

# THE POSTMODERN NOVEL IN LATIN AMERICA

Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth

Raymond Leslie Williams

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In memory of Germán Vargas

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Also by Raymond Leslie Williams

*The Colombian Novel, 1844–1987, 1991*

*Una década de la novela colombiana, 1981*

*Gabriel García Márquez, 1984*

*Mario Vargas Llosa, 1987*

*The Novel in the Americas (editor), 1992*

*La novela colombiana contemporánea, 1976*

## Preface

The subject of this book is the postmodern novel in Spanish America, with focus on the fiction written from the 1970s to the present. Given the range of postmodern cultural activity in the Americas in recent decades, I often use the plural postmodernities in recognition of the heterogeneity that I will explore in each chapter. One theorist recently published a book titled *Against Postmodernism* because of (as he himself admitted from the outset) the "irritation" of the omnipresent discourse of and about postmodernism in academia today.<sup>1</sup> My study has been written with a full awareness of the irritation many scholars feel about the term *postmodernism* and, in a minor way, as a response to my own irritation with the proliferation of articles and books on postmodernism today. In particular, I am responding to the looseness and vagueness surrounding the term *postmodernism* in the context of Latin American literature.<sup>2</sup> The most notable critics who write against postmodernism tend to be critical theorists with a relatively weak background in contemporary fiction, such as Alex Callinicos and Fredric Jameson. I am a scholar of Latin American literature writing—I will be clear about my position from the beginning—in favor of postmodernism.

I am fully aware that there is no common agreement on the exact definition of the *postmodern novel* and that several critics have questioned the appropriateness of using the term *postmodern* when speaking of Latin America. On the other hand, others have argued that Latin America, in fact, set the precedent of postmodernity long before the notion appeared in the North Atlantic regions.<sup>3</sup> Theorists such as Callinicos and Jameson have simplified the concept of what contemporary postmodern fiction writing is, and then, in turn, questioned the political function of this supposedly simple and popular fiction.<sup>4</sup> One of my several interests is to reveal and hopefully elucidate the political in the Latin American postmodern: I will argue that the postmodern novel is as political as its more traditional (realist-naturalist) and modern (modernist) predecessors in Latin America.

My point of departure is the assumption that Latin America is concurrently a region of premodern, modern, and postmodern societies, a fact

supported by numerous scholars.<sup>5</sup> Many of its rural areas, small communities, and villages are still premodern; most of its major cities have been undergoing an intense process of modernization since the 1930s and 1940s, and some urban sectors of Latin American society are as postmodern as Los Angeles, Boulder, Miami, New York, and Paris. In this book, I am concerned primarily, of course, with the fiction produced under the sign of the postmodern, but, rather than entering yet another inevitably futile (and perhaps ideologically or aesthetically limiting) exercise in defining postmodern fiction, I will discuss a broad range of the postmodernities that correspond to the different nations, regions, and conditions in Latin America.

This book was born in 1989 for several reasons. On the one hand, I had completed a book, *The Colombian Novel, 1844–1987*, in which the last chapter offered a brief, schematic view of modern and postmodern fiction in Colombia. This chapter left me with an interest in expanding and refining those ideas in a broader, Latin American context. In the fall of 1989, I offered a graduate seminar at the University of Colorado on the postmodern novel in Latin America, which forged beyond the schemes introduced in the book on the Colombian novel. In that seminar (and several similar seminars that followed), we read a variety of contemporary Latin American fictions within the context of the ongoing critical and theoretical dialogue on postmodernism, beginning with the writings of Ihab Hassan, Brian McHale, Jameson, and others. At the end of that semester, in December of 1989, I went to Mexico City and found myself explaining my recent seminar at a dinner in Carlos Fuentes's home to a group of Mexican intellectuals. After listening patiently to my brief description of the seminar, the Mexican cultural critic Roger Bartra lamented that the Mexicans were still concerned about becoming modern, and here the *gringos* were already teaching seminars on postmodernity. Later that evening, while watching U.S. troops invade Panama on CNN in the Hotel Maria Cristina, I decided to write this book. I thought of the project then as a logical culmination of my readings in postmodern theory, as a response to the many Roger Bartras in Latin America (and the United States, too), and as an outgrowth of my own postmodern experience in Latin America over the past two decades—including watching CNN in numerous hotels throughout Latin America while I skimmed Gabriel García Márquez novels or read the local press.

Most scholars of Latin American literature and culture, including my friend Roger Bartra, are far less skeptical about postmodernism in Latin America today than they were a decade ago. Recent Latin American cultural and political magazines have published numerous articles related to issues of postmodernity, such as *Nuevo Texto Crítico* and *Boundary 2*, which have dedi-

cated special numbers to this matter.<sup>6</sup> There have been a broad range of responses to these issues in Latin America. Some critics, such as the Chilean Nelson Osorio, consider it a foreign importation and sign of cultural imperialism, just as the nationalist intellectuals of the 1920s resisted the modern novel of the avant-garde writers who were hidden in small (and often elite) pockets of Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Havana, and a few other cities. Given the cultural interaction that Europe has always maintained with the Americas, beginning with the Spanish language, this nationalist argument seems as questionable now as it was in the 1920s.

Several social scientists and cultural critics have set forth much more substantial arguments against the postmodern in Latin America. Two prominent Latin American voices, the Chilean cultural critic José Joaquín Brunner and the Mexican philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, both arguing from Latin American perspectives strongly influenced by Jürgen Habermas, are highly critical of the postmodern. For Brunner and Habermas, postmodern culture is one of mass media manipulated by the dominating classes. Sánchez Vázquez argues that postmodern culture is essentially conservative in that it reproduces the cultural forms of the dominant ideology. Brunner, Sánchez Vázquez, and some other Latin American intellectuals, such as Fredric Jameson in the early 1980s, find little to recommend the postmodern, although none of these critics makes specific reference to contemporary Latin American fiction in their generalized condemnation of the postmodern. Certainly the recent work of Linda Hutcheon, particularly *The Politics of Postmodernism*, has done much to find value in the postmodern, including its critical political practices. Jameson's recent *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* also recognizes politics in postmodernism that the followers of Habermas have been reluctant to see, including Jameson himself in early writings on postmodernism.<sup>7</sup>

"Is there a story?" the narrator of Ricardo Piglia's *Artificial Respiration* (1980) asks at the beginning of the novel, and one narrator of Carlos Fuentes's *Holy Place* (1967) asks "Is there another place?" The possibilities of telling a story and of telling it in *this* place are questionable in Latin America today, after Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez, for very different reasons. It was also problematic to tell a story under the military regimes of the 1970s and to fix the locus of the telling of these stories. These are all issues of the postmodern writings of José Emilio Pacheco, Ricardo Piglia, Carlos Fuentes, and others.

A lively debate on postmodern culture and society has arisen in Latin America over the past decade. Young writers, such as the Venezuelan José Balza, the Colombian R. H. Moreno-Durán and the Chilean Diamela Eltit,

consider themselves postmodern and politically progressive, despite the positions of the neo-Marxists Brunner and Sánchez Vásquez. In another postmodern direction, the Cuban Severo Sarduy, a key figure of these Latin American postmodernities, has found his artistic roots in Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, and has searched for a divorce between ideology and writing.

In Santiago de Chile, on the other hand, an impressive group of young intellectuals between the ages of 35 and 50, who for the most part survived the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1988) living in Chile as underground resisters, have surfaced as Chile's leading writers, cultural critics, and artists. The young novelist Diamela Eltit, who has published four books, heads the group symbolically and collaborates on their new journal *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, directed by Nelly Richard. They conceive of their work in literature, criticism, and the visual arts as their space in *una escena de la escritura* (a scene of *écriture*).

A different "scene of *écriture*" has arisen out of complex cultural and political contexts in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. During the early 1980s, a phenomenon of marginality in Buenos Aires similar to the situation in Chile resulted in the publication of such diverse texts as Alejandra Pizarnik's violent rewriting of a vampire legend (an underground and subculture best-seller throughout the 1980s), Ricardo Piglia's experimental literary and historical fiction, and in Argentina the cultural speculations of various critics on postmodernism. Colombian intellectuals have organized several public discussions on postmodernity in Bogotá over the past five years (in some of which I have participated), and Colombian novelists such as Albalucía Angel and R. H. Moreno-Durán have numerous affinities with foreign postmoderns.

The scene with respect to postmodern culture is very complex in Mexico City, where Jameson is well known, Octavio Paz has questioned the very concept of postmodernity, and one of several feminist groups has begun publishing a journal called *El debate feminista*, with collaborations of writers such as Diamela Eltit and Albalucía Angel.

These discussions and, above all, the Latin American literary production of recent decades, suggest that there has been an epochal break in Latin America that took place in the late 1960s. From the late 1960s, as I will demonstrate in the upcoming chapters, a change in attitudes toward fiction and a change in novelistic production is evident. These changes correspond in many ways to what is currently being identified as *postmodern* in First World or North Atlantic academia.

Concepts of postmodern society and a postmodern fiction began to appear in Latin American intellectual circles in the mid-1980s, for both in Latin America and among First World academics actively engaged in the study of Indo-Afro-Iberoamerican culture. By the late 1980s, lines of division



had been demarcated, as the "debate" had begun between critics and proponents of the postmodern. Since then, numerous social scientists, cultural critics, and academics have taken positions on postmodernism in Latin America, including (in addition to those already mentioned above) George Yúdice, Santiago Colás, Neil Larson, and John Beverly in the United States; Hernán Vidal, Martín Hopenhayn, and Norbert Lechner in Chile; Fernando Calderón from Bolivia; Ernesto Laclau; the Brazilians Luiz Costa Lima, Renato Ortiz, Heloisa Buarque de Holanda, and Silviano Santiago; Jesús Martín-Barbero; the Venezuelans Celeste Olalquiga and Luis Britto García; Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat; the Uruguayan Jorge Ruffinelli; Ticio Escobar in Paraguay; Antonio Benítez Rojo from Cuba; the Colombians Alonso de Toro and Carlos Rincón; the Argentine Beatriz Sarlo.

My approach to the numerous and heterogeneous Latin American postmodernities is to discuss a group of the most representative, innovative, and postmodern novelists writing today. In chapter 1, I offer a general introduction to the development of Spanish-American modern and postmodern fiction, beginning with the origins of both the modern and postmodern in Borges, within several contexts, including the context of truth claims. I refer briefly to the historical discussion of truth claims as articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and then address this question within the context of modern and postmodern fiction in Spanish America. In chapters 2 through 5, I analyze the production of novels from four regions: Mexico, the Andean region (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, and Bolivia), the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay), and the Caribbean (the Spanish-speaking islands of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico). In each of these four regions, I offer a brief introduction to the postmodern cultural scene in general, and then analyze three or four texts of writers such as Severo Sarduy, Manuel Puig, José Donoso, Ricardo Piglia, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Diamela Eltit, Salvador Elizondo, José Balza, Jorge Enrique Adoum, and R. H. Moreno-Durán. Hardly any of the novelists I study are "popular" writers (with the exception of Puig and Donoso), although each has a respectable readership in Latin America and, in most cases, a substantive body of work consisting of at least three novels. Chapter 6, "In the Margins," is dedicated to writers who have been marginalized, such as women writers, or who write about marginalized groups. I include commentary on both modernist and postmodern writers, as well as on the fiction of the two countries most frequently marginalized in discussions of Latin American culture, Brazil (linguistically marginalized in Latin America) and Paraguay (geographically marginalized from the West). This chapter also deals with Central American fiction, gay and lesbian writing, and the *testimo-*

nio. Much of this fiction does not fit easily into most concepts of postmodernism; rather than forcing them into a category, I will discuss their affinities and differences with the variety of postmodernities described in the previous chapters.

I would like to thank the Council on Research and Creative Work of the University of Colorado at Boulder, which provided a semester research leave to advance this project. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Dean's Fund for the Humanities. Institutions in Latin America have kindly afforded me the opportunity to present and discuss ideas in this book at their early stage of development, including the Universidad Javeriana and Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango in Bogotá, the Universidad Central in Caracas, and the Universidad de Caldas in Manizales, Colombia. Several groups of graduate students were extremely helpful to my finding coherence in this project, particularly the participants in that 1989 seminar, which included Guillermo García-Corales, Laura López Fernández, Sandra Garabano, Yolanda Forero-Villegas, María Dolores Blanco-Arnejo, Alicia Rolón, Gina Ponce de León, and Alicia Tabler. I would also like to thank graduate assistants Jana DeJong, Michael Buzan and Jennifer Margit Valko. I appreciate the opportunity I had to speak formally and informally with numerous writers about the state of Latin American culture and literature, including their own; writers Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Ricardo Piglia, Diamela Eltit, R. H. Moreno-Durán, José Balza, José Emilio Pacheco, Severo Sarduy, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Federico Patán have been both generous and helpful, and have affected this book in a variety of ways, directly and indirectly. John Brushwood, Howard Goldblatt, George McMurray, and Donald Schmidt have made useful suggestions on the manuscript in its different stages. The ideas set forth in this book, however, are mine, as are its inevitable errors in fact and critical reading.

