's "ordinary train of human events [in] the modern state of society."⁷⁴ That is to imply its lesser status, fit more for ladies than for robust men. Scott claims, and is largely granted, significance as a historian because he is a "romancer," concerned not only with the "marvelous and uncommon," but also with the extrapersonal and social dimensions of a collective past.

In the United States writers like Hawthorne and his admirer Melville picked up this distinction and insisted they were writing romance dedicated to America's mission.⁷⁵ Cooper, at least, suggested the connection between the public good and private desire when he boasted that the special quality of romance was that it aimed to deal poetic justice all around and thus achieve a higher truth than any available from chronicles where too many heroes marry the wrong girls.⁷⁶ And Fiedler noticed that apparently male romance and female novels keep very close company.⁷⁷ Perhaps any distinction would be moot, since all

U.S. fiction of the nineteenth century can be called some variety of romance.⁷⁸

Even Lukács, who in the service of the Popular Front theorized the opposition between "heroic" history and lachrymose legend, showed despite himself how the genres attract each other in practice.⁷⁹ Lukács admitted that the novels of what one might call underdeveloped European countries could not repeat either Scott's middle-of-the-road modernity or his celebration of past events. These were possible for Scott only because England had already achieved its "progressive" bourgeois formation. And the happy outcome of English history produced an entire class of heroes. But for countries such as Germany or Italy, where bourgeois unification was frustrated, so too was the project of writing celebratory Scott-like novels. As in Latin America, European foundational fictions sought to overcome political and historical fragmentation through love. Lukács points to the strategy but doesn't call attention to the recurring pattern or to its relevance even for Scott. "Thus, while Manzoni's immediate story [in *The Betrothed*] is simply a concrete episode taken from Italian popular life—the love, separation and reunion of a young peasant boy and girl—his presentation transforms it into a general tragedy of the Italian people in a state of national degradation and fragmentation." The story of Manzoni's lovers grows into "the tragedy of the Italian people as a whole" (Lukács, 70). Gogol, too, concentrates on the downfall of the Cossacks in the romance of *Taras Bulba*. It is the tragedy of one of the hero's sons who, in love with a Polish aristocratic girl, becomes a traitor to his people" (Lukács, 74).

Latin American "historical novelists" found themselves in a similarly premodern situation, although, to follow Benedict Anderson, we should add that they did so before many Europeans and offered models in fiction as well as foundation.⁸⁰ Therefore, Latin American histories during the nation-building period tend to be more projective than retrospective, more erotic than data-driven. Viewed from the margins, then, Scott's "middle-brow" exemplarity becomes inimitable.⁸¹ Scott was a model of what a fully integrated national culture could be, just as the ex-

traordinary heroes of Latin American romance were. But to work for his willing heirs, Scott first had to get between the book covers with Chateaubriand, or Rousseau, or Stendhal. It was their ardent sentimentalism that helped to flesh out the histories that lacked usable, that is, constructive and flattering, data.

To marry national destiny to personal passion was precisely what made their disciples' books peculiarly American. On the one hand, little seemed to determine the direction of historical discourse from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, since, as Andrés Bello seemed to complain, basic data were lacking. But on the other hand, and this is my point, not just any narrative filler would have done. The glee I surmise in Bello's exhortation to imagine the past surely owes to the opportunity he perceives for projecting an ideal history through what Northrop Frye calls the most basic and satisfying genre, romance.⁸² What better way to argue the polemic for civilization than to make desire the relentless motivation for a literary/political project? To read on, to suffer and tremble with the lovers' drive toward marriage, family, and prosperity, and then to be either devastated or transported in the end, is already to become a partisan.

PRETTY LIES

What contemporary novelists can no longer take seriously, it seems, is the interested imaginings of empty spaces. Where nation-builders projected an unformed history on a beckoning empty continent, new novelists trace the historical density on a map full of mangled projects. *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, just to take one masterful example, is no less driven by history than were the earlier novels. It recounts the long century of Colombia's vexed history staged as a series of erotic alliances among principal families. But these are families that fight one another, mistake foreign interest for mere curiosity, and resist the talented outsiders whom romance should have invited in. The great Boom novels rewrite, or un-write, foundational fiction as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers, much less the

gente decente to emerging middle and popular sectors. And no novel disintegrates more programmatically than does *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1964), by Carlos Fuentes.⁸³

At first, Artemio seems like a classic father, less because he was an officer in Pancho Villa's army (Zapata was clearly too radical an option for him or for the liberal heroes of romance) than because he was a lover. Artemio loved Regina; he braved battles in order to be with her. And she reciprocated, getting ahead of the army to prepare a cozy spot and a warm meal for her man, as did so many other *soldaderas* of the Revolution. As they made love they thought back on the idyll of their first meeting, sitting on a beach, watching their double portrait in the water. So magic a memory, and so self-serving a vanishing act for the originary scene of rape. The imagined idyll was

esa ficción . . . inventada por ella para que él se sintiera limpio, inocente, seguro del amor . . . esa hermosa mentira . . . No era cierto: él no había entrado a ese pueblo sinaloense como a tantos otros, buscando a la primera mujer que pasara, incauta, por la calle. No era verdad que aquella muchacha de dieciocho años había sido montada a la fuerza en un caballo y violada en silencio en el dormitorio común de los oficiales, lejos del mar.⁸⁴

[a fiction that she had conjured up that she (*sic*) might feel clean and innocent and sure of love . . . her pretty lie. . . . It had no trace of truth. Neither did the truth: it was not true that he had gone into that Sinaloan pueblo just as he had gone into so many others, ready to grab the first woman who incautiously ventured outside. It was not true that a girl of eighteen had been thrown helplessly across his horse and carried back to the officers' dormitory to be violated in silence.]⁸⁵

Later, under fire, Artemio faces the fact of his cowardice. But before there is time to invent his own pleasing fiction, perhaps about a consuming love for Regina that made death unthinkable, she dies and Artemio turns deserter and opportunist.

If his desertion is an ethical disappointment for the reader, it does not compare with the erotic failure, in this unraveled romance, to make the next conquest. When the Revolution ends, he tries to win Catalina Bernal, the daughter of a rich landowner who blesses the uneven match in order to insure his

holdings by joining forces with the revolutionary victors. Catalina refuses, or is unable to make up the requisite romantic lies that would legitimate the union. She suspects Artemio's treachery against her brother. She is hurt by her father's acquiescence when she herself is proud enough to resist. But mostly she is unsure about how heartfelt love can be. Whereas *Doña Bárbara* showed only traces of guilt in the marriage between Bárbara's mestiza daughter Marisela and civilized Santos, a marriage that tries to cover over the history of usurpation and civil war with a lawful union, *Artemio Cruz* makes the guilt relentlessly self-conscious. Here, the foundational love affairs of romance are revealed as rapes, or as power plays that traffic in women. If only Catalina would do for Artemio what Marisela had done for Santos, we may sigh. The pair seems perfect: a beautiful aristocratic girl and a resourceful boy from the provinces with heroic credentials. Fuentes arouses and makes us confront the habits of romantic longing we have learned from national romance. But if she had given in, would Artemio have become more honest or admirable in reconstructing Mexico on a popular base? Or would he merely have seemed more genuine while reproducing the class structure that equally shameless exploiters bequeathed to Catalina's more elegant father?

Readers keep few illusions about Artemio's possible career in a country that "institutionalized" the revolution as a strategy of containment.⁸⁶ It is possible that the pretty lies of national romance are similar strategies to contain the racial, regional, economic, and gender conflicts that threatened the development of new Latin American nations. After all, these novels were part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation. It would ideally be a cozy, almost airless culture that bridged public and private spheres in a way that made a place for everyone, as long as everyone knew his or her place.

1
PART II
LOVE AND COUNTRY:
AN ALLEGORICAL SPECULATION

It is worth asking why the national novels of Latin America—the ones that governments institutionalized in the schools and that are by now indistinguishable from patriotic histories—are all love stories. An easy answer, of course, is that nineteenth-century novels were all love stories in Latin America; but it just begs the question of what love has to do with the requirements of civic education. The novels weren't immediately taught in public schools, except perhaps in the Dominican Republic where *Enriquillo* appeared rather late and where the number of students may have been limited enough for an adequate production of books.¹ In other cases, serialized or sentimental novels were at first hardly academic or even proper literature, to judge by their exclusion from the first national literary histories. Written at the same midcentury moment as the novels and with largely the same legitimating impulse, their authors had comparable political credentials but more classical criteria than the novelists. Literary historians selected a kind of elite prehistory for the "progressive conservative" consolidations that were stabilizing the new states,² but they omitted perhaps the most useful renderings of those oxymoronic consolidations: the romances that celebrated or predicted an identification between the Nation and its State.³ The programmatic centrality of novels came generations later; precisely when and under which particular circumstances in each country are questions that merit a different study.⁴ But in general, one can surmise that after renewed internal oppositions pulled the image of an ideal nation away from the existing state, like a mask pulled from the

masquerader, after nationalism could be understood as a political movement against the state,⁵ nineteenth-century novels apparently promised the ministries of education a way of covering over the gap between power and desire. The books, so immediately seductive for elite readers whose private desires overlapped with public institutions, might reinscribe for each future citizen the (natural and irresistible) foundational desires for/of the government in power.

My musing here about why erotics and politics come together—in school no less—begins by noting that it happened practically everywhere in Latin America. A particular novel may be celebrated in its national tradition as autochthonous, characteristic, and somehow inimitable; yet we have seen that each romance shares far more than its institutional status with others. The resemblances may be symptomatic of nationalism's general paradox; that is, cultural features that seem unique and worthy of patriotic (self-)celebration are often typical of other nations too and even patterned after foreign models.⁶ Almost like sexual intimacy, that which seems most private turns out to be embarrassingly public knowledge.⁷

In this section I would like first to consider *why* eroticism and nationalism become figures for each other in modernizing fictions and then to notice *how* the rhetorical relationship between heterosexual passion and hegemonic states functions as a mutual allegory, as if each discourse were grounded in the allegedly stable other. For examples of the perhaps constitutive connection between private and political passions, one can certainly turn to any of the following chapters. But here I want to speculate on what may account for the generic coherence that individual readings will necessarily miss.

From our historical distance, both romantic love and patriotism can be mistaken for natural givens, although we know them to be produced, perhaps, by the very novels that seem merely to represent them. To acknowledge this possibility is also to ask whether what may have passed for effects of the greater culture in the novel (for instance, the representation of romantic love or of conciliatory nationalism) may indeed be partial causes of that culture. If heroes and heroines in mid-nineteenth-century Latin American novels were passionately

desiring one another across traditional lines and desiring the new state that would join them, they were hardly representing timeless or essential affections. Those passions might not have prospered a generation earlier. In fact, modernizing lovers were learning how to dream their erotic fantasies by reading the European romances they hoped to realize.

The appropriateness of European fiction for Latin American founders may perhaps be read backward too (in a reflex learned from Benedict Anderson),⁸ meaning that the appropriateness suggests a cultural overlapping that should be as easily identifiable from Latin America as from Europe. Therefore, my rather local observations about a particular moment and genre in Latin America tempt me to hazard some conjectures about more general implications. Is it possible, for example, that outside of Latin America, too, political passion was being grounded in erotics? Had sexual desire as the shorthand for human association become "the explanation for everything," as Foucault said it had?⁹ The claim is hardly hyperbolic or even original. By 1865 in England, John McLean's influential *Primitive Marriage* considered "sexual attraction the underlying principle of all social formations," thus agreeing with other early texts of cultural anthropology including those by Herbert Spencer who would be so popular among Latin American positivists.¹⁰ Alternatively, if there were no erotic or sentimental investment in the state, if our identities as modern sexually defined subjects did not take the state to be a primary object and therefore the partner on whom our identity depends, what could explain our passion for "la patria?"¹¹ Is it also possible that the romances are themselves synecdoches of the marriage between Eros and Polis that was taking place under the broad canopy of Western culture? I hesitate to say bourgeois culture because it may be as much the child as the maker of the match. Nancy Armstrong's provocative work on England, *Desire and the Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, is wonderfully suggestive here: "Rather than see the rise of the new middle class in terms of the economic changes that solidified its hold over the culture," her reading "shows that the formation of the modern political state—in England at least—was accomplished largely through cultural hegemony," primarily through the domestic novel.¹² This is

possibly true for Latin America as well, where, along with constitutions and civil codes, novels helped to legislate modern mores. But unlike the English books that empowered the language of feminine domesticity by "disentangling" it from masculine politics, Latin American novels took advantage of the tangle to produce a secure knot of sentimentalized men.

The broad possibilities I am suggesting for readings of these novels are not (merely) an effort to suggest that Latin Americans may have general lessons to teach. The possibilities also derive from a suggestive coincidence between two significant books—one about desire, the other about nationalism—that have no apparent investment in each other's project. They are Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Together they will help to map out a context for passionate patriotism. Despite the books' different points of departure, their lines of inquiry intersect at two evident places. One is on the matter of timing: the end of the eighteenth century when the fundamental discourse originates (sex for Foucault and patriotism for Anderson).¹³ The other coincidence is a denial: each historically marked discourse claims to be timeless and essential to the human condition (Foucault, 105; Anderson, 14). However paradoxical and provocative their observations (respectively that sexuality is a function of the power structure that appears to repress it, and that nationalism is always a modeled but not inauthentic phenomenon), Anderson's and Foucault's timing is rather conventional and unlikely to arouse skepticism.¹⁴ Could there be some mutual significance to the overlap? To find out, Anderson and Foucault might be invited to a tête-à-tête, or a heart to heart, that would begin with their respective quandaries.

For Foucault the problem is why we so endlessly discuss what we say is repressed, which leads him to show how the "prohibition" against discussing sexual "irregularities" has spawned an array of institutional discourses for its control. The pathologies didn't exist before the authorities invented and deployed them. Perhaps for his own strategic purpose of foregrounding "marginal" sexualities and arguing, no doubt correctly, that they have been both the motive and the effect of juridical and clinical power, Foucault tends to elide what we could call the "other"

sexuality and the "other" discourse. He seems almost indifferent to the most obvious deployment of bourgeois sexuality, the legitimate conjugal variety without which there could be no perverse difference, as indifferent as he was to the best-selling genre of bourgeois discourse, the novels that did so much to construct the heterosexual hegemony in bourgeois culture.¹⁵ Foucault defends this relative silence on the majority phenomenon by saying that it was itself discreet and decorous: "The discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused this system centered on legitimate alliance to undergo two modifications. First, . . . heterosexual monogamy . . . was spoken of less and less. . . . It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter. On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals" (Foucault, 38). Yet we know that heterosexual love was being scandalously exhibitionistic from the concern caused by masses of young women who read sentimental novels. The absence of an *ars erotica* in the West does not necessarily signal discursive boredom with heterosexuality, as Foucault assumes, since we can boast an incredibly voluminous literature of courtship and titillation. Romantic novels seldom invite us into the bedroom, it is true, but they succeed very well at inciting our desire to be there. Because Foucault limits his range of discourses to the medico-juridical systems that exercised power rather directly, he understands desire to be the product of a power network that appears repressive. Had he included the novel, desire would also have been seen as the effect of a less paradoxical kind of training, something like an apprenticeship to republican parenthood. The exclusion helps to explain why his almost defensive insistence that power can be experienced in positive terms lacks really convincing illustrations. The "spirals of pleasure and power" that professionals and wards derived from each other (Foucault, 44-45) could not have had the broad appeal of the power that enthralled readers who wanted to possess or be possessed by the heroes and heroines of novels.

To stand Foucault's observation on its head, we could say that alongside the ubiquity of "perversion" in Western Europe there is a more obvious and public discourse of "normal" conjugal

love. It must have had an enormous appeal to have kept all the other discourses in business. Not so much an emotional appeal (without minimizing that) but more importantly a legitimating appeal, which is Foucault's point. But what monumental body needed legitimation so desperately as to account for the kind of public sex appeal that the novel evidently had? What was the defensive impulse that generated the spirals of power and pleasure in other discourses? I can think of only one body inclusive and insecure enough: the tenuously constructed antimonarchical state that needed (or would need in the "underdeveloped" European cases we saw with Lukács) a self-legitimizing discourse and found one in erotic desire. Sexual love was *the* trope for associative behavior, unfettered market relationships, and for Nature in general. If the traditional hierarchies were to be legitimately deposed, the ideological ground had to shift; and the natural ground as it was redefined was not only humanity's intrinsic acquisitiveness, but also its productive desire, the socially harnessable urge for heterosexual companionship and family. For some reason, Foucault writes off the republican pursuit of legitimacy by making bourgeois states curiously continuous with monarchies. Although not exactly silent on the construction of modern states, he shifts gear after describing the rupture in the history of sexuality and accounts for republics with a rather seamless genealogy (Foucault, 115). The modern state, he argues, is not qualitatively different from the monarchy; one inherited a juridical system practically intact from the other. "At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (Foucault, 88). Objections to monarchs were basically objections to their abuse of perfectly reasonable laws. Why, then, does Foucault insist that the new (universal) class invented a new (universal) language?

The bourgeoisie made [sex] identical with its body, or at least subordinated the latter to the former by attributing to it a mysterious and undefined power; it staked its life and its death on sex by making it responsible for its future welfare; it placed its hopes for the future in sex by imagining it to have ineluctable effects on gener-

ations to come; it subordinated its soul to sex by conceiving of it as what constituted the soul's most secret and determinant part. (Foucault, 124)

The guidebooks to that inner sanctum were largely the novels that Foucault ignores. They tended to banish alternative sexualities and construct legitimate models. Even so, an erotic education—whether natural or no—was officially off limits for young girls, not because it taught perversion, but evidently because it made even legitimate sex seem like fun. Novelists tried to insist that their work was “history” not fiction; and therefore not idle or fuel for fantasies.¹⁶ But the protestations of innocence became as much a rhetorical come-on as the sentimental plots. Foucault's readers can already guess what this “repression” did for sales. In the nineteenth century everyone was reading the forbidden texts, which is one reason the Mexican Ignacio Altamirano, among many others, was using them for patriotic projects. “Novels are undoubtedly the genre that the public likes best,” he wrote in 1868; “they are the artifice through which today's best thinkers are reaching the masses with doctrines and ideas that would otherwise be difficult to impart.”¹⁷

Thanks to Foucault, some homophobic ground has been cleared away in discussions of sexuality; and now we can afford to notice how strategically laconic he was about heterosexuality and the novel. What remains curious, though, is the way he seems to take for granted the concept of “state power” on which he grounds so many arguments about policing sexuality and controlling populations (e.g. Foucault, 25). Is it conceivable that the state derived some of its power from its positive attractions as the guarantor (or promisor) of rights, services, and national pride, and that, like some jealous lover, the state punished disloyal affections? Yet Foucault's hypothesis doesn't really acknowledge a seductive moment in state-celebrated sexuality (as the motivation both for engendering more patriots and for securing their embrace), as if all institutional stimulations were indirect or repressive.¹⁸ To sum up, Foucault's love of paradox, his arguably eccentric focus, and the seductive rhythm of his own powerful discourse cannot but produce pleasures for the

reader. But these as well as his important insights are generated around a cluster of blindspots, including heterosexual exhibitionism, the novel, and the invention of modern states.

Some of these are what Benedict Anderson sees best. One organizing question of his book is precisely how nation-states were constructed, and his speculations take him directly to the “fictive” discourse of newspapers and novels. Specifically, he asks how we can account for the passionate charge of nationalism even, or most especially today, in marxist regimes that should have gotten beyond the limits of national bourgeois culture. In part it is because nationalism is not “aligned” to abstract ideologies such as liberalism or marxism but is mystically inflected from the religious cultural systems “out of which—as well as against which—it came into being” (Anderson, 19). A certain spiritual investment in Christendom was deflected to a limited territory and therefore intensified, once the hegemony of Latin fragmented along the borders of secular administrative vernaculars. The fissures deepened after the local bourgeoisies developed vernacular print capitalism.¹⁹ The imagined community of a nation, he suggests, inherits or appropriates a spirit of sacrifice that would be unimaginable from the kind of cost-benefit calculations that self-conscious ideologies assume, and that Foucault apparently assumes when he wonders at the insanity of masses of people dying to save the “people” (Foucault, 137). Nationalism makes it possible for “so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson, 16). Limited, because the modern state is “fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory,” very different from monarchies which “were defined by centers” and where “borders were porous and indistinct” (Anderson, 26).

The fullness and uncompromising visibility of these new states—which were at the same time particular and universally proliferated in the West—brings to mind a different kind of body being constructed simultaneously. While nations were being embodied, their borders meticulously drawn and their resources territorialized, so too were the sexual bodies that attract Foucault's attention. For the early period of bourgeois consolidation Foucault notes that sex was forced into a pro-

ductive economy that distinguished a legitimate realm of sexuality inside a clearly demarcated conjugal relationship and "banished" the casual pleasures of polymorphous sexuality (Foucault, 36). At the borders "the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities . . . measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct" (Foucault, 48, my emphasis). Therefore, Foucault understands his project to be a "history of bodies" (Foucault, 152)—ungendered bodies that don't betray the long-standing convention that makes territory female—much as Anderson's is a study of national bodies. As if they assumed that the other's discourse were their own stable grounding, Foucault charts sexual bodies as sites of national production and governmental surveillance, while Anderson wonders at the libidinal attachment we have to bodies politic. The eighteenth century is not only remembered for the rationalizing sex (Foucault, 23–24) but also for drawing maps as the logos (locus too?) of desire. In a double paradox, repression was producing desire while diffuse empires were spawning patriotic passion for the local territory.²⁰ Yet Foucault doesn't wonder about how the nation is engendered, and Anderson doesn't mention that the definite contours of the new (national) bodies were making them the objects of possessive bourgeois desire.

Because of its relevance for Latin American national romances, I should point to the very different values Foucault and Anderson can imagine for territorialization. For Foucault it is always constraining, as when he makes the link between state-supervised sexuality and racism. "The works, published in great numbers at the end of the eighteenth century, books on hygiene, etc., improving the lineage bear witness to . . . the correlation of this concern with the body and sex to a type of 'racism'" (Foucault, 125; cf. 26). But Anderson notices the redemptive potential attributed to the national body and contemplates a map of interlocking bodies far beyond Foucault's Western Europe. He remarks that state-supervised sexuality had been seen as the "solution" to racism, sometimes with similarly nefarious results. His striking example, typical for Latin America, is Pedro Fermín de Vargas's suggestion that the way to *exterminate* the lazy degenerate Indians of his early nineteenth-century Colombia was to intermarry with them and

grant them property through land (Anderson, 21). Miscegenation was the road to racial perdition in Europe, but it was the way of redemption in Latin America, a way of annihilating difference and constructing a deeply horizontal, fraternal dream of national identity. It was a way of imagining the nation through a future history, like a desire that works through time and yet derives its irresistible power from *feeling* natural and ahistorical. "The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history" (Anderson, 136).

Unlike Foucault's dour tracing of sexuality to a priesthood of moralizers and pseudo-scientists, Anderson locates the production of nationalism precisely in the space of our democratically shared imagination, the private space of novels that links us serially and horizontally through a "print community." Newspapers, of course, were the hub of market and political information for an ascending bourgeoisie, but they would have been inconceivable, Anderson suggests, without the preparation of a print community through books, specifically novels. Novels pioneered what Walter Benjamin called "homogeneous, empty time," measured for everyone on the same calendar so that it linked an entire society through simultaneity. This is radically different from figural or "messianic" time in which there is no "meanwhile" but only a paratactic relationship to revealed truth.²¹ So, instead of considering novels (often published serially alongside the news) to be a function of newspapers, Anderson argues that newspapers derived from novels, that in the profound "fictiveness" of their kaleidoscopic juxtapositions among people and events newspapers were in effect "one-day best-sellers" (Anderson, 39). And the imagined communities of readers produced by these fictive juxtapositions became modern nations. It was a process that Anderson brilliantly argues took shape first among the linguistically homogeneous elites of the New World who became practical models—in nationalism's loopy trajectory—for the Europe that first imagined modern nations (Anderson, 49, 78–79). It may therefore not be too presumptuous to maintain here that Latin

American novels seem to be "correcting" European romance or at least putting them to good, perhaps exemplary, use by realizing their frustrated desires.

But those desires are precisely the issue on which Anderson is strangely silent. He values the novel, like the newspaper, for its synchronicity, its *horizontal* and democratizing commonality of time, rather than for its dynamism through time which he leaves fundamentally "empty." Therefore the overview of colonial Mexican society in Fernández de Lizardi's picaresque *Periquillo sarniento* (1816) seems ideologically indistinguishable from the romantic novels that would soon take over the newspaper columns (Anderson, 35). Those novels were trying to pull calendar time forward, by spacing the readings in consecutive issues of the paper, but mostly by constructing a desire for certain narrative developments. We can read out of Anderson's observations that in addition to sharing news items, print communities were being consolidated because everyone who read the paper was either laughing or (usually) panting and crying over the same installment of the serialized novel. Yet he doesn't discuss the passions constructed by reading novels, or their ideal gender models that were teaching future republicans to be passionate in a rational and seductively horizontal way.

This is where Foucault comes in. He points to the locus of modern social investments as the sexual body, which can be interpreted perhaps to be a national body as well. It is also where Anderson himself makes a suggestive aside while discussing the passion of patriotic feeling. After he accounts for it through the analogy with religion, Anderson mentions the equal centrality of our sexual identities (almost parenthetically and without development) in an observation about how universal both nationality and discrete genders are today. "[I]n the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender" (Anderson, 14). Said inversely, everyone not only "has" a nationality and gender in the same imagined way, but these imaginings constitute us as modern subjects. Unlike the competitive comparison between nationalism and religion, the interchangeability between nation and sex here is mutually reinforcing. And it is possible, through their overlapping analogies to religion, to see sex and nation helping each other to

displace earlier attachments. At least this mutual incitement of love and country is felt in the Latin American novels that helped to train generations of patriots in the appropriately productive passions of liberal intercourse.

By assuming a certain kind of translatability between romantic and republican desires, writers and readers of Latin America's canon of national novels have in fact been assuming what amounts to an allegorical relationship between personal and political narratives, a relationship that my reading is bound to repeat. Allegory is a vexed term, but unavoidable to describe how one discourse consistently represents the other and invites a double reading of narrative events. So if I shuttle back and forth from reading romantic intrigues to considering political designs it is because everyone else was doing the same.

The difficulty with the term *allegory* here is that the shuttling is not a simple matter of round-trips to the same two points or lines but is more loomlike in that the thread of the story doubles back and builds on a previous loop. Love plots and political plotting keep overlapping with each other. Instead of the metaphoric parallelism, say between passion and patriotism, that readers may expect from allegory, we will see here a metonymic association between romantic love that needs the state's blessing and political legitimacy that needs to be founded on love. Walter Benjamin provides a lead out of this terminological impasse through his unorthodox matchmaking between allegory and dialectic, a lead that detours back from Fredric Jameson's rather conventional and Paul de Man's acetic allegories.²²

Not long ago, Jameson discovered the possible charms of contemporary "third-world literature," thanks to allegory. "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*."²³ We will miss the interest of third-world literature, Jameson says, by missing the allegory, "a form long discredited in the west and the specific target of the Romantic revolution of Wordsworth and Coleridge, yet a linguistic structure which also seems to be experiencing a remarkable reawakening of interest in contemporary literary theory" (Jameson, 73). With this gesture, Jameson joined a number of critics who bemoan allegory's fall from favor and who individually attempt

to redeem and appropriate the term, as if there were a "repressive hypothesis" about allegory that insures it as the topic of our critical interest.²⁴ If we would but learn how, Jameson exhorts us, we could get beyond the rather unremarkable surface narrative to "an unveiling or deconcealment of the nightmarish reality of things, a stripping away of our conventional illusions or rationalizations about daily life" (Jameson, 70). This reading lesson is a gratifying acknowledgement for some of us and a welcome reminder for others about the way many people still read and write, so that it will not do to simply dismiss the relationship between nation and allegory.²⁵ But Jameson both affirms too much by it (since clearly some "third-world" texts are not "national allegories") and too little (since "national allegories" are still written in the First World, by say Pynchon and Grass among others). I also wonder if Jameson's assumption that these allegories "reveal" truth in an apparently transparent way, rather than construct it with all the epistemological messiness that using language implies, doesn't already prepare him to distinguish too clearly between Third and First World literatures. Even he strains at the borders by including Dostoyevsky with Proust and Joyce as a purveyor of First World literary satisfactions.

In any case, the texts that concern me here date from a period before that vexed geo-literary breakdown, before Jameson's guilt-ridden worry over our readerly disappointments with "underdeveloped" literature (Jameson, 65). When Latin America's national novels were being written, there were no First and Third Worlds but only an Old World that was producing model texts and a New World where those texts were grist for the nation-making mill. Perhaps this choice of novels accounts for my admittedly unorthodox but not wholly original appropriation of the term *allegory*. Following Walter Benjamin, when he identified baroque allegory as the vehicle for time and dialectics, I take allegory to mean a narrative structure in which one line is a trace of the other, in which each helps to write the other, much as I took Anderson and Foucault to imply traces of each other's discourse. A more standard interpretation describes allegory as a narrative with two parallel levels of signification. These are temporally differentiated, with one revealing

or "repeating" the anterior level of meaning (either trying desperately to become the other or looking on from a meta-narrative distance at the futility of any desire for stable meaning). Jameson's sense that the personal level reveals the priority of the political seems safely within this interpretation. But he ventures beyond it with the observation that the static structure could be "set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text" (Jameson, 73). Had he wanted to track the change from one moment to the next, Jameson might well have taken Benjamin's clue, as my working definition tries to do when I describe the allegory in Latin America's national novels as an interlocking, not parallel, relationship between erotics and politics.

The combination of allegory and dialectic will no doubt be oxymoronic for readers who begin with standard definitions, but it was the basis for Benjamin's effort to salvage allegory for historical writing, and probably to salvage history itself from the late-Romantic love of immediacy so dear to Nazi culture. Benjamin's essay on "Allegory and Trauerspiel," in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928),²⁶ is a polemic against the Romantic critics who preferred symbol over allegory. This was the same as preferring a "resplendent but ultimately non-committal knowledge of an absolute" over the consciousness that language, like allegory, functions in time as a system of conventions (Benjamin, 159-160). He explains in a proto-postmodern way that allegory is alive to the dialectic between expression and meaning because it is "a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and, indeed, just as writing is" (Benjamin, 162). Allegory works through the gaps, whereas "organic" symbols sacrifice the distance between sign and referent and resist critical thinking in order to produce more awe than irony.

Benjamin was apparently impatient with what he considered the Romantics' philosophical laziness. With the symbol they had short-circuited the apotheosis of the beautiful, even sacred, individual. "In contrast the baroque apotheosis is a dialectical one," because its subject could not stop at the individual but had to include a politico-religious dimension, "that worldly, histor-

ical breadth," which is "dialectical in character" (Benjamin, 160, 166). His prime example of the allegorical dialectic is the relationship between human history and nature, which was of course the Romantics' favorite instance of symbolic correspondences. But Benjamin takes care to point out a strategic difference between the figures: in symbol, nature is a hint of eternity and seems independent of culture; in allegory it is a record of human history and decay (Benjamin, 167). This dialectical record is what distinguishes modern secular allegory, initiated with baroque literature, from the medieval variety in which nature is the immutable background for the history it contains (Benjamin, 171). Yet Benjamin evidently had difficulty maintaining the distinction by 1938 when he wrote notes for an essay on "Baudelaire as Allegorist"; there he identifies the poet as a straggler of the seventeenth-century "allegorical way of thinking" yet adds that Baudelaire had excluded (baroque) dialectics from this notion of history.²⁷

Benjamin's distinction between medieval and baroque allegories may therefore have seemed negligible to Paul de Man, or he may deliberately have omitted the historical difference, along with Benjamin's respect for dialectics, for his own "new new critical" purposes.²⁸ If I pause to mention de Man it is to clear some theoretical space, because his version of allegory as the inevitable failure of words to attain meaning (surprisingly conventional in its strictly parallel structure and ironically reminiscent of Romantic enchanted timelessness) has become so general as to practically cancel Benjamin's dialectical departure.²⁹ Years after the *Trauerspiel* book, de Man would begin "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969)³⁰ by apparently reviving Benjamin's preference for allegory's pause over symbol's rush. Yet de Man was declaring a polemic from his very title, which disappears the historical temporality Benjamin associated with allegory as a fiction of rhetoric. The battle cry is time, but the stakes are dialectics.

Curiously, though, Benjamin had never made his dialectic count for anything constructive. It moves only downward and backward into an infinite regression in which "history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. . . . Allegories are, in the realm of

thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin, 177-178).³¹ Irresistible, too, would be the corollary tragic sense of life for those of us who tend to suffer more from allegorical double vision than from symbolic ex/implosions. But before we are overcome by comforting pessimism, we might consider the possibility that it depends on Benjamin's ambivalent farewell to theological allegory when he claims that human, historical, time is only an opportunity for distance from nature, for decay. In Benjamin's essay (as in de Man's), allegory is the trajectory of a philosophically felicitous failure, the recurrent waking from an endless dream of absolute presence.

If however we care to willfully misread Benjamin in order to sustain the possibility of mutually constructing terms without looking back at the crumbling structure of bad fits, we may get a sense of how the foundational fictions work. My reading consciously delays the ultimate questions of meaning, because I am more concerned to suggest *how* these books achieved their persuasive power than to determine *if* they had any right to do so. The foundational fictions are philosophically modest, even sloppy. Lacking the rigor that would either keep levels of meaning discrete or show how that was impossible, these novels hypostatize desire as truth and then slide easily between them. With the exception, perhaps, of *María*, these novels are not trapped in unproductive impasses. They do not actively worry about any incommensurability between Truth and Justice, the aporia that de Man locates in Pascal,³² because they know themselves to be performing and seducing.³³ Their object is to win at love and at politics, not to anchor the narrative or to reckon the cost of winning. Content to construct personal and public discourses "upon each other in a circle without end," as Pascal had described his own mundane allegorizing,³⁴ with no stable philosophical ground to either violate or desire, foundational novels are precisely those fictions that try to pass for truth and to become the ground for political association.

If the novelists had closely followed a popular model such as Rousseau they might have worried about what they were doing. Rousseau had fretted over the "referential error" of the word love. He sensed that love was not the cause of desire but desire's effect. "Love is a mere illusion: it fashions, so to speak,

another Universe for itself; it surrounds itself with objects that do not exist or that have received their being from love alone; and since it states all its feelings by means of images, its language is always figural."³⁵ And figure masquerades as reality once "Pathos is hypostatized as a blind power . . . , it stabilizes the semantics of the figure by making it 'mean' the pathos of its undoing . . . the figurality of the language of love implies that pathos is itself no longer a figure but a substance" (de Man, 198–199). But the nation-building novelists didn't fret. The possibility that hypostatized passion would be taken for empirical reality was hardly a "danger" at all but precisely their opportunity to construct a legitimating national culture. Whereas Rousseau's *Julie* counterpoises passion to piety in a way that must have seemed too classical to Latin American writers from the middle of the nineteenth century on, they were making a virtue of love. For Rousseau erotic passion may well have been pathological; for them it was the cure to the pathology of social sterility.

Despite their admiration for fashionable French and English styles, we noted that Latin Americans dared to adjust imported patterns. Balzac's Chilean disciple explicitly accommodates the master to local material in *Martín Rivas*: "The French . . . say: l'amour fait rage et l'argent fait mariage, but here love makes both: rage et mariage."³⁶ This "improvement" does not mean that the national novels represent any literary advance over a work like *Julie*; on the contrary, they are far more conventional. The genre has all "the stock characters in a situation of sentimental tragedy, persecuted by the social inequities of wealth and class and by the caprices of a tyrannical father" that *Julie* puts into question. They are closer in spirit to what de Man said about "Werther or the Mignon chapter in *Wilhelm Meister* or *Sylvie*," than to *La nouvelle Héloïse*, which "would be a very different (and a much shorter) text . . . if the narrative had been allowed to stabilize" (de Man, 215). More predictable, and understandably less challenging to read, these novels set up a dialectic between love and the state—as does *Julie* in the first part—but never stop, as *Julie* does, to turn around (in the Augustinian sense of converting)³⁷ and look back.

They look relentlessly forward, like the mortals Benedict Anderson leaves with their backs to Benjamin's nostalgic Angel of

History (Anderson, 147) and so do not draw desire into the regress of loss that seems inevitable in allegory.³⁸ Instead, they set desire into a spiral or zigzagging motion inside a double structure that keeps projecting the narrative into the future as eroticism and patriotism pull each other along. Rather than rue their artificiality, these novels celebrate their own handiwork as revolutionary departures. There is no crisis associated with the loss/castration that triggers the telling. Instead the loss opens a space because it is the father who has been castrated, not the hero of the piece. I am suggesting that some allegories, such as the ones I'll consider in the following chapters, may have no preexisting and eternal level of referentiality, but—like Nietzsche's point about the fiction of empirical moorings—make themselves up, all the while attempting to produce an illusion of stability.

If I read a double and corresponding structure between personal romance and political desiderata, it is not with any priority of either register. I am suggesting that Eros and Polis are the effects of each other's performance, something like the Marquis de Sade's explanation of sexual desire as the effect of another's commotion (although the analogy would certainly have scandalized the Latin American founders).³⁹ Erotic interest in these novels owes its intensity to the very prohibitions against the lovers' union across racial or regional lines. And political conciliations, or deals, are transparently urgent because the lovers "naturally" desire the kind of state that would unite them. For example, histories still debate about the political portrayal of Juan Manuel de Rosas. Was he a bloodthirsty and vindictive barbarian who singled out Argentina's intelligentsia for terror and torture? Or was he a sophisticated defender of Argentine cultural and economic autonomy, no more bloody than his equally extravagant opponents who wanted to Europeanize the country as soon as possible? If we "know" from reading *Amalia* that Rosas was an unscrupulous dictator, our knowledge is to a considerable degree a political articulation of the erotic frustration we share with *Amalia* and Eduardo. And we feel the intensity of their frustration because we know that their obstacle is the horrible dictator.

In national romance, one level represents the other and also fuels it, which is to say that both are unstable. The unrequited

passion of the love story produces a surplus of energy, just as Rousseau suggested it would,⁴⁰ a surplus that can hope to overcome the political interference between the lovers. At the same time, the enormity of the social abuse, the unethical power of the obstacle, invests the love story with an almost sublime sense of transcendent purpose. As the story progresses, the pitch of sentiment rises along with the cry of commitment, so that the din makes it ever more difficult to distinguish between our erotic and political fantasies for an ideal ending.

What I find ingenious, indeed brilliant, about this novel productivity is that one libidinal investment ups the ante for the other. And every obstacle that the lovers encounter heightens more than their mutual desire to (be a) couple, more than our voyeuristic but keenly felt passion; it also heightens their/our love for the possible nation in which the affair could be consummated. The two levels of desire are different, which allows us to remark on an allegorical structure; but they are not discrete.⁴¹ Desire weaves between the individual and the public family in a way that shows the terms to be contiguous, coextensive as opposed to merely analogous. And the desire keeps weaving, or simply doubling itself at personal and political levels, because the obstacles it encounters threaten both levels of happiness. These obstacles are almost always a social convention or a political impasse; that is, they are public and interpersonal rather than some intimate and particular differences between the lovers. The fact that the lovers almost never quarrel probably has something to do with the vestigial aristocratic character of these romances; its heroes and heroines appear on the scene full blown, immutable and easily distinguished from the masses of servants and supporters. Romantic heroes don't develop in the way we expect from the heroes of novels; instead they move the narrative as a magnet moves unanchored metals, selectively and at the center. When novels were imported by Latin Americans, the genre suffered some sea changes, along with its companion ideology of liberal democracy.⁴² The Latin American elite wanted to modernize and to prosper, yes; but it wanted at the same time to retain the practically feudal privilege it had inherited from colonial times. Logically, a functioning aristocracy by any name might prefer to represent itself in the in-

corruptibly ideal terms that Northrop Frye finds characteristic of romance, "the structural core of all fiction."⁴³ In Latin America's newly won bourgeois excess, Frye's heroic heroes, villainous villains, and beautiful heroines of romance are dislodged, unfixed. They cross class, gender, and racial stereotypes in ways unspeakable for European romance. Yet Frye's observations about masculine and feminine ideals here are to the point; they point backward to medieval quest-romances where victory meant restored fertility, the union of male and female heroes.⁴⁴ One might say that modernizing romances too are written backward, progressing like religious or mythical discourse from a sacred given and reconstructing a trajectory toward it. The narrative begins conceptually from a resolution of conflict, whether that resolution is realized or not, and serves as a vehicle for love and country that seem, after the fact, to have preexisted the writing. For some evidently cautious and controlling reason, its heroes are not the self-reflexive, naive, and developing protagonists that European theorists expect in the novel. Instead, they are unerringly noble, by birth and talent. Non-white lovers are more often than not indigenous or imported princes, like Sab's mother, Alencar's Guaraní, Enriquillo, Tabaré, and the African lovers in *María*.

To mention the "aristocratic" quality of Latin America's bourgeois heroes is meant to reinforce an observation about a particular narrative lack in their stories. It is the lack of personal antagonism or intimate arguments between lovers (except perhaps for the erotic power struggle in *Martín Rivas*), the stuff that sentimental romance is apparently made of. The only problems here seem external to the couple. That they can thwart the romance, fuels our desire to see it flourish. So it is not only desire that doubles itself on public and private levels here; it is also the public obstacle that deters (and goads) the erotic and national projects. Once the couple confronts the obstacle, desire is reinforced along with the need to overcome the obstacle and to consolidate the nation. That promise of consolidation constitutes another level of desire and underscores the erotic goal, which is also a microcosmic expression of nationhood. This zigzagging movement describes a kind of allegory that works primarily through metonymic associations between

the family and the state rather than through the parallelism of metaphoric analogy which seems so standard for allegory.⁴⁵ There is no insistence here on translating from one discourse to another, say from the Good Shepherd in standard Christian allegory to God himself. In these sentimental epics, one meaning doesn't merely point to another, unreachably sublime, register; it *depends* on the other. The romantic affair *needs* the nation, and erotic frustrations *are* challenges to national development. By the same token, requited love already *is* the foundational moment in these dialectical romances. This is one reason for my not including here Alberdi's far more conventional allegory *Peregrination of Light of Day, or Voyages and Adventures of Truth in the New World* (1871), with its standard translatability already visible in the title. The main reason, though, may be a result of the first: the book was simply not so popular nor (therefore) so institutionally promising as to help reinforce love of country. Alberdi may have borrowed his title from Eugenio María de Hostos's *The Peregrinations of Bayoán* (Puerto Rico, 1863), an intriguing attempt at Pan-Caribbean (amorous) alliance which is hardly so schematic as Alberdi's "travails of truth." Yet *Bayoán* is rather heavy-handed about announcing distinct allegorical registers, and its contradictory affairs with politics and passion founder in the rather un-American competition between erotics and duty. Whether or not the conventionally allegorical and puritanical features of Hostos's sentimental and political peregrinations kept *Bayoán* off the canonical list of national romances I take up here, it can hardly have had a similar career. Which country would it celebrate or project? Which existing government could it have supported, when Bayoán's dream was precisely international, beyond the future institutions that might have required it?⁴⁶

Of course the allegories will appeal rhetorically to some legitimating a priori principle. Being a justification for modern and anti-authoritarian projects, that principle is often Nature that has been conveniently redefined since the days of enlightened Independence as interactive rather than hierarchical. If erotic desire seemed to be the natural and therefore eternal grounding for happy and productive marriages (including national families by extension) it was thanks to these redefinitions. Na-

ture was no longer the classical realm of predictable law but the realm of flux where energy could meet obstacles and turn frustration into excess. It was a world that produced angels and monsters, not clockwork. The allegories will strain at points against these redefinitions. For one thing the writing elite was loathe to give up its hierarchical privilege to conciliatory projects, and for another compelling characters may exceed or somehow miss an ideally assigned meaning.

But the observation I am making is far more fundamental than any demonstration of the allegory's partial failures. I am simply registering the incredible measure of its success. In many cases, the double dealing romance actually helped to give a cognitive expression and an emotive mooring to the social and political formations it articulates. The historical romances became national novels in their respective countries, a term that refers not so much to their market popularity, although to be sure many of these novels were immediately popular, but to the fact that they became required reading by the first decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps their promise of a nationalizing embrace was particularly appealing after massive immigration in some countries seemed to threaten a cultural core, and after Latin American regimes decided on patriotic programs for economic and civic development as responses to the Depression and to competing "foreign" ideologies. These states, in other words, tacitly accepted the nineteenth-century pot-boilers as founding fictions that cooked up the desire for authoritative government from the apparently raw material of erotic love.

2

PLAGIARIZED AUTHENTICITY:
SARMIENTO'S COOPER
AND OTHERS

Poor Cora! Why must James Fenimore Cooper kill her off in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)? After lingering so long on her heroism, generosity, resourcefulness, and sheer ethical strength (not to speak of the physical attractions that fix Cooper on Cora) her death seems entirely undeserved. And poor us. Why make Cora so admirable only to deny us the continuing fantasy of possessing, or of being, her? This is especially distressing in a romance, or sentimental novel, which should typically unite hero and heroine after making them overcome apparently insurmountable odds.

One of the problems here is that she is not the heroine at all. Nor, much less, is the Mohican Uncas her hero. Cora is a woman marked by a racially crossed past that would have compromised the clear order Cooper wanted for America. And this is precisely why, tragically, he has to kill her off: to stop us short in our sentimental sidetracks and to leave us only the legitimate lovers who must command our lasting sympathy. They are childlike Alice, Cora's half-sister, and her dashing English suitor, Major Heyward.

I should confess right away that my responses to Cooper, romantic heartbreak alternating with practical resignation, are marked by my own past as a reader of Cooper's Latin American heirs. They reread and rewrote him, either to defend Cora's death as a necessary sacrifice or to redeem her as America's more colorful and more convincing heroine. Given the inevitable years and books that have intervened between Cooper and me, I cannot help but read him through these writers, just as

Jorge Luis Borges read *Don Quijote* through Pierre Menard's rewriting. Like Menard in Borges's story, the Latin Americans produced contemporary texts with each rereading of Cooper. Borges tells us that, "Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)"¹ When Cervantes wrote, for example, that history is the mother of truth, he was merely a "lay genius" offering rhetorical praise for history. But when Menard rewrites it, Borges finds that "the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened." Borges comes to understand that this brilliant updating of the text should not be surprising because, even if Menard's own fetishized version ironically wants to reinscribe a textual stability denied to Cervantes, the very practice of rewriting has already opened up the possibility for further tamperings. This leads his posthumous reviewer to contemplate that,

"Pensar, analizar, inventar . . . no son actos anómalos, son la normal respiración de la inteligencia." . . . Menard (acaso sin quererlo) ha enriquecido mediante una técnica nueva el arte detenido y rudimentario de la lectura: la técnica del anacronismo deliberado y de las atribuciones erróneas. Esa técnica de aplicación infinita nos insta a recorrer la Odisea como si fuera posterior a la Eneida. . . . Esa técnica puebla de aventura los libros más calmosos.²

["Thinking, analyzing, inventing . . . are not anomalous acts; they are the normal respiration of the intelligence." . . . Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. This technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid*. . . . This technique fills the most placid works with adventure.]³

Why not, then, read Cooper through the Latin American writers who read him? Each reading is original, because none really is, since the very pretense of originality is mocked by the endless succession of rereadings. Said another way, originality is

precisely what is unstable, that which decomposes and recomposes itself with every reading. The lesson to be learned from Menard's perhaps involuntary destabilization of writing, including his own, is that even if we *could* succeed in bracketing all the texts that have come between Cooper and us we would be fetishizing his novel by assuming that "thinking, analyzing, inventing" are discrete activities. And worse, perhaps, we would miss a series of "adventurous" Latin American revisions.⁴

Cooper himself might well have objected to these exploits when it came to exploiting *The Last of the Mohicans*. All such liberties would surely confound his foundational project, a book that became America's "gymnasium of the heart" according to a century and a half of autobiographical testimony by "politicians, businessmen, and soldiers—but also those who became her historians, preachers, writers."⁵ To be fair, few nation-builders would have welcomed other writers to tinker with their constructions. Nor could they have appreciated the controlling charm of Walt Whitman's injunction to "stray from me," a liberating gesture that of course insures a paradoxical obedience by granting the right to disobey: "yet who can stray from me?"⁶ And Cooper seems particularly defensive about his founding text for America. Tampering was tantamount to meddling with providence, because Cooper's pretext for writing was (to defend) God's own creation, the pristine and natural lines of America. It denounces no traces of writing but reveals a perfect creation that a spiritual elite may inherit. More true certainly than "cowardly" written histories, whose absent authors avoid criticism,⁷ and truer even than the Bible, in which God's intentions are colored by fallible human language (Cooper, 107), America's wilderness is His transparent writing. When David Gamut misses Hawk-eye's reference to the only book worth reading, the scout explains,

'Tis open before your eyes, . . . and he who owns it is not a niggard of its use. I have heard it said that there are men who read in books to convince themselves there is a God. I know not but man may so deform his works in the settlements, as to leave that which is so clear in the wilderness a matter of doubt among traders and priests. If any such there be, and he will follow me from sun to sun, through the windings of the forest, he shall see enough to teach him that

he is a fool, and that the greatest of his folly lies in striving to rise to the level of One he can never equal, be it in goodness, or be it in power. (Cooper, 138)

Yet, the very novel he gives us to read shows that Cooper is his own Menard, taking timeless nature as a pretense for adventurous historical embellishments. If God has already written, who is man to overwrite the creation until nature spells civilization? This contradiction certainly seems to nag Cooper as he reduces the divine work to writerly raw material. Only the Author's forbearance, and the Puritans' mission to make God's signs visible, can hope to resolve it. Cooper seems alive to the problem and makes visible efforts at writing an extension of nature, thus to provide his heroes with a legitimating prehistory. But extending, interpreting, writing, inevitably produce supplements. And in Cooper they convert an alleged static plenitude into the animated project of endless rewritings.

The fact that Latin Americans rewrote Cooper's books in so many *ways* assumes a reason *why* they gave him so much attention. Why did they? Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888) gives more than a clue. Probably the foremost author of the Argentine nation as journalist, ideologue, general, and president, Sarmiento provided an argument for Cooper's usefulness to other national authors which practically set off a Coopermania among them. His reasons were evidently powerful enough to make Sarmiento refer in great detail to Cooper's novels at the beginning of *Facundo* (1845), translated by Horace Mann's wife as *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants*.⁸ Something about Cooper's writings warrants the Argentine's review of several scenes from *The Last of the Mohicans* and from *The Prairie* (1827) in order to launch his own book, a book that seems to have little to do with fiction and less to do with North America. Or was the connection, perhaps, Cooper's emblematic value among European readers as *the American writer of his day*? These admirably civilized readers admired him, and this is Sarmiento's argument, because Cooper had developed a formula for writing about America that took advantage of her originality and that should therefore be taken as a model of New World writing. It amounted to "removing

the scene of the events he described from the settled portion of the country to the border land between civilized life and that of the savage, the theater of war for the possession of the soil waged against each other, by the native tribes and the Saxon race" (Sarmiento, 24, 25).

