

LOS SEÑORES PRESIDENTES Y
LOS GUERRILLEROS:
The New and the Old Guatemalan Novel (1976–1982)

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In literary terms, the new novel did not emerge until 1976 in Guatemala, which represented a ten-to-fifteen-year lag behind most of the other Latin American countries. Since 1976, however, four Guatemalan novels have been published that merit consideration in the same rank with *Hijo de hombre* (1960), *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), *Gestos* (1963), *Rayuela* (1963), *La casa verde* (1966), *Cien años de soledad* (1967), and *Tres tristes tigres* (1967). The explanation for the earlier paucity of high-quality, structurally and linguistically experimental novels is simple. The blatant violation of human rights by the autocratic governments of Carlos Castillo Armas (1954–57) and his successors has led to the exodus of the best-known authors and the self-censorship or silence of others. In this political climate, the birth of a Guatemalan literary generation of 1954¹ was almost completely aborted. With the exception of some new works published abroad by Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974) and Mario Monteforte Toledo (b. 1911), Guatemala's two most important twentieth-century novelists, the novels published between 1954 and 1975 were generally undistinguished, as is suggested by the annotated bibliography accompanying this essay.

The four Guatemalan novels have received practically no publicity in Guatemala. *Los compañeros* (1976) by Marco Antonio Flores (b. 1937) and *Después de las bombas* (1979) by Arturo Arias (b. 1950) were published in Mexico City by the well-known Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, but they are not sold in Guatemala. *El pueblo y los atentados* (1979) by Edwin Cifuentes (b. 1926) and *Los demonios salvajes* (1978) by Mario Roberto Morales (b. 1947) were actually published in Guatemala City, but with small printings and an even smaller circulation. All four works are variations, to a greater or lesser extent, on the theme of "El Señor Presidente," immortalized in the 1946 Miguel Ángel Asturias novel, and on the various guerrilla movements organized against Dictator Jorge Ubico (1931–44) and all the counterrevolutionary presidents since 1954.

The purposes of this essay are threefold: to establish the affiliation

of the four new Guatemalan novels with their Latin American counterparts by commenting on a variety of structural and linguistic experimental techniques; to make this affiliation even clearer by contrasting the four new novels with four "old" novels published during the same period; to reveal the constant preoccupation of both groups of novelists, who represent different generations and ideologies, with Guatemala's political situation.

Although the four new novels share many traits, they may be neatly divided into two categories consisting of the realistic and the carnivalesque. The realistic works, Flores's *Los compañeros* and Morales's *Los demonios salvajes*, are similar in that the protagonist is not a single individual, but a group of urban teenagers or young men who feel either committed to or disillusioned with the guerrilla movement of the 1960s. Although the two authors occupy different ideological positions, both their works are essentially pessimistic. In the carnivalesque category, *El pueblo y los atentados* and *Después de las bombas* are kinds of *Bildungsromane* covering more extensive time periods that culminate in the triumph of the individual picaresque hero against the archetypal dictator.

Interesting as these comparisons and contrasts may be, the novels have had so few readers that it is necessary to analyze them primarily on an individual basis. *Los compañeros*, written between 1968 and 1971 in Mexico City, Madrid, and Guatemala City, presents a negative view of the guerrilla movement of the 1960s while denouncing the right-wing government violence. Combining the experimental techniques of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* with the linguistic play of Asturias' *El Señor Presidente*, *Los compañeros* consists of thirteen numbered chapters, each one dated and bearing the name of the character from whose point of view the action is presented. First-, second-, and third-person narrations are effectively intermingled and the techniques of interior monologue and free association are used to reveal the social and psychological backgrounds of the characters, some of whom are driven by sexual insecurity and an obsession with the Jungian image of the Terrible Mother.

The most important of the four main characters is el Bolo ("the Drunkard"), who is also the least involved with the guerrilla movement. His only participation occurs in 1962 when he goes to Cuba for one year despite his mother's opposition. After abandoning Cuba for Paris, he does not attempt to rejoin the guerrilla movement until 1969, by which time it is almost completely destroyed. An anonymous friend answers his letter and colloquially criticizes his self-pitying indecisiveness, alluding to the conflict between the Communist party and the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias): "Ya tenés seis años de andar haciéndote la bestia hippie. Ya es hora de que te pongás claro . . . dejá de chingar con esas cartas lloronazas que nos hacés la campaña de mandar. . . . Aquí

hay muerte a carretadas. . . . El rompimiento se produjo al fin, las FAR y el Partido se echaron verga, todo se hizo una bola de mierda."²

Because el Bolo does not really participate in the guerrilla movement, the chapters devoted to him are much more concerned with his own personal war of liberation against his mother, the archetypal Terrible Mother, with whom the violence-ridden nation is totally identified at the end of the novel:

No voy a volver nunca más, no voy a regresar nunca a mi pinche guatemalita de la asunción, a meterme a ese hoyo que me destruye, que me ningunea, que me asfixia. Allí donde está la casa de mi madre . . . pero no voy a regresar . . . al país de mi madre, al país de mi padre, no existe, a mi país donde no puedes nunca estar solo ni libre, porque a todos conoces y todos te conocen y matan y te matan y tienes que huir que esconderte porque si no te desaparecen te encierran te matan te torturan te cortan los huevos te sacan los ojos te cortan la mano izquierda te cogen te violan . . . y te matan a pausas o de un tiro y allí está tu madre y está el tirano de turno y está la policía que en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón te ficha te persigue y te mata. Aquí sentado me voy a quedar Chupando Oyendo los bongós. (Pp. 237–38)

In marked contrast with the indecisive el Bolo, el Patojo ("the Kid") is the purest of the novel's revolutionaries, perhaps the only one. In the three chapters devoted to him, all dated 1966, he suffers brutal beatings and clubbings in jail, while "remembering" different scenes from his past symbolized by the violent whirlwind of his own birth: "Caí en el vacío y empecé a dar vueltas, a gritar, a chillar, a berrear con rabia" (p. 51). He dies as a result of being tortured, but without revealing anything to his sadistic captors. His identification with a nightmarish version of "Little Red Riding Hood" at the moment of death represents a return to childhood. Little Red Riding Hood is transformed into a man who walks with seven-league boots through an increasingly dark tunnel, which represents the return to the womb, thus reinforcing the same circular structure used with el Bolo's account—a reflection of the novel's cyclical, rather than linear, world view.

The chapters devoted to el Patojo and el Bolo are interesting but lack tension because there is no dynamic plot development. Tension does exist, however, in the story of Chucha Flaca ("Skinny Bitch") who, aided by el Rata, escapes from Guatemala in 1967 by taking a plane to Mexico City. Accused of desertion and embezzlement for having left his position as director of propaganda for the Communist party and for having absconded with a considerable amount of money, Chucha Flaca feels threatened by revolutionaries and police alike. He justifies his decision to abandon the revolutionary movement by criticizing the total subordination demanded of the individual by the party, while the higher-ups lead a privileged life: "Ustedes saben que el Partido llega a convertirse en tata y nana, ya no podés cogerte a quien te plazca, ni ir a una cantina a echarle un trago, ni tener una tu cacerola, ni mujer siquiera, ni

hijos, porque si no viene la crítica, su rendimiento personal ha bajado compañero. . . .—los del Comité Central del Partido tenían carro particular y chofer y ciento cincuenta maracandacas mensuales y viajes de diplomáticos para ellos y sus familiares cada año. Sí, por allí aparecían en Moscú, en Praga, en la Habana en congresos y en pendejadas por el estilo, pelándose la verga. Así quién no se hace revolucionario” (p. 69). Chuca Flaca extends his diatribe to Fidel Castro and the Cubans: “La culpa de todo este desbarajuste la tienen los cubanos de mierda. ¿Qué tenían que meterse adonde no les iba ni les venía? Según Fidel iba a ser otro Bolívar. Regular Bolívar resultó el cabrón; solo embrocó a un chingo de gente y después se lavó las manos” (p. 74).