## Contents

Preface . . . . .	v
1. Introduction to the Spanish American Modernist and Postmodern Novel . . . . .	1
2. Mexican Postmodernities . . . . .	21
3. Andean Postmodernities . . . . .	43
4. Postmodernities in the Southern Cone . . . . .	67
5. Caribbean Postmodernities . . . . .	93
6. In the Margins . . . . .	109
7. Conclusion . . . . .	127
Notes . . . . .	130
Selected Bibliography . . . . .	141
Index . . . . .	147

## *Introduction to the Spanish American Modernist and Postmodern Novel*

There is growing acceptance of the idea of a modernist and postmodern novel in Latin America, but the characteristics, definitions and chronologies are in the process of discussion and debate.<sup>1</sup> The literature of Latin America was mostly ignored by scholars and general readers alike until the 1960s, when the now much-acclaimed Boom of the Latin American novel arrived. Until then, this entire body of literature was typically relegated to a small and usually secondary sector of the Spanish departments in First World academia, and only occasionally mentioned (usually in the context of "magic realism") among general readers. The rise of the modern novel in the 1950s and 1960s, in addition to several other factors, has radically changed the situation.<sup>2</sup> The entrance of postmodern fiction from Latin America into the consciousness of scholars and readers, however, has been a far more complex issue. In one of the early chapters of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Buendía places a sign at the entrance to Macondo that reads "God exists"—in response to its inhabitants' loss of memory. In the early 1950s, before García Márquez had published any novels, Diego Rivera painted a mural that stated just as boldly *Dios no existe* (God does not exist). These two affirmations bring to bear a central issue of this study—truth claims.<sup>3</sup> Can we establish truths in writing? Under what conditions can we speak of truth in contemporary Latin American pre-modern, modern, and postmodern society? I will refer briefly to the historical discussion of truth claims as articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and then address this question within the context of Latin American modern and postmodern fiction. In the process, I will attempt to clarify my understanding of the concept as it may be used in reading contemporary fiction in Latin America. The characteristics and chronologies of this fiction will be of some concern.

The problem of "truth claims" has its historical origins in the philosophical discourse of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and phenomenological hermeneutics. Gadamer has recently articulated this hermeneutical tradition, which he, in turn, inherited from Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Martin Heidegger. Since Schleiermacher, the problem of interpretation has been historicized. Dilthey also conceived of hermeneutics within a historical context: he saw himself as a historical being and maintained that there is no such thing as a universal subject, only historical individuals.<sup>4</sup> Citing Hegel, Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method* that the truth that lies in every artistic experience is recognized and at the same time mediated with historical consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Reading this philosophical tradition, Gadamer views the development of hermeneutics in the modern period as the culmination of the rise of historical consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Gadamer concludes that "Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event."<sup>7</sup> *Truth and Method* has been appropriately described as one of the most serious attempts in contemporary theory to recover history for textual interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

For Gadamer, the hermeneutical problem is not a matter of method, but of knowledge and of truth. In the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains that the purpose of his research is not to offer a general theory of interpretation and an account of its methods, but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given "object" but to the history of its effect. In other words, according to Gadamer, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood. Gadamer's position on hermeneutics depends to a large degree on the concepts of horizon and prejudice. He describes horizon as the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Returning to Dilthey, we find that he argues that the prejudices of the individual, far more than its judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.<sup>9</sup> Citing Heidegger, Gadamer states that "the important thing is to be aware of one's own ideas, so that the text can present itself in all its truth against one's own fore-meanings."<sup>10</sup>

Tradition is another important concept for Gadamer's understanding of interpretation and truth, and tradition grows out of the senses of historicity and the concept of horizon. Interpretation includes our sense of historical past and our own present situation. As such, Gadamer approaches the text as a speaker in a tradition. In addition, our ever-renewed fusion of ever-changing horizons is crucial to the understanding of ourselves—as interpreters—as part of a tradition.