THE DOUBLE-CROSS: RACIAL AND GENDER CROSSINGS CROSSED OUT

This is one hint that Sarmiento understood Cooper's sign for the natural, legitimate hero and heroine as, rather, a lack of sign, a pristine blankness in the original sense of whiteness, which leaves fair Alice and Heyward unblemished.⁹ Unlike Cora, whose dark hair and dignified manner denounce a complicated history, and unlike Uncas whose race is marked by his savage coloring, no mark or trace of a compromising past, no "cross" of blood, burdens Alice or Heyward. They not only survive more colorful Cora and Uncas but also, presumably, prosper and populate the innocent and benign America. Inheriting her by virtue of a mutual love that bears no crosses of the past, they set out together, he to inscribe himself on, and she to be inscribed along with, an equally untraced wilderness.

The heroine of the piece is, then, also America, both mother and consort to the founding white fathers. By the same token, seen from its flip side, women can offer the legitimate ground for society only if they seem unmarked and nonhistorical, as America appeared to the settlers who called her a wilderness. Rhetorical figures like the "virgin forest" and her "bosom" are so standard here that one may miss the vanishing act of a language that vaporizes woman by substitution. Cooper's romance gives a domestic cast to what has been called America's pastoral dream and helps to relieve some ambiguity or guilt over the white man's conquest of a Virgin Land.¹⁰ What could be more legitimate than courting and winning a virgin? If man's penetration threatened to destroy the wilderness, certainly this was not true once conquest was figured as mutual love. Or was it? The domestic conquest of women was not entirely benign, as we see from Cora's case. How could it be, when, for apparently ethical and historical reasons, women should be inert terrain for

human activity?¹¹ Those who can serve do not act. And those who cannot serve are eliminated.

Reducing the female to a blank page, the better to bear man's inscription, means, for example, that Cora will not do. Her flaw is not only a racial slippage but also a certain gender indeterminacy evident in her manly dignity (Cooper, 119). Along with her, Uncas is victim to this founding romance, not only because he threatens to complicate Cora's racial crossings, but also because his masculinity has room for the grace and sensitivity associated with women. Both characters cross over the rigid racial and sexual divides, although readers have more often noted Cooper's defense of racial purity than his simultaneous policing of gender boundaries. Misgivings about miscegenation spill over into misogyny. I do not mean to ignore the pained ambiguity that one senses each time this exterminating angel waxes critical of pure whites, or each time Cooper prefers women with histories. On the contrary, I want to underline the pain, the cathartic sacrifice of social impurities, that became necessary if the nation was to be established in the clearest possible terms.

One might imagine, from reading Michel Foucault, that Cooper's defense of racial and gender purity is consistent with an eighteenth-century "map" or "grid" of knowledge. Foucault understands the classical *épistème* to posit a universal plenitude, every part of which fits neatly into a table of categories; any spillovers from one category to the other were simply errors or symptoms of the temporary limits of human knowledge. Science, in one form or another, was taxonomic. Yet Cooper either shows that this view of the eighteenth century is unnecessarily static or that he is caught between a classical affirmation of knowledge and the daring nineteenth-century pursuit of new categories. Taxonomies, Foucault continues, were giving way to histories, and attention shifted from static parts to unstable organisms, changeable combinations that disturbed and finally dismantled the meticulous grids of classical knowledge.¹² Charles Brockden Brown was already dabbling with cross-overs in *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), where the hero's marriage to a Portuguese-Jewish widow makes social order seem possible through inclusion rather than elimination.¹³ But he worried

along with Cooper about the appropriateness of certain mixes for America. Various Europeans might combine, as they do in Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), but cautiously.

In the more defensive *Mohicans* written three years later, both Sarmiento and his straying Latin American readers would find an endorsement of their alternative assumptions about order and progress. On the one (Sarmentine) hand, each of the characters in the novel can be located on a stable graph of utility in language (French being inferior to English, for instance); musicality and religiosity (David Gamut's excess in contrast to Iroquois paucity); domestic practices (the cooking Mohicans and the raw-eating Iroquois); and gender (Alice's ideally infantile femininity, Heyward's masculinity, and the confused categories of Cora and Uncas). These hierarchies function more to set up a grid of values than to motivate the novel. Motivation comes precisely from a commitment to keep the categories pure, against the disturbances in gender and, more conspicuously perhaps, against racial amalgamations. It's bad enough here to be an Indian or even a Frenchman, but much worse to be a mixture that upsets the neat rungs of the racial ladder. That is why Hawk-eye keeps insisting, rather defensively, that he is a man without a cross (of blood); but Chingachgook, too, is bound to call himself "an unmixed man" (Cooper, 37).¹⁴ As for Cora, her tragedy is announced by the fact that she is the product of a leaky grid of blood. Her blood was so rich that it "seemed ready to burst its bounds" (Cooper, 21). It stains her; makes her literally uncategorizable, that is, an epistemological error.¹⁵ Heyward agrees that this is "unfortunate," because even though there is no blame in Cora, there is a blemish that "obscures" her worth (Cooper, 308). By contrast, Alice is pure, named for truth itself and for the mother who sacrificed her youth to remain true to Munro.

But on the other (romantic novelist's) hand, Cooper's novel seems ready to explode the classical prisonhouse of knowledge by way of its most vital and most admirable characters. Through them, America and the nineteenth century practically promise to be the place and time for new possibilities and unplotted histories. If America is different from Europe, as Cooper's and Sarmiento's nationalism must insist that it is, surely her children

should subject Old World categories to a new reflexivity and to new combinations. How could it be otherwise, if instead of the historicized Nature of Europe, America was a Wilderness, an unknown and surprising land? Therefore, along with their map of civilization, Cooper and Sarmiento give us guides to the unknown, a scout named Hawk-eye and an entire class of *mestizo* Argentine pathfinders. And alongside these quintessentially "American" characters whose rustic nobility dares to straddle social categories, we get a combination of "masculine" dignity and "feminine" sensuality in Cora.

We do not get them for long, however, as Sarmiento is quick to recognize. Cooper introduces these anomalous figures as if to pledge that America can be original by providing the space for differences, variations, and crossings. But then he recoils from them, as if they were misfits, monsters. If Hawk-eye seems redeemable inside the gridwork of a classical reading because, unlike the gauchos, he is a man without a cross, he is finally as doomed as they are by Cooper's obsessive social neatness. Hawk-eye disturbs the ideal hierarchies that Sarmiento and his Cooper have in mind, because neither birth nor language can measure his worth. And Cooper leaves the scout behind as surely as his characters leave their cross-over identities after the carnival-like masquerade of the final rescue scenes. Chingachgook can no more remain a beaver than Heyward can be a buffoon, or Alice an Indian. And Cora, already exposed as impersonating a white maiden, can hardly remain the beloved of a Mohican. At her funeral Munro asks Hawk-eye to comfort the mourners with the promise that "the time shall not be distant when we may assemble around [God's] throne without distinction of sex, or rank, or color." The more "natural" man objects: "To tell them this . . . would be to tell them that the snows come not in the winter" (Cooper, 411). To be beautiful, vital, virtuous, and resourceful was not enough for Cora. Rather, it was too much for any woman.

Some readers weep along with the Indian maids. Sarmiento may have wept too, but with the grateful cathartic tears that felt the profound injustice but also the "necessity" of what had already become a policy of Indian removal or genocide in both the United States and Argentina. For Sarmiento, Cooper's

dedication to progress made the sacrifice inevitable. Surely, Cooper could not have been serious about imagining that America was already the rational and uncorrupted given order of things. Instead, she was merely available for men to impose clarity and rationality. Apparently loyal to the eighteenth-century *épistème*, Cooper seemed to defend the purity of her natural wilderness, just as he insisted on the transparent simplicity of his virginal heroine. But what he really wants, on Sarmiento's reading, is to defend the nature of society, for inchoate nature to embrace civilization. This reader is untroubled by the possible paradox of loving the wilderness to death,¹⁶ or by the related paradox of loving virgins like Alice. Love a virgin and she stops being one; inhabit the pristine wildness of America and you've civilized it. The violation of the purity that seems to legitimate America may be a problem for some North American readers, but it was precisely what Sarmiento wanted: to engender civilized settlers who would conquer the still overpowering land.

He had no pretense of preserving the virginity or totality of America; quite the contrary. Empty spaces were the problem itself: "Its own extent is the evil from which the Argentine Republic suffers." The country's demographic and discursive nature was an emptiness that "threatened to invade her entrails" (Sarmiento, 9; 1)¹⁷ and that invited man's writing and the supplement they could produce together. That meant, of course, bodies to populate the pampa and modern systems of production and exchange. But Sarmiento's immediate supplement was, in fact, his native overwriting of "exotic" texts, travelogues and voyagers' accounts that provided the only pampa he knew.¹⁸ As for the danger that objections to nature could be construed as blasphemy, Sarmiento arrogantly quips that, "We should lodge a *complaint against Providence* and ask it to correct the land's configuration" (Sarmiento, 12; 6. Mrs. Horace Mann's pious mistranslation reads: "This would be to complain of Providence and call upon it to alter physical outlines."). Sarmiento and his Cooper then proceeded to take providence in hand; he resents the awe-inspiring land, so immense and empty that it was uncontrollable. The indistinct horizon on an endless pampa may inspire the American sub-

lime and may be a source of national pride—as in Sarmiento's reverie about the American subject whose gaze "sinks into that shifting, hazy, undefined horizon; the further it withdraws from him, the more it fascinates and confuses him, and plunges him in contemplation and doubt" (Sarmiento, 26; 27). But that same obdurate landscape defeats reason and industriousness.

More specifically, it mocks him in the figure of an overwhelming tease, a taunting and tempting virgin who doesn't quite have the shape of a woman, because no one has yet been able to make a woman of her. Unlike Cooper's wilderness, Argentina's pampa is chaste only in the most technical sense. Demanding to be admired wild and shapeless as she is, the land lies ready for the man who dares to make her productive. She "flaunts her smooth, infinite, downy brow without frontiers, without any landmarks; it's the very image of the sea on land, . . . the land still waiting for the command to bring forth every herb-yielding seed after its kind" (Mrs. Mann's chaste translation gives "downy" as "velvet-like," while the Spanish word *velludo* is unmistakably associated with pubic hair) (Sarmiento, 10–11; 2). The American sublime may well be that conflicted response to the combination of responsibility and inadequacy, the duty to intervene and the helplessness before an enormous hermetic body. In any case, Sarmiento is saying that Argentina needs the manageable, recognizably demarcated body that a modern subject could love, because his real passion was for progress.

That is why the Land's unproductive consorts, Indians and gauchos so indolently at peace in unredeemed nature, had to be erased from the national project. They were racially unfit, in Sarmiento's proto-positivist language, for associative behavior. Learning about European positivism in Latin America was like learning that people spoke in prose. It was already a habit of thought that had developed, as it had in Europe, from certain disappointments with revolutionary idealism. Very broadly, positivism in Latin America is an often eclectic tradition that combines a reverence for positive or "scientific"—meaning here empirical—data along with the assumption that the emerging social sciences should take the physical sciences, mostly biology, as their models. Social ills were duly diagnosed and remedies

were prescribed. Herbert Spencer's organicism was especially popular and coordinated with a Comptian schema of the progressive stages of history.¹⁹ Since growth meant modernization and Europeanization, the most extreme ideologues advocated a combined policy of white immigration and Indian or black removal, whereas others settled for redeeming the "primitive" races through miscegenation and ideological whitening. Cooper's nineteenth-century Latin American readers either defended Sarmiento's categorical position or, as we'll see below, developed a more conciliatory and romantic one.

SELF-AUTHORIZED DISCIPLES

The book that Sarmiento wrote to follow his praise for Cooper's novels seems dutifully to follow the master's lead. In *Facundo*, Sarmiento was in fact writing America through her racial and cultural conflicts; and he produced what is probably the most widely read and influential of any book Cooper may have inspired. Yet my point here will be that Sarmiento's backing up Cooper is quite subtle, even paradoxically self-advancing. By setting up Cooper's America as a model for Argentina, Sarmiento will hardly sacrifice his own particularity or his country's; he is far too cunning an author simply to subordinate either himself or the nation he hopes to lead to another's authority. Sarmiento was in the habit of giving strong readings, or as Sylvia Molloy astutely points out, translating others' work, an operation she shows was related to plagiarism.²⁰ I will be suggesting that in the case of his Cooper, and in multiple cases from *Recuerdos de Provincia* (1850), Sarmiento's apparently deferential gesture, his respectful naming of masters and models, is merely a strategic distancing. It constitutes the second move in a maneuver that works like a boomerang, ultimately circling back with the spoils of borrowed authority. The first step, logically, is to wield the rhetorical boomerang, to assume full control, announce the pursuit, and predict the prize.

Everyone who reads Spanish American literature, or history, or politics, knows what Sarmiento is pursuing in *Facundo*. He practically tells us what the prize is in the book's subtitle, *Civilization and Barbarism*. This opposition constructs a normative dif-

ference between what Argentina should be and what it now is, between productive control and desultory excess, a difference that amounts to a program for accomplishing one by eliminating the other. Sarmiento evidently reviles Argentina's present excess as unproductive waste. He does so repeatedly and passionately, every time he mentions a gaucho who butchers a cow just to eat its tongue, or a regional caudillo like Facundo Quiroga who sacrifices whole armies to his personal glory and scores of women to his lust.

Yet excess is precisely what characterizes Sarmiento's writing about it in this exorbitant text, half fiction, half biography, half political history, half manifesto, a generically immoderate book that obviously adds up to much more than one.²¹ He is writing inside what he might have called the American idiom, as well as against it, writing *in* conflict as well as about it. Sarmiento is founding a peculiarly American political rhetoric by resisting, simultaneously, his anarchic environment and the unnatural constraints of European genres that would distinguish between poetry and politics and that keep missing the specificity of American life.²² *Facundo* spills over standard generic categories and even seems to be written out of Sarmiento's writerly control; it reads like a feverish product of an inspiration that never condescended to an editing job. On rereading the very title, we may notice that the equivalence introduced by the colon makes both opposing terms of the subtitle curiously apposite to the name Facundo.²³ Alberdi must have been among the first to notice that this two-faced book argued for and against the same questions.²⁴ An explosive rhetorical pressure keeps threatening to blow up (in both senses of exaggerating and destroying) his initial dichotomy of civilization versus barbarism, and the ones that follow from it: the future versus the past; Europeans versus Indians; settlers versus nomads; and generally, deliberation versus passion. These oppositions tend to cross out/into each other until Sarmiento himself admits how useless it may be to keep them straight. One notorious example is his treatment of "savage" dictator Rosas, who is credited with having accomplished the national unity that his civilized Unitarian antagonists only dreamed of. Their improvement on Rosas would certainly not be to level his top-down style but to replace him

at the top with a more legitimately elite leadership.²⁵ Far from wanting to destroy this authentically Argentine "barbarian"'s work (just because some defensively dichotomous definition would make barbarians incapable of real work), Sarmiento wanted to appropriate it, in the same way that he wanted to appropriate whatever was salvageable in Argentina's special character. (No wonder that Alberdi thought the book should have been called *Faustino* instead of *Facundo*.)²⁶ The country's originality, after all, was the justification for Independence and for the patriotism that Sarmiento must attribute to himself in order to win support for his own leadership.

His paean to that originality comes very early on, long before he gets to Rosas, and even before the bulk of the book where he sketches out the figure of the national tyrant in *Facundo*'s minor regional lines. It comes in the first section, after Sarmiento rushes his reader through the vast, empty expanse of the country left barren by nomadic gauchos and Indians, an emptiness that mutely invites him to write on it. Chapter 2 is where Sarmiento pauses at his own dichotomy as he stops, with some pride, to consider the "Originality and Peculiarities of the Argentine People." Mrs. Mann ends her chapter title there, but Sarmiento had added a list of untranslatable types: "El Rastreador. El Baqueano. El Gaucho malo. El Cantor." This early double take about laudable Argentine peculiarities in Sarmiento's apparently single-minded campaign for civilization is, as I said, itself a peculiarly Sarmentine move. He shows his American self to have non-European tastes, values, structures of feeling. Different from Europeans on the one hand and from native nomads on the other, Americans are also extensions of both; they are culturally doubled and different from themselves, a violent excess. Therefore, a truly American literature would necessarily be unorthodox by European standards; it would attend to "scenes so peculiar, so characteristic, and so far outside the circle of ideas in which the European mind has been educated, that their dramatic relations would be unrecognized machinery outside the country that developed these surprising customs and original characters" (Sarmiento, 24; 24).

Those inimitable Argentine characters occupy Sarmiento in this second chapter, where his legitimacy as a specifically Argen-

tine leader must be established. And yet Sarmiento's literary model for describing the indigenous drama and the extravagant actors is, as I already said, the North American Cooper. How strange that Sarmiento should refer to a foreigner precisely when he is celebrating what is most homespun and characteristic. It is as if the difference between domestic self and imported other didn't matter when it came to marketing his national political identity. One explanation Sarmiento offers is that he senses the stirrings of a local, properly American esthetic in Cooper's work, a barbarous esthetic of the sublime (probably taken more from travels in the United States, like Chateaubriand's, than from Cooper)²⁷ that was both deferential to and contemptuous of Europe. "The natural peculiarities of any region give rise to customs and practices of a corresponding peculiarity, so that where the same circumstances reappear, we find the same means of controlling them invented by different nations" (Sarmiento, 25; 25). But to offer this explanation, Sarmiento has had to tailor Cooper to fit Argentina; he purposefully ignores the differences in terrain among Cooper's novels, which by Sarmiento's own determinist logic (roughly, that geography was destiny) should have mattered. Whereas Cooper's wilderness is a womblike enclosure in *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Prairie* shows a blinding expanse. And this expansive landscape is the one that Sarmiento chooses to universalize for America. "To arouse the poetic sense . . . we need the sight of beauty, of terrible power, of immensity of extent, of something vague and incomprehensible; . . . Hence it follows that the disposition and nature of the Argentine [and North American?] people are poetic. How can such feelings fail to exist, when a black storm-cloud rises, no one knows whence, in the midst of a calm, pleasant afternoon, and spreads over the sky before a word can be uttered?" (Sarmiento, 26; 27).

It is very possible that Sarmiento's apparently eccentric national identity, meaning that it seems mirrored through Cooper's America, was programmatic for a man who wanted to modernize his country by "Europeanizing" or "North Americanizing." What interests me here, as I said, is less the degree to which Sarmiento may be borrowing from Cooper's originality than the way he manages to invert the terms and perhaps

even the implied debts. He manages through a double-dealing logic that begins, as we saw, by announcing programmatic oppositions between civilization and barbarism, then proceeds to defer to a model of writing about American oppositions, a model endorsed, significantly, by a European (that is, exoticizing) standard that allegedly glorifies conquest of the land. She had resisted domesticating inscriptions, for Cooper as much as for Sarmiento, because Mr. Right and his writing tool hadn't come along yet. To whose authority would the virtuous, or stubborn, Land yield? Whom would she allow to inscribe his name, to produce a landmark? Certainly not the Indians. They had their chance and were obviously unequal to the challenge, mostly because they were cast as "nomads" in the discourse of America ever since the sixteenth-century settlement of Roanoke and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. And since civilization meant stable settlements for the Europeans, the Indians were practically synonymous with barbarians. From the European "discovery" through the period of imperialist rivalries and internal conquests, the Americas were named and renamed after the fathers who fought on and over her. Cooper traces one such history of conflict over what, for now at least, is called Lake George. The Jesuits had given it the "title of lake 'du Saint Sacrement.' The less zealous English thought they conferred a sufficient honor on its unsullied fountains when they bestowed the name of their reigning prince," both having blotted out the "original appellation of 'Horican'" (Cooper, 12).

If Cooper was indeed convincing himself that America was worthy of love because she was pristine and untouched by history, it must have been to establish her legitimacy as wife. To acknowledge her former consorts might have been to cast doubt on the permanence of her current ones. Cooper, in fact, manages with one hand to write the land's "erotic" prehistory with the Indians and the French and to erase it with the other. Like Alice, whose family history leaves no mark of experience, the landscape around Lake George remains a wilderness because it shows no trace of rivalries and intrigues. These became the history of her suitors, but not hers. "Forts were erected at the different points that commanded the facilities of the route, and were taken and retaken, razed and rebuilt, as victory alighted

on the hostile banners" (Cooper, 13). Perhaps her innocence, her wildness, allowed her to resist their efforts to brand her.²⁸ In any case, the traces of successive inscriptions would have been problematic for Cooper, if he hoped to convince us that the wilderness was pure and virginal. The Father may be willing to share his virgin child with a worthy husband, so that they might be fruitful and multiply. But her chastity and the transparency of her language cannot survive the marriage.

With far less show of guilt or nostalgia, Sarmiento performs a similar *ninguneo*, the "nobody-ing" of a threatening somebody.²⁹ Calling the Indians and the mestizo gauchos "American Bedouins" in *Facundo* (Sarmiento, 14; 10)³⁰ is enough to eliminate them from history, since "there can be no progress without permanent possession of the soil, or without cities" (Sarmiento, 18; 15). This would be embarrassing enough for today's readers if nomadism really canceled "conjugal" rights to the land. After all, the Old Testament promised land to the patriarchs and the prophets, so dear to the Puritan settlers, and so inspiring to Sarmiento (Sarmiento, 8; 15). Their nomadic life was the only spiritual safeguard in a world of decadent settlements. But recent work shows that the North American Indians he gleefully saw exterminated were not invariably nomadic. In fact, the Algonkin word for the land area known now by the pristine name of "Virginia" meant "densely populated." Algonkins typically lived in towns, to which the English settlers would flee periodically when their own resources failed them.³¹ The obviously winning suitors are the Europeans, the ones who know how to write on smooth surfaces. Sarmiento does not mince words, because he casts himself here as none other than Mr. Right, writing an epic of (pro)creation; and he can attribute no less to his putative model, Cooper.

Step three in Sarmiento's roundabout rhetorical trajectory is, then, to close up the distance between imported models and local manufacture. His Cooper evidently supported the extreme racist position that backed Sarmiento against some critics at home.³² If he had paused to consider that Cooper's struggle for the land probably had as much to do with his own rearguard defense of "feudal" rights in New York State (besieged by the anti-rent legislation of the democratizing "masses") as with

Monroe's Indian removal policy formulated in 1824, Sarmiento might have admired him even more.³³ It was as easy for the Argentine as for the New Yorker to conflate the "anarchic" propertyless classes with "savages." Unfortunately for Cooper, the "masses" were winning some ground, while the more obliging Indians continued to lose it. Jane Tompkins underlines how typical Cooper's guilt-ridden celebration of that loss was in those years. "Between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Americans wrote seventy-three novels dealing with Indian-white relations. . . . With few exceptions, the white hero and heroine marry at the end, the bad . . . Indians are killed, and the good Indian either dies, or dies out."³⁴ These blood-purging novels lament the sacrifice, as Sarmiento apparently laments it in the second chapter of *Facundo*, but not so loudly that readers could miss the barely muffled gasp of relief.

Sarmiento's Cooper is uncannily close to a marxist Cooper, like the one Lukács remembers through Gorky, one who bids a mournful but necessary farewell to the primitive world that capitalism replaces.³⁵ Neither Lukács nor Sarmiento could afford to worry themselves over Cooper's possibly ambivalent position between classical, clearly defined, signs and romantic evolutionism.³⁶ Sarmiento "knew" that Cooper was a modern man dedicated to progress and change. And he also "knew" that progress depended on keeping the signs clear; it depended on distinguishing Indian from white and male from female, so that in the battle for America the best man would win. His Cooper was not only tidying up the sloppy signs that exceeded ideal categories. He was also setting the American record straight by clearing up the space that previous settlers had scribbled on, before the ideal English writers appeared. So, unlike the average North American reader, and unlike the Latin American novelists who would follow, Sarmiento doesn't allow sentimentality to distract him. He assures us that genocide is the necessary condition for progress; and he affirms that this is the deepest and the most significant message of Cooper's novels.

