

## ◆ Introduction

*Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli and Ana María Mutis*

The continent that came to be Latin America was both inferred by, and announced to, Europeans by rivers. Sailing southward during his third voyage, near the island we know as Trinidad, Christopher Columbus heard a deafening roar of water that jolted him from a stupor induced by the crushing heat of the Caribbean. He observed a bizarre change in the tides relentlessly pushing his ship eastward: indomitable torrents of freshwater collided with marine currents that swelled the ocean into “lomas” (hills) diverging and converging with fury across the seascape in a thunderous dance (44). Columbus could only conjecture, he told the King in his fourth letter, that this sublime event could mean only one thing: the promise of continued land belonging to a continental mass. Contemplation of these simultaneous phenomena in the ocean led him to envision the complex forces shaping this transcendent occurrence and the other, equally complex, realities that the event itself heralded.

The admiral’s wonder was more than a mere reaction to the spectacle of waters offered by what proved to be the Orinoco River, which his expedition was the first from the Old World to encounter. His observation also had bearing on a then on-going quest for confirmation of one of two speculative proposals being circulated in a dispute over the nature of the world and its peoples. Proponents of closed cosmographies asserted that a “River Ocean” enveloped the continental mass of the earth, creating a single, insular world. With waters fundamental to their argument as well, advocates of open cosmographies affirmed that water-land distribution predicted the existence of unseen lands. Columbus’s observation would prove the frustration of the former current of thought and a major affirmation of the latter, an open view of the globe in which flowing waters traversing the earth in constant, cyclical permutations—like the scene near the mouth of the Orinoco—foretold unknown lands. Nevertheless, this open view of the world carried a paradox at the heart of its argument. While its proponents conceived of far-away zones populated by human life, they did not extend full civility to the inhabitants of these lands. This contradiction, as Nicolás Wey Gomez reminds us, was constitutive of the very experience of coloniality.<sup>1</sup> It also was central to the opposing debates seeking to explain the nature of

humankind and of the cosmographic, the political, and the historical.

Once the continent was announced, rivers remained central to the exploration and colonization that ensued. To begin with, the great currents, or rivers, of the ocean transported European mariners across the Atlantic to new continents. After these seafarers had reached the New World, rivers became object and motor of territorial expansion, as conquistadors searched for the coveted northwest river passage that was to connect the new continent with the Pacific or for the mythical fluvial paths to El Dorado. Nevertheless, myth, the representation of the New World through the rhetoric of Edenic landscapes, and that utopian impulse that Beatriz Pastor aptly observed in the writing of Latin America, was also countered from the beginning by another, more troubled, discourse marked by controversy and disquiet that challenged idealized, restrictive, and closed visions of the world.

Embedded in the debates on the nature of the world—controversies that propelled the project of the Indies itself—and drawing on the quality of constant, cyclical permutations of the waters that challenged inherited closed cosmographies and bolstered new views of the globe, the notion of rivers has paramount importance in Latin American literature and culture. The present volume is dedicated to the study of how writers have transformed flowing waters into sites of contemplation and contestation of the historical, geographic, and literary foundations of colonial Spanish American and modern Latin American imaginaries. Authors have found in rivers a suggestive literary locus of unrest and ambiguity to problematize and disrupt the physical, metaphysical, and ontological symbolic value ascribed to landscapes by their predecessors. The literary production in the region reveals contradictory meanings associated with flowing waters: as boundary and as connection; as paths to death and life; as emblems of both transformation and an anchoring of identity; as signs of dissolution and transformation; and as change and continuity. Joining the philosophical and cosmographic debates central to the founding of European colonialism in the Americas, authors adopt the representation of particular rivers to point to paradoxes and contradictions in inherited organic notions of the colonial, the imperial, the national, and the global. What remains constant in the changing role of the river in Latin American cultural production is that flowing waters serve as a discursive site of scrutiny, debate, and transgression in which disquiet about the political, natural, human, and collective experiences engendered by encounters with new realities can be expressed.

Joining the recent “Spatial Turn” in the humanities and social sciences, these studies of the representation of rivers of disquiet and discontent reaffirm the relevance of space and place and highlight the intersection of geography and history in the elaboration of political and cultural landscapes that inform Latin American worldviews. The writing and rewriting of totalizing, organic constructs, both political and philosophical, from an

exclusively historical consciousness impeded the emergence of a critical sensibility toward spatiality in the imaginaries of the region. The influence of the historicist frameworks inherited from Hegelian and Marxist thought promoted all-encompassing teleological narratives that privileged temporal sequences and obscured the relevance of spatiality. Social Darwinism imposed a linear perspective that removed agency in the fashioning of historical accounts. And Orientalist thought established a hierarchical organization of peoples and continents based on ostensibly natural relationships between time, technological progress, and civilization. The increasing interdisciplinary attention to space, place, and the geographic imagination over the last two decades calls for a collaborative inquiry into the links between landscapes and history in the region's literature and culture.

The earliest reconsideration of space through an interdisciplinary approach can be traced to the contemplations of the effects of industrial revolutions on the urban landscape in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel. It was Henri Lefebvre who spearheaded an innovative conception of space, offering a new, critical perspective from the field of geography by looking into the metaphysical, physical, and social aspects of space as functions of its production. His influence reached fields ranging from urban studies to sociology and geography, yielding new critical approaches of Marxian inspiration from theorists like David Harvey. In his work, Harvey develops an analysis of the articulation of time and space through the logic of commodity production, which infuses capitalist narratives with stability through appeal to timeless and unproblematic landscapes. Edward Soja also condemns the subordination of space to time and reasserts the importance of placing social structure on the same plane as both of these concepts. Soja, along with Derek Gregory and Steve Piles, advanced those postmodern perspectives that transcend the barriers of particular disciplines and contribute to a larger reconsideration of the role of space in the study of social, political, and cultural practices. Yi-Fu Tuan, in turn, led the exploration of space and place from the perspective of human experience, establishing the discipline of human geography. Informed by new geographical perspectives, scholars in literary and cultural studies, anthropology, history, political science, and art joined the poststructuralist rejection of teleological and universal explanations founded solely on historical accounts, inaugurating the renowned "Spatial Turn" (Cosgrove, *Mappings*).

In the field of Hispanism, Edmundo O'Gorman called attention more than half a century ago to the human dimension in the crafting of geographical knowledge, focusing closely on the explicative process entailed in the "invention" of America (1958). More recently, literary critics took up O'Gorman's insights once more and answered the call issued by cultural geographers to restore space to the study of culture, society, and politics as a

whole. Concerned with the dialogic process involved in written descriptions, cartography, and the cosmographic debates surrounding them, the contributions by these critics shed new light on the implications of space and enrich our understanding of the project of imperial expansion (Zamora, Padrón, Wey Gómez). New considerations of space informed by postmodern perspectives provided literary scholars with a wider generic scope in the study of relationships of power, bringing to the fore the intersection between visual, written, and performative human practices (Rabasa, Mignolo, Pratt, Arias and Meléndez, Verdesio). In turn, this renewed preoccupation with spatiality also contributed to a reconsideration of notions of territoriality from indigenous perspectives and within religious groups; it also opened up the study of overlapping locations as fields of inquiry for new understandings of identity and gender (Arenal and Schlau, Myers, Adorno, Mignolo and Boone, Meléndez).<sup>2</sup> New attention to space has led to a reconsideration of the Enlightenment in general. A focus on the production of knowledge regarding rivers in the region offered novel ways to understand the period in a global context and contributed to a reconsideration of modernity (Ewalt).

Scholars studying spatial representations in nineteenth and twentieth century Latin American literature have devoted great attention to the city. Ángel Rama's epochal *The Lettered City* (1984) has absorbed critics since it was published, inspiring sustained discussion and reformulation of his observations on the power of written discourse in relation to the configuration of urban space (Franco, Moraña, Spitta and Muñoz, Paz Soldán and Castillo, Lambright and Guerrero). Beyond the scope of Rama's study, a proliferation of urban studies has engaged the city as a site of cultural production and subjective experience (Sarlo, García Canclini, