

Foreword

“Trujillo . . . “ When I was a boy being raised in three Hispanic-Caribbean countries, the very word struck fear, suggested something sinister. In Puerto Rico, many adults seemed to know of someone-who-knew-someone who had been harassed, imprisoned, or worse by the evil Generalísimo’s henchmen. In Cuba, in 1956, Batista military officers openly speculated about the possibility of an attack by Trujillo on their island’s soil. And in Venezuela, in 1960, the Dominican despot actually came close to assassinating the reformist, democratically elected president Rómulo Betancourt with a car bomb. (Betancourt suffered hand burns; an officer in the car and a pedestrian were killed.)

It was from the lips of my mother, Carmen Villada Bell (then a reporter for the *San Juan Daily Journal*), that I first heard about the Galíndez affair. Jesús de Galíndez, an exile from Franco’s Spain (via Santo Domingo) and a law professor at Columbia University, had been flagrantly kidnapped from the streets of Manhattan, presumably by Trujillo’s thugs. Galíndez, who had written his Columbia dissertation on the dictatorship, was never seen again, dead or alive. My mother, understandably appalled, would allude casually to the Galíndez case years after that, speculating that the sordid, internationally visible episode might well be Trujillo’s downfall.

A young boy, of course, scarcely understands these things. Yet, for us callow youths, Trujillo and his misdeeds seemed somewhat more menacing than did the threat of communists. Communism, after all, was Over There, while Trujillo was on the island next door. Moreover, one could hardly forget the occasional encounter with the regime’s extreme “style.” Travelers arriving at the airport at Ciudad Trujillo would soon catch sight of a set of enormous block letters atop the terminal, saying, “DIOS EN EL CIELO, TRUJILLO EN LA TIERRA” (God in his heaven, Trujillo on earth). To raw adolescents, a megalomania so bald seemed mostly comical, as did the reports and gossip about the Trujillo clan’s sexual escapades, such as the legendary womanizing of the dictator’s physically well endowed son-in-law, Porfirio Rubirosa, or the red Mercedes convertible sent in via chartered plane by son Ramfis to movie star Zsa Zsa Gabor.

The tyrant was gunned down on a country road in 1961 by disaffected army officers (with CIA support). Throughout the Americas there was amazement coupled with unease. Celebrations were minimal and cautious; indeed, the Dominican people’s woes were far from over. Meanwhile, the broader Latin American continent was entering a time of unique ferment. The 1959 revolution in nearby Cuba held out the ultimate promise—however illusory—of al-

tering the sociopolitical makeup of some of the earth's most unjust societies. The same decade that had started out with Trujillo's demise, moreover, would see the publication and wide diffusion of some of the signal works of the Latin American literary "Boom." Before readers' very eyes, novelists on the order of Carlos Fuentes, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa were producing the foundational classics of a marginalized, disdained, and long-suffering civilization. And those of us for whom artistic excellence somehow matters found ourselves living a privileged moment in history, one with major cultural ramifications for the future.

Tyrants. Tyrannies. Surviving and withstanding tyrannical regimes, both national and local. Several novels engendered at the height of the Boom deal in greater or lesser measure with these issues. Among the more salient instances are García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Carpentier's *Reasons of State*, and Vargas Llosa's *Conversation in the Cathedral*. Other equally notable works take on the unsettling topic in innovative ways. Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, for all its formal wizardry, is essentially a tale of the rise and fall of a provincial Mexican satrap. And chapters 6 through 9 of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* focus on the serial strongmen (not just Conservative ones) of the town of Macondo and on the spontaneous resistance their abuse of power can provoke.

Long before the Boom, dictatorship had served as a central subject for Latin American writing. Already in Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), perhaps the most influential book in South America's nineteenth century, the activist and future Argentine president anatomized the strange nature of the Rosas regime (1829–52) and its rural following. In addition to such recognized classics, though, there are the hundreds, thousands, of scarcely known texts by unsung or untutored scribblers who, through fiction or reportage or *testimonio*, have felt driven to inform the world about the unimaginable horrors and Kafkaesque absurdity of their respective nations' despotisms. In much of Latin American letters, dictatorship is not simply a literary trope or archetype but a shared experience and a matter of ongoing urgency, much as white racism has been for African American authors or General Franco's brutal campaign and stultifying victory were for postwar Spanish literati. As was said of Richard Wright, he didn't choose his subject; rather, it chose him.

