

Introduction

Dominant Poses, Iconoclastic Gestures

In August of 1994, the reproduction and dissemination of a single work of art plunged Chile into a cultural crisis in which issues of freedom of speech, foreign diplomacy, and sexual freedom became entangled. The catalyst of the controversy was the reproduction of Juan Dávila's painting *The Liberator Simón Bolívar* (1994), then on display at London's Hayward Gallery, on a widely distributed postcard funded by the cultural arm of the Ministry of Education, FONDART. Dávila's postcard belonged to a collaboration called La Escuela de Santiago, which was comprised of the artists Gonzalo Díaz, Eugenio Dittborn, and Arturo Duclos, whose work was also staged in the postcard format. Dávila's image portrays the equestrian Bolívar with a woman's body and a masculine face covered with makeup. Bolívar wears a sumptuously lined military coat spread open to reveal breasts, black stockings, and feminine boots. The wide hips are bare but the saddle obstructs the hero's sex. Bolívar's horse is transected in two, with one half as an abstracted grid and the other depicted mimetically. Bolívar's left arm is lowered and bent, holding in its crook a colorful floral wreath, while his hand forms a fist with a vigorous finger extended in an obscene gesture. When we turn the postcard over, we see that Dávila has signed his name as "Juana Dávila."

The image exploded onto the front pages of newspapers and into television newscasts as national and international political figures attacked the desecration of the continental hero. "Never before in the history of Chile," declared one commentator, "had a work of art or a cultural theme activated to this extent those institutions linked to power" (Donoso 28). Gabriel Valdés, the president of the Chilean senate, decried the fact that the postcard project had received state funding and called the image a detestable insult to all Chileans, Bolivarian nations, and to good taste itself ("Ad-

vierten"). In a press release, the Venezuelan Embassy in Chile affirmed the sanctity of Bolívar and declared that the Venezuelan nation had been unjustly wounded in its national honor: "In light of the libelous campaign that is being orchestrated against the most sacred value of our nationality, which presents The Liberator Simón Bolívar in publications that we consider without decorum and in violation of the immortal genius of American independence, the Venezuelan Embassy in Chile protests and deplors these manifestations that are alien to the sentiments of the Chilean people, who have always been united to the Venezuelan people by history and shared cultural values" ("Gobierno"). Six days later, the Chilean Foreign Ministry presented apologies to the governments of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. The controversy continued to rage on, however, as Chile's cultural and political establishment debated the agenda of FONDART, its use of state funds, and whether or not the organization favored gay artists and themes. The other members of La Escuela de Santiago weighed in as well, arguing that the unrelenting attacks on Dávila in the media were creating an unacceptable atmosphere of violent censorship and veiled threats (Díaz, Dittborn, and Duclos). At a time when Chile was negotiating the transition to democracy after almost two decades of military repression, the Juan Dávila affair touched many nerves. How free was Chile after all?¹

I begin with the Juan Dávila affair because it illustrates a constellation of themes and problems that go to the center of this book. My study's focus on monumentalism, gender, national identity, and the failures of modernity is exemplified by the toppling of the mythic Bolívar in Dávila's painting. *The Liberator Simón Bolívar* confronts nationalist history and its authoritarian claim to ideological truth through an iconoclastic challenge to all the absolutes represented by Bolívar; in the apt words of George Alexander, Dávila "gives us a disturbing record of history on the run" (84). In the pages to follow I consider *The Liberator Simón Bolívar* as a way of introducing the themes, methodologies, and focus that shape this study. A critical reading of Dávila's image enables us to define and theorize the very contours of the official ideologies that reacted so vehemently against his iconoclastic representation of the hero of Latin American independence.

Monumental Poses

Russ Castronovo's definition of monumentalist narratives summarizes how I use the term here and throughout my analysis. The word *monu-*

ment is derived from the Latin word *monere*, which signifies both to remember and to teach with authority (Castronovo 109). Monuments are thus memory infused with the exercise of power; they are personal and intimate in their bid to make a person reflect on something past, and relational in their embodiment of an authoritative narrative for the individual and the collectivity. "It is indeed power that shapes the history that defines people as citizens," writes Castronovo, "and collects them in the construct of the nation" (109). The monumentalist definition of Bolívar is not limited to nationalist statuary, but extends to any representation that seeks to define the hero as an unmoveable idol that stands for eternal and inviolable values. Juan Dávila's treatment of institutions, gender, race, aesthetic codes, and gesture all undermine the monumental Bolívar, striking the bronze and marble of his authoritative contours. His revision of Bolívar reverses the dominant poses and gestures of the monumental hero and replaces them with a set of revealing questions about gender, representation, and Latin American modernity. However, to better understand Dávila's iconoclasm we need to define the myth of Bolívar and its ideological functions.