After arriving in Mexico City, Chucha Flaca has to struggle with the self-contradictory, absurd rules and regulations of Gobernación (the Immigration Department), but he finally lands a job in the Renault factory in Ciudad Sahagún following his archetypal descent into the underworld, the “submundo total” of the workers’ *pulque* bar and “casa de putas de poca moder” (p. 208). Within two years, however, he is transformed into a member of the idle rich supported by his mistress, a researcher at the Colegio de México who is proud to live with a former guerrilla.

In addition to its political and psychological features, *Los compañeros* is an outstanding linguistic creation. Aside from the clever colloquial dialogues, its rapid-fire descriptions of Guatemala City and Mexico City in the 1960s capture the jarring effects of modernization. Although he criticizes Miguel Ángel Asturias, Flores gives the reader the impression that he shares with his famous predecessor the traditional Mayan fear of empty space. The words seem to pour or gush out with the constant use of free association: “Técnica Universal Tecún umán el de las plumas verdes, verdes, verdes, ese Miguel Angel es un maricón, todas las mierdas que escribió sobre Tecún, es un chantajista sentimental y gordo: el de las plumas verdes, verdes, verdes, bien a pichinga ha de haber estado cuando escribió esa mierda” (p. 33).

Because of its similar colloquial language, its fragmented structure, and its collective protagonist, Mario Roberto Morales’s *Los demonios salvajes* lends itself to a contrastive analysis with *Los compañeros*. Although the authors are only ten years apart in age, they belong to two different Guatemalan and international generations. Born in 1937, Marco Antonio Flores has a greater affinity with the generation of García Márquez (1927) and Carlos Fuentes (1929), which also includes Mario Vargas Llosa (1936) and Severo Sarduy (1937). In general, these authors have taken on the responsibility of projecting a muralistic vision of their countries’ problems, with an international dimension. In Guatemala, these writers were thrilled in their adolescence by the 1944 revolution, became

radicalized in response to the U.S.-backed Castillo Armas counterrevolution of 1954, and between 25 and 35 were inspired by the Cuban Revolution to join the guerrilla groups of 1962–70. On the other hand, Morales (b. 1947) belongs more to the “Onda” (“Mod”) generation that is identified mainly with Mexicans Gustavo Sainz (b. 1940) and José Agustín (b. 1944), but with representatives in almost all the other Latin American countries, including Andrés Caicedo (1951–77) and Marco Tulio Aguilera Garramuño (b. 1949) in Colombia and Antonio Skármeta (b. 1940) in Chile. These writers are the young rebels of the late 1960s who attacked every aspect of “the establishment,” including its literary traditions. Therefore, their works, although not completely devoid of sociopolitical concerns, are based more on their own experiences as adolescents with emphasis on rock music, sex, and drugs. As authors, they do not regard themselves as privileged sociopolitical analysts; and as literary rebels, they seldom strive for the well-structured novel.

Los demonios salvajes consists of various types of texts. The so-called “estúpidas hazañas” of the “demonios salvajes” resemble the wild teenage rides of Flores’s “compañeros.” But in *Los compañeros*, those scenes are recalled vaguely from the past and are relatively unimportant, while in *Los demonios salvajes*, the various episodes in the Opel are detailed more vividly and they are more specifically located in different parts of Guatemala City. While riding in the Opel, the boys smoke, drink, play the guitar, fight, and crash. The conflicts are presented in an abrupt, choppy, almost telegraphic style.

In contrast to Marco Antonio Flores’s intermingling and fusing of different time periods in the lives of his characters through interior monologue and free association, Morales clearly identifies each chronological period (he is not interested in the Faulknerian experimentation with time that so captivated the previous Latin American generation). At least one third of *Los demonios salvajes* is devoted to portraying life in the *colegio*, which preceded the period of the “estúpidas hazañas.” Each of the *colegio* sections bears the name of one of the school subjects: mathematics, English, history, and philosophy, and each teacher is fully described as are the students’ pranks.

The scenes in the *colegio* and the “estúpidas hazañas” comprise the major part of the novel and tend to be repetitive and boring. What saves the novel to a certain extent are the six more-or-less-independent short stories that all present the distinctly prorevolutionary contrast between the idealism of the communist revolutionaries and the selfishness of the bourgeoisie. Even the tone of these sections is different. Morales abandons the irreverence so typical of his generation and endows the narrative voice with greater seriousness and even an occasional touch of lyricism. The best of the six is “David o como se haya llamado,” which

could well be included in an anthology of the best contemporary Guatemalan short stories. Its climax occurs when El Canche ("Whitey"), a medical student, experiences a tremendous sense of shame and guilt upon recognizing the bullet-ridden corpse of his friend David, whose request to distribute revolutionary fliers he had rejected only a few days previously. The narrator Roberto creates a strong emotional impact by directing his words to El Canche in the *vos* form, thus establishing a feeling of greater intimacy between the two characters.

In two other stories, the bourgeois concerns of love and marriage triumph over social consciousness. In "Como una muñeca predilecta," the narrator discusses his marriage, real or hypothetical, to the typical middle-class woman who is interested only in her well-furnished home, her two children, and her periodic trips to Miami, a woman who criticizes her husband's communist ideas because they threaten her way of life. In "Yo para estas cosas me llamo René," the narrator recalls in an almost elegiac tone the heroic guerrilla David who was training in the mountains when the narrator was expelled from the revolutionary group for thinking too much about his responsibilities as a husband and father.

In the remaining two special sections, both entitled "Hay gentes en la universidad," the attractive new university campus and the nearby expensive homes owned by Guatemalan and American oligarchs are contrasted with the needs of the poor. Criticism is also directed at the university students, children of bourgeois parents who think that they are fulfilling their duty to the revolution by participating in the Huelga de Dolores when actually they are preparing to become the politicians of the future, who will be no different from the targets of their mockery. Even the historical student leader Oliverio Castañeda is criticized by Morales for his "ciento cincuenta guardaespaldas" (p. 106). (His assassination in the Parque Central subsequent to the novel's publication made him a martyr.) Ironically, the novel ends with the words engraved on the plaque at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Eleventh Street in honor of other students who had been assassinated.

Although *Los demonios salvajes* does not dwell on the guerrilla movement as much as *Los compañeros* does, Morales's revolutionary ideology is clear and unambiguous, unlike that of Flores. In yet another, smaller type of text in the novel, the narrator summarizes the history of the Guatemalan revolution of 1944–54, the Castillo Armas counterrevolution, and the Ydígoras Fuentes presidency; he also tells about reading a biography of the guerrilla leader Luis Turcios, who was killed in 1966 (p. 113).

In contrast with the realistic *Los compañeros* and *Los demonios salvajes*, *Después de las bombas* and *El pueblo y los atentados* express their bitterness over the political situation through carnivalesque elements.

Después de las bombas has none of the ideological ambiguity of *Los compañeros*. It is clearly a revolutionary novel directly related to Asturias's *El Señor Presidente* through its puns, its puppet-like characters, its anticlericalism and anti-imperialism, the presence of Mayan mythology in the twentieth century, and the important role of prostitutes. The novel's indebtedness to *El Señor Presidente*, however, does not negate its originality. Published in 1979 in Mexico City with an edition of only three thousand copies, *Después de las bombas* has not yet received its due recognition as the best representative of the Guatemalan new novel.

While less realistic and less surrealistic than *El Señor Presidente*, *Después de las bombas* has a more dynamic, agile rhythm that is better suited for the atmosphere of a grotesque carnival and a masked ball. The novel is basically structured on the archetypal maturation process of the protagonist, interspersed with an account of the line of counterrevolutionary presidents from Carlos Castillo Armas to Carlos Arana Osorio. The novel's title refers to the 1954 bombing of Guatemala City by the counterrevolutionary forces, when protagonist Máximo Sánchez was still a baby. The political and personal themes represented are fused in the first chapter by the sores and blotches that erupt and explode on the boy's face. The bombing assumes even greater importance when it is juxtaposed with the eruption of Santa María Volcano that destroyed Quezaltenango and the 1917 earthquake that flattened the capital during the dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera.