And right after he establishes Cooper as the model for literary and military exploits that Argentina would do well to imitate, Sarmiento makes his final, fourth, move in his magisterially circular logic. He boldly questions the master's own orig-

inality by noting that Cooper's "descriptions of practices and customs . . . seem plagiarized from the Pampa." Notice that he says "plagiarized," not inspired, or suggested, or even copied. What could Sarmiento possibly have meant with that word? Is he simply telling us that the North American experience is notably similar to that of South America? If that were the case, then why not point out the relationship from the other direction and say that the South shows similarities with the North? This would maintain the chronological (and ontological) order between Cooper's text and Sarmiento's commentary, between center and periphery. In other words, why not say that the pampa seems like a copy of the prairie? After all, it is rather obvious from the very fact of his references to Cooper, not to mention Sarmiento's national catching-up projects, that the United States provided the model for Argentina and not the other way around. Of course his comment could pass for an offhand or ironic way of emphasizing the similarities and thus establishing the possibility that Argentina could develop just like the United States did. It might pass for levity, perhaps, if it were not for the nature of the details from Cooper's novels that Sarmiento finds so appropriate(able) and that immediately precede the remark about plagiarism. Those details, which I mentioned as the measure of Sarmiento's admiration for Cooper and which we should consider now, represent some significantly predictable scenes for the Argentine reader:

Cuando leía en *El último de los Mohicanos*, de Cooper, que Ojo de Halcón y Uncas habían perdido el rastro de los Mingos en un arroyo, dije: "Van a tapar el arroyo." Cuando en *La Pradera*, el Trampero mantiene la incertidumbre y la agonía mientras el fuego los amenaza, un argentino habría aconsejado lo mismo que el Trampero sugiere al fin, que es limpiar un lugar para guarecerse, e incendiar a su vez, para poderse retirar del fuego que invade sobre las cenizas del que se ha encendido. . . . Cuando los fugitivos de *La Pradera* encuentran un río y Cooper describe la misteriosa operación del Pawnee con el cuero del búfalo que recoge, "va a hacer la *pelota*, me dije a mi mismo: lástima es que no haya una mujer que la conduzca," que entre nosotros son las mujeres las que cruzan los ríos con la *pelota* tomada con los dientes por un lazo. El procedimiento para asar una cabeza de búfalo en el desierto es el

mismo que nosotros usamos para *batear* una cabeza de vaca o un lomo de ternera. En fin, otros mil accidentes que omito prueban la verdad de que modificaciones análogas del suelo traen análogas costumbres, recursos y expedientes. No es otra la razón de hallar en Fenimore Cooper descripciones de usos y costumbres que parecen plagiadas de la pampa.

[When I came to the passage in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, where Hawkeye and Uncas lose the trail of the Mingos in a brook, I said to myself: "They will dam up the brook"; when the trapper in *The Prairie* waits in irresolute anxiety while the fire is threatening him and his companions, an Argentine would have recommended the same plan which the trapper finally proposes,—that of clearing a space for immediate protection, and setting a new fire, so as to be able to retire upon the ground over which it had passed beyond the reach of the approaching flames. . . . When the fugitives in *The Prairie* arrive at a river, and Cooper describes the mysterious way in which the Pawnee gathers together the buffalo's hide, "he is making a *pelota*," said I to myself, "it is a pity there is no woman to tow it," for among us it is the women who tow *pelotas* across rivers with lassos held between their teeth. The way in which a buffalo's head is roasted in the desert is the same which we use for cooking a cow's head or a loin of veal. I omit many other facts which prove the truth that analogies in the soil bring with them analogous customs, resources, and expedients. This explains our finding in Cooper's works accounts of practices and customs which seem plagiarized from the pampa; . . .] (Sarmiento, 25–26; 26)

Sarmiento can tell, before Cooper informs him, how the most characteristically American characters will (or in the case of the Pawnees, should) behave. And this sustained display of foreknowledge has a peculiar effect. It suggests that the real Cooper was Sarmiento himself, especially if the redundancy of publishing what the Argentine public already knew could have occurred to him. Sarmiento practically boasts of having anticipated many of Cooper's pages before he read them. And one can just imagine how he read, almost preparing textual ambushes and traps for poor Cooper, to see if the revered American author could get out of his own tight spots with the right American solutions.

Perhaps already sensitive to his reputation as an inveterate

braggart, Sarmiento slyly evades any renewed imputations of arrogance by removing himself from the comparison with Cooper. Sarmiento was not, he implies, competing with or, much less, improving on Cooper. Cooper's copying was not of Sarmiento at all, but of the pampa, since the plagiarism that he attributes to Cooper is not of a particular text, or even of the pampa's foremost interpreter: Sarmiento himself. Cooper's greatness is having deliberately imitated the Land, God's creation, the divine text that the American says he respects. And Sarmiento's attribution of a divine inspiration for Cooper's plagiarism is even more crafty than the calculated modesty of staying out of the comparison. It safeguards the model's value as an American artist. If Cooper, plagiarist that he was, were not also valuable as the honorably mimetic portrait-maker of American reality, he would be no good to Sarmiento as a point of departure or as a mentor.

Sarmiento's doubletake here is to reduce the stature of his model and to keep him as a model at the same time. It responds to a characteristic double-bind for some national authors in Latin America; that is, a certain reticence to share authority, even with the models who bestow it on their disciples and who, therefore, must be respected as legitimate. In Sarmiento's exemplary case, Cooper is as much an opportunity to improve on the model as to improve himself. If it were not for Cooper's success, and for the success of the country he helped to found, what foundation would Sarmiento have for writing America? And if Sarmiento let himself become a simple copy of Cooper, or if the pampa were an imitation of the prairie, where could his own authority come from, and where the very sovereignty of his country? The military strategist in Sarmiento surely understood that the best defense is sometimes an offensive move. So, in a tactic designed to free himself and his country from the ignominious charge of being mere copies (which he was more than willing to acknowledge in his arguments for modernization in this same book), Sarmiento fires the first shot at Cooper. Of course, he aims to do very little damage, because without his opponent as counterpart, without the mirror that would reflect back a legitimate American name, Sarmiento could not have hoped to make a name for himself.

What does he hope to accomplish, then, by sowing a seed of doubt about the North American model's originality, suggesting that it might be the copy of his own imitation of Argentina? He hopes, I am suggesting, to harvest an irrefutable originality that is well rooted in a stable landscape of precursors. And Sarmiento's desire for unquestionable authority is so great that instead of simply cannibalizing Cooper's text as a subtext, as a pretext of his own work (a consumption that would make conspicuous the model's priority), Sarmiento prefers to toy with it, as if time and linearity were illusory, and as if a reader could be the greatest authority of someone else's text.

This displacement or metaleptic inversion between text and commentary, and also between master and disciple, will repeat itself in *Recuerdos de provincia* (1850), where at one revealing point Sarmiento makes the paradigmatically circular and self-serving assertion that "to my progeny I am my own successor."³⁷ In general, the book's self-reflexive logic, meaning here that it is twisted always to reflect well on its author, needs to propose a revaluation of plagiarism. It does this quite explicitly through mention of Deacon Funes, about whom Sarmiento writes, "he has been burdened too long with the charge of plagiarism, which for me turns into something far from a reproach, but rather a sure sign of merit,"³⁸ the merit of erudition and good taste. This indulgence bordering on enthusiasm for plagiarists frees Sarmiento from having any qualms about plagiarizing his own biography from Benjamin Franklin's. "No other book has done me as much good as this one." "I felt I was Franklin"—he says, immediately to ask himself rhetorically and a bit defensively, "and why not? I was very poor, just like he was, a diligent student like he was." That is, a veritable "Franklincito" before discovering his own person in somebody else's book. A little later he adds, "prodding myself on and following his footsteps, I could one day become as accomplished . . . and make a name for myself in American literature and politics."³⁹ Sarmiento's staged adulation here is probably meant to dramatize his endorsement of Franklin's book for Argentine school boys. In general, Sarmiento instructs us in one of the appendices—which lists some of his publications and promises others—that "Biography is the most original kind of book that South Amer-

ica can produce in our times, and the best material we can offer history." It is the genre, according to him, to which *Facundo* belongs, and also the *Provincial Memoirs* we are reading, both being personal stories about exemplary persons.

But Sarmiento's celebration of Franklin's achievements may also be providing a measure for the celebrant's even greater success. He must already have felt the satisfaction of outdoing Franklin, both in literary accomplishments and in the brilliant political career that these very *Recuerdos* helped to assure. While he was writing them, as a kind of narrative curriculum vitae or political self-portrait,⁴⁰ he was also circulating a photographic portrait with the caption, "Sarmiento, future president of Argentina."⁴¹ If his cautiously respectful diminution of Franklin seems a daring appropriation, Sarmiento had anticipated it in his lines about Cooper; and he had also gone arguably further in an earlier chapter of the *Recuerdos*. It is the one dedicated to Domingo de Oro as the "model and archetype of the future Argentine."⁴² But this future model is past history for prophetic Sarmiento who concludes on the next page, "De Oro's life is proof of the way I understood his rare eloquence." How do we disentangle the subject from his representation here? How do we know where priority resides? In the prophecy, in the proof?

This tactical inversion will already be familiar to us through Pierre Menard's work. If it seems a bit anachronistic to misread Sarmiento via Borges, it is at least a strategy that both teach us. It would be almost perverse to miss reading Sarmiento as Cooper's and Franklin's and Oro's Menard. If we had attempted respectfully to stabilize some of his sources as Cooper's novels, Franklin's biography, and Oro's life we would have been mistaking "thinking, analyzing, inventing" as discrete activities. And if we care to be even more anachronistic, we could mention that Jean Baudrillard makes a similar observation about production in the "postmodern" world, an observation that should have little relevance for a nineteenth-century writer who found that his country was already behind the times. Alleging that Western culture used to be or to feel itself more solidly grounded, Baudrillard complains that all we can produce today are simulacra, copies of models that are themselves inauthentic. Even what we call reality is nothing more than a

series of fictitious constructions, neither more nor less genuine than their "re-presentations."⁴³

Baudrillard begins his meditation with a gesture that has evidently become stylish in French philosophy. He begins with a Borgesian parable, the one about the cartographers who are so determined to make a scientifically exact representation of reality that they produce a map as big as the empire. He starts with Borges in order promptly to discard the model, condescendingly charging that Borges's irony depends on a naive notion of the Real, on an empire that precedes the map.⁴⁴ Baudrillard thus reads without mentioning Borges's proverbial circularity, the textual whirlwind that blows away any pretense of stable originality and that is so notorious among his French fans. Whether or not this reading does justice to Borges's thought, one must agree that Baudrillard's is a strategic reading (in the same way that Sarmiento strategically misreads Cooper). It would be rather out of character for the theorist of simulation and of the failure of referentiality to refer respectfully to the authority who gave him the base for theorizing. Baudrillard evidently opted for intellectual orphanhood, perhaps in order to dramatize his own theme: the impossibility of lineage and of the relationship between origin and following. If everything is (and all of us are) inauthentic, it would be absurd to follow in anyone's footsteps.

But it was not absurd for Sarmiento who preferred a different option. I say option, because I imagine in my necessarily Menardian reading that he had several to choose from. One was to resign himself to renouncing originality, with the same ironic and haughty modesty that Baudrillard and Borges no doubt affected. Another was to assume absolute, practically divine, originality, as Sarmiento does in *Mi defensa* (1843) and, by an apparent rhetorical slip, as he does once in *Recuerdos*. "When I had finished this work [a book on pedagogy], I could say in my rejoicing that I had produced something worthy: *et vidi quod esset bonum*. Then I applauded myself."⁴⁵ A third option was what I am calling the boomerang effect: to attribute originality and the authority it implies to someone else, so that they may be snatched out of the model's hands in a lightning game of "now you see it, now you don't." If the strategy Sarmiento fol-

lowed with Cooper is characteristic, and it seems to be, given the subsequent uses he made of Funes, Franklin, and Oro among others, he clearly preferred this last choice. He proposes models, cuts them down to manageable size, and glories in their presumed (or explicit) approval, even when they have doubtful credentials. The chapter on de Oro, for example, criticizes the model's misdirected shrewdness that ends up clearing the political obstacles to Rosas's victory. Yet the chapter ends by quoting in its entirety a letter of recommendation that Oro had sent the author.

Sarmiento distances himself from his models only enough to outdistance them, not to dismiss either them or their offer of legitimacy. The ambiguity is really ingenious here for someone who may have "known" history to be a fiction, a simulacrum. If he did, it was always as an opportune fiction for the writer who dared to invent it. Sarmiento succeeds in attributing to himself the authority and the privilege of a foundational thinker. At the same time his claim to legitimacy is based on implied approval by an established origin, established just to make sure, by the very fact that he considers it a model. *Facundo*, after all, had something to do with Cooper's exemplary status among Latin Americans who admired, imitated, and adopted him as the first among (North) American narrators.

PIERRE MENARD'S COOPERS

Menardian readers that they were, though, Latin American novelists followed neither the foreign model nor the Argentine purveyor too closely, unless of course, following Sarmiento means learning a Whitmanian step that strays enough to find comparably opportune uses for Cooper. They also learned (and further bequeathed) the disciple's backstep, putting model behind copy: "You're like the Romantic writers," Marito incautiously remarked to their scriptwriting heir in *Aunt Julia*. "In point of fact, *they're like me*. . . . I've never plagiarized anybody."⁴⁶ These romantics were national authors, in the same multivalent sense that describes Sarmiento. They will occupy us in the following chapters, so that short mentions may suffice here as we consider the possible repercussions of Sarmiento's

praise for Cooper. As novelists they were generally bound to challenge Sarmiento's assumptions about the didactic and socially constructive potential of exemplary single lives.⁴⁷ Writing novels was already a statement about the collective, or coupling, nature of nation-building. If one of the main goals of Argentina's national program was to populate the deserted pampa, if for the modernizing bourgeois culture that South America's elites were trying to adopt sexual desire had indeed become what Foucault characterized as "the explanation for everything," heroic biographies would hardly be (re)productive enough.⁴⁸ Typically, the novelists presumed to "correct" Cooper, or at least to read him correctly. Most of them knew, for instance, that the author of *The Last of the Mohicans* really preferred, or should have preferred, Cora as America's archetypal mother. Rather than keep America racially pure, a Latin-Americanized and romantic Cooper was warning his compatriots that their country's hope for peace and progress should not be sacrificed to an ideal of purity as anachronistic and self-destructive as military heroism. National consolidation needed the reconciliation of differences, not their exclusion. The hegemonic project of the dominant class had to win the support of other interests for a (usually) liberal national project that would benefit them all, just as the hero of romance won the heroine through love and practical concern for her well-being. A white elite, often in the large port cities, had to convince everyone, from landholders and miners to indigenous, black, and mulatto masses, that liberal leadership would bridge traditionally antagonistic races and regions in a new prosperity.

In political practice, Argentines were evidently far less jealous husbands than was Cooper. In the introductory chapter, we saw that prudent Juan Bautista Alberdi recognized his own national shortcomings and made a virtue of the necessity to share his patrimony with foreigners. (To import Anglo-Saxon studs in order to develop a superior and manageable breed, one might say in the cattle-breeding logic that prevailed.) Sexual love would do the rest, once Argentina's army of desirable women conquered the white would-be conquerors. But Cooper, convinced of his own superiority, had seen no advantage to

amalgamation. After all, he is the Anglo-Saxon Prince Charming whom the swarthier Argentines want.

Is it possible that the erotic or fairy-tale rhetoric that I am attributing to the political theorist Alberdi comes from contemporary Latin American novels rather than from his own juridical discourse? Is it also possible that I have been reading Sarmiento's Cooper as an advocate for enlightened inscription, or the civilizing kiss, through this same literary tangle of romance and nation-building? Perhaps Sarmiento was insensible to the love story between the land and the men who would make her prosper. The drama of seduction may be superfluous to a man accustomed to commanding. If I am caught in a rhetorical jumble, it owes as much to a tradition of Latin American writing as to my belated reading. Sarmiento became the pretext for so many other Pierre Menards in Latin America. Nevertheless, to defend this possibly misplaced "romantic" reading of Sarmiento, I should point out the inevitable resonance of *romance* for today's reader. Referring to Cooper as a *romancista*, might simply have been a gallicism for "novelist"; and Mrs. Mann duely translates it both as "romancer" and "novelist" (Mann, 24). The difference between these terms is an Anglo-American, not a Romance language, tradition.⁴⁹ But when Sarmiento uses *romance* in a sarcastic remark about Facundo's abuse of his girlfriend ("No es éste un lindo romance?" [Isn't this a fine story / romance?]) (Sarmiento, 126), the word acquires the precocious quality of love story, even though that meaning probably came a century later, perhaps from Hollywood. Through a conscious anachronism, then, I find myself reading Sarmiento's epithet as acknowledging the erotic core in Cooper's work.

The national novelists certainly read it as erotic. Their Cooper allegorized Sarmiento's pseudo-scientific rhetoric about civilization and barbarism, white settlers tackling the pampa, into a story of requited love. Therefore, the ideal national marriages were often projected in romances between whites and Indians (the title characters of José de Alencar's Brazilian *O Guarani* [1857] and *Iracema* [1865], are examples), or mestizas inspired no doubt from Chateaubriand's *Atala* (such as Manuel de Jesús Galván's Doña Mencía in *Enriquillo* [Dominican Repub-

lic, 1882] and Marisela in *Doña Bárbara* [Venezuela, 1929] by Rómulo Gallegos). The ideal of *mestizaje*, so pejoratively rendered in English as miscegenation, was based in the reality of mixed races to which different virtues and failings were ascribed, and which had to amalgamate in some countries if anything like national unity was to be produced. Unity, in positivist rhetoric, was not so much a political or economic concept as it was biological. José Vasconcelos gave probably the most famous and utopian formulation in *Raza cósmica* (1925), written after the Mexican Revolution when Indian masses forced themselves into any consideration of nationalism and progress. But as early as Simón Bolívar's famous discourse at Angostura, Latin Americans have at least rhetorically assumed a racially mixed identity. "It is impossible to correctly determine," said the Liberator, "to which human family we belong. . . . Born all of the same mother, our fathers [are] of different origins and blood."⁵⁰

Only an atypical novel like Jorge Isaacs's *María* (Colombia, 1867), his swan song for the slavocracy, could afford to revive Cooper-like pessimism about *mestizaje*. Like double-crossed Cora, the originally Jewish María was born in the West Indies (Jamaica) and, though perfectly innocent and admirable, she too bears a blemish of racial difference. It is a Jewish stain and serves as a sign for the more troubling differences between blacks and whites. As in *Enriquillo* and in *O Guarani*, the real threat that darkens a plantation society becomes unspeakable to Isaacs. Instead, he seems to be saying that no amalgamation, however innocent and sincere, can be productive in the aristocratic society he yearns for. Although more programmatic, perhaps, Uruguay's *Tabaré* (1888), by Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, is atypical too for its sacrifice of racial difference in the person of the mestizo hero. The blue-eyed Indian is as out of place in either white or native society as was Cooper's tragic culturally mestiza Ruth, the captive of *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* (1829). More Latin American writers by far, however, tended to be programmatic in a more synthetic way. When the lovers in romance are both white, they probably come from mutually hostile areas, as in José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851), where the hero is a Buenos Aires boy and his heroine a childless young

widow from provincial Tucumán. Far from being put off by his heroine's past, as an unassimilated Cooper might have been, Mármol admitted that Argentina had an unproductive history that national romance would cure. And Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* (1862) joins the son of a bankrupted mining entrepreneur in the north of Chile to the daughter of the Santiago usurer who had acquired the mine. The hero finally convinces Santiago's bankers that getting together would be mutually satisfying, at the same time that Chile's elite sectors were making political and financial deals. Where racial and regional differences keep lovers apart, as in Cuba's abolitionist novels, *Francisco* (1839) by Anselmo Suárez y Romero, *Cecilia Valdés* (1839; 1882) by Cirilo Villaverde, and *Sab* (1841) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, the blame for personal and national tragedy falls on archaic and un-American habits of social ordering. The implied or explicit program for change saves these novels from the ruthlessness of Sarmiento's Cooper and from the pessimism of Isaacs's tragedy. This is not to say that racism and economic partiality ceased to exist among the novelists. To see prejudice at work, one has only to observe that Indian and mestiza lovers appear in books like *O Guarani* and *Enriquillo* so that blacks can disappear, or that *Amalia*'s Tucumán remains a background producer for the trade decisions made in Buenos Aires. Hegemony, after all, is not an egalitarian project but one that legitimates the leadership of one social sector by winning the consent of others. Romance had, therefore, to give a loving cast to national unity, not necessarily to equalize the lovers.

The Latin Americans must have been relieved to see that Cora Munro was redeemed at home after the defensive nervousness about gender and race coding relaxes; that is, after the man's work is done and the West is won. She comes back to be celebrated in the late and "decadent" period of dime novels. Cooper himself paved the way by freeing at least one legitimate heroine, Ellen Wade in *The Prairie* (1827), from the noble birth that confers inhuman paralysis on his women,⁵¹ and especially in "self-reliant" Mabel Dunham of *The Pathfinder* (1840). In fact, Cooper's dime-novel-writing Menards of the North became fond of celebrating half-breed heroines and even of displacing the traditional genteel heroes with the savage

women protagonists. The great difference from South America is that the mass production of Western novels, starting with Beadles's literary industry in 1858, was less an enterprise to establish an American consciousness and national project than to mine that earlier effort in order to supply the growing market for sensationalism. The Amazon cum heroine of the end of the century, according to Henry Nash Smith, is one exemplary innovation that marks the decay of dime-Westerns that learned to pander to an American public hungry for ever more gratuitous adventure.⁵² But if we read more sympathetically, these ungentle heroines encode the return of the repressed Cora. Cooper may have been compelled to doom her because she was too able and too full of surprises for the benighted hero's taste. Her self-motivation complicated his rights to motivate her and, by extension, to manipulate the land. But for his Menards to the South, Cooper may also have preferred her. In that case, his novel is a tragedy, along the lines of Isaacs's *María* and Cuba's heart-rending antislavery novels. To prove the tradition's profound preference for Cora they could point to her domestic line of descendants: the straight-shooting, hard-drinking, Calamity Janes who get their men one way or another.

I am suggesting, perhaps provocatively, that gender-crossing is as endemic to foundational romances in Latin America as are racial and regional crossings. Even in a later, defensive, "populist" romance such as *Doña Bárbara*, written when men were men and women women, again, the apparently ideal hero has a paradoxical lesson to learn from women. He has to fall helplessly in love with the right one in order to maintain his masterly control.

These romancers understood why Cooper had to make impressionable Heyward, rather than the ideally male Hawk-eye, a founding father. They also felt the tragedy of sacrificing as graceful and sensitive a man as Uncas, whom Alencar revives to be the hero of *O Guarani*. Some readers, including Sarmiento, may have thought that Cooper's ideal America was based on precise gender and racial categories, but Latin American romancers recognized the unproductive distance that ideal opposites have to maintain in order to stay pure. If a lover at

all, Hawk-eye is in love with the equally pure wilderness, which is as sublimely simple as Alice, or with impassive Chingachgook, D. H. Lawrence's choice. In fact, their mutual affection is most convincing if we consider the two men bound together through their equal respect, rather than erotic love, for nature. Their very chaste version of homosocial desire⁵³ takes the form of a ménage à trois where nobody really violates anybody else. Nobody makes children either. This categorical purity is one reason why Natty must shun Judith Hutter in *The Deerslayer* (1841). What other readers have called his chastity is also his pride in being a "man without a cross," as free of feminized, domestic inclinations as he is of Indian blood. North American readers may be concerned with what appears to be the unresolved dual allegiance to civilization and to barbarism that plays itself out through Hawk-eye's contradictions. He of course betrays Chingachgook by acting as scout for the other men, those who "civilize" the wilderness, marry virgins, and turn them into mothers. But the Cooper whom Latin American romancers read (into) calmly kissed Hawk-eye's ideal and obsolete masculinity good-bye, just as they had turned their backs, during this peaceful moment, on heroic Bolívar and San Martín.

Their impressive chain of reading and writing Cooper surely began from a particular text. But after Sarmiento's playful remark about plagiarism, after noting that it is he who makes Cooper a landmark in South American literature, we should wonder whose text is originary. Is it Cooper's, or is it Sarmiento's appropriation? Is it the father who makes the son, or is it thanks to the son that the father recognizes himself as such? With this simile, I want to suggest the Oedipal character of this inversion between model and commentator, aligning it therefore with a strategy that Beatriz Sarlo and Carlos Altamirano have identified so convincingly in *Recuerdos de provincia*. I am referring to Sarmiento's repeated denial of his paternal lineage and of his father's personal importance. The son seems to have engendered himself upon the body and the genealogy of his mother, whose identity is sometimes and purposefully confused with that of the motherland. The superfluous father is infantilized, or feminized, which amounts to the same thing, so that Sarmiento can replace him in the familial text.⁵⁴

But despite a possible parallel between his father and Cooper (or any other model in *Recuerdos*) Sarmiento's rivalry with adoptive mentors allowed for something different from denial, something that must have been an inspiration for other national authors. It allowed him to subordinate the master, gently and without eliminating him, so as not to lose the legitimacy of the master's approval that Sarmiento attributes to himself. This difference (which Tulio Halperín Donghi also suggested when he contrasted the self-creation of *Mi defensa* with the respect for lineage in *Recuerdos*)⁵⁵ suggests a pattern for the strategy that I have been trailing here. It may be parallel to parricide, but it is cunningly restrained. I mean Sarmiento's practice of making plagiarism count for the most efficient originality by inverting the priority between model and revision.

Happily for authorized imitators like Sarmiento, and for their Menardian readers, imitation often surpasses the model, even as it constitutes the model as such. It is, to sum up, doubly foundational: first by establishing the origin, and second by improving on it. And if this displacement tends to cast doubt on all pretension of originality, the liberating side of doubt for latecomers to writing and to history is that it leaves unresolved the question of priority between master and pupil. Sarmiento turns out to be a proto-Borgesian priest who unites the two with a Moebius ring for which inside and outside, origin and trajectory, are only illusions of perspective. After this marriage, it would be rather mean-spirited to remind Cooper of his distance from Argentina, as mean-spirited as reminding Sarmiento of his debts as a disciple.