The concepts of pose and gesture refer to the meaningful manipulation of the human body and are particularly appropriate for exploring the conventions of heroic statuary. My argument is that the authority of monuments, and by extension, monumentalist narratives about heroes, may be diagrammed through the concept of *monumental poses*, or authoritative statements about the monumentalist hero that explain his primary claim on ideological power. In the case of Bolívar, there are three monumental poses that may be used to summarize the ideological mission of the cult of Bolívar. The first pose is the concept of progress. In modern Latin America, the symbol of Bolívar has been charged with the defense of the promise of tomorrow. History is plotted through continuities and Bolívar is a powerful wellspring of myth capable of joining the past to the present and to a providential future. Bolívar represents a democratic project that is still unfolding some two centuries after his death, and to which he still serves as an inspiration or a kind of rosetta stone for ensuring its continual growth and consummation. Thus, the Liberator encodes an authoritative claim to the past and to the future, with the power to exert influence over the political, social, and cultural realms. The equestrian statue of Bolívar in the central plaza of Caracas illustrates this desire. The monument was erected in 1876 in order to create a centralized space for the experience and performance of national memory where before there had been none. As

framed by the grid of a plaza designed by a veteran of Parisian urban design, the statue marks the site of the state's will to emerge visibly and publicly from an unstable past into the community of modern nations.² As noted by the celebratory newspapers of the day, the monument was not only a reminder of the glories of the past, but also a vision of the nation's future glories. The equestrian statue of Bolívar, like a bronze chaperone frozen in motion, would oversee the continuing growth of Venezuela.

Another dominant pose of the monumental Bolívar is its embodiment of a patriarchal principle. In epic representations of Bolívar, the hero effectively creates independence, willing it from the fecund seed of his genius and martial prowess. The Liberator is a symbolic father whose heroism and vision have entitled him to the unswerving loyalty of his heirs, who seek his inspiration and guidance in times of crisis. In this respect, the patriarchal power of Bolívar is well served by the purposes of monumentalist statuary, which posits his body as a sealed entity, a titan of bronze or stone that represents the foundational claims and exemplary scripts of great men. The phallic power of their monuments requires that their bodies acquire the permanence that they did not possess in life. In the memorable words of Lewis Mumford, monumentalism was a form of renewal and reproduction, "a desire to wall out life, to exclude the action of time, to remove the taint of biological processes, to exclude the active care of other generations by a process of architectural mummification" (434). Despite the unforgettable images of the iconoclastic dismantling of monuments in the former Soviet Union, which attest to the fragility of statuary in times of historical crisis, these giants of stone and bronze represent the conceit that an absolute and unquestioned narrative of identity may be materialized permanently.³

The third and final pose is related to language and signification, and may be termed *metatextual*. The cult of Bolívar maintains itself through unquestioned faith in the authority of the words of Bolívar, which are characterized by Bolivarians as transparent and commanding, like those of a religious catechism. "The word of Bolívar," writes Luis Castro Leiva, "is the end of History and of its unfolding" (171). In other words, the mythic Bolívar is a conduit for sacred, unquestioned truths that are not meant to be relativized or interpreted. As a script of identity, Bolívar stands for a timeless alphabet that may be utilized to respond to ever-changing social and historical realities. Bolívar represents the continuity and coherence of key terms and concepts, such as *independence*, *liberty*, and the *nation*. Iconoclastic representations of Bolívar disrupt these terms, questioning