For Gadamer, the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth.<sup>11</sup> He argues that the phenomenological return

to aesthetic experience (*Erfahrung*) teaches us that this aesthetic experience is real truth.<sup>12</sup> Gadamer's conclusion demonstrates his profound faith in the truth to be found in the operations of hermeneutics, a discipline that, for him, guarantees truth through its processes of questioning and inquiry.

Ricoeur concurs with Gadamer on many positions concerning language and has developed numerous positions with respect to truth: in *History and Truth* he has argued for the pluridimensional nature of truth. Ricoeur has noted our historical temptation to unify the truth by violence and has proposed a differentiation of the orders of truth in our cultural history. Like Gadamer, he returns to a sense of tradition in his discussion of truth:

At a first glance, nothing is simpler than the notion of truth. Tradition defines it as an agreement, an agreement at the level of our power of judgment (of affirmation and negation), an agreement of speech with reality, and, secondarily, an agreement among ourselves, an agreement of minds. Let us note the features of this definition of truth: it is a manner of disposing ourselves "in conformity with, in the same way as."<sup>13</sup>

Gadamer and Ricoeur have exercised an enormous influence, of course, on literary studies and theory in recent decades. Gadamer's positions relate to connections in literary studies between society and literature, and Ricoeur's writing—emphasizing the plurivocity of texts and the multiplicity of readings—corresponds to some aspects of poststructuralist theory. Jameson favors Gadamer's historicism and agrees with what Gadamer calls "prejudices," which Jameson calls "class habits" and ideological thought modes inherent in our own concrete social and historical situation.<sup>14</sup> Jameson also points to Ricoeur's "negative hermeneutics," which are a demystification and are at one with the most fundamental modern critiques of ideology and illusory consciousness associated with Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. According to Terry Eagleton, hermeneutics sees history as a living dialogue between past, present, and future, and seeks patiently to remove obstacles to this endless mutual communication.

Nevertheless, Habermas and some other critical theorists have raised serious questions about hermeneutics, claiming, for example, that Gadamer overlooks social processes involved with language. Habermas also questions Gadamer's "rational character of understanding," but perhaps his strongest

critique concerns the claim to "universality" by Gadamer and others in hermeneutics. Habermas criticizes validity claims for being "universalistic." Both rationality and universalism, of course, have been historical foundations for truth claims, as reason and universality have justified the dominant truths. Habermas associates truth claims with domination and force; Gadamer wants to see authority of the great work and of the teacher who explains it as a claim on us that is rooted in knowledge and in free recognition, never in force.

In retrospect, the concerns that Gadamer and Ricoeur have developed over the issue of truth claims, within their respective philosophic work, have resulted in what might be called a "discourse of truth." This philosophical-theoretical discourse of truth has had universalistic intentions and has not questioned the very nature of this discourse or the very possibility of making truth claims. To the contrary, Gadamer holds the hope that the spirit of dialogue and open communication—both important for this hermeneutics—can prevail in society. He argues for the inexhaustibility of truth that is handed down by tradition—by way of the works of predecessors. Gadamer agrees with post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes that the text has no fixed meaning or truth, but, in the end, Gadamer distinguishes himself from the post-structuralists by returning to the idea of some meaning that the interpreter finds through the linguistic community and tradition. By means of these concepts, Gadamer has remained faithful to the tradition of the discourse of truth.

If truth claims have their roots in this philosophical-theoretical discourse of hermeneutics, issues of truth also have a venerable tradition in discussions of strictly literary texts. The Anglo-American New Critical tradition provided for the acceptance of the "poetic truths" that poets establish with the carefully delineated boundaries of the autonomous text. Under these rules, the poetic voice establishes a "truth" that has a meaning as "truth" because of the inherent unity and coherence of the text, a truth discovered by the reader. From these "poetic truths" internal to the text, "universal" truths were often extrapolated, or at least inferred.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics coincide in some ways with this idea of the "poetic truths," for Ricoeur is willing to accept the idea that truths can be created within the framework of an individual text. He affirms: "Even the imagination has its truth with which the novelist is very familiar as well as is the reader: a character is true when its internal coherence, its complete presence in the imagination, dominates its creator and convinces the reader".<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Ricoeur privileges the power of the individual novelist to evoke truths in texts:

On the contrary, he will create something new, something which is socially and politically valid, only if he is faithful to the power of analysis which flows from the authenticity of his sensitivity as well as from the maturity of the means of expression which he has inherited.<sup>16</sup>

For Ricoeur, writers establish orders of truth that are mutually contested and then reinstated in an endless "circle."