3

AMALIA: VALOR AT
HEART AND HOME

"On the night of the 4th of May, 1840, at half-past ten o'clock, a party of six men crossed the inner courtyard of a small house on the Calle Belgrano, in the city of Buenos Aires" (Mármol, 11; 1).¹ Readers of José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851, serialized in Montevideo's *La Semana*) may remember this ominous first sentence. The date makes it ominous, marking Rosas's stepped-up terror against the traditional elite, and so does the conspiratorial lateness of the hour. Five of the six men are, in fact, conspiring to join the resistance in Montevideo. The sixth, their guide, turns out to be an infiltrator who delivers them to the *Mazorca*, Rosas's death squad. This betrayal, and the rest of Mármol's rambling novel about the terror and the frustrated campaigns against it, practically require readers to venture a political interpretation that amounts to partisanship. For many, *Amalia* is a Manichean tract that was duly suspended in 1852 from a second printing in the columns of *El Paraná* during the post-Rosas climate of "neither winners nor losers";² it was both a long pamphlet against Federalism, which advocated a loose association of semi-autonomous provinces, and a paean to the Unitarian ideal of centralized rule under the intellectual and commercial elite of Buenos Aires.³ The city had a taste of Unitarian rule under Bernardino Rivadavia, the utopian thinker who was elected president of the United Provinces in 1826. He provided some respite in Argentina's civil wars (the "decade of anarchy" 1820-1830) and a promise of relief from colonial patriarchy in public and private spheres.⁴ But Rivadavia's victory was illusory in a country where the interior regions resented their subordination to the center. His resignation in 1827 brought chaos back, and Argentines wanted nothing so

much as a strong leader. By 1829 they got him when Juan Manuel de Rosas, a rancher from the Province of Buenos Aires and the "Restorer of Law," was elected governor of the province. In 1835 he was invested with almost absolute power, which by 1840 he exercised remorselessly, until his fall in 1852.

But another political interpretation of that first sentence of *Amalia* becomes possible if we notice that beyond the obvious threat announced by the precise timing, danger lurks in the location. I am not referring merely to the contrast between civilized interior space that the conspirators leave and the savage streets where all but one is killed, although David Viñas is quite right to note an ideological coding throughout the novel that pits an enlightened private sphere against barbarous public life.⁵ To underline his point we could add that, at some level, the Unitarians understood their mission as "domesticating" the wild outdoors, and at another the exiles who managed to escape also wanted to come home, to be domestic.

What interests me here is the particular street that Mármol chose as the danger zone, la Calle Belgrano. Once we learn that the foiled emigré whom the text has singled out for admiration is also named Belgrano, we may suspect an additional threat to Unitarian hegemony. It is as serious as the Federalist reaction: the threat of static and self-contained centering that literally has no future. This "youth with the sword," whom we have been admiring as much for his phallic epithet as for the melancholy dark eyes set off by his handsome pale face (Mármol, 12), turns out to be a nephew of Manuel Belgrano (Mármol, 26; 22), the Unitarians' foremost hero of Independence and the namesake of the street. The illustrious surname repeated as young Eduardo stands in the name and the place of his forefather seems to redound to the glory of the Unitarian cause. But there is more than a hint of incestuous habit or sterility in this closed circuit. What possible room is there for history or any narrative if Belgrano the man could remain on Belgrano the street in an inherited noble and military pose? In what follows, Rosas's men untie the tangle of name and place like a Gordian knot. The violence is lamentable, but it is also Mármol's opportunity to narrate, to dislodge Belgrano from the narrowly Unitarian struggle and enlist him for a more flexible project.

Eduardo's battle against the *mazorqueros* is practically superhuman: they circling him with butchers' knives aimed at his head like some menacing coalition of barbarians converging on a civilized center, and he opening breaches in their alliance while heading for town. Finally faint as a result of blood lost from a thigh wound, Belgrano is literally about to lose his head when suddenly the last assassin falls, joining the circle of dead Federalists with Eduardo surviving at their center. The savior in this miniature rehearsal of the civil wars is his best friend, Daniel Bello. He has stolen behind the assailant and dealt him a mute blow with a mysterious weapon. He then spirits Eduardo home, not his own or his friend's, but off to a home in a distant suburb where Daniel's widowed cousin Amalia lives. That is, away from the center where Belgrano's redundant and suicidal habits were leading him, toward a peripheral haven. As the only survivor of the attack, Eduardo will be hunted down by the police. And they will find him, Daniel warns, if Eduardo refuses to exchange his social meaning based on (aristocratic) origins for a new meaning based on domesticity. Going home, it appears with growing clarity, is not a return at all but finding where the woman is.

Much later, Bello will reveal his weapon, calling it a *casse-tete*, which translates in Spanish as *rompecabezas*, literally a head-breaker but also a puzzle and perhaps a pun on its threat of permanent disaggregation. The detail is important, because the neologism evidently associates Bello with the Francophile opposition to Rosas. This admiration for France was not only typical for young intellectuals, modeling themselves after French romantics; it was also a response to France's punitive blockade of Buenos Aires (while Rosas continued to traffic with England to the point of stifling home industry)⁶ and to her promises of support for the resistance. Daniel's Francophilia is detailed in long scenes of a clandestine trip to Montevideo where our hero tries to negotiate alliances among exiled leaders and French sympathizers, scenes that recreate Juan Bautista Alberdi's frustrating negotiations.⁷ But the weapon itself, with its wicker (*mimbre*) handle connecting two ropes tipped by iron balls and covered by a fine net of soft leather, turns out to be uncannily familiar. I am not referring only to the visual

joke it produces when Amalia's curiosity about Daniel's hidden tool finally makes him expose what looks like artificial genitals (*miembro*):

—¿Qué arma es ésa, Daniel, que usas tú y con la que has hecho a veces tanto daño?

—Y tanto bien, podrías agregar, prima mía.

—Cierto, cierto perdona; pero respóndeme; mira que he tenido esta curiosidad muchas veces.

—Espera, déjame terminar este dulce.

—No te dejo ir esta noche sin que me digas lo que quiero.

—Casi estoy por ocultártelo entonces.

—¡Cargoso!

[“What is that weapon which you use, Daniel, and with which you have at times done so much harm?”

“And so much good, you might add, cousin.”

“True, true, forgive me. But answer my question; it is one that I have often before desired to ask you.”

“Wait, let me finish this piece of candy first.”

“I shall not let you leave the house tonight until you tell me what I wish to know.”

“I am almost inclined to hide it from you, then.”

“Tease!”] (Mármol, 391; 274)

The joke, so characteristic of Mármol's flair for dialogue but perhaps lost on generations of required readers,⁸ is of course prepared earlier on the same page, when Daniel hopes out loud that Eduardo has given up his unwieldy sword for something less troublesome, to which Eduardo condescends, “I do not use mysterious weapons, sir.” “That may be,” Daniel retorts, “but they are more effectual, and above all more comfortable.”

The familiarity I am referring to is also the structural and strategic similarity between this new and improved phallus and the gaucho's traditional lasso, or *bolas*. The device is a triple rope tipped by three hard balls that wrap around the victim's legs. Structurally Daniel's weapon displaces power from the rigid center (that Eduardo still prefers) to a multiple periphery, just as the *bolas* do, the difference between two balls and three being one measure of the plurivalence achieved once phallogentrism gives in to dissemination. And strategically, Daniel's dis-

creet masculinity, borne close to the heart in his breast pocket (and turning upside down Freud's quip about the heart being at the genitals) is more potent than Eduardo's sword, much as the ensnaring *bolas* are. (They had, in fact, made the Unitarian cause hopeless after General Paz's horse was caught in the whirling ropes of Rosas's gaucho troops.)⁹ The analogy is ambiguous to be sure. It may even leave the reader incredulous at the transgression of a French signifier, *casse-tete*, pointing to a “barbarous” signified. Nor do we easily imagine that elite ends (saving Eduardo) are served by popular means (gaucho equipment). But this lack of imagination, Alberdi was arguing, had more to do with a doctrinal narrowness he associated with Sarmiento than with the country's political economy. Gauchos, after all, should hardly be eliminated in a clean sweep of barbarism by civilization, since they were the rural workers who produced the nation's wealth and who kept its cities in business.¹⁰ Nevertheless, more and more Argentine intellectuals after 1840 tormented themselves because “Americanism,” the rallying cry for so many heroes of Independence and the bond that might have conciliated Centralists and Federalists, now appeared to be in stark contradiction to national “progress.”¹¹

By the time Bello exposes his intriguing instrument, we know that he is Mármol's sign for excess and transgression, a trace of Argentina's young intelligentsia that had tried to rise above (or maybe to step aside from) the paralyzing standoff between Unitarians and Federalists. The Generation of 1837, as they were known, galvanized around Esteban Echeverría, who had returned from Paris in 1830 with Hugo's blasting of convention and Saint-Simon's utopian prophesies still ringing in his ears. From their war of position against both traditional parties, these youths imagined Argentina as a community with no party but *la Patria*, no regime but the thirty years of Independence. “From the heights of these supreme facts, we know not what Unitarians and Federalists are . . . , plebeians and gentlemen, old and young, capital and provinces . . . mean-spirited divisions that we see disappearing like smoke before the three great unities of the People, the Flag, and Argentine History.”¹² Mostly children of Unitarian families, they wanted to recognize the Federalist other in themselves, hoping that they could produce

a spark of reciprocity among the Federalists in power. Their elders, like Mármol's Eduardo, were skeptical that any good could come of this ignoble straddling. Yet it described the Unitarian posture as well, according to Bello's self-defence and self-implication; duplicity was endemic to a city that thought it should be a nation.¹³ "Eduardo, I am a son of Buenos Aires, whose people are the most fundamentally inconsistent and mutable in all America; . . . that's why they chose despotism: for the perverse pleasure of being inconstant to liberty. And that's what you think too, Eduardo" (Mármol, 188).

The group was officially inaugurated in June of 1837, when it began to meet in Marcos Sastre's bookstore.¹⁴ There members would read and discuss works by Cousin, Guizot, Lerminier, Quinet, Villemain, Saint-Simon, Leroux, Lamennais (whose *Paroles d'un croyant* read like a theology of liberation),¹⁵ Mazzini, Tocqueville, among so many others.¹⁶ It was at this literary salon that Echeverría presented drafts of what would become his *Dogma Socialista*, a selective compilation of French utopian socialism, which became the group's ideological platform.¹⁷ Part of its practice, logically, was to interpolate the traditional antagonists. So the cultural arbiters of Rosas's government, Pedro de Angelis and Felipe Senillosa, were warmly invited to join the salon. They did so but soon left. And early in 1838 Rosas had the bookstore closed. His relative tolerance up to that point ended abruptly when he banned even the publication of "women's" journals such as Juan Bautista Alberdi's *La Moda*. The fashion magazine was correctly suspected of fronting for the unmanly Europeanized "fops"; it was a coy screen in both senses of hiding and showing,¹⁸ a womanly voice as the men's public organ.¹⁹ Alberdi didn't hesitate to describe himself as feminized, although the suggestion of homosexuality would have been an outrage.²⁰ The ban shocked him, because this youth from the province of Tucumán stubbornly believed in conciliation between the nation's intellectual center and the interior heartland. That is why his journal regularly published Federalist slogans and appeals to Rosas.²¹ Once those failed, Alberdi was among the first to leave Buenos Aires. "If ever Echeverría's group dreamt of a conciliation in which it would

become the *brain* for Rosas's formidable political *arm*, the dream was now abandoned."²²

The members now formed as the clandestine "Asociación de Mayo"; since they couldn't win Rosas over to them, they would conspire to win power over him.²³ And they continued to leave one by one as the terror mounted. They went to Montevideo, Santiago de Chile, La Paz. One particular group, "the five-man club," whose contacts with the army included the officer who denounced them, bears more than a coincidental relationship to the party of would-be emigrés at the beginning of Mármol's novel.²⁴ In exile, the "proscript" published newspapers and generally agitated politically. This time it was not for rapprochement but for Rosas's defeat.

Only Echeverría stayed as long as possible, before he finally fled to Montevideo, penniless and reduced to selling his books. But before he went very far, he stayed for a long while at "Los Talas," the ranch outside of Buenos Aires that he shared with his brother. (In a similar move, Daniel Bello removes Amalia and her ward to "the solitary house" toward the end of the book.) "Emigrating," Echeverría would say, "is making yourself useless to your country."²⁵ Like him, Mármol's heroic homebody knows that the struggle is within, inside the self/other and inside the city that practically was the country. Bello, like so many Argentines he represents, kept waiting for something to happen in Buenos Aires; no one could understand why General Lavalle's liberating army never reached home. Although alliances with the provinces were important for the struggle and ultimately for national consolidation after Rosas, Lavalle's provincial campaigns merely stretched the resistance too thin and kept missing the mark. Rosas and his few trusted supporters were in the capital.

But Mármol (1818–1871) himself had to leave in 1840, after spending some months in the dictator's dungeon. He was well received by the exiles already in Montevideo, although Mármol was too young to be an original member of the Asociación de Mayo. By then, political flexibility with the regime was evidently impossible. Except for Alberdi and a very few others, any conciliation with Federalists seemed misguided. The Gen-

eration of 1837 had managed to hypostatize an ideological middle road and then to recognize the illusion. That meant giving up the Romantic promise that the popular, untutored charm of "Americanism" could be the handmaid of progress. The political loss was very real. It led to a renewed intransigence among Argentina's intelligentsia, a stubbornness that would later cause, among other things, General Mitre's refusal to join other provinces in ratifying the 1853 Constitution drafted by Alberdi. Buenos Aires would rebel against the provinces and win.

Of the original Generation of 1837 only Alberdi maintained some balance through the terror and later on. Only he published scathing criticisms of entrenched, monolithic (not to say unitary) postulations such as Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), where the terms *civilization* and *barbarism* achieved their unfortunately paradigmatic clarity. It was Alberdi who kept Echeverría's early principles of the *Dogma Socialista* alive enough to draft a practical proposal for the new constitution after Rosas's defeat. It stipulated, among other things, that the political capital of the country should not be in Buenos Aires, which was de facto the economic center; this was to prevent a Unitarian tyranny that well-meaning Federalists justly feared. To Alberdi's legislative balancing act, Mármol would add a literary one, his mercurial hero.

Hardly an orthodox Unitarian and certainly not a sincere Federalist, Daniel Bello is an unstable mix, a lamb in wolf's clothing, the gentleman who does not hesitate to show Federalist bravado. Sarmiento's *Recuerdos* had drawn a less duplicitous but quite as exorbitant a figure in Domingo de Oro, the enlightened Federalist whose political target was the tyrant but whose strategy backfired: forcing negotiations between Rosas and his rivals only cleared the road to terror. His resemblance to Bello is notable:

(S)alido de una de las familias más aristocráticas de San Juan, ha manejado el lazo y las bolas, cargado el puñal favorito como el primero de los gauchos. . . . Pero estas predilecciones gauchas en él son un complemento, sin el cual el brillo de su palabra habría perdido la mitad de su fascinación; el despejo adquirido por el roce familiar con los hombres más eminentes de la época, . . . la

seguridad del juicio adquirido en una edad prematura, y las dotes que traía ya de la Naturaleza, toman aquel tinte romanesco que dan a la vida americana las peculiaridades de su suelo. . . . Oro ha dado el modelo y el tipo del futuro argentino, europeo hasta los últimos refinamientos de las bellas artes, americano hasta cabalgar el potro indómito; parisiense por el espíritu, pampa por la energía y los poderes físicos.

[Hailing from one of San Juan's most aristocratic families, he used to wield lasso and bolas, carrying his favorite dagger with the best of the gauchos. . . . But these rural preferences complemented his polished discourse, which otherwise would have lost half its charm. The easy manner acquired from associating with the most eminent men of the period, . . . the sure judgment so precociously his, along with Nature's generous endowments, take on in him the romantic hue that the peculiarities of American soil can give. . . . Oro presents the model and archetype of future Argentines: European down to the last refinements, and so American he can mount a wild horse; Parisian in spirit and Pampa in his sheer energy and physical capacities.]²⁶

Once terror grips the city, Bello can give the slip to police as long as he does, practically until the end of the book, thanks to his talent of course. But it is also thanks to the Federalist credentials of his adoring father, like the credentials of several historical Federalists whose sons—Rafael Corvalán, the Quiroga brothers, Alejandro Heredia, Vicente Fidel López—joined the conspiracy.²⁷

Don Antonio Bello era un hombre de campo, en la acepción que tiene entre nosotros esa palabra, y al mismo tiempo hombre honrado y sincero. Sus opiniones eran, desde mucho antes que Rosas, opiniones de federal; y, por la Federación, había sido partidario de López primeramente, de Dorrego después, y últimamente de Rosas, sin que por esto él pudiese explicarse la razón de sus antiguas opiniones . . . sin embargo, tenía un amor más profundo que el de la Federación; y era el amor por su hijo. Su hijo era su orgullo, su ídolo y, desde niño empezó a prepararlo para la carrera de las letras, para hacerlo *dotor*, como decía el buen padre.

[Don Antonio Bello, himself a good Federalist, was at the same time honorable and sincere. Long before Rosas he had supported the Federation. . . . Nevertheless, he had a profounder affection than

that which he entertained for the government—his love for his son. His son was his pride, his idol, whom from a boy he had trained for the profession of letters—to be a *dotor*, as the good man used to say.] (Mármol, 37; 35–36)

This inverted familial hierarchy, privileging a rebelliously intellectual son over a father associated with dictatorial power, is one measure of the constitutive transgression in this foundational fiction. For a contrast, one may think of the defensive Argentine novels of the 1920s and 1930s often called *mundonovista* and which I prefer to call populist. Whereas *Amalia* assumes a social chaos in the absence of legitimate power, and therefore sets about to construct a legitimate nation/family from the elements in flux, the populist novels insist nervously on safeguarding an already established patriarchal structure. Unruly sons devastate that order, almost as much as do the sensual women who incite them.²⁸ For Mármol, though, sons and lovers make their own families. And an indulgent father seems to wink at his appreciative son as they go through the obligatory steps of an Oedipal conflict that has already been resolved through love.

A divine prankster like Hermes, Daniel continually risks his life to protect his friends and to build the resistance. But he is never so foolish as to risk it for some feudal and inflexible notion of honor and masculinity. This makes him different from Mármol's apparently ideal lovers, the impeccably correct "youth of the sword," and his ministering angel of a hostess. Belgrano would jump at any chance to defend his and Amalia's good names, if Bello's restraining arm did not save him from noble but stupid suicide. And Amalia is flat enough as a character to announce to the police who have searched her home that, yes, she is a Unitarian and proud of it (Mármol, 295; 255). Proud but not very smart is what readers think, after Bello has taught us how to think.

This strategically promiscuous double-crosser is as willful as Rosas himself.²⁹ From the beginning, Daniel insists on having full command. "Let me take full control here" (Mármol, 28). Against Eduardo's objections, Bello explains almost patronizingly, "You've got more talent than I, Eduardo, but there are certain cases where I'm worth a hundred times more than you"

(35). And his tactics are tyrannically crafty. Daniel will insinuate to his ever-loyal servant Fermín that any carelessness might get him drafted into the army. In a paroxysm of loyalty, the servant blurts out that rather than betray Daniel, "I would let myself be killed" (41; 41). He will also blackmail the madame of a local whorehouse into hosting clandestine meetings: "Remember that the slightest indiscretion on your part, without costing me a hair would cost you your head" (100; 113). Her repetition of Fermín's response is just what Bello wants. "My life has been in your hands for a long time past, Señor Daniel; but even if that were not the case I would die for the least of the Unitarians" (100; 113). This is precisely the kind of response that Rosas elicits from his own henchman: "I would sacrifice my life for your Excellency" (60; 66).

Cunning Daniel is the very image of Rosas, described by many as monstrously sly,³⁰ but an image inverted. Whereas Daniel multiplies himself to cover all fronts at home and in the world, Rosas cleverly stays under cover in his most public appearances, at the battle front:

¿Dónde dormía Rosas? En el cuartel general tenía su cama, pero allí no dormía.

En la alta noche se le veía llegar al campamento, y el héroe popular hacía tender su recado cerca de sus leales defensores. Allí se lo veía echarse; pero media hora después ya no estaba allí. ¿Dónde estaba? Con el poncho y la gorra de su asistente, tendido en cualquier otra parte, donde nadie lo hallase ni lo conociese. (Mármol, 414)

[Where did Rosas sleep? He had his bed in the main barrack, but he didn't sleep there.

In the dark of the night he would come to the encampment, and the hero of the people would lay down his pack near his loyal defenders. You could see him lie down; but a half hour later he was no longer there. Where was he? Under the poncho and cap of some assistant, stretched out in the most unlikely spot, where no one would find him or know him.]

The hero's portrait and its negative manage to confuse allies as much as enemies, as if they were figures for a Lacanian phallus that continually plays hide and seek with our desire to know it.

When, for example, Daniel's old teacher Don Cándido appeals to him for protection, because even innocent apolitical subjects are not safe from the Mazorca, Bello senses an opportunity. Rather than console Cándido, he prefers to use the effect of official terror to force the nervous old man into spying for the conspiracy. "Daniel laughed," as he began to scheme, while "Don Cándido was staring at him and racking his brains to understand what his disciple was up to" (Mármol, 145). This manipulation cannot but recall Rosas's interview with the English ambassador (68–80; 74–94). After several exchanges that leave him "truly perplexed and unable to comprehend what Rosas was after (74; 85), Mr. Mandeville congratulates himself on finally understanding and then pledging what Rosas wants from him, namely military support against the resistance. But Rosas takes care not to lose his advantage. The Englishman gets a reply that is calculated to convince his government that it would be acting only in self-interest; any debt of gratitude for the tip could be collected by Rosas. "'Do what you choose. All I desire is that you should write the truth,' said Rosas, with a certain air of indifference, under which the minister, if he had been at this moment less enthusiastic, might have perceived that Rosas had now begun to act a part" (77; 89). Here is an Argentine outsmarting and outtalking the Englishman, whose people exercised what critics called a virtual commercial monopoly in Argentina and who probably taught Rosas something about the relationship between shrewdness and power. If his success betrays some patriotic pride on Mármol's part, enough pride for readers to guess who Daniel Bello's instructor might have been, then the writer's manipulation will not be lost on us.³¹

Bello, like Rosas, gets results. That is why he is the real hero of the piece. But unlike the tyrant, whom Sarmiento was crediting at the same time for finally establishing Buenos Aires as supreme, Mármol's hero doesn't merely hide an elite effect behind a "barbarous" sign, although he does that too. He also manages to occupy the distance between the antagonistic signs, the distance that Rosas's terror needed in order to construct itself as a campaign against the Other. Bello fills in the space and so cancels the polar opposition, as the conciliatory youths of 1837 had tried to do. At the same time, Bello suggests the extent

to which Rosas had already canceled oppositions by forcing the federation behind the capital.³² Rather than merely a trespasser, I prefer to think of Bello as one of those puzzles in which differently marked spaces can be shifted into many combinations because one square is missing and open. Zero becomes the magic cipher, the empty space that makes possible the manipulations that Belgrano's integral figure cannot conceive.

Our puzzle of a hero shifts more than party lines; everything about him seems doubled or contradictory, including his gender. Besides the guile that might typically be associated with women (his beloved Florencia becomes a double) and that Sarmiento disparagingly attributed to Rosas, Daniel is also physically feminized. "The whiteness of his lovely hands could have made any coquette jealous" (Mármol, 96). And, if women are admirable in this novel, and they are, it is because they are as independent and courageous as men should be. Amalia is free to help Belgrano because, as she says, "I am independent; I lead a solitary life" (29; 25). Then she confronts the police chief with this generalized role-reversal: "In Buenos Aires only the men are afraid; the women know how to defend a dignity which the men have forgotten" (295; 255). Victorica already knew, of course, that the most persistent enemies of the regime were the university students and the women (66). (See also p. 299: "Only God knows, surely, how many noble Argentine women have sacrificed themselves"; and p. 411: "Without any dispute or historical doubt, the women of Buenos Aires showed a moral valor, a firmness and dignity of character . . . that the men were far from exhibiting.") By the time the young men of Buenos Aires are disdained for acquiring "effeminate habits" (401; 291), the adjective may no longer point to women but precisely away from them.

By contrast to this vogue for unisex virtue, racial distinctions seem indelible in this novel. In fact, one of the few clearly programmatic differences between Rosas and his rivals was on the question of white immigration from Europe. He objected to it, whereas opponents were convinced it was Argentina's most urgent need. Sarmiento and Alberdi agreed (despite acrimonious disputes about everything from federal projects to spelling conventions)³³ that the country's racially inferior stock of Spaniards

and Indians needed to be improved by Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Sarmiento's biological determinism was somewhat attenuated by his faith in mass education and modern institutions in general, but Alberdi was implacable.³⁴ So were others, such as Juan María Gutiérrez, the "Generation"'s literary historian: "Those who invoke democracy to the exclusion of good birth, misunderstand both. No matter how many turns society may take, it will never alter the fundamental laws of nature."³⁵ Like his ideal citizens, Mármol's are flawlessly white, and in the case of Florencia Dupasquier, half French. Among even reformed Unitarians, such as Daniel represented, the half-Spanish half-Indian gaucho produced a practically visceral revulsion that extended by association to Federalists in general. (The narrator describes the infiltrator Merlo as "a man of the people . . . connected to . . . the gaucho by antipathy to civilization" (Mármol, 13; 4). Fermín is also called a gaucho; but carefully set apart as a white one (34; 30). And although the novel never mentions Indians, since it hardly ventures outside the capital, Argentines dealt with them in much the same way as did North Americans; that is, largely by extermination campaigns for territorial expansion, like the one Rosas led in 1833 to prop up his waning popularity.