their coherence and underlining their constructed nature. In the conceptual worlds of Juan Dávila, for example, signs are multivalent and contradictory, and function as a challenge to the more transparent definition of representation that is proposed by mythmakers and official culture. The challenge to Bolívar, then, is necessarily a challenge to the authority of the language of myth, and to the truth claims of language in general. If signs that are commonly seen as having one meaning can be set against each other and deconstructed, then any attempt to create an authoritative formulation through signs may be challenged and relativized. The cult of Bolívar is thus sustained through the defense of key terms and the definition of language as a transparent, self-evident, and immutable system. Outside of this conservative definition of language, Bolívar-the-national-hero cannot exist. In other words, reverence for Bolívar is an investment in the ordering and transformation of experience through authoritative representational codes. The breakdown of the authority of such systems, from the vantage point of official culture and its definition of Bolívar as a republican deity, signals the degeneration and failure of society and its quest for progress. The passionate response to Juan Dávila's iconoclastic representation of Bolívar, predicated in part on his playful attitude toward signs, brought into focus the Bolivarian commitment to a monological definition of representation.

Iconoclastic Gestures

Now that the monumental poses of the cult of Bolívar have been defined, Juan Dávila's iconoclasm comes into clearer focus. The most apparent manner in which Dávila assaults the sanctity of the national hero lies in his treatment of gender. *The Liberator Simón Bolívar* questions the correspondence between sex and gender and challenges the idea that Bolívar has a true gender. The presence of breasts and the absence of the phallus, obscured by the saddle and displaced onto the profane finger gesture, destabilize the notion of Bolívar as a patriarch (Richard 189). It was precisely this aspect of Dávila's image that provoked the Colombian ambassador to Chile, Jorge Mario Eastman, to decry the deviant and "hermaphroditic" nature of Dávila's "blasphemy" and defend Bolívar's heterosexuality ("Hay simbologías"). The assault on Bolívar's masculinity may also be understood in relation to how Dávila clothes and unclothes his version of the hero. Dávila's Bolívar wears a jacket and boots but no pants, suggesting, in effect, that Bolívar has been caught with his "pants down" and may

be penetrated.⁴ However, the most important aspect of Dávila's version of Bolívar vis-à-vis gender is the fact that we are in the presence of sexual identity as an arena of performance. In her analysis of corporeality and gender, Judith Butler notes that drag, cross-dressing, and butch/femme identities in the lesbian community parody the fiction of "an original or primary gender identity" (127). Whereas dominant, masculinist definitions of Bolívar posit his body as a fixed, masculine entity, Dávila plays with boundaries and blurs that stable category.

Further, what critics have called the transvestic nature of Dávila's image cannot be separated from the question of race. Readers will recall how Gabriel García Márquez in *The General in His Labyrinth* succinctly describes the symbolic whitening of Bolívar over time: "as his glory increased, the painters began to idealize him, washing his blood, mythologizing him, until they established him in official memory with the Roman profile of his statues" (180). Justo Pastor Mellado argues that Dávila transgresses the classical, sublimated model of Latin American identity by presenting the hero as a *mestizo* whose visage appears to have been whitened (Richard 187). In fact, the presence of makeup on the face of Bolívar serves a dual function, not only referencing the ambiguities and instabilities of gender identity but also a racialized identity that grotesquely performs the narrative of whiteness. Unlike the aristocratic and distinctly European visage of Bolívar by the Venezuelan painter Tito Salas, which graces the ceiling murals of the National Pantheon in Caracas, Dávila's Bolívar is not the triumphalist messenger of the Creole national project but rather its object. Here is a person of color caught between whiteness and the reality of ethnic difference, between self-important, martial mythology and irreverent gender play. Yet, this social agent is not passive; like a trickster, his/her power to play with masks keeps challenge alive and sustains the obscene finger gesture as a kind of declaration of independence from dominant narratives of identity.

The concept of *mestizaje* is not limited to the imbricated concepts of gender and race. In his commentary on an exhibit by Dávila titled *Juanito Laguna* (held at the Chisenhale Gallery in London in 1995), Guy Brett reminds us that Dávila's travesty, his commitment to the theme of *mestizaje*, moves from gender and race to aesthetic codes, to the very modalities of representation that the artist works with and ultimately relativizes. Brett's broadening of the definition of *mestizaje* deserves citation: "*Mestizaje*, again, can stand for the syncretism of cultures and artistic styles. Making a 'travesty' refers too to Dávila's practice of lifting styles



Figure 1. Juan Dávila. *The Liberator Simón Bolívar* 1994. Oil on canvas on metal, 125 X 98 cm. Copyright Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Copyright Agent.