Almost every Spanish American country has its vein of dictator lore, waiting to be explored, quarried, and crafted by storytelling artists. The Perón pair, for instance, inspired a fine diptych from Argentine novelist Tomás Eloy Martínez, as well as a familiar British rock opera and a Hollywood version thereof, with its flashy blonde sex symbol. In recent years, the Dominican Republic's far more sordid, brutish, all but endless night of tyranny has come in for world attention. Julia Álvarez's subtle and humane *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) is perhaps the first non-Dominican novel ever to unearth a certain dark

slice of Dominican history—Trujillo’s cruel murder of the rebellious Mirabal sisters—and give the murky raw materials a compelling yet serenely satisfying shape.

And the spectacular global success of Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000; *The Feast of the Goat*, 2001) has transported us international readers back to the nerve center, to the sickened soul and body of the Trujillo autocracy. In the process, the Peruvian Spanish author airs some outsized, spine-chilling truths that, for four decades, had been edged aside and closeted by the tacit needs and purposes of the cold war.

Given this resurgence of interest in the Trujillo “problem,” Ignacio López-Calvo’s remarkable study, *“God and Trujillo”: Literary and Cultural Representations of the Dominican Dictator*, could not be more timely. López-Calvo has performed some necessary basic research and examined up to three dozen narrative texts, most of them by Dominican authors scarcely known beyond their nation’s shores. He has also reread Álvarez’s and Vargas Llosa’s relevant novels, along with the Spaniard Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s ambitious experiment in historical fiction, *Galíndez* (1990). To all these works López-Calvo brings many pages of skillful, thoughtful exegesis. Along the way he convincingly argues for the existence of a specific subcurrent, a scattered tradition of “Trujillato narratives” (a matter of Trujillo, as it were), with its own key conventions, shared concerns, and recurrent *topoi*. In addition he judiciously enlists *The Autumn of the Patriarch* for the Trujillo cycle; he wisely concedes that García Márquez’s colorful vulgarian is a composite figure, yet deftly traces the nameless Patriarch’s quirks, deeds, and native setting to the theatrical manias and grotesque stage of Santo Domingo’s master puppeteer.

In this undertaking López-Calvo greatly expands our knowledge of several fields, both historical and textual. Few non-Dominicans have encountered the many novels he singles out for analysis. To call attention to their existence is already a worthy task; to tease out and highlight their formal properties and significant contents is scholarship at its most fundamental and serious, nuts-and-bolts intellectual labor. Overseas readers will now be more aware of Dominican writers such as Veloz Maggiolo and Viriato Senci3n, and may hence feel moved to seek out and read their novels. Inasmuch as López-Calvo’s study frequently introduces little-known works, some plot summary is called for, and he performs this oft-underestimated task with skill and sensitivity.

As we accompany López-Calvo on his journey through the Trujillo cycle, we learn a great deal not only about Trujillo novels but also about the inhuman, flesh-and-blood monster himself and his dehumanized state apparatus. What Vargas Llosa exhumes and refashions in *The Feast of the Goat* is basically, often factually, true. And yet it is never enough; there’s always more. The violence, the humiliation, the everyday servility and sadism, and the pseudo-populist grandeur—all of which had been implanted from top to bottom by the

obsessive yet canny generalissimo—knew no limits. So damaged was the collective Dominican psyche by it all that, as some observers sadly note, the entire culture seems never to have recovered. Each of these novels and *testimonios* thus has new stories to tell that are often perfectly plausible, their far-fetched truths being stranger than most fiction.

And of course there is the immense issue of sex under the Trujillato. Probably no modern dictatorship can equal Trujillo's in the extent to which the ordinary, daily governing machinery was thoroughly sexualized. Sex for El Jefe (The Chief) was as much an instrument of power and control as were his torture chambers and dungeons. To say that Trujillo and his kind exploited women is an understatement that scarcely nips at an unsavory reality's surface. The Señor Presidente slept with a fresh bevy of handpicked young ladies each week; he also bedded down the wives and daughters of his allies, and later, in banquet speeches, vaunted his "erotic" exploits with demonic glee. Significantly, in *The Feast of the Goat*, one abhorrent act of sexual abuse looms as large as do the blood-curdling scenes of savage repression and death with which that single episode of transgression alternates.