The fate of Argentine blacks may, however, be less familiar than the history of Indian removal. During the wars of Independence, in which Argentina repeatedly came to the aid of her sister states, African slaves were drafted in large numbers. The creole elite that launched those wars, even the constitutional monarchists who projected a Conservative continuity to avoid anarchy, may not have imagined how uncontrollable that mobilization would become. The very privileges creoles were fighting for could be lost to their former slaves, because the military importance of blacks and mestizos guaranteed a series of reforms that the Unitarian elite begrudgingly conceded after the fighting.³⁶ Rosas knew how to exploit the resentment of Argentina's masses. One result of the elite's reconquest of power after 1852 (and after it adapted Alberdi's proposal for enlightening Federalism through European immigration more than mass education) was that blacks seem to have disappeared entirely. This time the "genocide" is—quite remarkably—a "tex-

tual" campaign; the government apparently made a decision to be color-blind and to eliminate the category for blacks in the national census.³⁷ This recalls Florencia's purposeful blindness when she hardly deigns to notice the black women in María Josefa's house (Mármol, 85; 96). They won recognition elsewhere. Rosas had eyes and ears for their enthusiastic support and their practically seamless spy network of workers and servants of the city. The first thing Daniel requires of Amalia when she agrees to hide Belgrano, for example, is to fire her black servants. Later, the lovers are spied upon and denounced by another black working woman. Yet Daniel's apparently color-fast social text leaves some room for attractive shades when the colors bleed and cross over; that is, when black is whitened. "In the lower classes the mulattoes only are to be trusted, because of the tendency which every mixed race has to elevate and ennoble itself" (29; 25).

Daniel's sympathies are not always predictable; nor are his lessons all in duplicity. A recurring self-reflexiveness keeps his enchanting game from deteriorating to cant. But Belgrano is puzzled by his friend's indefinite nature and general lack of scruple. This disappointment, or criticism, gives Mármol an opportunity to defend an entire esthetico-political project, one that he shared with other Romantics of his generation even though most of the others had long since retreated. The project would fail, Mármol suggests, if its goals were mistaken as merely "ideological"; it was at the same time a cultural reformation based on a Romantic appreciation of nature in flux, a notion that denied the classical grid of knowledge on which so many misfired Rivadavian schemes had hung. Daniel's reply is worth quoting:

No hay nada, mi querido Eduardo, que se explique con más facilidad que mi carácter, porque él no es otra cosa que una expresión cándida de las leyes eternas de la Naturaleza. Todo, en el orden físico como en el orden moral, es inconstante, transitorio y fugitivo; los contrastes forman lo bello y armónico en todo cuanto ha salido de la mano de Dios; . . . (Mármol, 187)

[There is nothing, my dear Eduardo, that is more easily explained than my erratic character, because it's nothing more than a candid

expression of the eternal laws of Nature. Everything in the physical world and in the moral order is inconstant, transitory and fleeting. It is contrast that creates beauty (lo bello) and harmony in everything that issues from God's hand.]

Purposefully unstable, Bello objects to the anarchic personalism that, for example, keeps General Paz from joining forces with Lavalle and keeps the exiles in Montevideo absurdly vying for supremacy inside the cafés. Is there a suggestion here that an older generation of arrogant Unitarians might learn something about association and coalitions from virtuous Federalists? There is no dearth of them in the book, from Daniel's father, to Police Chief Victorica, whom Mármol thanks in a footnote for his kindness while the author was Rosas's prisoner (Mármol, 291), and especially Manuelita Rosas, whom Mármol helped to promote as an almost mythic figure of eternally feminine kindness, both in this novel and in his biography of her.³⁸ Daniel dismisses some gossip that Amalia hears at the Federalist Ball like this: "Those are malicious inventions. . . . Mrs. Rolón is the best of the Federalist circle; her generous heart is always open to everyone" (191). In any case, political opposites live together in Daniel Bello. It is a marriage of convenience, no doubt, but a delicate bond of respect and affection blesses the union. Clearly Mármol has forced an unequal balance between the partners, but Bello is nonetheless a model for national cohesion.

He is also the agent, insofar as he gets Belgrano and Amalia together. The crossover artist is a natural go-between. And marriage, a figure for the institutional basis of government that Sarmiento defended (not personal exemplarity) would provide social stability.³⁹ Bonds of love (not the sword of justice) would make this Romantic generation succeed where its classical elders did not. "Our new politics needs the element of affection," as Gutiérrez put it, "it needs to thrust away the threatening dagger by now as classical as the sword of Justice. Now is the time for much love."⁴⁰ In his serialized love story launched from Montevideo, the sentimental frame of Mármol's daily interventions in Argentina's political deadlock does far more than keep us reading and panting from installment to installment. This is not to say that the panting is extraneous to the intervention.

On the contrary, it ensures it by constructing our desire for a particular kind of sexuality that crosses over. As soon as Bello removes his wounded, almost castrated, friend from town to Amalia's home where he could acquire a more modern sexuality, we suspect that Mármol's geographic decentering is itself a strategic, conciliatory move. And when we learn that the lovely Amalia hails from further still, the interior city of Tucumán, the weight of association pulls our hunch into the sure nod of recognition. Amalia's inevitable love affair with the Buenos Aires boy will signal a national rapprochement between center and periphery, or at least between modern history and Arcadian pastoral. Tucumán was the old colonial capital, when Spain was more concerned with getting Peruvian gold and silver out to the Atlantic coast than with encouraging commerce from the port of Buenos Aires. After Buenos Aires declared independence in 1810, Tucumán was where the United Provinces declared their independence in 1816.⁴¹ Tucumán was also the first important center to renounce Rosas once he institutionalized terror, as Mármol takes care to remind us. "By a decree passed on the 7th of April, 1840, the Chamber of Representatives of Tucumán had withdrawn from Rosas their recognition of him as Governor of Buenos Aires" (Mármol, 43; 45). It was, in other words, already in the centralists' orbit, pleasantly provincial but hardly the rival Córdoba had been.⁴²

The affair between "la bella tucumana" and General Belgrano's nephew, takes on programmatic proportions, even if we forget that Juan Bautista Alberdi, the one "tucumano" among the Romantics in the capital, Mármol's admirer in Montevideo⁴³ and roommate in Río,⁴⁴ became the architect of national conciliation. This Alberdi dated his own birth along with the birth of his nation (as did Sarmiento), as if they were inseparable, mutually dependent twins.⁴⁵ Mármol may even have attempted a kind of lopsided parity between the cities by dedicating the second part of the book to Amalia and beginning with a description of Tucumán, that tropical womblike interior paradise, just as he had begun the first part with a bachelor's Buenos Aires. True, the description is deferred and is mediated by quoting an English observer. I am not suggesting that Mármol's ideal relationship between the male and female figures is one of equals but

merely noting the more obvious and promising point: that the gender-coded cities *could* be related in a seductive hegemony of the loving capital over its ministering province, very different from the dictatorial isolation that weakened both sites of civilization.

Rosas had little use for political seductions. Those whom he could not mold by artfulness, he simply eliminated. And while his empire tottered on the ruins of local popularity and international opinion, he became ever more deaf to special pleadings and warm requests, so deaf that he refused to hear his closest allies intercede for Camila O'Gorman. The twenty-year-old daughter of a solid Federalist family in the capital was also a personal friend of Manuelita. In December of 1847, the girl had run off with a young priest, Uladislao Gutiérrez, nephew of the governor of—where else?—Tucumán. To be fair, Rosas first tried to cover up the embarrassment, but Montevideo's emigré newspaper, the *Comercio del Plata*, made much of it with carping jokes about the morality of liberal Federals.⁴⁶ The lovers were then pursued and nothing, not even Camila's eight months of pregnancy, could save them from the execution that was never forgiven by the tyrant's most intimate associates.⁴⁷ Writing barely three years after the enduring scandal of this punctilious punishment for passion, Mármol must surely have sensed and exploited his readers' readiness to embrace less extravagant but equally outlaw lovers. And he must have anticipated that a delayed tragic climax would nourish the public's fantasies for the runaway couple before opening sentimental wounds that still festered with political outrage.

Understandably, if Mármol was indeed rewriting Camila's story as a hegemonic allegory, his romance would reroute the lovers to make her hail from the voluptuous interior and him from the heady capital. Yet the love story between Ms. Tucumán and Mr. Buenos Aires takes very little space in this more than 500-page novel. It does occupy the center of the book, though. And it is precisely at the center, somewhat decentered thanks to Bello (and also perhaps to Rosas who was clever enough to be a provincial from the central province), that they could have hoped to make their love last. The bulk of the novel is a wonderfully unorthodox jumble of intrigues, drawing-room

dialogues, detailed descriptions of interiors and clothing worthy of the opposition "fashion" journals, historical documents, and character studies of historically identifiable agents.⁴⁸ All this loosely coordinated into a plot about Daniel Bello's personal contest of strategy against personalist Rosas. The tension builds toward an unbearable pitch that irresistibly quickens the pulse. Or is the throbbing a function of the love song that Mármol has been playing in harmony with the life and death theme? In fact we want much more than survival for individual heroes. We want them to survive because we increasingly desire their institutional and mutual union: Daniel's union with Florencia but, even more passionately, Amalia's union with Belgrano. These two finally marry near the end. But barely one hour later she is widowed again when the "barbarous" police storm her house. Belgrano and Bello hold them off with unbelievable heroism and success, but not long enough for Bello's Federalist father to arrive and turn the police away. The two friends *could* have been saved by his conciliatory presence. The tragedy was not inevitable; it was rather a miscalculation.

Perhaps that is why the loose ends of that final scene play on the reader's mind like some kind of possibility or a promise. Belgrano is dead, to be sure, but from the very beginning we knew that he was an anachronism and began to say our good-byes. The greater loss is Daniel, our model of future Argentines, who seems mortally wounded. Yet instead of pronouncing a narrative dead-end over his body, the narrator ends with this ambivalent meditation on the (il)legitimacy of Federalism and paternal authority: "his father, who by a single word (Restorer) had suspended the dagger which the same word had raised to be the instrument of so much misfortune and crime" (Mármol, 529; 416). Don Antonio arrives to fill a power vacuum in the city that Rosas, like the Unitarians, had abandoned to make war in the provinces. He arrives instead of the liberating army led by Lavalle, who lacked either the nerve or the timing to intervene. Buenos Aires is an empty center waiting for the *real* father to come home and to restore order. The title of Restorer is still legitimate, even if Rosas doesn't merit it. The place of the name of the father is still intact; it's the last word. If Daniel's cunning had not already reproduced Rosas's manipulations for us, if

good Federalists were not already portrayed as equal to good Unitarians, this word itself would establish the overlap between the apparent antagonists in *Amalia*.

Probably surviving them all is Amalia, the title character whose name bears some resemblance to Argentina's. Admittedly she is heartbroken at Eduardo's death, but the very fact that their love was consummated, in Amalia's first surrender to passion, promises an afterlife to the novel. It promises a baby, perhaps to replace the one Rosas killed in Camila's womb. Orphaned as a girl (the colony so long ignored by Spain?), Amalia married her first husband out of respect for her mother's choice and the need for protection (Rivadavia's sterile Unitarianism?). But in her rapture with Eduardo she tells him what the new husband must already have found out: it was her first celebration of love, "mi primer himeneo" (Mármol, 522). They fairly melt into each other, this tucumana and the porteño, maybe to produce a child who is a little of both.

If I am deliberately stretching this possibility so thin that it barely covers my own fictitious construct, it is to tease out the connections between Mármol's novel and the original ideals of Argentine Romanticism. As the esthetic and political battle cry of the young men who met in Sastre's store during 1837, Romanticism defied the enlightened, classical habits of thought that led Argentina to Independence but were now anachronistic. Those habits had become obstacles to national consolidation and progress. "What barbarians!" Miguel Cané fulminated against the old guard. "Not to be romantic in the nineteenth century is not to be patriotic, or progressive, or Christian, or human!"⁴⁹ The struggle against categorical purity was at once ideological and esthetic in Victor Hugo's vastly popular formulation. "Romanticism, if it is militant, is the same thing as liberalism in literature."⁵⁰ Classicism, the youths charged, had kept Argentine literature at the standstill of imitation and had locked Argentine politics into a standoff between Unitarians and Federalists. Rivadavia's enlightened policies of the 1820s aimed to Europeanize the country but had misfired on the American frontier. Enlightened thinking did not, for example, account for Rosas's popularity. The Francophile Romantics

noted, with an ironic lapse of reflexivity, that ideas could not simply be imported.

Old habits were literally sterile, compared to Alberdi's national project, for example: it was to dominate the "desert," not by eliminating "barbarians" but by increasing population. This revisionary of Argentine consolidation, who used to weep over the passionate pages of *Julie* held under his desk in Latin class and who used to insist that his notorious weakness for women and dances answered to strict doctor's orders, understood very well the mechanism for increasing population.⁵¹ And if the nascent future I read in(to) Mármol's conclusion is a projection, Alberdi's project may have engendered it. At least one remarkable section of his *Bases* for the new constitution practically reads like a manual for lovers. In good bourgeois form, it reconciles affairs of the heart to affairs of state. With other "prepositivists," Alberdi observed that as children of Spaniards, Argentines are racially disabled for rational behavior, whereas Anglo-Saxons were naturally hard working and efficient. So Argentina should attract as many Anglos as possible.

The problem was that the state recognized no religion but Catholicism and, without a legal sanction for intermarriage, the Protestants who would inevitably desire Argentine women would have no choice but to debase the women they could not resist and to produce illegitimate children.⁵² Another problem for Argentines was how to maintain political power while encouraging foreigners to make fortunes. Alberdi showed how the double jeopardy could be neatly contained, if only Argentina would grant religious freedom. The result would be, argues this political matchmaker, that *romance* would literally conquer all. It would effect a parity between prosperous husbands and irresistible wives. And more than that, it would produce legitimate, homegrown inheritors of local power and foreign capital.

Necesitamos cambiar nuestras gentes incapaces de libertad, por otras gentes hábiles para ella, sin abdicar el tipo de nuestra raza original, y mucho menos el señorío del país; suplantar nuestra actual familia argentina, por otra igualmente argentina, pero más capaz de libertad, de riqueza y progreso. ¿Por conquistadores más ilustrados que la España, por ventura? Todo lo contrario; conquis-

tando en vez de ser conquistados. La América del Sud posee un ejército a este fin, y es el encanto que sus *hermosas y amables mujeres* recibieron de su origen andaluz, mejorado por el cielo espléndido del nuevo mundo. Removed los impedimentos inmorales, que hacen *estéril* el poder del bello sexo americano y tendréis realizado el cambio de nuestra raza sin la pérdida del idioma ni del tipo nacional primitivo.⁵³

[We need to replace our citizens with others more able to profit from liberty. But we need to do this without giving up our racial character, or, much less, our political control. . . . Should we, perhaps, bring in more enlightened conquerors than the Spaniards? On the contrary; we will conquer instead of being conquered. South America has an *army* for this purpose, its *beautiful and amiable women* of Andalusian origin and improved under the splendid sky of the New World. Remove the immoral impediments that *sterilize* the power of America's fair sex and you will have effected the change in our race without losing our language or our racial character.]

Amalia could certainly have been one of those women, although her conquest of the center is the precondition for future, farther-reaching enchantments. Her charm inscribes erotic desire as a "natural" grounding for any dialectic of political conciliation and economic growth. Amalia need not be convincing or complex as a character in order to be central to this national romance. It is enough that she is desired and that political obstacles stand in the way of that desire, repeatedly redirecting erotic energy to political conciliation. Her love story becomes a foundational fiction because it projects the kind of liberal social intercourse between regions and parties that could establish a legitimate public family.

The same ardor with which the Generation of 1837 hoped to thaw congealed categories of alliance did manage to melt traditional literary barriers. The prudish distances between literary genres, registers of language, and classical unities were overcome in the frenzy of Romantic transgressions. There was a will to hybridization, surprises, unorthodox juxtapositions. Echeverría launched this "revolution" with *Elvira o la novia del Plata* (1832), but his "epic," *La cautiva* (1837), really blasted open a new American literary terrain. It celebrates the "com-

mon" hero—in fact celebrates the far more heroic heroine—and inscribes popular regionalisms without setting them off by quotation marks or italics.⁵⁴ If these exceed standard Spanish, the Romantics pointed out that their language was Argentine, not Spanish. In the continuing polemic with the classicists, Juan María Gutiérrez joined Alberdi in celebrating more excesses yet. "In Paris everything is French, in Madrid everything Spanish. But Buenos Aires is the place where everything has come, is coming, and will come, thank God, from France, from Spain . . . from all the civilized nations." The whole world's linguistic habits overlap to constitute an Argentine language.⁵⁵

Now Mármol's style might seem conservative by contrast. David Viñas, for one, notes with a combination of scorn and embarrassment that *Amalia* is a stylistic see-saw of glaring contrasts: a spiritualized, practically ethereal language that floats like a halo around the heroes, especially the heroines; and a dogged attention to the carnal, almost bestial, immediacy of the villains.⁵⁶ Of course Viñas is right. No reader today can miss Mármol's knack for caricature, his unproblematic and flagrant racism, or his passion for (imported) luxury that is practically synonymous with civilized virtue and fills whole pages with interior decorating and fashion news. More elitist at times than his fellow travelers, and apparently sharing the schematic and binary clarity that prevailed again after 1840, Mármol even shows himself to be a monarchist, like Manuel Belgrano. The hero of Independence had for years shopped around for a European prince to head the new state in order to avoid setting up a republic that might threaten the local elite with a tyranny of the masses (Mármol, 338).

I cannot but grant all these dichotomous and regressive features in *Amalia*. But it is a long and also a wonderfully complicated, even contradictory, adventure in form. It is, to use a Bakhtinian and economical word, a novel. In contrast to the stunning ideological casualties suffered by the Generation of 1837, very little had yet been ventured or lost on the esthetic front. Despite the romantic gesture of embracing local scenes and signifiers into his texts, Echeverría's work retains a rigidly binary logic. Between 1838 and 1840, he wrote *El matadero*, an almost naturalistic story about a gang of butchers who attack

and—with a *mazorca* or ear of corn—“rape” a Unitarian who passes by (a snob, more like Eduardo than like Daniel). This was after Echeverría had lost hope of getting beyond traditional dichotomies.⁵⁷ The story is evidently more pessimistic than was *La cautiva*, probably because during the terror it seemed natural to displace the barbarian from the Indian frontier right into the center of the Argentine body politic. But the earlier work never really got beyond the dichotomies either. Noé Jitrik asks, for example, how any political reconciliation might be possible when the characters of the poem are figured either as barbarous Indians or as their civilized victims. After reifying the enemy what can the writer do? “Do you exterminate him or try to assimilate him? Yet after proposing these alternatives, is assimilation possible?”⁵⁸

Many others tried their hand at romantic fiction. Among them were Juana Manuela Gorriti and the future general and president Bartolomé Mitre. Like Mármol in *Amalia*, they wrote ideological pronouncements in sentimental fiction. What is it about his book, then, that makes it Argentina’s uncontested first great novel?⁵⁹ To follow Benedict Anderson’s lead, we could note that Mármol’s care in dating and timing his novel has significant nation-building significance. We might recall *Amalia*’s initial sentence and the insistence on keeping the reader up to date. Anderson brings our attention to this kind of “calendrical time” that provided the frame for national narratives through newspapers and novels and allowed for a simultaneity of related events, joining reader and writer in a shared social moment. But on recalling *Amalia*, we may also remember that other fictions timed and dated themselves precisely and were, moreover, written by far more credible leaders of the Liberal resistance. *El matadero*, for example, begins with a tongue-in-cheek rejection of the epic time in America’s first chronicles: “Although I am writing a history, I won’t start with Noah’s ark and the genealogy of his descendants, the way our first Spanish historians of America used to do.”⁶⁰ Then he dates the story during the meat shortage of the 1830s. Mitre’s *Soledad* (1847), takes place directly after the Independence war in Bolivia. And many of Gorriti’s stories mark their precise moment. Probably the easiest and the best reason for *Amalia*’s institutional success is

that it is a better and longer-lasting piece of entertainment, keeping readers of *La Semana*’s installments at a pitch of hopeful anticipation until the very eve of victory against Rosas.

Another reason may be that unlike Mármol, passion and politics often compete for the reader’s sympathy in other writers. For Gorriti, to cite one telling example, the possible contest seems almost irrelevant, because both desire and power belong to the male world, as capable of producing horror as of winning glory. Her alternative is a spiritualized celebration of “female” self-denial; that is, of Christian love possible only in the victims of history. Gorriti’s own marginalization from the ideological and strategic debates among aspiring agents of Argentine history is repeatedly rehearsed and universalized in her stories of the incompatibility between women and men. So, far from blurring traditional gender distinctions, as Mármol does, Gorriti underlines them. The alternative to machismo for her is not flexibility but a countervailing ideal of *marianismo*.⁶¹ Nevertheless, her heroines are sometimes caught between personal desire and spiritual duty; that is, the femaleness is vulnerable not only because it is victimized by men but because it can be complicitous with them. Gorriti’s ideal reader is never confused about what the right choice is; she knows, as well as does Racine’s classical and prebourgeois reader, that sexuality can pervert female virtue into destructive power. In the story “El tesoro de los incas,” for example, an Indian princess reveals the secret of Cuzco’s treasure to the Spaniard who has seduced her. Rosalía pays for her sin once the colonial authorities learn of the treasure; they torture her and her family, finally killing them, in the hope of learning the secret.⁶² This is one of Gorriti’s warnings against succumbing to desire across national and class lines. Another is “Un drama en el Adriático,” about a Venetian noblewoman in love with an Austrian officer in the occupying army. After learning that her incredibly solicitous and loving brother is conspiring for liberation with other patriots, she betrays them to her lover, but not without an interior struggle that readers are expected to resolve on the side of patriotism as against passion. The point is that in choosing her lover she loses the struggle and causes a general loss for both sides. The desperate Italians prefer anything to ignominy, including the cat-

aclysmic mass suicide that brings the Austrian victory down with the victims.⁶³ By contrast, a "winning" heroine is she who chooses to lose in love. Clemencia, for instance, the ideal title character of "La hija del mazorquero" (Manuelita?) sacrifices everything, including romantic fantasies about the Unitarian she had saved, and finally her life. Her brutal father mistakes the girl for the Unitarian's lover and slits her throat. This is the story with a "happy" ending. "Her virgin blood found favor before God, and like a new baptism He cast the divine light of salvation on the sinner now redeemed."⁶⁴ Love, in what can only be called a fervently Catholic and even colonial model, amounts to self-sacrifice. The womanly ideal here is the Virgin Mary or even Christ himself, someone who can wipe the slate of history clean, not the prudent bourgeoisie whose passion produces children to fill up the empty spaces.

As for Mitre's precocious novel, it shows the teenage title character struggling against her passions in desperate efforts to avoid the old royalist she was forced to marry. One distraction in the solitude of her bedroom is reading, which provokes as many problems as pleasures because Soledad is reading Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse*. From one forbidden chapter to the next, she grows dangerously attracted to an insincere visitor who would have played a parody of St. Preux to Soledad's Julie. She is saved from this false passion when her cousin and childhood sweetheart returns from the wars, aborts the rendezvous, and saves her virtue. Then cousin Eduardo patiently waits for the superfluous husband to obligingly die, so that he and Soledad can marry. Without an informed reading partner, Soledad had obviously gotten Rousseau all wrong. She managed to notice that *Julie* constructed a particular kind of illicit desire between two youths who were separated by the young woman's father (her mother in Soledad's case) and the older man she obediently married. But she, or Mitre, missed Rousseau's equally powerful construction of womanly virtue as the apparent constraint on passion that, in fact, produces it. Julie and St. Preux could not have loved so intensely if they had not struggled so passionately against love. Perhaps, though, Mitre's misreading is more purposeful than naive, suggesting along with some of Gorriti's stories that female desire needs

manly control. In the first place, the military hero is privileged and, like Mitre himself, would take credit for defending (public) virtue; and in the second, he finesses the conflict between Soledad's passion and her virtue by denying her the liberty to be conflicted.

Although *Soledad* "corrects" its tortured and pessimistic European model by among other things returning virtue to the hero and suggesting that America is the free space for modern love and bourgeois productivity, a space where aristocratic fathers such as Julie's were eliminated with the colony, Mitre's happy ending is rather airless. Like Echeverría and Gorriti, Mitre also rehearses the rearguard Unitarian opposition between "us" and "them." That is, it contrasts the civilized young lovers who are already related as cousins with the barbarous, feudal outsider who (like Rosas) is a lecherous and sentimentally illegitimate husband. There is no conciliation here, only a consolidation. And this hasty narrative closure by Mármol's or Alberdi's standards seems to predict General Mitre's hostile response to the 1853 constitutional demand to move the capital into the interior. It also underlines the divide between "our" kind of Europeanizing novels that Mitre's Prologue calls for and "their" *gauchesca* poets in vogue at the time. That kind of "oral" literature was evidently a contradiction in terms; instead Mitre preferred the books that novelistic heroes and heroines were reading, European books. From the imposed distance of exile, he and other Argentine novelists had turned their backs to the pampa and were striking Romantic poses in Europe's direction.⁶⁵

The only really comparable book to *Amalia* was Vicente Fidel López's *La novia del hereje o la inquisición de Lima*, published serially in 1846 and issued as a book in Buenos Aires along with *Amalia* in 1854.⁶⁶ Writing from exile in Chile, this founding member of Sastre's salon performed some of the same narrative seductions that made Mármol so powerful. Through its lengthy and complex intrigue set in Peru's inquisitorial sixteenth century, López's novel assigned contrasting cultural and ideological backgrounds for his star-crossed lovers; it went so far as to make the Liberal a "heretic," that is a Protestant Englishman. His marriage to the daughter of the viceroy's first minister, and

their escape to England where the couple produces a family, bring Mármol's themes to a happy finale. But this very resolution may satisfy rather than engage the reader politically. *La novia* is about a past perfect world whose resolution of problems is a given, whereas *Amalia*'s world is indefinite, unsettling. The tried and true practice of Scott-like historical novels that dress contemporary issues in medieval garb produces, as the Scottish aristocrat may have intended, a ready-made ending. Mármol, by contrast, keeps the ends of history untied. His preliminary "Explicación" admits that the book is only masquerading as a historical novel. "By a calculated fiction," the author imagines that several generations have intervened between contemporary events and the writing. The calculation pays off by making Mármol our contemporary, equally distant from the events. By absenting himself from the history he does more than project a possible relief from horror; he also gives himself a narrative "presence" for future generations of readers.