and visual codes out of their contexts and grafting them together in wild profusion, and also to what happens in Carnival the world over, when men become women, the poor become rich, the denigrated are exalted, inhibitions are cast aside, and all that is official and serious is mocked by popular laughter" (Brett 2). Nelly Richard underscores the same point in her discussion of the representation of Bolívar's horse, calling the process the "hybridization of codes" (188). She describes the image of Bolívar in terms of a component that may be associated with the avant-garde and modernity (the abstract aspect of the horse), as well as in relation to tradition and folklore (the depiction of Bolívar's body). This juxtaposition of high and

low aesthetic codes adds another layer to the questions of identity raised by the image. Is Bolívar a foundational figure or a more local, native character? What vocabulary or sensibility is best suited to capture the figure of Bolívar? Dávila's visual *mestizaje*, the mixing of representational registers, creates an ellipsis that allows for critical reflection on the limitations of representation and the complexities of a cultural experience that is resistant to reductive interpretive models.

Finally, Dávila's iconoclasm may be read in relation to the manipulation of gesture, in which his image is freed from the fixity of Bolivarian monumentalism and redefined as a parody of the phallic claim to authority of martial, sculptural embodiments of the hero. Bolívar's obscene finger gesture signals a diversion from a very different kind of gesture that is common to martial statuary: the hand that directs the battle, finger or sword pointing toward triumph. The martial gesture enacts the virility of the hero, his power to direct others and show the way, to pierce the air with a will to triumph.⁵ For example, Martín Tovar y Tovar's painting *Batalla de Carabobo* (1884–1888), which graces the ceilings of the National Capitol of Caracas, represents the Bolivarian gesture in such a martial manner. As soldiers struggle over the panoramic battlefield, Bolívar elegantly irradiates his authority with his outstretched hand. Tito Salas's painting of Bolívar swearing to liberate the New World from a hilltop in Rome, in the National Pantheon of the same city, takes the outstretched hand to signify the power of prophecy, and references classical models of gesture as a necessary part of the *pronuntiatio*, or delivery of oratory. The authoritative, indexical gesture with the index finger may in fact be associated with the relationship between signifier and signified; in his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintillian valued indexical gestures as a way of pointing at the objects represented by the words of the orator (Graf 39; Aldrete 17). The beautiful, young Bolívar in European dress swearing to liberate the New World in the National Pantheon seems leisurely as he gazes into the future and wills the materialization, in the real world, of the order of his signs. In Dávila's depiction, the bent arm that is lowered and culminates in the *digitus impudicus*, annuls the martial pitch of the hero, situating Bolívar in a colloquial realm of signs considered to be profane. The finger represents an aggressive yet intransigent and fleeting scene of power that displaces Bolívar's masculine virility onto a gestural act. In other words, the finger indicates the presence of a performative type of masculinity that takes the form of symbolic aggression, mockery, and defiance.

New Paths in Bolivarian Studies

My study examines how the dominant poses of the cult of Bolívar (progress, patriarchy, and the authority of the sign) are challenged in nineteenth- and twentieth-century representations of the most famous hero of Latin American independence. The most elementary premise of my analysis is that Simón Bolívar should not only be examined as a military and political agent, but also as a symbol for the construction of identity. No doubt much work remains to be done to understand the arc of Bolívar's life as a soldier and statesman, but this study does not examine that question, nor does it compare and contrast a gallery of fictional Bolívars to a "real" Bolívar in order to establish that the cult distorts the historical record. Instead I explore a richly developed cultural icon that emerged after independence for the purposes of building national identity and promoting progress. Rather than embark on the quixotic quest to recover an authentic Bolívar, I trace and contextualize major themes and contradictions in novels and other prose texts about Bolívar and the nation. Is Bolívar a substitute for Christ? Did he father children biologically? Was he a good lover? In light of the painful and divisive history of the continent since his death, is Bolívar a symbol of defeat? These are the kinds of questions that shape my study.