As a consequence of the counterrevolution, the boy's father, who worked in the Arbenz government, disappears. Máximo misses him, and as in the *Odyssey* and *Pedro Páramo*, the search for his father becomes a key element in his development. After the assassination of Castillo Armas (1957), Máximo goes out on the street alone for the first time—the archetypal crossing of the threshold. He tags along with a gang of boys who bury a dead bird (the symbol of freedom) and then meets his first archetypal wise old man, a garbage-dump scrounger who talks to Máximo of the conquest and the hand-to-hand combat between Pedro de Alvarado and Tecún Umán. Máximo, however, is still too young to understand his country's history.

In the following chapter entitled "Fogata," Máximo passes through another landmark in the archetypal voyage. He should now be in the first grade (1959) but because of another political crisis, all classes are cancelled. Although he has not yet given up his pacifier (the symbol of his prolonged infancy), Máximo observes the soldiers burning a man's books "for being a Communist." The owner of the books seems to be Máximo's second archetypal sage advisor:

"¿Dónde está mi padre? ¿Dónde lo encuentro?"
 "¿Tu padre? ¿Vos tenés padre?"

"¿Buscás a tu padre? ¿Un padre?"

"Sí."

"Buscalo en las cenizas de mis libros."³

President Ydígoras Fuentes is overthrown by a military coup in 1963, at which time Máximo becomes obsessed with soccer, movies, the bar "El Último Adíos," and the breasts of the prototypical liberated American girl Karen, the twist-dancing daughter of the president of the Monsanto Company (who is also the acting U.S. ambassador). Máximo continues to ask his mother about his father, but she tells him nothing. His third and most all-knowing archetypal counselor is the oneiric cyclist Chingolo, an "aprendiz de pensador" (p. 83) who insists on returning to the library several books with blank pages because "su contenido es ilegal" (p. 74). Chingolo takes Máximo to a brothel where Amarena, the daughter of the Union Church minister in Guatemala City, uses all her skill to try to excite Máximo, but in vain. He is not yet ready.

In the next-to-the-last chapter, appropriately entitled "Amanecer," Máximo wakes up sexually after telling Amarena everything that his mother finally told him about the revolutionary events of 1944 and their links to those of 1920 and 1871. Thus Máximo acquires his manhood by identifying with his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather. With his masculinity confirmed, he also feels a surge of creative power. While Amarena writhes in pleasure, Máximo waxes eloquent about his writing plans, which actually constitute a commentary on the novel:

"Encontraré a mi padre a través de las palabras. Crearé al país con mis palabras . . . Lo que quiero hacer es decir todas esas cosas que callan los demás . . . Poder llenar todas esas páginas en blanco que coleccionan polvo en nuestras bibliotecas. . . ."

"Claro, claro. Y con lo chistoso que sos harás reír a los generales."

"Los haré reír. Se reirán y reirán tanto que se les hinchará la panza y explotarán. . . . Exageraré. Mentiré. Chingolo dice que para ser entendido hay que mentir. Es otra manera de penetrar dentro de alguien. Volvete palabra entonces. O hasta soldadito de plomo si querés. Con tal que echés siempre tus pasaditas por mi cama, ya sabés." (Pp. 146–48)

Máximo's archetypal trajectory culminates in the last chapter, entitled "La ensalada de las flamas," when he becomes a full carnivalesque hero. During the funeral ceremony for a CIA agent, Max takes the stage unexpectedly and entertains the audience by reading them the short story entitled "El hombre de la CIA." While the generals, diplomats, and the archbishop become increasingly dismayed over Máximo's descriptions of the mutilated corpses and the CIA agent's lust, the soccer players and prostitutes applaud wildly. In the ensuing pandemonium, Max escapes and hides in the Union Church. He no longer sucks on his pacifier and for the first time in his life, his skin is free of sores. While the police torture Chingolo in jail, Máximo fulfills his promise to visit the shrine of

María Tecún, who had vowed to die rather than surrender to the foreign invader (p. 182). Chingolo may die, but his spiritual son Máximo will carry on his revolutionary mission. He escapes in a carnivalesque musical procession in which all the soccer players and prostitutes wend their way through the streets of Guatemala City from the Union Church to the airport, dancing the twist and singing “La Adelita.” Thus, in *Después de las bombas* as in *Los compañeros*, the departure from the motherland is extremely significant. The great difference is that whereas Flores identifies the political oppression of his country with his own domineering mother, Arturo Arias chooses María Tecún as the positive image of his country. She is implicitly identified with Máximo’s mother, who participated actively in the Revolution of 1944 and who at the opportune moment liberates her son by allowing him to identify with his father.

Although Máximo’s development as an individual constitutes the novel’s principal plot, the work is interlaced with references to counter-revolutionary Guatemalan history that allow the reader to date specifically each one of the seven chapters. In keeping with the carnivalesque tone, the names of the Señores Presidentes are purposely distorted: Carlos Castillo Armas (1954–57) becomes Castillo Cañones; Idygoras (1958–63) is written Idigyoras, which pronounced in English becomes “I dig your ass” (the author studied at Boston University); Peralta Azurdia (1963–66) is transformed into Peralta Absurdo; Carlos Arana Osorio (1970–74) becomes Araña Sobrio; and Kjell Laugerud (1974–78) becomes Shell Genial Longitud. By contrast, the names of the three guerrilla leaders of the 1960s—Luis Turcios, César Montes, and Yon Sosa—are not distorted.

Although the historical figures may be easily identified, the author places greater emphasis on their similarities. Each change of government is accompanied by a crisis with the usual declaration of martial law and the cancellation of classes. Máximo never does attend school. The police and soldiers of each regime beat and torture everyone deemed to be politically suspect, rape women, and toss corpses into the river or the sea. In keeping with Miguel Ángel Asturias’s view of the continued presence of Indian history and culture in contemporary Guatemala, Máximo observes the execution of the losing jockeys in the hippodrome, evoking the execution of the losing ballplayers in Mayan times. After the guerrillas kill the U.S. ambassador,⁴ the seven leaders of the prostitutes’ strike are executed Aztec-style in the national stadium. In the dancing exodus of the last chapter, the name of the musical group “Los Flamas” recalls the dance of Tohil, the Mayan god of fire, who was immortalized in *El Señor Presidente*.

In spite of its undeniable similarities with the Asturias novel, *Después de las bombas*, like *Los compañeros* and *Los demonios salvajes*, is an original literary creation. As the protagonist proclaims, words are the

key to the understanding of the universe: "encontraré el universo y entenderé el eterno presente a través de mis palabras. En mis palabras encontraré, acabaré, me volveré las palabras mismas, seré palabras, palabras, palabras, encarnaré palabras, palabras, palabras" (p. 147). The value of this novel (like the two previously discussed) therefore lies not in the denunciation of los Señores Presidentes, but in the form, in the words used to project that denunciation.

The fourth of the new Guatemalan novels and the most linguistically oriented of all is *El pueblo y los atentados* (1979) by Edwin Cifuentes (b. 1926). The novel is so linguistic that the author's cleverness almost prevents the reader from concentrating on the contents. The clauses and sentences are linked linguistically by one of several means, including the repetition of a word or of one or more syllables, the orthographic transformation of words in order to produce other meanings, or free association. Amazingly, the author maintains this stylistic system throughout the entire novel. The following examples will give some sense of Cifuentes's technique:

"del señor sacerdote, como un cerdote muy cebado y muy católico."⁵

.....

"Ella era, inteligentemente solapada. Sola padecía pero gozaba. Sola se las entendía con solapas y con guerreras y sola solicitaba a las autoridades veinte y tantas cosas" (p. 171).

.....

"La fuerza pública se hizo presente. Presiente que la cosa va en serio. En serie lanza bombas lacrimógenas y de garrote. Ya a daga rota y a la culata entera, vapulea y arresta al vecindario, que se ve sin diarios" (p. 208).

In spite of its originality, *El pueblo y los atentados* undeniably shows the influence of Miguel Ángel Asturias. The following passage is obviously modeled after Cara de Ángel's well-known train ride in *El Señor Presidente*: "y si no tenés suerte te violarán y te tirarán a un barranco junto con el chiquitío y entonces ya no tendré nada a pesar de las razones de los compañeros de lucha por quién vivir. Vivir, vivir, comenzó despacio el tren y luego más ligero, vivir vi-vir, vivir vi-vir, vivir vi-vir, y todavía mas ligero, vivir vivir, vivir vivir, vivir vivir vivir y correr, correr y vivir vivir y correr, corrientes tres cuatro ocho segundo piso ascensor. ascensor las escaleras subite al "último vagón, vagón, vagón, vagón, vago vagabundo sin chance para qué me sirves mundo" (pp. 3-4).