Last but not least, one must mention the utterly bizarre figure of Joaquín Balaguer, a master courtier so smooth and strange that, had he not existed, a novelist would have had to invent him. I must admit that, before I'd read *The Feast of the Goat*, Balaguer for me was a shadowy personage, little more than Trujillo's eventual successor in a regime sometimes characterized as "Trujillismo without Trujillo." I knew of the extravagant, cross-shaped beacon he had ordered built in celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Columbus, and I knew that, in his old age, he had somehow managed to rule while blind. It is Vargas Llosa who has since brought to life this urbane, almost effete man of letters, honey-tongued and soft-spoken, a phrasemaker with no military experience and no apparent interest in money or sex, who nonetheless succeeds in outfoxing all his rivals—Trujillo's own sons included—as he slips into and remains in the Dominican presidency. Some of the novels studied by López-Calvo also depict Balaguer, who, thanks to these works of fiction, has been fleshed out for us as a historical participant and actor.

These are mostly novels, not news accounts; they're fiction, not factual reportage. López-Calvo ably discusses the divers ways in which many of these authors struggle to give form to some aspect of the vast Trujillo nightmare and thereby keep the memory alive through written words. The risks are legion, and not all works fully succeed. As we know, and find out time and again, in a novel it is not enough simply to portray and condemn a dictator and his crimes or to describe in blood-soaked detail a people's victimization. Narrative and stylistic skills are also necessary, and some enormously promising texts can hence succumb to their aesthetic mistakes or shortcomings of vision. Just as not every Holocaust writer is a Primo Levi or a Tadeusz Borowski, similarly, not

every Trujillo novelist is a Vargas Llosa or a Julia Álvarez. Like all traditions, the Trujillato cycle has its grand masterpieces as well as its smaller-scale, or less achieved, or more workmanlike, or rougher and unpolished verbal artifacts.

Yet all of these works are part of the broader enterprise of trying to capture a frightening past with present art, of striving to convey the oft-times banal and stupid evils of Trujillismo through the serene, reflective powers of the imagination. In this regard, even the most modest and unassuming piece of fiction has the potential to inform someone of forgotten and hushed-up realities. And of course great works can serve (in Ezra Pound's phrase) as "news that stays news." To take a familiar instance: only certain kinds of readers will pick up and read a history of the United Fruit Company. (There are several good ones.) On the other hand, millions worldwide have learned about that imperial firm's labor practices and its corrupting control as a direct result of the banana company chapters—11 through 15—in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Similarly, Trujillismo is once again in the public forum solely because of the innovative fictions of Vázquez Montalbán, Álvarez, Vargas Llosa, and others.

By looking at these works and their background in depth, López-Calvo further enhances our sense of the Trujillato as real-life fact and as reconstructed, rememorative experience. Those who are interested in Trujillo and in Latin American literature—be they students, scholars, or general readers seeking to satisfy their curiosity about some larger-than-life horrors in an ill-starred, mostly forgotten, chronically oppressed land—will have much to learn from the cultural impact of Trujillo from "*God and Trujillo*."

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Preface

More than four decades after the assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, one of the most complex and baffling figures in Latin American history, his name continues to strike an emotional chord among Dominicans. Yet, although there are numerous studies on Trujillo and his regime, the literature that emerged as a foreseeable reaction to these three decades of terror and corruption has received much less critical attention. In the fall of 2002, while teaching a graduate seminar on the novel of the Latin American dictator at California State University, Los Angeles that included Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*, I came across a surprising lacuna in the study of the presence of this charismatic dictator in Dominican narratives, particularly in the most recent ones.

In fact, Miguel A. Collado, in his *Apuntes bibliográficos sobre la literatura dominicana* (Bibliographic Notes on Dominican Literature, 1993), points out the need for more rigorous research on the so-called Trujillo Era or Trujillato as treated in Dominican literature and culture. Doris Sommer's *One Master for Another: Populism as Patriarchal Rhetoric in Dominican Novels* (1983) is one of the most complete analyses to date, but it is limited to two novels from the 1930s and three from the 1970s. In this sense, I believe that "*God and Trujillo*," as a comprehensive inquiry into the evolution and significance of the cultural production about the Trujillato (and ultimately into Dominican national identity), is a positive contribution to the ultimate goal of filling this gap. Besides contributing to the rescue of the voices of numerous Dominican authors and testimonialists from oblivion, this study adds further insight into the lasting effects that Trujillo's ironclad rule had on the Dominican psyche, on the formation of the Dominican nation, and on the contemporary political arena.