It may be, however, that other factors intervene in the comparative success of these books, factors external to their relative merits in combining convention with Romantic excess. López, the historian who acknowledged how intimately novels consorted with history, even more than Mitre did, ended up on the losing side of the struggle between Alberdi and Mitre.⁶⁷ The son of a prominent Federalist, López defended Alberdi's constitution as the only stable and equitable means of consolidating a divided country. Mitre, of course, did not. And the new government established in Buenos Aires after Mitre's victory appointed José Mármol to the Senate, not Vicente Fidel López, while it promoted *Amalia*'s celebrity as the foremost novel.

Whatever the circumstances, the celebrity was surely justified. *Amalia* is a startling esthetic departure that finally gave form to the passions of Argentina's early Romantics. That form was the novel, in the most flexible, hybrid, and "non-generic" use of the term. It provided an erotics of unity, exiled the all-too-admirable heroes to strut in the margins, and allowed the text to be a porous body in which every kind of writing is admissible. Mármol's personal success, including the appointment to the Senate, where he spoke eloquently and frequently if not always to the point, and his semiretirement as director of the National

Library, came largely from the success of patriotic verses he hurled against Rosas. But some contemporaries must have noticed in the novel a design for the new Argentine citizen, honorable in the last instance but elastic enough to associate with others, even opponents. For many it was *the* novel of triumphant Argentine liberalism. Yet today it is read more as a period piece than as a founding text. The novel's project, so the reading goes, was to depose Rosas. Once that was done, so was Mármol's politics.

Instead of *Amalia*, it is now *Martín Fierro* (1872) which people call Argentina's "epic." The long narrative poem written in gaucho dialect by José Hernández developed an already-existing genre of politically conciliatory poems that, as Josefina Ludmer masterfully shows, constructed a national voice by appropriating the language of "authentic" but notoriously shiftless Argentines for patriotic and economically rational projects.⁶⁸ In some ways, this poem is a swan song. Hernández wrote it when the gauchos had all but disappeared because of government policies, both military and economic. They were forcibly conscripted into armies sent to fight Indians in wars that may well have been aimed at a double extermination; and they were confined to narrowing spaces between modernized, privatized ranches on a once vast pampa. *Martín Fierro*'s story is about these abuses, how they make him into the criminal and vagabond that whites expect gauchos to be, and about his flight from white settlements. But in part II called "The Return," (1879) the poem shows the gaucho's resignation to the new order and to its small mercies. Like the politically Promethean hero of *Amalia*, and like some leaders of Argentina's post-Rosas government, *Martín Fierro* would rather live compromised than die fighting for an impossible idea of liberty.

There is certainly good reason to read Hernández's poem as Argentina's epic. But there is no less reason to read *Amalia* as epic. Both narratives struggle through the conflicts of Argentina's middle period in order to show the room and the need for reconciliation. The difference between each book's claim to foundational status is qualitative; that is, a difference in the kind of political sympathies they develop. Both Mármol's conciliatory neo-Unitarianism and Hernández's reformed Federalism

aimed to consolidate a nation rather than to defend provincial autonomy; and they provided more common ground than did the original antagonist parties. But their coming together means, of course, that they come from different positions. And in post-Rosas politics, the older ties and projects were more often left suspended than left behind. Policy debates on the virtues of European immigration or protectionism could be so partisan and passionate that they would become extraparliamentary and continue, again, on the battlefield. Hernández himself opposed the elite liberalism of Mitre and in 1870 participated in a revolution led by a provincial caudillo.⁶⁹

Considering that *Amalia* and *Martín Fierro* coincide in projecting a national unity after devastating years of division, to choose one as the country's epic is like taking a particular partisan stand; it is to renew the debates about what kind of unity Argentina should achieve. One choice crosses male- and female-coded cities, a capital lover with a provincial beloved; the other crosses class boundaries between rural men as ranchers adapt their peons' language for a project of mutual understanding and legitimation. (Neither choice imagined a simultaneous move across gender and class lines.) One book excludes masses of mestizo and black workers through a linguistic seesaw between spiritual heights and blood-drenched lows; the other excludes women and the citified (feminized) men associated with foreigners who cannot keep the language's or their own gender assignments straight and who are therefore useless to Argentina's community of heroes and herdsmen.⁷⁰ The novel calls gauchos "barbarians"; the poem mocks all others as literally barbarous strangers, making itself at home in Argentina's homespun style. If these "epics" face one another like mirror images gesturing from opposite directions toward a patriotic threshold, the reader who calls one image reality and the other a reflection is, in fact, declaring what side of the mirror he or she is on. To remember the political significance that contemporary readers gave to *Amalia*, and the fact that *Martín Fierro* became a national epic only half a century after it was published, is also to remember that these readings are historical as well as partisan. Mármol's admirers, an elite class of literate Argentines returning from exile to take control at home, undoubtedly agreed with

the positions taken in his book. At least they could choose between hegemonic bonding and indulgent paternalism in his inconsistent formulations. He was, therefore, an overnight success. But Hernández had to wait. Not that he wasn't immediately popular; he was, both with city people who could safely indulge their nostalgia for the vanishing gauchos and with the very gauchos themselves who lingered on for a short while as they recited his poem. Hernández was popular, but not seriously regarded as an artist, and certainly not an artist of national stature, until Leopoldo Lugones started a literary polemic in 1913 by proclaiming *Martín Fierro* to be Argentina's epic. He hoped that celebrating its local particularity would safeguard Argentine culture from the socialist and anarchist "corruption" of foreign immigration.⁷¹ Since then, the claim has seemed less extravagant than self-evident, especially after the literary populism of the 1920s when, for example, a young Jorge Luis Borges helped to found a journal called *Martín Fierro*, after generations of immigrant children have identified themselves as Argentine through that poem, and after the long Peronist period when Rosas himself was becoming a symbol of nativist patriotism.⁷² Nevertheless, Lugones knew that he was being polemical by favoring "Americanism" over progress in a country still dominated by Sarmentine liberalism. He may even have been surprised at his own success in promoting the poetic exaltation of autochthonous mestizo culture over Argentina's favorite novel, the genre that bourgeois Europe liked best.

4

SAB C'EST MOI

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda could well have said something like Flaubert's quip about Bovary, because the Cuban writer evidently identified with the hero of her abolitionist novel, *Sab* (1841). Sab is a mulatto slave hopelessly in love with his young white mistress and on the verge of rebellion, precisely the kind of explosive (self)portrayal that allows the novelist to construct a paradoxical, interstitial, and ultimately new or American persona. In other words, it was never easy to identify "la Avellaneda," or Gertrudis the Great as she is also called, in conventional or stable terms. Born in Cuba in 1814 to an impoverished Spanish aristocrat and a wealthy creole mother, and more or less settled in Spain from 1836 until her death in 1873, her national allegiance and the glory that she brings are still disputed by both countries. And although feminist readers of Spanish American literature are giving her the kind of attention that amounts to a gender-specific claim on her work,¹ Avellaneda has always figured in the canonical, overwhelmingly male mainstream of Hispanic literature.² Neither Old World nor New World, neither a woman's writer nor a man's, Gertrudis was both, or something different; she was Sab.

Her identification with him is obviously not autobiographical. Neither is it simply mimetic in the sense of representing the writer's characteristics and passions.³ As daring as this particular example of what might be called a spiritual mimesis is, given the fact that novelist and protagonist differ in apparently every conceivable way including gender, race, and class, the general literary practice is rather common and would by itself have been far less noteworthy than what Avellaneda does here. The stunning thing about this self-portrait is that it identifies author with apparently helpless slave through their shared productive func-

tion, their literary labor conditioned in both by the need to subvert and to reconstruct. The obscure slave represents the privileged novelist because both vent their passions by writing and because their literary slippages destabilize the rhetorical system that constrains them.

Sab writes at the end of the book, after his pitiful story of humiliation and loss. Exhausted and on the verge of death, he writes a long letter about Carlota, the chestnut-haired mistress and childhood playmate whom he loves desperately. And while writing "Sab's letter," probably in 1839, Avellaneda is also writing a long autobiographical letter to the one man whom she was passionate about and who managed to ignore her during a lifetime.⁴ In Sab's letter, Avellaneda's hero declares his love for the unsuspecting girl and explains the other interests that had been motivating the narrative. Sab's name at the end of the letter serves as the signature for an entire novel that seemed to be a simple story about a slave who is ignored, misunderstood, and passive in the face of unequal social relationships. (The literature on Sab as "noble savage" is rather predictable.)⁵ But the letter shows him as the writer of his own story and the only one who could fulfill Carlota's dream. Her dream was to marry Enrique Otway, the handsome son of an opportunist English merchant. Until she reads Sab's letter, Carlota is naive about Enrique's wavering interest in her (depending on how he assesses her dowry) and about her stoic cousin Teresa's infatuation with the same blond idol. Now Carlota learns that Enrique almost broke his engagement to her, after realizing that the dowry was indeed depleted; and she finds out that Sab had restored her wealth by slipping his winning lottery ticket into her mail. She also realizes that Sab then literally killed himself and his mount while racing on horseback to call Enrique back with the news of her good fortune.

The letter is written, as I said, afterward, while Sab is dying, and it is addressed to Teresa for safekeeping. She takes it into the convent where she chooses to live out her short life, and Carlota marries the man who soon proves, even to her, that he was unworthy of love. About to die, Teresa reveals the letter to Carlota. Thanks to Sab, whom she now recognizes as a soulmate, Carlota finally learns how much women and slaves have

in common. "Oh women! Poor, blind victims! Just like slaves, they patiently drag their chains and lower their heads under the yoke of human law" (221).⁶ Her faith in love (and liberation) revives, though, with the rest of Sab's letter. In it, Carlota manages to reread her romance in light of what could have been.

In other words, the end discovers Sab as the agent and the authority of the very story that portrayed him as a defenseless object of history. The signature authorizes the novel and leaves no doubt regarding his constructive role in the book. Already absent by the time he signs off, Sab makes himself present to Carlota, his mistress and ideal reader; he can present himself candidly by writing. In the same way, Avellaneda makes herself present to Cuba in a book written far away, from the absence that paradoxically makes possible the passionate supplement called writing. Sab, as much as she, writes from beyond hope. But much earlier than this signature, we suspect that Sab writes, directs, and manipulates everything we are reading. It is Sab, after all, who directs Enrique Otway to Carlota's house at the very beginning of the book; and it is he who decides to save the unworthy rival after Enrique falls unconscious in a storm. Later, Sab is the one who provides a guided tour through the treacherous caves of Cubitas where his master's family planned an outing to impress Enrique. And it is Sab again who interchanges people's fates by displacing lottery tickets. Finally it is Sab who determines their destinies by racing to stop Otway from embarking for Europe.

Throughout, Sab produces his story. Gertrudis did the same, within the limits that circumscribed them both. Only he, along with her, has enough command of the narrative to sound out the most intimate secrets of other characters, of Enrique for example.

Yo he sido la sombra que por espacio de muchos días ha seguido constantemente sus pasos; yo el que ha estudiado a todas horas su conducta, sus miradas, sus pensamientos . . . ; yo quien ha sorprendido las palabras que se le escapaban cuando se creía solo y aun las que profería en sus ensueños, cuando dormía: yo quien ha ganado a sus esclavos para saber de ellos las conversaciones que se suscitaban entre padre e hijo, . . . (154)

[I have been the shadow that has constantly repeated his steps for many days now; I the one who has all the time been studying his conduct, his way of looking, his thoughts . . . ; I am the one who has surprised the words that escaped him when he thought himself alone and even the ones he offered up in daydreams, and when he slept: I am the one who has won over his slaves in order to know the conversations that take place between father and son.]

The productive confusion of gender, and also of race and class, that the identification between Sab and Gertrudis implies is among the liberating linguistic disencounters that this novel achieves. But the best example is perhaps the description of Sab himself. In the very first scene, when Otway stops Sab to ask for directions to Carlota's house, the slave is introduced through a series of negations or absences. He is not a landowning peasant, although by his appearance he could easily be mistaken for one; nor does he have an easily identifiable color.

No parecía un criollo blanco, tampoco era negro ni podía creérsele descendiente de los primeros pobladores de la Antillas. Su rostro presentaba un compuesto singular en que se descubría el cruzamiento de dos razas diversas, y en que se amalgamaban, por decirlo así, los rasgos de la casta africana con los de la europea, sin ser no obstante un mulato perfecto. (23)

[He didn't look like a white creole, neither was he black nor could he be taken for a descendant of the first inhabitants of the Antilles. His face presented a singular composition in which one could discover the crossing of two different races, an amalgamation, so to speak, of African and European features that doesn't add up, however, to a perfect mulatto.]

It is as if the inherited signs of a European language could not catch up with an elusive American referent. Before describing him in positive terms, the text first has to erase or cross out a certain ethnocultural linguistic space in order to compose a new sign. Sab, and by association Avellaneda, is different, somehow foreign to established categories of representation. In the next paragraph, Avellaneda recomposes the very same signifiers she has just destabilized, or liberated, in an almost incoherent way when she describes Sab's color as "a yellowish white

with a tinge of black in the background" (24). The autonomy of each racial signifier was negated a few lines earlier only so that they could be amalgamated here. Sab is a new incarnation of an extinct aboriginal "Cuban," one who exceeds or violates the strict racial categories that have made slavery work. The reader, and Otway, are practically blinded to the existing social relationships by the lightness of Sab's skin. And it is this racial indefiniteness, this new shade of social meaning, that may be among the most radical features of the novel.

Despite the apparent incoherence of this exhaustive catalogue of colors, Sab is recognized as a typical resident of central Cuba, both by Enrique Otway and by the reader. The incoherence, in other words, owes to a certain linguistic obsolescence rather than to mistaken perceptions. The novel begins, then, with an aporia between language and experience, a ruse that would be repeated, significantly, in more than one canonical woman's novel. A particularly loving example, one I cannot help but mention, is Teresa de la Parra's nostalgic series of vignettes about plantation life in Venezuela called *Las memorias de Mamá Blanca* (1929). As will be seen in the last chapter, the playfully deliberate aporia between Snow White's name and her color, among many others, allows for the conciliatory effect of humor and affection.

The result in both *Sab* and *Memorias* is an awareness that our reality suggests its imaginary form, to borrow Lacan's terms, but that it still lacks a symbolic expression. If reality had an expressible form, if we could imagine an adequate sign that would represent Sab, a sign that would name this nameless pariah in the slave-holding language of the "parvenus,"⁷ that sign might be, perhaps, Cuban. Then we would recognize him to be as legitimate and autochthonous in this New World as were the indigenous, or as Spanish says it, the "natural" masters of the island. In fact, the term "natural child," meaning bastard in the established language and attributed to both Sab and Teresa, takes on a legitimating value by association, because the orphaned Sab is spiritually related to the aboriginal masters through his adoptive mother Martina, an old slave who insists she is Indian royalty.

If we ask ourselves how Avellaneda could identify with so

complex a character, one so difficult to locate between negation and excess, her motives announce themselves in a cluster of possibilities. And all of them are bound up with the need in both subjects to transgress the symbolic order, the order of the father, in their effort to construct an identity. Before I try to specify the nature of their excess or transgression, it is probably worth noting that the reigning patriarchal order in this novel is itself in profound crisis. No character here can be considered a legitimate or effective father. Don Carlos de B., Sab's master and Carlota's father, is in general incapable of ordering anything; he is too sweet or naive, or simply too lazy, to provide continuity and cohesion for the symbolic realm. His moribund son, the only one in a house full of daughters, underlines Don Carlos's nullity as a progenitor and gives their tasteful slavocratic world a definite expiration date. It is easy to see that Enrique's crass and foreign father, Jorge Otway, is just as problematic. Despite his energy and occasional financial coups, the man is too calculating and graceless to be a legitimate model. And his son is even less promising because he turns out to be Jorge's clone, lacking the will to confront his father with alternative values. By comparison, despite the fact that Sab combines the contrasting virtues of disinterested sweetness and energetic dedication, he cannot aspire to be a father. What Sab lacks is any claim to legitimacy in the patriarchal symbolic order, precisely because he has no father and no patronym, because there is no space in his language in which he could occupy the place of the name of the father.

In this social vacuum, "author-ity" can pass on to new hands, feminine and/or mulatto hands. Except for Martina, there are no mothers either, no one but Sab's "indigenous mother" to hold out the promise, or the memory, of an alternative order to the slavocratic patriarchy. She, the mistress of Cubitas, is an inspiration for wresting a kind of independence from bondage. From the space of his social exile Sab can wrest a kind of independence too; the space allows him to construct a different "artificial" order that can recognize his natural legitimacy. And this is exactly what the slave does when he plants a garden in the middle of the plantation. The text tells us that Sab breaks this new ground in order to provide Carlota with an ideal space

for intimacy and daydreaming. But the miniature Eden, carved out of the rival slavocratic system and composed of the most surprising combination of flowers and shrubs from the master's turf, must surely have given Sab another kind of personal satisfaction. He, at least as much as Carlota, needed a spot for recreation.

No había en Puerto Príncipe en la época de nuestra historia, grande afición a los jardines: apenas se conocían: acaso por ser todo el país un vasto y magnífico vergel formado por la naturaleza y al que no osaba el arte competir. Sin embargo, Sab que sabía cuánto amaba las flores su joven señora, había cultivado vecino a la casa de Bellavista, un pequeño y gracioso jardín. . . . No dominaba el gusto inglés ni el francés en aquel lindo jardinillo: Sab no había consultado sino sus caprichos al formarle. (70)

[Gardens were certainly not in vogue in the area of Puerto Príncipe during the time of our story. They were hardly known at all, perhaps because the entire country was a vast and magnificent natural bower, against which art did not dare to compete. Nevertheless, knowing how much his young mistress loved flowers, Sab had planted a small and charming garden near the house at Bellavista. . . . No English style nor French style dominated that lovely spot; Sab had consulted nothing but his own whims in forming it.]

There, in that little independently organized world, Sab's ideal mistress and reader most enjoys herself. Consequently, it is where her truest lover feels accomplished and happy.

In an analogous piece of work, and from the space of her literary marginality, Gertrudis managed to compose a *doppelgänger* out of traditionally incompatible characteristics. In his fissured totality, Sab turns out to be more pleasing than disturbing, more angel than monster, just as Sab's garden has an Edenic, rather than an artificial (English or French), quality. Sab, whose allegedly African name has no masculine or feminine marking in Spanish, is at the same time pacifist and rebellious, reasonable and passionate, practical and sublime, violent and delicate, jealous and generous. He is, in sum, so integral a combination of opposites that any hope of disentangling his characteristics becomes illusory. Their possible origins in another traditional and binary linguistic system no longer seems

to matter. Sab is new, as natural and attractive as the garden he planted in the interior and liberated space of the plantation. In a like manner, Gertrudis constructed a new self between the crossings-out of a patriarchal language that would have identified her simply as a woman and white.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda understood that in order to write something new one had first to violate an earlier text, to open a space for oneself. The fact that this novel recognizes that writing implies a necessary violence should not surprise us. In one form or another, the notion was almost a commonplace of romantic literature. In *Sab* the violence is directed above all against the rhetorical system that organized races into a rigid hierarchy of color, from lightest to darkest. The unnameable but familiar mixture that Sab represents is not the only dilemma that the novel makes this order confront. Another misfit is Enrique Otway whose pure-blooded whiteness amounts to blinding good looks that are presented in contrast to his contemptible character (154). In fact, his very whiteness stands out against the subtle shades of his Cuban context like a foreign interruption that threatens to dissolve the tropical harmony.

At the same time that *Sab* abandons the strong colors that could tragically divide Cubans against themselves, the novel also relaxes an implied binary system of gender coding. It shows the porousness and the strategic availability of signs, for example the signs "male" and "female."⁸ If Enrique is a disappointing man to the extent that he is unable or reluctant to feel a sublime and disinterested passion for Carlota, Sab is heroic, one might say, to the extent that he is passionate and sentimental. He can correspond to the depth of women's feelings, to Carlota's intensity and to his adoptive mother's affection. That is, he is heroic to the extent that he is feminized. Gender coding relaxes on the other side as well, with Teresa, a woman who gives up romantic infatuation for principled passions. Carlota's illegitimate cousin and the family's penniless ward, Teresa is the only one who understands Sab's sublime feelings and catches it like a liberating fever. She offers to run away with him, away from his frustrations and from her misguided longing for Otway. We admire her for the reserve and emotional control that cannot be confused with the shyness or coyness that a patriarchal

language might require of women. But more than anything else, we admire her for the novelty of a fictional woman who falls in love with the abstract principles that Sab represents. Nevertheless, Avellaneda doesn't insist on establishing a balance between male and female characters. The regular coincidence here between the feminine and the admirable is borne out by a *dramatis personae* in which all the women are noble (heightened to an almost comic level in the "Indian princess," Martina), while the men range from the feminized ideal of Sab to the ineffectual Don Carlos and the opportunist Otway Senior.

This ironic association of *vir-tue* with women, as well as the insistent parallels that Avellaneda establishes between the condition of women and that of slaves, has led to various and eminently justified feminist readings of *Sab*. But for the purpose of specifying the feminist nature of this novel, it seems important to remember that the characters and much of the erotic struggle in the text are *typical* of the period. Or they became typical once other Latin American novels repeat, or independently invent and vary, her fissured characters. Those novels will create a context around this early one, making Avellaneda's daring project part of a legitimate canon. This doesn't minimize the effect of the novel. On the contrary, it makes the impact felt globally in the continent. Although some readers choose to focus on what makes Avellaneda's novel particularly feminist, arguing that she is writing against the male tradition (and even that she uses abolitionism as a code for the more radical feminism),⁹ I am more concerned to show that she was at the vanguard of what would become the standard male canon and to suggest that the canon itself is remarkably feminized.

Even if we wanted to read Avellaneda as a lone rebel, we might find it impossible, by now, to bracket the later nineteenth-century novels through which we inevitably read hers. Our approach to her is necessarily like Borges's reading of Menard's *Quijote*. It is contaminated, or enriched, by layers of intervening readings. For some readers today, affected as we almost unavoidably are by feminist and more generally poststructuralist lessons in reading, nineteenth-century romantic novels produce an uncanny sense of familiarity and contemporaneity. The Latin American canon of romantic novels seems to wage a con-

sistent struggle against classical habits of oppositional thinking. Instead of keeping race, class, gender, and cultural differences pure, the "historical" romances that came to be considered national novels in their respective countries married hero to heroine across those former barriers. After the wars of Independence and the civil wars that followed in many Latin American countries, insisting on pure categories became literally self-destructive. If nations were to survive and to prosper, they had to mitigate racial and regional antagonisms and to coordinate the most diverse national sectors through the hegemony of an enlightened elite; that is, through mutual consent rather than coercion. Even the most elitist and racist founding fathers understood that their project of national consolidation under a civil government needed racial hybridization. Of course for some, such as Argentina's political architects Sarmiento and Alberdi, the plans did not project a union of whites with blacks (and much less with Indians), but rather the marriage between Hispanics, allegedly incapable of liberty and progress, with Anglo-Saxons who could take advantage of the economic opportunities that the creoles kept missing. Still, Argentine consolidation, after Buenos Aires's centralism struggled against the interior's insistence on federating power, was posed more in interregional than interracial terms. Clearly, though, this kind of political embrace as well as the color-coded variations of national amalgamation implied a certain exclusivity, principally of sectors that would not fit the enlightened plans: these sectors were the Indians and gauchos in Argentina; the blacks in Galvan's *Enriquillo* (Dominican Republic, 1882); and in the Cuba that Avellaneda represented, the ideally excluded sectors were the creole "sugarocracy" and the English interlopers.

Unlike the militant populist novels that would follow, where heroes measure their manliness against imperialist or dictatorial contestants for their country's love, the early novels celebrated a domestic, sentimental, and almost feminized brand of heroism. Instead of the caudillo, or local boss, whose power came from being at the top of a rigidly patriarchal pyramid of supporters, the sentimental and bourgeois hero of the times developed more lateral relationships with fellow citizens. He

exercised a freedom of (market) choice, for example, by picking his romantic partner; and he conquered her by love, always aware that she enjoyed the same kind of freedom. Consequently, the bond between the two, that is the hegemonic structure that coordinates diverse interests by appealing to their mutual benefit, seems to dispense with the need for military or any other type of coercive power. Instead, the love affair replaces power with desire, as if power and desire were two radically different things.

The obvious question with regard to *Sab* is what Avellaneda's Cuba has to do with this post-Independence esthetic and the related mandate to call an internal truce after the civil wars. Cuba in the 1830s was many decades away from achieving independence, let alone reconciling differences at home after Spain had left. It was also far from abolishing slavery, as Spain's other colonies had done after independence, and therefore far from creating at least the legitimate space for racial amalgamation. In some ways, Cuba represents the mirror image of Brazil, the other apparently anomalous and long-lasting slave society. Neither country fits the general Latin American pattern of Independence in the 1810s and 1820s followed by civil wars that ended by midcentury. Cuba was among the last colonies that Spain lost at the end of the century, whereas Brazil, long independent from Europe, was a sovereign monarchy at home. Yet both countries were slavocracies until the end of the century, when Cuba rid itself of Spain and Brazil became a republic. If slavery created a bond between them, it also should have distanced them so much more from countries where slavery had been abolished, at least officially, with early independence. Therefore, it is most significant that Cuban and Brazilian national romances look so much like the others. It suggests a cultural and even political coherence in the literary/political project to reconcile oppositions, to embrace the other, that goes deeper than the historical differences among the countries.

This is remarkable, I cannot help repeating, because Cuba was still at odds with Spain; it was preparing militarily and culturally for a series of struggles that would last for decades. Nevertheless, the conciliatory genre of romance in this and other abolitionist novels seems to have seduced even the Cu-

bans. Perhaps romance takes over because internal unity would be necessary for the fight against Spain. Romance between previously segregated sectors might ideally create the national unity among whites and blacks, ex-masters and ex-slaves, that the war for Independence would need. In Cuba, in other words, abolitionism becomes a *condition*, not a result, of independence. The fact that *Sab* makes a second appearance during the Independence struggle (in 1871, the same year that Avellaneda expunges it from her respectable *Complete Works*), and serialized in a Cuban revolutionary journal in New York, suggests how important an ideological weapon this novel must have been.¹⁰ Even if its romantic project were insufficient to the goal of establishing mutual love between the races, the rigid and irrational distinctions that belonged to the old order would have to be toned down before independence could be a safe alternative for Cuba's white minority. The threat of slave uprisings, and lessons from Haiti's revolution, surely had something to do with the departure of Avellaneda's family from Cuba in 1836.

Critics are probably right to point out that *Sab* represents a perhaps feminized and radicalized version of the "noble black lover" theme so popular in romantic literature. From Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko; or the Royal Slave* (1688), through Victor Hugo's high romantic version in *Bug-Jargal* (1826), where for the first time love tragically (and violently) crosses race and class lines, to the abolitionist novels written in Cuba, black heroes were conquering white audiences.¹¹ Part of their heroic appeal, no doubt, was the cathartic effect they produced when they lost, inevitably, to unjust but unmovable laws of the state. In the context of contemporary Cuban abolitionist novels,¹² Avellaneda's variation amounts to dislocating the dramatis personae of the tragic genre, perhaps following Hugo's revolutionary move.¹³ One specific dislocation makes her invert the expected racial identities between lover and beloved. Spanish American novels that describe interracial affairs have often been a loving or eroticized version of the white man's burden. They describe an active lover who is both male and white (the liberal bourgeoisie) and the yielding object of his galvanizing attention who is often a mulatta (the masses to be incorporated in a hegemonic project). Examples that come to mind range

from Cuba's canonical *Cecilia Valdés* (1839, 1882) by Cirilo Villaverde, to one of the most important populist novels, Venezuela's *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos.¹⁴ When the lover is a slave, his beloved is usually a slave too. But, as Mary Cruz notes in her prólogue to Avellaneda's novel, Sab is the only "man of the enslaved race" who dares to desire a white woman.¹⁵

This evidently scandalized or terrified the Spanish authorities in Cuba, as well as powerful groups of merchants and planters who dominated the sugar economy of the island,¹⁶ since the book was banned almost immediately. It is difficult to know, however, whether *Sab* scandalized them any more than did a contemporary novel such as Suárez y Romero's *Francisco*, which could be published only posthumously and abroad. Its delayed publication date may have had something to do with the fact that *Francisco* is an open denunciation of slavery. The fatal love triangle that frames the narrative, involving a noble black slave, the mulatta slave who reciprocates his love, and the lascivious white master who stops at nothing to possess her, seems almost a pretext for the novel's relentless and detailed review of slavery's institutionalized horrors. Throughout, Suárez underscores Francisco's Christian meekness. In *Sab* the censure is more subtle and the response more violent. Slavery is not its most urgent problem; the problem is rather a general system of unequal, binary, esthetic, and social relationships between light and dark, men and women, masters and servants.¹⁷

This difference in focus—from racial bondage to racist bonding—is refined in far greater detail and over many more pages in *Cecilia Valdés* and helps to account for its claim as Cuba's national novel after the period of abolition (1880–1886).¹⁸ The story is familiar even among Cubans who never read the novel, for one reason, because it became popular literally as a revue, a staged musical by Gonzalo Roig.¹⁹ Understandably, the nation constituted after the formal institution of slavery is replaced by more delicate and daunting discriminations may identify more with Villaverde's tragic rehearsal of elaborately exclusive habits than with Avellaneda's projection of unity. His cast to the color scheme, therefore, deserves more than passing mention in this chapter dedicated to the other less pessimistic, more rebelliously feminist novel.

Hardly anyone in *Cecilia Valdés* escapes the charge of racism, not the mulatta or her white lover, and certainly not the white narrator. A first, far shorter version, published contemporaneously with abolitionist novels in 1839 but inoffensive enough to appear in Cuba and then in Spain, had featured a predictably idealized heroine, the omniscient author who knew her worth, and little of the flair for provoking self-doubt that distinguishes the four-part novel of 1882.²⁰ In it, the narrator continually calls attention to his own social blinders by delaying information long after it is news to us. It is delayed, a bit transparently and with a studied clumsiness that leaves the teller tellingly benighted because, for one thing, there is no free-thinking Teresa here who knows enough to listen to blacks. As in *Sab*, it is the slaves who can tell this story about Cecilia, the daughter of an unknown white gentleman and a mulatta who goes mad when her lover removes the baby to an orphanage. That first tragedy is reversed too late to save the mother, but Cecilia gets to grow up partly in her grandmother's house where she learns that any white husband is preferable to a black one, and partly on the street where she falls in mutual love with Leonardo Gamboa, the spoiled son of a Spanish slaver who—horrors!—happens to be her father too. Neither one knows that their affair is incestuous, nor that their conflicting expectations—love for him, marriage for her—will clash violently. To underline the potential for perverse productivity in the incest theme, Leonardo's youngest sister is Cecilia's double, so that if he and Adela "were not flesh and blood siblings, they would have been lovers" (Villaverde, 57).

The other woman in Leonardo's life is Isabel Ilincheta, elegant, correct, a fitting counterpart to independent and candid Cecilia. Isabel seems in excess of standard good-girl heroines; in fact she is more the hero, modeled perhaps after Villaverde's independentist wife.²¹ It is Isabel who runs her father's business—growing coffee rather than the more labor-intensive sugar; and her womanly good looks don't interfere with a markedly virile appeal.²² The fact that Leonardo can profess love for both women, for his incestuous and finally narcissistic sibling substitute as well as for the ideal fiscal match of Isabel's coffee with his sugar, even boasting that many more

women have room in his heart, augurs the schizophrenic and irrational destiny of desire here. The campaigns of amorous conquest, the intrigues and jealousies, the doubts that Isabel feels about joining an insensitive if not brutal slave-owning family, are all set against a detailed backdrop of an inhuman system, inhuman because it denies human rights to blacks and because it makes monsters of their masters. The tragedy comes to a circular climax when Cecilia and her lover set up house together, have a baby girl, and separate once bored Leonardo feels ready to marry Isabel. Cecilia complains about the betrayal to her desperate mulatto admirer, a tailor's apprentice by day and a musician by night, which makes him doubly promising as the purveyor of an autonomous Cuban style.²³ The pattern traced here for fashioning a nation from competing colors and tastes evidently cuts Leonardo out after he betrays Cuba's characteristic beauty. As a result of her admirer's murderous outrage against Gamboa, Cecilia is left as mad as her mother was, and her baby is left quite helplessly orphaned.

This is a novel about impossible love, not because blacks and whites should not love each other—after all, they are mutually attractive and produce beautiful children—but because slavery makes it impossible. As Havana's frustrated mayor puts it, "In a country with slaves . . . morals tend . . . toward laxity and the strangest, most monstrous and perverse ideas reign" (Villaverde, 279). Romance and convenience don't coincide in this country that is not quite American, nor even a country yet, just as they did not coincide in aristocratic, hierarchical Europe. We know that Gamboa Sr. married his wife for money and then looked elsewhere for love, and that Leonardo, admiring and even loving Isabel for her useful virtues, remains romantically irrational. He undercuts—or overextends—his affections because archaic privilege exceeds his individual bourgeois self. Father and son are seduced as much by the absolute power of their racial and sexual advantage as by their partners' charms. This is no modern and rational free market of feeling where unprotected desire could produce social growth,²⁴ but a bastion of colonial custom where erotic protectionism nurtures desire in surplus of social need.

The novel, then, poses the problem of racial exploitation

whose other face is self-annihilation. The marriage contract to reproduce the family within domestic confines is here as transparently fictional and as easily violated as was the 1817 agreement that England had wrested from Spain to stop importing slaves, a promise that should have forced the reproduction of a labor force at home. Beyond a metaphoric relationship between broken conjugal contracts and contraband slaves, we saw that Havana's moralizing mayor senses a link of cause and effect between social dissolution and slavery. The brutality allowed by prospects of new imports, and the unproductive privilege it fostered, he said, corroded society's most sacred values: "familial peace and harmony" (Villaverde, 282). The family might not be quite so threatened by extramarital affairs, on which the men look with indulgence, were it not for the secrecy imposed by the conflicting code of bourgeois marriage contracts. It is secrecy that puts Leonardo at risk of incest. He will not be guilty with Adela because their relationship is clear; but Cecilia's parentage is an explosive secret, a debilitating blindspot where the rule of masters' privilege (double-)crosses modern family ties. Both the narcissism and the secrecy point to the moral contradictions of a slave society that assumes it can be modern. Neither the sugar industrialists—whose irrational excesses produce slave rebellions, suicides, and English interventions—nor the interracial lovers can make a stratified society coincide with bourgeois pacts. The tragedy, as I said, isn't caused by interracial romance but by the secrecy that obscures the slipperiness of racial categories.

The fine divide between exogamy and incest goes unattended, largely because of a certain reluctance to attend to the information slaves command. One informant is María de Regla, Adela's beloved black nurse now exiled to a sugar plantation. She eventually gets a hearing from the girl, joined by her mother and sister, at the end of part III, chapter 8, when she "connects the dots" in what had remained a studiously spotty story. This slave is also the one who provided Cecilia with a mother's milk and knows who the father was, which explains her removal from the house in Havana; the one who witnesses the self-annihilating heroism of a field slave who swallows his tongue to make his forced silence felt; the one who now keeps

the ladies of the house listening for hours about the nefarious effect of slavery when black families are separated and sold off in pieces; the Hegelian slave whose storytelling power over the enchanted mistresses comes from the knowledge gained in the work only she was fit to do. Once her welcome assault on their bedroom frees the novel's narrative flow, the reader may feel an uncomfortable self-doubt in retrospect. Not about the evidently incestuous plot she points to and which begins to unravel from the very beginning of the novel; any one of us can enjoy the self-congratulatory pleasures of getting the point long before the punchline. I mean the self-doubt or self-censure that María de Regla provokes in us readers when she authorizes some information that we may have resisted when it came from a then-questionable source, her husband Dionisio.

In part II, chapter 17, the lonely and bitter man, separated from his wife for twelve years, had crashed a formal dance restricted to free "colored" artisans and had been rebuffed there by Cecilia. Enraged, Dionisio blurted out what we partially know and she suspects: that she and her lover are already too intimately related and that her enslaved nursemaid was banished to the sugar plantation where Gamboa Sr. would be safe from her knowledge; in short, that because of this haughty and thoughtless mulatta who was about to consummate her own disaster, Dionisio and his wife were leading disastrously lonely and humiliating lives. It's not the information that may make us uncomfortable, especially not when it's repeated by a nonthreatening female slave in the conventionally sentimental (s)pace for reading novels; it is rather thinking back on the scene of refusing to know, Cecilia's refusal, that of her admiring companions and, also perhaps, of her readers. Villaverde sets the trap of racially restricted listening by keeping Dionisio anonymous for a while, all the while he remains an aging too-black man, dressed in ill-fitting finery and forcing himself on the Cuban Venus. Borrowing standards of good taste—as well as entire pages—from his society articles for *La Moda* where, arguably, fashion news was meant to customize a particular national style (as in Alberdi's case),²⁵ Villaverde's novel counts on certain assumptions of etiquette that would censure the aggressive outsider for inappropriately coveting the

barely bronzed object of general desire. Surely the free men documented by invitation, and by the narrator's biographical references, are likelier to get her attention. Isn't Cecilia's caution, if not her disdain, understandable? What possible significance could Dionisio's string of insults and recriminations have? She worries about it for a bit, at least until the next dance; and María de Regla reminds the reader to worry too, about why Dionisio, the source of knowledge, the appropriate teller of the story, cannot be appropriately heard. In this novel, as in *Sab*, it is the slaves who know and tell, if the masters will only listen to slaves whose mastery of standard Spanish should itself have been an eloquent promise of social coherence. And by drawing a distinction between blacks who know and whites or mulattoes who refuse to, Cirilo Villaverde cannot confuse himself with an omniscient informant, as Avellaneda had done when she signed Sab's name to the end of her book. Instead, Villaverde's signature appears at the beginning, on the initial title page, via his own initials (and credentials?), C. V., which also can stand for Cecilia Valdés.²⁶ He is Cecilia, deluded like her, unwilling but obliged to divorce desire from destiny, more white than black but, as Leonardo Gamboa remarks about his own privileged color, definitely Cuban in its indefinite origins. "My mother really is a Creole, and I can't vouch for her blood purity" (Villaverde, 38). The confusion doesn't produce a new autochthonous archetype, as it did in *Sab*, but an impossibly precarious hierarchy in which the mulatta's desire to move up coincides tragically with her white lover's taste for slumming. Compared to the bold abolitionist pronouncements of *Sab*, the politics in *Cecilia Valdés* is insidiously subtle, because color coding is shown to be so culturally constituting that the lovers never really unlearn it. Instead one yearns for racial privilege while the other plays on it.

With Villaverde's hindsight, we might assume that the Spanish censors of *Sab* were more concerned than they needed to be about its subversive potential. However, even if the novel wouldn't radically alter centuries of insidious habit, the prose patrol was probably right to fear for a peculiar institution from which slave traders and slaveholders were getting rich. After all, rebellious blacks would be among the most impassioned

freedom fighters of Cuba's Ten Years' War (1868–1878) for independence. The book was stopped at the very dock in Havana as the censors surely worried about its potentially destabilizing effect on the slavocracy.²⁷ That is, the effect produced by seeing a slave invested with the power implied by desire and with the legitimacy that accompanied romantic passion, a combination of forces that took the white elite as its object. His excess of desire always threatens to spill over into a bloody explosion. By contrast, a canonical novel like Brazil's *O Guarani* (1857) by José de Alencar, constructed around a similar erotic investiture of the subaltern class, caused little concern among slavocrats at home. Here the Indian protagonist adores his blond blue-eyed Portuguese mistress. But he adores her as the living image of the Virgin, not as an object of human desire, a passion experienced only by the less ideal characters. Like *Francisco*, this book refuses the radicalizing power of *Sab*, both because the Guarani can feel no self-interest and because Alencar (antiabolitionist that he was) preferred to cast his sublime lovers in racially pure categories (even though the categories were bound to mix in the productive afterlife of his racial romances). *Sab's* enduring charge of radicalism surely owes something to Avellaneda's success in making the racial categories themselves, along with gender assignments, the fragile objects of writing. She destabilizes oppositions from the beginning, by offering us a racially and generically mixed ideal in *Sab*; and she uses that ideal composite of selves to create a mirror effect for the ideal reader of *Sab's* letter; that is for Carlota, Cuba's sensitive, white elite that has been blinded by European esthetic and social habits. *Sab* is already a projection of national consolidation. As such, he goes much farther than simply taking the first denunciatory step in the struggle for blacks' and women's social equality. As a literary construction, who is nevertheless already a familiar type to the Cuban reader, *Sab* crosses over the very terms that constitute(d) the inequality.

I was suggesting above, that this Cuban romance, like others elsewhere, tends to reconcile tensions, and so it differs from populist, anti-imperialist novels of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. These insist on distinct boundaries between self and other, legitimate and illegitimate ownership of national resources. Yet

my suggestion may be a flagrantly Menardian anachronism. I may be reading *Sab* so much like a typical example of the canon that I can overlook a significant variation, one that links this book precisely with the populist novels that would follow. The point is that *Sab* distinguishes clearly between "legitimate" Cuban protagonists, both black and white, and "illegitimate" foreigners, the Otways. Like the first Spaniards who left traces of blood in the caves of Cubitas where *Sab* is the tour guide and Martina the living memory, these Englishmen came to Cuba only to exploit its wealth; that is, to marry her for her money.

Avellaneda's characterization of the Englishmen as social parasites is somewhat surprising in the general historical context of her book. She wrote it during a moment when the leading circle of Cuban abolitionists, who used to meet in Domingo Del Monte's living room, was allying itself with England.²⁸ England, after all, was the world power that did most to abolish the slave trade in those years. Predictably, this alliance made Del Monte's group the object of enmity and repression for Cuba's slaveholding authorities, which included the Creole sugarocracy and the Spanish merchants and slave traders. But in Spain the resistance to abolition and to England went much farther. It went as far as defending Spanish national or imperial sovereignty. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the English were using the kinds of political and military means to stop the slave trade that actually threatened Spain's stability.²⁹ Needless to say, they also infuriated Cuban sugar growers for whom the Del Monte group was an annoying extension of English power.³⁰

It also seems that English intervention hardly pleased Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. She evidently held out some hope that Cuba could gain freedom without "selling herself" to England. In addition to being just as much a Spanish Liberal as she was a creole abolitionist, Avellaneda had other, more local reasons for belonging only marginally to Del Monte's Anglicized group. In the first place, she was neither from Havana nor from anywhere else in the western part of the island where sugar embittered the lives of far too many slaves. Her social and intellectual world was not polarized between sugar's power and abolitionist resistance. Avellaneda's country was elsewhere; it

was the "Little Cuba" at the margin of plantation society, to the east of Havana and Matanzas.³¹ It is "Cubita," represented time and again in *Sab* (either in the womblike caves associated with Martina or in the garden that Sab planted in the middle of the plantation) as the small world whose master was the legitimate Cuban, the feminized, mulatto, protagonist.

I will not insist that Carlota represents Cuba, or "la Cuba chiquita," with her name beginning and ending like the island's and the depleted dowry that still attracts mercenary lovers (40, 142). But I will suggest that her romance with Enrique Otway parallels the misguided affairs that were bonding some sentimental Cubans to their English "allies" and others to conservative Spaniards. The alliances, Avellaneda is saying, are one-sided. The English, as much as the Spanish slave traders and merchants, are using Cuba for their own purposes. But Cuba is getting nothing in return, nothing, that is, but the useless and unproductive prestige of Old World elegance. A pale and indolent Spain, like Otway, owes its life to the very population that it excludes from its society—not only blacks but also, to some extent, Cuban colonial subjects.

Certainly Avellaneda would not include all Spaniards in her implied criticism. It must not have been easy always to predict who would fit into the "us" and "them" categories of this protopopulist opposition. After all, she herself was a Spaniard both because of her father's family and then largely by choice. She was Cuban more as a matter of sentimental allegiance. As if to dramatize the opportunities for a personal construction of national identity, Avellaneda gives young Otway more than one chance to make the switch from foreign opportunism to national sentiment. Virtue, in the form of passion for the other, tempts him, but not enough to be saved as a New World hero. "Under her power, despite himself, he felt his heart race with an unknown emotion" (88). Enrique *could* have chosen to love Cuba, as Avellaneda had, but his split and finally traditional loyalties make his romantic flight with Carlota miss its liberating mark. Perhaps because of his years, Enrique seems more capable of sincere feeling than does his father; and the youth is almost redeemed through love. As in other romances, a generational difference suggests a possible political and sentimental

gap. In *Amalia* (Argentina, 1851), *Martín Rivas* (Chile, 1862), *Enriquillo* (Dominican Republic, 1882), and *Soledad* (Bolivia, 1847), parents often represent values that their children recognize as anachronistic or un-American. But the tragedy here is that Enrique is finally reconciled to his father. Carlota's lover is unmanned because he short-circuits the Oedipal circle and becomes his father's clone rather than his rival. And Cuba's birth is delayed because clones cannot hope to engender anything new.

The real man here is, of course, Sab, or Avellaneda herself, as passionate as Carlota and as principled and selfless as Teresa. S/he is the more manly, as we said, because s/he is womanly. And s/he is the more Cuban because, as already suggested, in a parallel move away from binary gender terms, Sab's racial and historical character is already so intimate an amalgamation of terms that it has produced a unique, "autochthonous" type.

The novel hints, at least, that continuing intimacy between the already Cubanized sectors would advance the colony's consolidation into a nation. Sab himself represents a product of that intimacy and the ideal harbinger of national authenticity. His desire for Carlota is also a desire for greater national solidarity. It is no revolutionary dream but, as the novel suggests, merely the hope of legitimating a family relationship that is already intimate. The match is less unthinkable than possibly redundant or even incestuous. In that first scene, when Sab meets Otway, he explains that he never knew who his father was; it was a secret that his mother would not reveal. The only thing Sab did know was that his guardian, Don Luis, prepared for death by having a long and secret conversation with his brother, Don Carlos. Since then, Carlota's father has cared for Sab almost like a son (29–30). A conversation between Enrique and Carlota corroborates the insinuation of family relationship, although for some reason Sab doesn't seem to have gotten the point (52). In any case, since Sab and Carlota are probably cousins, the intimacy of possible "incest" at this safe remove might have provided an ideal family consolidation in the nation-building project. Incest here is not the unproductive dead-end of love, as it would become with the threat of sibling incest in pessimistic novels like *Cecilia Valdés*, *Aves sin nido* (Peru, 1889), and even

One Hundred Years of Solitude (Colombia, 1967). Rather it was proof that Cubans had been loving Cubans productively for a long time. For pre-independentists like Avellaneda, *Sab* is no warning against some unnatural and secret passion. It is an opportunity for consolidation.

This kind of cousin-to-cousin love is the norm in many of the foundational novels that followed, as for example in *Solidad*, *María* (Colombia, 1867), *Amalia* (at another remove), *Enriquillo*, and *Doña Bárbara*. In this nation-building scheme that depended on marrying powerful and conflicting interests to each other, the possible match between Sab and Teresa is doomed from the beginning. Even if Sab had overcome his own self-limiting ideal of love and responded to the warmth he inspired in Teresa, their union would not have delivered the kind of hegemonizing stability that Carlota's recognition could promise. Teresa's history does not intersect with Sab's; instead it runs parallel. She is as illegitimate and economically dependent as is the slave (36). Whereas Carlota could have supplemented Sab's generic Cubanness and prudent industriousness with the aura of a broadly acknowledged legitimacy, Teresa could only encourage him to turn his back on Cuba: "Leave these lands, leave them and search for another sky" (159). She would have fixed him in another, ghettoized terrain, somewhere beyond a potentially amalgamated redefinition of the nation.

Read backward from the self-defeating racism that lingers in *Cecilia Valdés*, Avellaneda's knowing promise of a coherent Cuba may seem partial or strained, based on partial knowledge and straining with more will than conviction. Avellaneda has Teresa offer herself to Sab, but never really to tempt him; nor can his freedom to leave Cuba solve anything at home. These narrative dead-ends, along with Sab's preference for self-sacrifice over struggle, all point to an ideological pause in the novel's motivation. Despite the space that Sab and Avellaneda manage to liberate inside the discourse that traps them, as writers they are bound together by the classic double-bind. In the first place, Sab and Gertrudis continue to be united in their admiration for a schematic heroine whose adorable qualities themselves, her innocence and naiveté, keep her from recogniz-

ing Sab's worth. Carlota begins to love him only after she is no longer really Carlota anymore, but the embittered and disillusioned Mrs. Otway. The romantic affair that should have liberated Sab seals his tragic fate. The very language that channels his feelings makes sure that those feelings will be absent to his ideal reader until it is too late. In the second place, Sab also refuses to love himself through his textual double, Teresa. He refuses because he aspires to the recognition of his mistress, because he does not want to break with the binary generic categories of ideal romantic love. Carlota is not only his childhood playmate and the object of his incestuous fantasies; she is also the incarnation of an ideal and uncontaminated sign. Her name is woman.

But for Sab or Teresa there are no names adequate enough to make them feel legitimate. There are no new categories in the language of a slave society. Neither Sab nor Avellaneda coin any. Could this be because of some irreparable breach in their language? Or is it because of Avellaneda's fear of falling into excessive verbal violence, the same horror that Teresa had of Sab's fantasies of revenge?

He pensado también en armar contra nuestros opresores los brazos encadenados de sus víctimas; arrojar en medio de ellos el terrible grito de libertad y venganza; bañarme en sangre de blancos. (147)

[I too have thought about arming our chained and victimized bodies against our oppressors; of casting among them the terrible cry of liberty and revenge; of bathing in the blood of white men.]

No doubt Avellaneda preferred not to follow Hugo's lead in making his black hero a leader of the slave rebellion in Haiti; she rather chose to imagine the possibility of a peaceful and legitimate marriage of signs inside the existing order of things. Avellaneda must have felt safer about writing the old works in new combinations so that they would only look incoherent, because the idea of inventing new and revolutionary names evidently seemed more violent than constructive.