Beyond the linguistic virtuosity of this passage, the train's wheels symbolize the circular nature of the plot and the purposely repetitious style that features words and their derivatives constantly revolving and recurring. A second reading of *El pueblo y los atentados* reveals its thematic significance as a protest against the tyrannical Ubico regime that is both contemporary and timeless. The novelistic tyrant Augusto Aurelio

Ubeda Castañás is easily identifiable as Jorge Ubico y Castañeda. In an example of the novel's carnivalesque tone, the president himself recognizes that Guatemala has not had truly free elections since the independence era, and he therefore authorizes his people to vote as many times as they like "en nombre de sus antepasados que no lo habían podido hacer desde aquellas épocas. Se sacudió y se acudió entonces al árbol genealógico, y lógico, al cementerio para averiguar el número y el nombre de los difuntos" (p. 194). The president is not a lovable tyrant, however. After an explosion causes the dictator to lose a leg due to the neglect of his bodyguards, he orders them all to use wooden legs. Those who arouse his ire for the slightest reason are beaten or thrown into jail. The most unfortunate ones are ordered to be transferred to another jail and in the process are encouraged to escape. When they try, they are shot under "la ley fuga." Attractive young women either accede to the tyrant's demands or suffer the consequences.

The story of the novel's picaresque hero, Coca or Coquita Aguilar, actually starts with then Captain Ubeda Castañás's unrequited love for Coca's mother, María Rosa Candelaria. When she marries Chalo Aguilar, Captain Ubeda pursues the couple relentlessly and succeeds in killing Chalo when the hero Coca is less than a year old. As in *Los compañeros* and *Después de las bombas*, the protagonist grows up without his father. Unlike the other orphans, however, Coquita does not appear to have any oedipal problems. His only goal in life is to avenge his father's death. At the age of five, he kicks Captain Ubeda in the Adam's apple in order to prevent him from raping his mother. She then advises her son to attack Ubeda every time he sees him because otherwise "ese desgraciado te va a matar" (p. 48). At the age of fifteen, Coquita decides to launch an assassination campaign against his mortal enemy. Although his first three attempted *presidencialazos* fail despite their ingenuity, Coquita never gives up. He ultimately enlists in Sam Dinista's guerrilla band and has to content himself with the dictator's being killed by one of his subordinates.

The name "Sam Dinista" indicates the author's intention to extend the antityrannical protest to Nicaragua. The clear allusion to the Sandinistas is reinforced by the presence of Comandante Ciro [sic] and the irresistible puns on Dictator Somoza's nickname Tacho: "Coca Aguilar con todos los del comando salió de allí—admirado de sí mismo y por supuesto del Comandante Ciro—celebrando el triunfo más audaz de los actuales luchadores contra las dictaduras, tachaduras—tacho duras—tachones, tachines, matachines, mata-chinos, tachas, pa'tachas y patachos de la represión, lamentando sólo que no hubiera estado en el palacio que asaltaron el tal de su enemigo mortal, para darle la mortadela" (p. 224). The declaration of the "periodistas valientes" (p. 231) directs the reader's thoughts to the current revolutionary struggle in El

Salvador: "Es la batalla para explicar al mundo que mientras millones no tenemos casa—note que no tenemos—ellas tienen fincas tan grandes como El Salvador" (pp. 231–32).

The anti-Somoza struggle in its anti-imperialist aspect is linked to the concessions granted to the United Fruit Company in Guatemala: "Los hombres engrosaban las filas de Sam Dinista y engrasaban el filo de sus machetes, y la Dinastía—de la tía Dinastasia—parecía haber llegado a su fin: fin de finqueros financieros del norte—nor te presto si nor me das una enorme tajada de tu territorio para que Terry Thory pueda sembrar bananos" (p. 232).

The shooting of "los mejores sindicateros" (p. 13) and the enumeration of the missing persons seem to refer more to the present than to Ubico's period: "varios periodistas, uno que otro poeta, cinco conocidos 'golpistas'—todos militares pero no estadistas—, ciento veinticuatro estudiantes, trecientos empleados públicos, quinientos cincuenta y seis obreros y mil campesinos, asesinados y hacinados en zanjas que formaban un laberinto de horror" (pp. 178–79).

In keeping with a Guatemalan tradition that goes back to *El Señor Presidente* (1946), bars and brothels play as important a role in *El pueblo y los atentados* as they did in *Los compañeros* and *Después de las bombas*. Cifuentes's novel exposes the complicity between the owner of the "BAR La Eternidad" and the police chiefs, appropriately named Don Efra Barrotes and Don Barras, who receive "una nueva tajada con cada nueva autorización" (p. 183). As in *Después de las bombas*, the prostitutes perform heroically. They take to the street with large banners to protest against the town despots and two of them are killed by the police. All the thematic and stylistic similarities among the four new Guatemalan novels are particularly noteworthy when one considers the age differences among the authors: Cifuentes was born in 1926, Flores in 1937, Morales in 1947, and Arias in 1950. The explanation can be traced to several factors: the traditional fondness for punning and linguistic experimentation among many Guatemalan novelists since Irisarri and Milla, the major influence of *El Señor Presidente*, and the prevalence of despotism in Guatemala from 1954 to the present.

In the past five years, four older writers who belong stylistically to an earlier period have also published novels condemning the despotic regimes of Ubico and his post-1954 successors. These works are *La semilla del fuego* (1976) by Miguel Ángel Vázquez (b. 1922); *Eran las doce . . . y de noche* (1976) by Argentina Díaz Lozano (b. 1909), a Honduran who has lived in Guatemala for many years; *¡Violencia!* (1978) by Carlos Cojulún Bedoya (b. 1914); and *Los estafados* (1981) by Pruden Castellanos (b. 1929), a Spaniard who has lived in Guatemala since 1950.

La semilla del fuego, like *El pueblo y los atentados*, is based on the

Ubico dictatorship, but it does not attempt to relate the regime to the present nor is its structure or style experimental. Written between 1947 and 1967, *La semilla del fuego* is a national novel⁶ in the *criollista*, social-protest tradition of Carlos Wyld Ospina's *La gringa* (1935), Flavio Herrera's *La tempestad* (1935), and Mario Monteforte Toledo's *Entre la piedra y la cruz* (1948). In some aspects, *La semilla del fuego* also reveals the direct influence of *El Señor Presidente* (1946) by Vázquez's namesake Miguel Ángel Asturias, who wrote a prologue for the novel. Artistically, the work suffers from the subordination of both plot and character development to the creation of the national mural that deals with geographic, racial, and social aspects of Guatemala. The novel is divided into three parts entitled "La ciudad," "El campo," and "La selva," which are given specific place names. The action of the first part unfolds in Guatemala City, mainly in the poor neighborhood near the railroad station. The second part, "El campo," is divided among four distant rural areas: a tropical plantation in Santa Lucía Escuintla on the Pacific coastal plain; a village in the high mountains of San Marcos Province near the Mexican border; the little town of Concepción, Chiquimula, near the eastern border with Honduras; and the United Fruit Company plantation in Bananera, near the Atlantic port of Puerto Barrios. The third part, "La selva," refers to the *chicle* region of Petén and also includes stories of minor characters who come from the province of Quiché and the town of Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlán.

In the racial panorama, the Indians of San Marcos and Quiché have their lands confiscated and are forced to carry "boletos de vialidad" showing that they have contributed their uncompensated monthly days of work repairing the nation's roads. When the 121 Indian peasants of San Marcos request the distribution of the uncultivated municipal lands, the local mayor has them all thrown in jail and killed. The Quiché Indians, after being driven off their lands with the complicity of the local priest, flee to the Petén jungle, where they found their own small settlement. One of the main *chicle* workers is black, while the company manager named Mr. Outlaw (the name seems to have been inspired by Mr. Danger in *Doña Bárbara*) is an American.

The racial differences, however, are far less significant than the social ones. At the top of the pyramid sits the Señor Presidente, who, like his literary model, rarely intervenes personally in the novel. His presence is strongly felt, however, through his war minister, his lesbian friend, the military governors of each province, the government lawyers, and the large plantation owners. The protagonist of the novel is an army lieutenant who refuses to collaborate with the ruthless *finqueros* and political leaders. He escapes to Mexico, where he works in a factory for three years and becomes enthusiastic about the revolutionary reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas. Other pursued enemies of the Ubico regime include a

general involved in an unsuccessful plot, a lawyer who helped the latter escape, a university student, a teacher, and the peasants in general. As in the previously discussed novels, the prostitutes are presented positively, although they do not perform any heroic deeds.

Historically, the novel covers the last ten years of the Ubico regime, starting around 1934 and ending with the Revolution of 1944, symbolized in the motto that is echoed in the title: "Estamos sembrando la semilla de un fuego que ya nadie será capaz de extinguir."⁷ The Ubico regime is characterized by its violation of human rights, its arbitrarily cruel political leaders, the awful conditions in the jails, the racist exploitation of the Indians, and the concessions to American companies that collaborate with the government in squelching all signs of protest among the workers. Although the protagonist dies in the last chapter, the novel ends on an optimistic note with the excitement of the 20 October 1944 revolution against Ubico's military successor, General Ponce.

This melodramatic ending, along with other similar scenes, reduces the artistic value of the novel. For example, the mayor responsible for the massacre of the Indians gets drunk, falls down in the cemetery, and breaks his neck on the edge of one of his victims' tombstones. The characters generally tend to be Manichean, although their sentiments are expressed convincingly in a realistic manner. The style is straightforward and unpretentious, with only occasional melodramatic slips: "La ciudad estaba tranquila. Siempre estaba tranquila. Había una sombra siniestra que le prestaba esa tranquilidad. Era la policía nacional" (p. 95). Another flaw is the excessively obvious similarity between some episodes that take place in Guatemala City and those of *El Señor Presidente*, and between near-namesake Clemencio Dorado and his fellow chicle workers wandering lost in the Petén jungle and Clemente Silva's wandering in the Colombian jungle of *La vorágine*. Despite this relative lack of originality and other defects, *La semilla del fuego* nevertheless maintains the reader's interest throughout its 355 pages and succeeds in creating an impressive muralistic vision of the Ubico dictatorship.

Eran las doce . . . y de noche (1976) by Argentina Díaz Lozano and *¡Violencia!* (1979) by Carlos Cojulún Bedoya are even more artistically anachronistic than *La semilla del fuego*, although the events and situations presented are more recent. *Eran las doce . . . y de noche* intertwines a historically based political plot with a nineteenth-century Romantic love story, which is reflected in the title of the novel. Although the action takes place in the 1960s, the situation is not very different from that of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The emphasis is on the extreme cruelty with which a right-wing paramilitary group pursues guerrillas, students, and labor leaders. The head of the paramilitary group, Ricardo Mansabrán, is also the head of the Partido Reconstrucción Nacional and apparently was modeled on Mario Sandoval, longtime head of the Partido de Liberación

Nacional, the Castillo Armas party. The president in the novel could be a combination of Castillo Armas and Julio César Méndez Montenegro. He is an honest, well intentioned military officer who disapproves of Mansabrán's methods but cannot control the tyrant until, encouraged by his wife, Silvia, he asserts himself. He deports Mansabrán and fires the latter's cohort, the Minister of Defense. Before boarding the plane for Mexico, however, Mansabrán manages to order the assassination of the president. Actually, Mansabrán's main antagonist is not the president, but the president's wife, Silvia, the real heroic figure in the novel. The author's apparent mouthpiece, Silvia not only sympathizes with the guerrillas but does everything possible to help them, especially Alejandro Madrid and his girlfriend Maruja, the former law-school beauty queen. The pair belong to the same socialist cell and share "la misma fe socialista."⁸ Their goal is "la derrota de este gobierno corrompido de feroz derecha, apoyado por las bayonetas militares, que sigue haciendo más ricos a los capitalistas mientras nuestros campesinos, nuestros indígenas, siguen viviendo en covachas como para cerdos; ignorantes, enfermos, malnutridos, abandonados a la más vergonzosa miseria" (p. 45).

Because the army is "en abierta colaboración con los intereses políticos y militares de USA, para mantener a estos pueblos a su merced" (pp. 45–46), the opposition's only recourse is guerrilla warfare. Maruja is captured by Mansabrán's henchmen, who strip her and torture her. Before they can rape her, however, she swallows a lethal pill. In retaliation, Alejandro and his companions kill two American military attachés.⁹ Thanks to Silvia, Alejandro is able to flee the country before Mansabrán's men can catch up with him.

After the assassination of the president, the guerrillas suspend operations, waiting for the new president to carry out the plans announced by his spokesman: "—Yo creo sinceramente que debemos instaurar un socialismo nacionalista" (p. 167). The happy ending of the political conflict, which is obviously not a true reflection of reality, reveals the work's Romantic naiveté. The author even resorts to a Romantic style in describing the guerrillas' camp: "Eran las once de la mañana, el sol brillaba en un cielo limpio, azulado, y la brisa de la arboleda suavizaba el calor" (pp. 113–14).

Carlos Cojulún Bedoya's *¡Violencia!* (1979), despite its soap-opera ingredients, reflects more recent Guatemalan history and also provides a broader social vision because the protagonist is not the president's wife, but a poor girl who lives with her family in a shack in el Gallito, one of the worst slums of Guatemala City. Although she grows up in a depressingly sordid environment, Floridalma (as her name might predict) maintains her goodness and innocence against all odds. Her father is an alcoholic and two of her brothers are petty thieves who become urban

guerrillas and are killed in a shoot-out with the police. In the meantime, Floridalma makes excellent grades in school and studies to be a teacher while resisting such temptations offered by her more modern classmates as pornographic movies, discotheques, and sexual adventures. Because she refuses to submit to "El Sanguinario," the head of a paramilitary group, Floridalma is relentlessly pursued. Her boyfriend, who is also morally pure, is brutally killed by "El Sanguinario," who then succeeds in raping Floridalma after anesthetizing her. She is rescued by Captain Braulio, who had formed his own vigilante group in opposition to "El Sanguinario." Floridalma then begins her teaching career in a small town near Totonicapán. Upon hearing the news of the terrible earthquake of February 1976, she rushes back to the capital to find that her parents and little sister were killed when their shack collapsed and that two other brothers have disappeared. Despite all, the novel ends happily when Floridalma marries the now wealthy Captain Braulio, who takes her with him to live in the United States.

In spite of its Manichean characters and romantically idealized protagonist, *¡Violencia!* portrays a relatively realistic vision of the extreme violence that has been rampant in Guatemala City in recent years. The paramilitary groups steal cars, kidnap or kill their political and personal enemies, and dump the corpses in the ravines or in the rivers, as in *Después de las bombas*. The "culture of poverty" described by Oscar Lewis prevails among the large majority of the one-and-one-half million inhabitants of Guatemala City. The owner of the land and shack where Floridalma's family lives charges excessive rent and provides no services. The sons work as shoeshine boys and become thieves upon reaching adolescence because there is simply no other way to survive. Some of them join clandestine guerrilla cells, organized and oriented by communists, groups that are not at all idealized as they are in the Díaz Lozano novel. At the same time, the lower middle-class teenagers sport their tight-fitting blue jeans along la Sexta Avenida and adopt the modern life style reflected in movies, roller-skating rinks, and electronic games hangouts. *¡Violencia!* is unlikely to become a literary classic, but its view of the rapid transformation of Guatemala City with its different levels of violence is remarkably authentic.

Los estafados by Pruden Castellanos is the most realistic and specifically historical of these four "old" novels, but is equally undistinguished in literary terms. A plot-oriented work, *Los estafados* recounts the most important historical events in Guatemala from the fall of Arbenz in 1954 to the election of Arana Osorio in 1970. The title refers to the thousands of Guatemalans killed during this period who have been equally victimized by the meddling of the United States and the Soviet Union. Unlike some other Guatemalan and Latin American novelists, Castellanos tries to portray objectively his three main characters: a CIA agent, a Mexican

Communist, and a young military officer turned guerrilla leader. Each one is a human being with personal conflicts who performs his historical role. Henry Villarreal, the CIA agent, was born in Puerto Rico and can understand the Guatemalans' problems and sympathize with them. Because he is mistreated by his callous Anglo wife, Henry assumes a positive image that is strengthened when he subsequently falls in love with and marries a young Guatemalan widow. The Mexican Communist Arturo Chávez, who travels to Moscow and Havana, also acquires an increasingly positive image when he gives up his wealthy, flirtatious Mexican girlfriend in order to become an advisor to the Guatemalan guerrillas, suffers over the death of his father, and has an attack of ulcers. The young officer Nucios decides to join the guerrillas when his politicized girlfriend is killed after being raped and mutilated. Like the other two protagonists, Nucios becomes a more positive human being in the eyes of the reader through his suffering.

Los estafados, like the other three "old" novels *La semilla del fuego*, *Eran las doce . . . y de noche*, and *¡Violencia!*, is devoid of any linguistic creativity. It also suffers from discontinuity caused by the three plot threads being alternated every four pages. *Los estafados* and the other three novels of this group nonetheless bear witness to the overriding obsession with the political theme in the Guatemalan novel during the years 1976–81.

Conclusion

The emergence of the four "new" Guatemalan novels from 1976 on as well as the publication of the four "old" novels dealing with the same themes cannot be attributed to any specific cause. The eight writers discussed do not constitute a group by any stretch of the imagination. For the most part, they do not even know each other. Nor does the year 1976 mark a change in the Guatemalan government's attitude toward the arts or signal a change in the status of Guatemalans living abroad. The fact that two of the four new novels were published in Guatemala by authors living in Guatemala at the time rules out the theory that the exiled writers have had greater contact with the new Latin American novel. Furthermore, the works of the boom novelists including Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, and others have never been banned in Guatemala.

One can only conjecture that the increase in the quality and quantity of novels published by Guatemalans since 1976 may be due to a heightened political awareness caused on the domestic front by the dramatic increase in political violence and a deterioration in the living conditions of the poor in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake, and on the international front by an intensification of the revolutionary guerrilla

movements leading to the July 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the escalation of the war in El Salvador. The organization in 1983 of the first Premio Guatemalteco de Novela, sponsored by the Dirección General de Bellas Artes, the Alianza Francesa, the Tabacalera Nacional, the literary group Rin 78, and the publisher Artemis-Edinter, suggests that the political climate in Guatemala may be changing. It remains to be seen to what extent this *concurso* will encourage a series of new novels on new themes and whether the writers will feel sufficiently secure to present critical views of political and social conditions in their homeland.

NOTES

1. According to Juan José Arrom's *Esquema generacional de las letras hispanoamericanas* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1963), the generation of 1954 includes those authors born after 1924 whose first works were published around 1954.
2. Marco Antonio Flores, *Los compañeros* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1976), pp. 199–200. All quotes are taken from this edition.
3. Arturo Arias, *Después de las bombas* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1979), p. 65.
4. U.S. Ambassador Mein was killed by the guerrillas in September 1968.
5. Edwin Cifuentes, *El pueblo y los atentados* (Guatemala City: Serviprensa Centroamericana, 1979), p. 14.
6. See my articles: "In Search of a Nation: The Twentieth-Century Spanish American Novel," *Hispania* 38, no. 4 (1955): 432–42; and "La novela experimental y la república comprensiva de Hispanoamérica: estudio analítico y comparativo de *Nostramo*, *Le dictateur*, *Tirano Banderas*, y *El Señor Presidente*," *Humanitas* (Universidad de Nuevo León) 1, no. 1 (1960): 406–64.
7. Miguel Ángel Vázquez, *La semilla del fuego* (Guatemala City: Ediciones Técnicas y Culturales, 1976), p. 355.
8. Argentina Díaz Lozano, *Eran las doce . . . y de noche* (Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 1976), p. 44.
9. In January 1968, the mutilated body of former beauty queen Rogelia Cruz Martínez was discovered. She had been tortured and killed by a right-wing group. In retaliation, the guerrillas killed Colonel John D. Webber, Jr., head of the U.S. military mission, and Lieutenant Commander Ernest A. Munro of the naval section.

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The following critical bibliography of Guatemalan novels published between 1955 and 1982 includes a few titles of works that I have been unable to locate and read.

1955

Herrera, Marta Josefina. *Espada de remordimiento*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar.

1956

Álvarez, Carlos E. *Amor ciego*. Guatemala City: Tipografía América. Sentimental love story involving a man blinded in an accident and a nurse with a throat tumor. Both are cured by operations, marry, and live happily ever after.

Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *49 días en la vida de una mujer: novela histórica*. The fall of the Arbenz government in May and June of 1954 is presented through the observations of a woman deeply in love.

- Gálvez Estrada, Héctor. *Redención*. Guatemala City: Centro Editorial, 257 pp. Justification of the Castillo Armas regime.
- Hurtado Espinosa, Alfonso. *De la cumbre al valle*. Guatemala City: Imprenta Hispania, 188 pp.
- Rodríguez Macal, Virgilio. *Jinayá*. Guatemala City: Centro Editorial. Defense of a German coffee-plantation owner in Alta Verapaz, with criticism of the Arévalo-Arbenz governments and an exaggeratedly heroic protagonist. The idyllic description of the plantation and the hunt scenes are reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Colombian novel *María*.

1957

- Aguirre, Lily. *Estigma*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 158 pp.
- Valenti, Walda. *Azul y roca*. Mexico City: Imprenta Arana Hermanos. Love story of a young doctor accompanied by criticism of wealthy women. A tourist's view of Lake Atitlán.

1958

- Wyld Ospina, Carlos. *Los lares apagados*. Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 273 pp. This posthumous volume contains the short novel of the title (72 pp.) and six short stories. A skeletal form of the subgenre that portrays the indigenista as marginal man, as exemplified by Monteforte Toledo's *Entre la piedra y la cruz* (1948). The hero is a K'ekchi' Indian who abandons his father's land to work on a coffee plantation owned by Germans. Too many events crowded into seventy pages.

1959

- Barret, Margarita de. *El cabello rojo*. Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 319 pp.
- Coronado Aguilar, Manuel. *El año 2001*. Quezaltenango: Editorial El Tiempo, 344 pp.
- Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *Il faut vivre*. French edition, Brussels, Belgium: Editorial Messaco. Second edition, . . . *y tenemos que vivir*. Mexico City: Editorial Latinoamericana, 1961. Third edition, Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 1963. Fourth edition, Guatemala City: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública "José de Pineda Ibarra," 1978. The narrator recalls his childhood and adolescence in a small town near Antigua during the Ubico dictatorship, when he overcame poverty through study and hard work. Expresses compassion for the Indians and protest against government abuses. Moving story simply told, but it excessively idealizes some characters. The novel ends with the optimism generated by the 1944 Revolution.
- Rodríguez Macal, Virgilio. *Negrura*. Madrid: Editorial Colenda, 361 pp. A poor attempt to capture the thoughts and feelings of a German veteran of World War II in what is probably the city of Hamburg. The title refers to the hopeless gloom enshrouding a world that can be saved only by faith.
- Zea Ruano, Rafael. *Nor Julián*. Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 130 pp. A psychological study of a Guatemalan *brujo* who succeeds in liberating his soul from his body.

1960

- Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *Los ojos de los enterrados*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 482 pp. The third volume of the banana trilogy. Preparations for a strike at Bananera and Tiquisate are coordinated with the movement to overthrow Ubico. Over-

emphasis on ugly, pornographic scenes with drunken U.S. soldiers. The puns are not as clever as those in the author's previous works.

Zea Ruano, Rafael. *Las barbas de don Rafay*. Guatemala City: Ministerio de Educación Pública. A poor old farmer suffers because nobody, not even his own family, respects him or believes the tales of his heroics in the wars of President Rafael Carrera.

1961

Arévalo, Teresa. *Emilia*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 142 pp. Matrimonial difficulties caused by the wife's tuberculosis. The two protagonists are well depicted, but an excess of unimportant incidents weakens the plot. Written in 1955.

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *El Ahajadito*. Buenos Aires: Goyanarte, 141 pp. Poetic, surrealist short novel about a sensitive illegitimate boy in search of his identity. Divided into three semi-independent parts. Almost total absence of typically Guatemalan elements, including speech.

Barrientos, Alfonso Enrique. *El desertor*. Guatemala City: Ediciones del Círculo Literario de Guatemala, 358 pp. Portrays the unsavory role of the military in Latin America. Narrated by the hero of the title, who leads a band of revolutionaries that is finally destroyed. Simple style is marred by immature attempts at experimentation.

McDonald, Sonia Rincón de. *El destino sonrío*. Guatemala City: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública "José de Pineda Ibarra," 173 pp. Modeled on Castillo Armas's wife. Journalistic style with Romantic elements.

Rodríguez, Blanca Luz Molina de. *Sabor a justicia*. Quezaltenango: Unión Tipográfica. Tragic life of a woman who kills her unfaithful husband, then commits suicide following another disillusioning love. Set in France and not at all related to Guatemala.

1962

Ferguson, Gloria. *La herencia del abuelo*. Guatemala City: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública "José de Pineda Ibarra," 139 pp.

García Granados, Jorge. *El deán turbulento*. Guatemala City: Universidad de San Carlos. Historical novel situated in early seventeenth-century Antigua depicting conflict between the haughty Inquisition official and the humble, humanitarian bishop. Too much historical detail.

Rodríguez Macal, Virgilio. *Guayacán*. Guatemala City: Ministerio de Educación Pública, 560 pp. Written in 1953, but not published until 1962. The author's criticism of the Arbenz government and his favorable attitude towards Yankee imperialism is indeed rare in Central American prose fiction. Set in the Petén jungle, the novel's similarity to Gallegos's *Canaima* and Rivera's *La vorágine* weakens its impact.

Zea Ruano, Rafael. *Donde la niña Hermilia*. Guatemala City: Ministerio de Educación Pública. A much-loved, honorable woman who owns a coffee plantation cannot cope with a series of tragedies (sickness, storm, earthquake, economic problems) and ultimately dies.

1963

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *Mulata de tal*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 280 pp. What starts out as a Guatemalan version of the Faust legend becomes a struggle between Catholic and Quiché demons. Magical elements predominate over reality. Characters are transformed into dwarfs and giants. The usual

Asturian obsession with sex and wordplay, but no plot line and little social concern.

Zea Ruano, Rafael. *Luto*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 122 pp. An old man recalls his childhood and laments the disappearance of three former friends. Reflections on the tragedy of life.

1964

Montezuma Hurtado, Alberto. *Piedras preciosas*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 277 pp. Two short novels set in Colombia. *Piedras preciosas* portrays a bureaucrat's personal integrity during the corrupt reign of Dictator Rojas Pinilla. *La luz humana* presents the conflict between young love and old political rivalries. Both novellas contain some descriptive passages reminiscent of modernism, but realistic dialogue predominates. Both end happily.

Pérez Maldonado, Raúl. *La sangre no es azul*. Chichicastenango, 277 pp. Poorly written social protest aimed at the dictatorial, graft-ridden government and reactionary landowners. Too much moralizing and sentimentality.

1965

Arévalo, J. Gregorio. *Huracán en las almas*. Guatemala City: Editorial de Autores Nacionales, 238 pp. Romantic melodrama with trite dialogue and an anachronistic theme.

Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *Mansión en la bruma*. Guatemala City: Editorial de Autores Nacionales, 124 pp. An embittered spinster who owns a coffee plantation reluctantly accepts her widowed young sister-in-law and child. Beautiful descriptions of nature border on the trite. Melodramatic situations, soap-opera dialogues, and an inconsequential call for a radical revolution.

Hernández Cobos, José Humberto. *Las casas sin paredes*. Guatemala City: Secretaría de Información del Gobierno, 252 pp.

Quintana Rodas, Epaminondas. *El agro ubérrimo, pasional y trágico*. Barcelona.

Radford, Luis Neftalí. *Las castas de la Meches*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio.

———. *Rancho de Manaco*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 241 pp. Too many characters and events are crowded into this portrayal of a rural environment during the years of the agrarian reform. Includes unleashed passions, mistaken identities, murders, superstition, and the appearance of a ghost.

Rodríguez Chávez, Elisa. *Oro de cobre*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 210 pp. An excessively idealized professor of medicine reveals the conflicts within the Universidad de San Carlos. Phrases like "sentimientos sublimes" and "almas rectísimas" indicate the artistic level.

1966

Contreras Vélez, Álvaro. *¡A la orden de usted, General Otte!* Guatemala City: Editorial Prensa Libre, 247 pp. A delightful farce on the rise and fall of a typical Latin American dictator. Military coups, U.S. intervention, student demonstrations, and terroristic bombings are all treated humorously. Typical Guatemalan fondness for puns.

———. *El blanco que tenía el asma negra*. Guatemala City: Editorial Prensa Libre, 232 pp. This novel is a humorous treatment of an asthmatic journalist's travels to the U.S. and Japan in search of a cure. Satirical comments on American racial discrimination, foreign aid, tourism, and the CIA; Guatemalan terrorism and government tyranny; and Latin American democracy. Tone similar to José Milla's *artículos de costumbres*, with witty use of language.

- D'Echevers, Malín. *Metal noble*. Guatemala City: Ministerio de Educación Pública. Soap-opera kind of love story.
- Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *Fuego en la ciudad*. Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 201 pp. Historical novel about American *filibustero* William Walker.
- Estrada, Hugo. *Veneno tropical*.
- López Valdizón, José María. *La sangre del maíz*. Guatemala City: Ediciones Nuevo Día, 197 pp. A loosely structured interpretation of life in a Guatemalan village in the vein of Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Hombres de maíz*. Costumbrista sketches of the Indian and *ladino* inhabitants, defense of the educational and agrarian reforms undertaken during the Arévalo and Arbenz regimes, Mayan folklore, and the ever-present Guatemalan flair for linguistic games.
- Monteforte Toledo, Mario. *Llegaron del mar*. México City: Joaquín Mortiz, 234 pp. A poetic and anthropological recreation of Mayan life in Yucatán on the eve of the Spanish Conquest. Describes relations between the Mayans and their Aztec lords. Individual *cuadros* with little, if any, plot structure.
- Pellecer, Carlos Manuel. *Útiles después de muertos*. Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 399 pp. A "nonfiction" interpretation of events in Cuba from 1952 to 1964 by Guatemalan ex-Communist Pellecer. The trial of Marcos Rodríguez is the vehicle through which the author denounces the machinations of the Communists and Fidel Castro's egocentric personality. A Cuban version of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.
- Solórzano, Carlos. *Los falsos demonios*. Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 217 pp. A psychological study of the timid and sensitive narrator who is dominated by women; he is reminiscent of the protagonists of Rafael Arévalo Martínez. The narrator's fears stemming from personal insecurity are related to the nation's fears engendered by dictators Estrada Cabrera and Ubico. The narrator tells his story from a hospital bed, as though trying to justify his life to his estranged son.

1967

- Arévalo, J. Gregorio. *Cien y una noches en mi tierra de marfil*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 207 pp.
- Bernhard, Carlos A. *El indio zarco*. Guatemala City: Imprenta Hispania, 100 pp.
- Paz y Paz G., Leonor. *La mujer de pelo largo*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 202 pp. Protest against a hypocritical priest and the living conditions of the rural and urban poor, which are melodramatically contrasted with the wealth and immorality of the rich. The novel contains too much moralizing, and its different elements are not well integrated.

1968

- Cifuentes, Edwin. *Carnaval de sangre en mi ciudad*. Guatemala City: Editorial Contemporánea, 60 pp. A cruel vision of Guatemala City bloodied by both right-wing official government terrorism and left-wing revolutionary terrorism. Each side tries to outdo the other in cruelty. Long paragraphs with little or no punctuation and frequently shifting points of view help create the nightmarish vision.
- Montenegro, Juan de Dios. *La máscara*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 112 pp. A psychology teacher narrates the envious rivalry between his small-town and big-city students. The leader of one group is expelled for homosexual activities while the other leader commits suicide.
- Pater, Julius. *La gaveta del abuelo*. Guatemala City: Talleres Gráficos Díaz-Paiz, 684 pp. Includes the novel that won the 1959 Quezaltenango prize, *La maraña*,

several short stories, poems, aphorisms, and a dictionary of religious concepts. *La maraña* (171 pp.) consists of a priest's interpretation of life in a small Indian village. He views the world in terms of the struggle between good and evil, Jesus and Satan.