Undoubtedly, given the large number of novels, short stories, poems, essays, and *merengues* devoted to Trujillo and his era, one of the most difficult tasks was to select the texts to be analyzed. Along with historical fiction and testimonial accounts by Dominican and Dominican American authors, I chose to include novels on the subject of Trujillo by Peruvian Spanish Mario Vargas Llosa, Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, Spanish Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Chilean Enrique Lafourcade, and Haitian American Edwidge Danticat. Among the main narrative works that I analyze are Jesús Galíndez's "A Report on Santo Domingo" (1955) and *The Era of Trujillo* (1958); Marcio Veloz Maggiolo's *Nosotros los suicidas* (We, the Suicides, 1965), *Los ángeles de hueso* (The Bone Angels; 1967), *De abril en adelante* (From April On, 1975), *La biografía difusa de Sombra Castañeda* (The Vague Biography of Sombra

Castañeda, 1980), *Ritos de cabaret* (Cabaret Rites, 1991), *Uña y carne* (Flesh and Bone, 1999), and *El hombre del acordeón* (The Man of the Accordion, 2003); Freddy Prestol Castillo's *El Masacre se pasa a pie* (You Can Wade Over the Massacre, 1973); Augusto Roa Bastos's *I, the Supreme* (1974); Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975); Pedro Vergés's *Sólo cenizas hallarás* (You Will Only Find Ashes, 1980); Efraím Castillo's *Curriculum (el síndrome de la visa)* (Curriculum [The Visa Syndrome], 1982); Jaime Lucero Vásquez's *Anónimos contra el Jefe* (The Anonymous Struggles against the Chief, 1987); Bernardo Vega's *Domini Canes (Los perros del Señor)* (Domini Canes [The Lord's Dogs], 1988); Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Galíndez* (1990); Viriato Sención's *They Forged the Signature of God* (1992); Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994); Manuel Salvador Gautier's *Toda la vida* (The Entire Life, 1995); Frank J. Piñeyro's *Náufragos del odio* (Castaways of Hate, 1995); Diógenes Valdez's *Retrato de dinosaurios en la era de Trujillo* (Portrait of Dinosaurs in the Era of Trujillo, 1997); Miguel Aquino García's *Los amores del dios* (The God's Love Affairs, 1998); Miguel A. Holguín-Veras's *Juro que sabré vengarme* (I Swear That I'll Know How to Take Revenge, 1998); Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*, 1998); Carlos Fernández Casanova's *Papá y Trujillo* (Dad and Trujillo, 1999); Andrés L. Mateo's *La balada de Alfonsina Bairán* (The Ballad of Alfonsina Bairan, 1999); and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* (2001).

While the realist approach is the norm among these works (at times flirting with the documentary account, as in the case of *Galíndez* and *The Feast of the Goat*), magical realism is prominent in two of them: *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *La biografía difusa de Sombra Castañeda*. Another common trait is the focus on the Generalissimo's last days, his demagogical use of patriarchal iconography, the political mistakes that brought about the end of his Era, and the effects of his regime. It is interesting to note that the most successful (both from aesthetic and marketing points of view) re-creations of the Trujillo Era have been realized by non-Dominican authors, particularly Vargas Llosa, Vázquez Montalbán, and García Márquez. Julia Álvarez, a Dominican American, stands out not only as the only woman writer to have written a significant narrative text about the Trujillato but also as the only author of Dominican origin who has achieved comparable international acclaim. The popularity of Dominican authors such as Viriato Sención, Pedro Vergés, and Marcio Veloz Maggiolo (despite the commendable aesthetic quality and experimentalism of the works by Vergés and Veloz Maggiolo) has failed to reach an international level. In contrast with the analytical, self-reflective, and dialogical nature of the aforementioned works, the rest of the Trujillato narratives analyzed here tend to miscarry in their unpolished structural organization and monotonous repetition of commonplaces about the Era (eccentricities, anecdotes, sexual exploits, etc.), which systematically desensitize readers. Yet they are still telling

literary and testimonial illustrations of the leftist resistance and of Trujillo's politics of revenge and homosocial entourage.

In my second chapter I summarize the historical background to the Trujillato narratives, concentrating in particular on the cold war, the National Security Doctrine, anticommunism, and the peculiar relationship that Trujillo's regime maintained with the Catholic Church, the United States, and Fidel Castro. Chapter 3, in turn, establishes a contrast between two major works, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *The Feast of the Goat*, and elaborates on the effect that their dissimilar approaches may have on the reader. This chapter analyzes the potential of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* for abetting dictatorship and provides evidence of the need to recontextualize it among the works of the Trujillo cycle. In addition, it studies the Spanish conquest of America as background to the plots, the mechanisms of *continuismo* as they appear in both works, the effects of death on the characters, and the use of parody in the archetypal imaging of the Latin American dictator. The first section of chapter 4 focuses on the ethics of political resistance and the interaction between fictional and historical discourse in *Galíndez* and *King Ahab's Feast*. The second analyzes *They Forged the Signature of God* and several other works, paying particular attention to the role of Joaquín Balaguer during and after the Trujillato, as well as to the figures of the homosocial acolytes, the favorites, and the intellectuals in this literary corpus.