Despite my commitment to reading the subject of Bolívar against the grain of nationalism, historiography, and political philosophy, I do consider my research to be connected to a domain of study with a long and distinguished history: Estudios Bolivarianos (Bolivarian Studies). Bolivarian Studies has been and continues to be the study of anything and everything Bolívar, such as the question of when Bolívar wore a moustache and when he did not, the byzantine search for possible biological offspring of the hero, and the cataloguing of his amorous conquests. Yet, in its broad focus, Bolivarian Studies has also created spaces for the writing of cultural histories centered on Bolívar and his time. Although until recently most scholars working in Bolivarian Studies were devout Bolivarians who believed they were contributing to the recognition of Bolívar by detailing historical minutiae, philology, and cultural representations of the hero, their scholarship has established that studying Bolívar could extend beyond the terrain of martial history. Texts such as Diego Carbonell's medical study of Bolívar, *Psicopatología de Bolívar* (1916), Jose Luis Busaniche's anthology of testimonials, *Bolívar visto por sus contemporáneos* (1960), and Pedro Grases's history of Bolívar in print, *Los papeles de*

Bolívar y Sucre (1985) exemplify the generative and critical potential of moving the focus from Bolívar's well-known political and martial biography to different registers. In recent years, however, a small group of scholars have turned the focus on the cult of Bolívar itself, creating a new subject area within scholarship about Bolívar.

The foundational text of the new critical corpus about the cult of Bolívar is Germán Carrera Damas's *El culto a Bolívar: Esbozo para un estudio de la historia de las ideas en Venezuela* (1969). Carrera Damas's underlying, theoretical argument supports the case for studying representation as an ideological phenomenon, both as a historical product and as a functional, political entity in the historical present.⁶ Other important historiographical statements on the cult of Bolívar include studies by Pamela Murray (2001), Inés Quintero (2001), Elías Pino Iturrieta (1999), Napoleón Franceschi González (1999), and Miguel Americo Bretos (1976). This invaluable scholarship is pioneering a field that is still in its infancy, establishing benchmarks for a periodization of the cult of Bolívar and creating awareness that the cult is an ideological phenomenon with a cultural history of its own. Notable exceptions to the historiographic approach represented by these studies include Michael Taussig's *The Magic of the State* (1997), which traces the connections between religious syncretism, political discourse, and daily life; Luis Castro Leiva's *De la patria boba a la teología bolivariana* (1991), a philosophical meditation that takes the cult to task for strengthening a "hermetic hermeneutics" that adjudicates all discussion and political action in Venezuela to a closed system of mutilated and decontextualized quotes by Bolívar (170–171); and Yolanda Salas de Lecuna's *Bolívar y la historia en la conciencia popular* (1987), which recovers the reinvention of Bolívar in oral culture through fifty-five native informants. Still, the image of Bolívar in fiction, and the conceptual understanding that we might arrive at through the study of literature, has not been explored. More importantly, we are lacking a general synthesis of the mission, constituent thematics, and contradictions of the cult of Bolívar. It is in this arena that this book makes its contribution.

Design and Key Concepts

Although containing original, archival research, the present study does not pretend to be a diachronic cultural history of the cult of Bolívar, or an intellectual history or sociological study. Rather, it defines the cult of Bolívar in relation to modernity through novels, biography, and other nar-

rative prose about Bolívar. I wrote this book as a result of a simple question that is worth repeating here: Why is it that modern Latin American novels about Bolívar insist on wounding his symbolic body, as in the case of Gabriel García Márquez's *The General in His Labyrinth*? As I explored this question, I discovered that such treatments of Bolívar were targeting the failures of Latin American modernity. The objects of critique were the empty promises of a spent, triumphalist ideology of progress that had taken shape after Bolívar's death. In toppling the sanctity of the monumental Bolívar that stood for that ideology, these writers offered their readers provocative insights about the ways in which hero-worship is constructed and manipulated by nationalists in the name of progress. The analysis of the variety of ways in which the icon of Bolívar is challenged in modern Latin America enabled me to better understand the cult of Bolívar across genres and historical periods. Thus, the present study delineates the fictions that sustain the cult of Bolívar while exploring stories that chart its failure and contradictions.

My analysis is structured around two types of inquiry, one into specific texts (primarily novels), and the other into historical and cultural trends (interdisciplinary synthesis and research). The discussion of certain themes in the texts under study, such as theology, paternity, monuments, and sentimental love, allows me to explore these questions in nonliterary, Bolivarian texts as well, thus enabling a better understanding of the symbolic foundations of the cult of Bolívar.

Chapter 1, "Bolívar and the Emergence of a National Religion," lays the groundwork for the rest of the study by examining the origins and characteristics of the nineteenth-century cult of Bolívar during the Wars of Independence and the early national period in Venezuela. I explore how Bolivarian discourses of identity emerged during Bolívar's lifetime as a means to validate his role as a republican statesman. In opposition to the image of Bolívar-as-Augustus, as exemplified by José Joaquín Olmedo's "La victoria de Junín" (1825), enemies of Bolívar deployed the image of Bolívar-as-Caesar, and called for tyrannicide. The chapter focuses on how the final years and controversies of Bolívar's career resulted in his literal and symbolic banishment from the national project. In the case of Venezuela, I demonstrate how political tensions between 1830 and 1842 resulted in a growing awareness of the necessity of using Bolívar as a symbolic linchpin for the nation. I focus on two Bolivarian texts, Fermín Toro's "Honosres a Bolívar" (1842), the first official expression of Bolivarian nationalism in Venezuela, and Felipe Larrazábal's *Correspondencia general*

del Libertador Simón Bolívar (1865), a romantic biography. Both texts distance Bolívar from the debates that characterized the Wars of Independence, and situate the hero in a republican project deeply indebted to the beliefs and devotional practices of Christianity.

Chapter 2, "Monumentalism and the Erotics of National Degeneration," examines the concept of the monumental Bolívar in late nineteenth-century Venezuela. I discuss the creation of the Plaza Bolívar in Caracas within the context of the ubiquitous national project of architectural renewal sponsored by President Antonio Guzmán Blanco. In particular, I consider literary texts that celebrate and question the potential of Bolivarian monumentalism to consolidate the national project. One of the narratives I examine is Eduardo Blanco's "Las noches del panteón" (1865), a gothic recreation of the secret lives of statues and monuments in the National Pantheon, which suggests that the ideals of the nation exist in a fantastic space associated with personal subjectivity and dream-states. For Blanco, the historical present, so full of monumentalist statuary and progress, is devoid of life and transcendent meaning. Further, I explore *Idolos rotos* (1901) by Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, an iconoclastic novel that decries the corruption and underdevelopment of Venezuela by presenting the monument of the Plaza Bolívar as a wounded and violated body. The amorous failures of the protagonist of Díaz Rodríguez's novel enact an allegory about the failure of the nation and of Bolivarian monumentalism at the turn of the century.

Chapter 3, "The Promise of Bolivarian Paternity," frames the issue of paternity in relation to gender and modernity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature for children and young people. Despite his ostensible failure in fathering biological children, Bolívar has been represented in children's literature since the nineteenth century as an accessible, filial figure. In my discussion of a variety of texts that include works by José Martí, Eduardo Blanco, and the Ecuadorian journalist Manuel Calle, I underline how the monumental Bolívar is replaced by a foundational figure capable of inspiring sentimental bonds between child and hero. Moreover, I discuss how these and other Bolivarian pedagogues frame the myth of Bolívar through narratives of national crises or failure. In this vein, I consider Teresa de la Parra's novel of childhood, *Las memorias de la Mamá Blanca* (1929), as well as her essays and letters, as a critique of the monumentalist model of Bolívar. Like others before her, Parra reconstructs Bolívar through a critique of the present, yet she denies the premises of mainstream Bolivarian ideology by idealizing the colonial period that pre-

ceded Bolívar's foundational acts. The chapter ends with a discussion of the educational policies of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela.

Chapter 4, "A Whore in the Palace': The Poetics of Pornodetraktion," examines how Denzil Romero's explicitly sexual novel about Manuela Sáenz, *La esposa del doctor Thorne* (1983), reinforces and challenges the patriarchal dimensions of the cult of Bolívar through the narration of the sexual exploits of Bolívar's most famous lover. I analyze dominant trends in the representation of Manuela Sáenz since the nineteenth century that demonstrate that nationalist writers have had difficulties in classifying this cross-dressing and politically committed woman. This analysis sets the stage for an understanding of Romero's novel, which decenters Bolívar and his masculinity through unflinching descriptions of Manuela's insatiable, transgressive, and ambiguous sexuality. Romero narrates the destruction of the Bolivarian dream through a complex allegory in which Manuela's unruly body represents the chaos of a body politic that will only bend to Bolívar's power (dictatorship), not his romantic idealism. Paradoxically, in spite of this daring purpose, Romero reifies the cult of Bolívar by defending the phallic power of the hero.