Valiente Rodríguez, Oscar. *La historia de un lustrador*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 150 pp.

Vargas, Edgardo León. *La maestra de mi pueblo*. Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio.

1969

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *Maladrón*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 217 pp. A historical novel about the ill-fated attempt in the mid-sixteenth century of four Spanish deserters to find the meeting place of the two oceans and to foment the cult of the Bad Thief, whom they consider the true martyr instead of Jesus. The first quarter of the novel artfully describes the defeat of the Mam Indians in the Green Andes of Huehuetenango at the hands of the Spanish conquistadores, but the main part of the novel is disappointing. Less linguistic experimentation and less humor than in Asturias's previous novels.

Guerrero, Ulises. *Los otros*.

Rodríguez, Blanca Luz Molina de. *Azul cuarenta*. Story of a black child.

_____. *Los brutos*. Guatemala: Unión Tipográfica, 314 pp. Describes an international narcotics ring with an outpost on a small island off the northern coast of Honduras. The exasperating tranquility of the tropical scene alternates with case studies of the individual criminals: an unemployed radical teacher, an alcoholic wealthy landowner, a Corsican gigolo, an ambitious daughter of poor Italian immigrants, as well as the homosexual son of a Guatemalan ranchowner, and his aristocratic French wife. Little suspense for what is basically an adventure novel.

1970

Paniagua Santizo, Benjamín. *Luces, bruma y amor: novela en el camino*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 128 pp. Sickeningly sweet narrative.

1971

Pérez Paniagua, Roberto. *Los trece cielos*. Guatemala City: Editorial Cultural Centroamericana. Costumbrista portrayal of Mayan life in Chichén-Itzá before the arrival of the Spaniards. Love and war predominate.

Solórzano, Carlos. *Las celdas*. Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 218 pp. Set in the Benedictine monastery of Gregorio Lemercier in Cuernavaca with its controversy over psychoanalysis. The Guatemalan protagonist anxiously searches for and ultimately finds his masculinity. His neurotic state is explained through brief, but revealing, recollections of his early relations with his virile, donjuanesque father and his self-pitying mother.

1972

Ardón Fernández, José Enrique. *Monseñor y Josefina*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional. Historical novel set in the 1820s. The possible love affairs of the archbishop.

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *Viernes de Dolores*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 314 pp. A somewhat nostalgic recreation of life in Guatemala City during the Estrada Cabrera dictatorship, based on the traditional pre-Holy Week parade by university students in which the pillars of society are mercilessly lampooned. The

theme of treachery and the social protest are subordinated to typical Guatemalan puns and several grotesquely humorous scenes of sex and drunkenness. Barrientos, Alfonso Enrique. *Ancora en la arena*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional. Stream-of-consciousness narration centered at a fictitious beach resort. Cifuentes, Edwin. *Jesús Corleto*. San José, Costa Rica. Diez de Arriola, Luis. *Un Quijote de la era atómica o ¿Gobierno mundial para el año 2000?* Guatemala City: Imprenta Gutenberg, 383 pp. Mansilla, Pepe. *Cita a medianoche*. Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 215 pp. Detective story.

1973

Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *Aquel año rojo*. Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 166 pp. In a rural environment near San Pedro Sula, Honduras, several love conflicts are interwoven with social protest against the U.S. banana company.

1974

Carrillo Meza, Raúl. *Lo que no tiene nombre*. Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria. Criollista novel. Juárez Muñoz, J. Fernando. *Su señoría*. Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional. Romantic historical novel. Mansilla, Pepe. *Último gol*. Guatemala City: Imprenta Eros, 156 pp. Basketball story.

1975

Córdova, Samara de. *La nuez vacía*. Mexico City: Federación Editorial Mexicana. The flight of Latin Americans to New York.

1976

Díaz Lozano, Argentina. *Eran las doce . . . y de noche*. Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 181 pp. The president's wife helps the guerrillas escape and defeats the leader of the right-wing paramilitary group, but not before he orders the president assassinated. Closely based on political events from 1955 through the late 1960s with a love story added. Flores, Marco Antonio. *Los compañeros*. Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 238 pp. A negative view of the guerrilla movement of the 1960s as well as a bitter denunciation of government violence, which is equated with the archetypal Terrible Mother. Interior monologue and free association, colloquial language and wordplay. Monteforte Toledo, Mario. *Los desencontrados*. Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 191 pp. The matrimonial difficulties of a young Mexican engineer and his American wife in Mexico City give way to the exploration of many other social and personal conflicts among the members of his family. Interesting, but weak in structural coherence. The omniscient narrator prevents the characters from becoming more lifelike. Vázquez, Miguel Ángel. *La semilla del fuego*. Guatemala City: Ediciones Técnicas y Culturales, 355 pp. Criollista, national, social-protest novel typical of the 1930s and 1940s. Panoramic denunciation of the Ubico regime with a variety of geographical regions and social sectors.

1977

Cifuentes, Edwin. *Libres por el tema*. Published in installments in *El Imparcial*

(Guatemala City) between 22 January and 8 October. Formation of a utopia occasions political concern in an imaginary setting.

1978

Morales, Mario Roberto. *Los demonios salvajes*. Guatemala City: Dirección General de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 134 pp. Teenage frivolity in school and on wheels is contrasted with the self-sacrificing revolutionary guerrillas. Fragmented structure. Reminiscent of the Mexican *onda* writers, but displays greater political commitment.

1979

Arias, Arturo. *Después de las bombas*. Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 195 pp. The carnivalesque denunciation of the Guatemalan counterrevolution from 1954 through the 1970s parallels the protagonist's growth from infancy to manhood during the archetypal search for his father. Effective wordplay.

Cifuentes, Edwin. *El pueblo y los atentados*. Guatemala City: Serviprensa Centroamericana, 253 pp. Carnivalesque denunciation of the Ubico dictatorship. The picaresque hero somehow joins forces anachronistically with the Sandinistas. Sentences and phrases are cleverly linked by words of the same or similar roots, spelling, or sounds.

Cojulún Bedoya, Carlos. *¡Violencia!* Guatemala City: Editorial Landívar, 207 pp. A romantic rags-to-riches story of the pure Floridaalma who emerges from the city slums to become a teacher. She marries the wealthy captain Braulio, head of a vigilante anti-right-wing terrorist group. Realistic portrayal of urban violence and the social effects of modernization in the late 1970s.

1981

Arias, Arturo. *Itzam Na*. Havana: Casa de las Américas, 297 pp. Endless wandering of a group of wealthy Guatemalan hippies. Drugs, sex, and rock music. "Mod" language and experimental orthography.

Castellanos, Pruden. *Los estafados*. Guatemala City: Editorial "Apolo," 214 pp. Fast-moving account of the 1954–70 period, with three alternating plot lines starring a Puerto Rican CIA agent, a Mexican Communist, and a young military officer who becomes a guerrilla leader. All three are presented objectively. The title refers to the dead Guatemalans who fell victims to American and Soviet policies.

1982

Albizúrez Palma, Francisco. *Casa de curas y otras locuras*. Guatemala City: Editorial Rin, 177 pp. *Casa de curas* is a short novel (110 pp.) consisting of a series of vignettes narrated by a former priest. Encounters with a variety of priests and other former priests as well as recollections of seminary life. Criticizes the Church hierarchy and praises the self-sacrificing priests who work among the poor. Nostalgia for the tranquil Guatemala City of the 1930s and 1940s. Effective, unadorned, "nonliterary" style.

Carrera, Mario Alberto. *Hogar dulce hogar*. Guatemala City: Maxi-Impresos, 236 pp. The title is ironic. The narrator paints a totally negative picture of his parents and other relatives, particularly his father, a drunken military officer who sides with Arana in his ill-fated struggle against Arbenz. Heavy emphasis on personal problems.