Many contemporary writers, including prominent Latin American novelists, have taken positions on the truth claims implied by these "poetic truths." Mario Vargas Llosa, however, calls these illusions lies, rather than the truths of fiction.<sup>17</sup> Vargas Llosa would agree with Ricoeur's proposition that truths somehow flow out of an unconscious level of the artist's creation. Ricoeur states: "True art, in conformity with its proper motivation, is engaged when it has not deliberately willed it, when it has agreed not to know the principle of its integration within the total setting of a civilization."<sup>18</sup> Gabriel García Márquez makes numerous statements about being a "realist" who attempts to describe the reality of Colombia as truthfully as possible, despite the insistence of many foreign readers on classifying him as a fantasy writer or an imaginative fabricator of the chimeras associated with the now defunct magic realist enterprise. For Carlos Fuentes, the historians of Latin America have so distorted or ignored truth that it is the responsibility of the Latin American novelist to tell the "other history," to find truth in the imagined past. In the 1960s, both Julio Cortázar and Carlos Fuentes questioned the Western philosophical search for universally valid truths, pointing out that this search has always been a Western, logocentric exercise.

The modern and postmodern novel in Latin America have given a different status to truth. Modernists such as Gabriel García Márquez and the young Chilean postmodern writer Diamela Eltit represent, in certain ways, these different approaches to truth. In the first chapter of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Buendía, after an apparently thorough search, announces proudly to his wife, Ursula: "The world is round, like an orange." In the next line, the narrator registers Ursula's reaction: "Ursula lost her patience."<sup>19</sup> This interchange is the first of many juxtapositions of writing versus oral culture, for Ursula consistently reacts, throughout the novel, as a person who belongs to a primary oral culture. As such, her truths are fundamentally contextual, and she responds to the most immediate circumstances.<sup>20</sup> The very idea of truth claims represents as much nonsense to her



as the idea of her obviously flat town described as a piece of round fruit. Consequently, she consistently ridicules truth claims throughout the novel, as would any member of an oral culture.<sup>21</sup>

José Arcadio Buendía, unlike Ursula, both understands and believes in truth claims, as is evidenced in the sign that he places at the entrance of Macondo, "God exists." His claim is a repetition of traditional Catholic doctrine that has predominated in Latin America for five centuries. Nevertheless, the reader laughs at José Arcadio Buendía's truth claim because of the contextual error that José Arcadio Buendía commits, substituting the everyday instructions of traffic signs with a grandiose truth claim of biblical rather than bureaucratic language. By ridiculing the ultimate truth claim—the claim of the existence of God—this novel associates truth claims with the superannuated language of medieval disputes and, finally, with absurd propositions.

A third truth claim is written as an anecdote of a banana workers' strike. The subject of this part of the novel is truth. The event that occurs in it seems impossible: the workers of Macondo declare a strike and a rumor spreads that the government has massacred hundreds of workers, if not more. The passage is incredible, seemingly one of the most fantastic of the novel: a historic massacre is reduced to rumor and story. Nevertheless, historians and literary scholars have documented the fact that this chapter is one of the most historical, indeed, the most truthful, of the entire novel, for it refers to the massacre of striking banana workers in Ciénaga, Colombia, in 1928.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a novel that relates truths that, unlike those "poetic truths" consistent only with textual strategies, correspond to real historical issues.

For Gabriel García Márquez and Latin American writing, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represented a culmination, in 1967, of a modernist project that still privileged issues of truth. A follower of William Faulkner and Franz Kafka since the beginning of his writing career, García Márquez began writing in the late 1940s and published his first novel, *Leafstorm*, in 1955. He continued his Colombian elaboration of Yoknapatawpha County, which he called the town of Macondo, with the publication of two novels and a volume of short stories; he then synthesized his entire project in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This literary production coincided with the growing complicity in First World academia between the formation and reproduction of the discipline of English (the dominant form of literary studies) and the very notion of modernism itself.<sup>23</sup> García Márquez's modernist project was relatively late in arriving on the First World modernist scene. It was written almost exactly, in fact, at the time when John Barth began his postmodernist reflections on the literature of exhaustion and when Leslie Fiedler, for better or for worse, popularized the term *postmodern*.