Chapter 5, "Solitude, Signs, and Power in *The General in His Labyrinth*," explores the metatextual dimensions of Bolivarian iconoclasm, as previously defined in my discussion of the dominant poses of the cult of Bolívar. I argue that the bodily decay of the protagonist of García Márquez's well-known novel expresses the failure of representation, a phenomenon consistently related in García Márquez's treatment of the solitary nature of power in his fiction. To this end, I read *The General in His Labyrinth* (1989) alongside *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1968), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), García Márquez's short fiction, journalism, and finally his Nobel lecture, "The Solitude of Latin America" (1982). I draw parallels between "the General" and other soldiers and dictators in García Márquez's fiction, and how their solitary nature results in a disconnect between words and the things they are intended to represent. I argue that the main theme of *The General in His Labyrinth* is hermeneutic in nature, and that García Márquez recovers Bolívar as a principle of renewal that has been buried under foreign words and misunderstandings. García Márquez's meditation on the limits of representation in relation to the cult of Bolívar is a profound statement on official nationalism's dependence on monological languages and definitions.

My study closes with an afterword, "Bolivarian Self-Fashioning into the Twenty-First Century," which explores the reinvention of Bolivarian

ideology at the dawn of the twenty-first century in Venezuela. I sketch a history of the Bolivarian *Movimiento Quinta República*, which propelled former army paratrooper and coup leader Hugo Chávez into the Venezuelan presidency in 1999. Chávez's controversial presidency has resulted in frictions with the international community, a radical rewriting of the Venezuelan constitution, and a new name for the country: the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In particular, I offer some reflections on how Hugo Chávez challenges the monumentalist contours of the official cult of Bolívar by fashioning himself as Bolívar and imagining the contemporary Venezuelan scene as a restaging of the conflicts of the nineteenth-century Wars of Independence. In light of Chávez's vigorous attempt to reclaim Bolívar, once again, at the dawn of a new century, I close with some observations about Bolivarian ideology today, its inherent conservatism and the promise of breaking with almost two centuries of Bolivarian monumentalism.

My approach to the cult of Bolívar is informed by the centrality of gender to the construction of meaning. As Ludmilla Jordanova defines it, gender is not a topic or a subject, but an "analytical category" that functions both as "a way of ordering experience, a system of representation and a metaphor for particular kinds of relationships" (474). Therefore, gender is not seen here as an essential term, but as a cultural construct that interprets bodies as "masculine" or "feminine." If we accept that gender is not equal to sex, then masculinity and femininity become artificial terms that may be associated with either sex (Butler 6). In nationalist cultures, however, masculinity is indeed seen as biological, and tightly bound up with essential characteristics that are seen as springing naturally from its fixed quality. Conversely, femininity is seen in official cultures as the other of masculinity: it is lack, absence, and periphery. Because the heroism that Western culture has enshrined as foundational is associated with "great" men, and with institutional and cultural spaces that have historically been defined by men, a focus on masculinity as a cultural construct is particularly pertinent for the study of nationalist hero-worship. The representation and distribution of the concepts of the "masculine" and the "feminine" enable us to trace how different texts challenge or reaffirm dominant modes of perceiving gender. In the chapters that follow, for example, I demonstrate how texts that challenge the monumental body of Bolívar wound the nation and its scripts of identity by diminishing the phallus of Bolívar, and introducing confusion into the conceptual and hier-

archical opposition between what is represented as masculine/authoritative and what is considered feminine/subordinate.