Chapter 5 studies the politics of revenge, the concept of "private revolution," and the struggle of Dominican women against dictatorship as represented in the Trujillato narratives. The first subdivision of this chapter analyzes, from the point of view of national allegory, the re-creation of the women's subversion and the deification of Trujillo's image as they appear in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and other related novels. The second focuses on both active and passive female characters, and considers, from the perspective of class struggle and resentment, the abuse of women's bodies in several works as a demoralizing and humiliating tactic. Likewise, the phallogocentric discourse of some of the narrators is deconstructed to show the authors' hidden admiration for the sexual exploits of Porfirio Rubirosa and the Trujillo clan. Chapter 6 articulates the fictional representation in several novels and *testimonios* of the disintegration of the Left after Trujillo's fall, as well as the demythification of the anti-Trujillo resistance and the treatment of homosexuality in these works.

The analysis of this literature ultimately leads to the disclosure of various nationalistic cultural fabrications. One of them is the Dominican establishment's demagogic manipulation of history in their quest for a mythic demographic homogeneity under the Spanish and Catholic markers. As a result, the internal colonialism implicit in this hegemonic strategy racializes black Dominicans and tries to obliterate the African ethnic and cultural component of the national "family." From a different perspective, the Trujillato narratives

commonly practice a sort of strategic essentialism that blends the Spanish conquistadors and the U.S. Marines as one imperial Other. This approach, which feeds Dominicans with a sense of belonging to a national community by setting them apart from other antagonistic countries, provides Dominican and Dominican American writers with a frame of reference against which to construct a sense of national identity. Along the same lines, the authors often link Trujillo's government to these foreign intruders as a historical continuum of oppression and exploitation. With these premises as a point of departure, in the Trujillo cycle the oppressed subjects tend to identify with an idealized Taino *noble savage*, whose lost world is romanticized as a paradise lost that must be regained. Within the context of nationalist self-perception and collective subconscious, the study of this corpus of works exposes the different ways in which Dominican politicians and authors formulate their own "imagined communities" (in Benedict Anderson's terms). Ultimately, both groups negotiate, from different positionings, the true essence or specificity of Dominicanness.

In the end, the analysis of the Trujillato narratives and of the Novel of the Latin American dictator in general can be framed within the more global project of unveiling the deplorable effects of the hegemonic tactics used by most dictatorships, by some supposedly democratic regimes, and, particularly today, by greedy transnational corporations. In fact, authoritarianism, the most corrupt form of government, shares a surprising number of common practices with today's most powerful transnational corporations, including not only the abuses against human rights and dignity characteristic of unrestricted neoliberalism but also their influence and manipulation of other sovereign nations' governments.

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A Note on Translation

In all those cases in which the English version of the text does not appear in the bibliography, the translation of the quotations is mine. Otherwise, the English version is quoted from the following already-printed sources: Jules Archer's *The Dictators*; Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (trans. Harry Zohn); Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans. Myra Bergman Ramos); Jesús Galíndez's *The Era of Trujillo* (ed. Russell H. Fitzgibbon) and "A Report on Santo Domingo" (ed. Hugh M. Hamill Jr.); Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (trans. Gregory Rabassa); Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson); Enrique Lafourcade's *King Ahab's Feast* (trans. Renate and Ray Morrison); Marisela Rizik's *Of Forgotten Times* (trans. Isabel Z. Brown); Augusto Roa Bastos's *I, the Supreme* (trans. Helen Lane); Viriato Sención's *They Forged the Signature of God* (trans. Asa Zatz); Rafael L. Trujillo Molina's "The Evolution of Democracy in Santo Domingo" (ed. Hugh M. Hamill Jr.); Mario Vargas Llosa's *Conversation in the Cathedral* (trans. Gregory Rabassa) and *The Feast of the Goat* (trans. Edith Grossman); and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Galíndez* (trans. Carol and Thomas Christensen). However, in the case of Viriato Sención's *They Forged the Signature of God*, Marisela Rizik's *Forgotten Times*, and Jesús Galíndez's "A Report on Santo Domingo" and *The Era of Trujillo*, I felt compelled to provide amendments (which I wrote in square brackets) for some passages that seemed unidiomatic.