Corporeality is also central to my study. Although vital for the construction of gender, corporeality is not only understood here in relation to the culturally constructed concepts of masculine and feminine, but also as a metaphor for society and identity writ large. In the words of the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, the body “is a model that can stand for any bounded system” (115). The symbolic body of Bolívar may thus be read as a diagram of identity, a bounded system that stakes a powerful claim upon the lives of Latin Americans who believe their New World is hobbled by unfinished business and broken dreams. This concept is well represented by the metaphor of the monument, which constructs the body of the foundational father and the values he represents as an unmoveable idol, one that is anchored upon a superior, mythical register that demands the reverence of his subjects. The violation of the symbolic body of Bolívar violates the narrative of identity promoted by the monument, as well as its patriarchal claim to power, which is predicated on the unassailability of its body. My study examines the interplay between this monumentalism, the quest to fix and maintain identity in an authoritative pose, and iconoclasm, which topples the monumental claims of the cult of Bolívar. The centripetal impetus of monumentalism seeks to shape culture and social interactions through the primacy of the symbol of Bolívar (the body as a closed system), while iconoclastic texts and interventions represent instances of a centrifugal disruption of the power (the body as a broken system, as polluted or as chaotic).

This conceptual antagonism between the body as a closed system and the body as an open one underpins this study in my discussions of gender. If the Bolivarian ideal is conceptualized as masculine by monumentalism, iconoclasm is logically an assault on that culturally constructed masculinity. However, an important caveat is in order: Whereas the monumentalist definition of Bolívar in this study may be read as patriarchal, texts that critique that monumentalism are not necessarily feminist nor do they necessarily represent a “feminine” perspective. A case in point is the complexity of Bolivarian identity in relation to children’s literature, as discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, I underline that filial narratives for children about Bolívar are not necessarily equivalent to monumentalist definitions of masculinity, while noting that Teresa de la Parra’s feminist reconstruction of Bolívar as a sentimental being akin to women does not necessarily

deny the hero's foundational role. Although I part from the premise that masculinity and femininity are essential terms in the dominant culture, I believe that Bolivarian iconoclasm raises questions about the validity of this conceptual dyad for all instances of Bolivarian nationalism.

The word *modernity* appears repeatedly in this study and deserves some discussion as well. Modernity is primarily used to refer to the project for remaking and reimagining social and political realities in Latin America since the Wars of Independence. According to Stuart Hall's succinct definition, modernity is characterized by political secularism, a monetarized exchange economy, and the decline of the traditional social order and religious worldviews (8). The values of the Enlightenment (reason, universalism, progress, and so forth) and the rise of the idea of the nation at the beginning of the nineteenth century are also central to modernity. In Latin American history and culture, the quest for modernity has defined the political, economic, and cultural programs of the liberal state. The desire to be modern has promoted the idea of progress and its teleologies of identity, the nation and its demands for sacrifice and collective recognition, and dependence on the economic and cultural systems of the so-called developed world. The present study underscores how iconoclastic representations of Bolívar engage with this overarching investment in modernity, calling into question its absolute value, disclosing its erasures, and underscoring the artifice of the developmental and cultural models it espouses. My analysis is informed by symbolic moments in which the monumental Bolívar, which has embodied the drive to modernize the continent, has registered upon its sacred, inviolable body the iconoclastic traces of the contradictions or failures of the project of modernity. However, as I note in my afterword, in all of the texts I examine in this study Bolívar remains important to discussions of identity and political development. It would seem that a truly iconoclastic treatment of Bolívar, and of modernity itself, would have to dispense with Bolívar altogether.

This book is far from being the last word on the subject of the cult of Bolívar. The definition of Latin American identity requires an eternal return to the figure of Bolívar and his pan-American thought. Whether it is the unfinished business of political freedom, or the wonders of a New World that has not found its true political measure because of its internal divisions, Bolívar continues to be the starting point for discussions of the promise of Latin America. In his landmark treatise *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* (1845), Domingo Faustino Sarmiento yoked the mystery of the Latin American continent and its potential discovery by Europe to an un-

written biography of Bolívar, a biography that would reflect his relationship to the land and the peoples of the New World. In short, he argued that what the world needed was a biography that depicted Bolívar wearing a poncho (49). A close look at the image of Bolívar in poems, novels, essays, histories, and biographies underscores that Latin American cultural history has indeed invested Bolívar with a continental meaning, but not necessarily an intended one: Bolívar is a symbol of the contradictions of an identity that is constantly in flux, and in conflict with itself. Bolívar may be an inescapable presence but the irony is that his power is more often than not measured by a sense that his utopian vision is far from being realized in Latin America. He is a monument of abundance and lack, authority and fracture, under permanent destruction and reconstruction.⁷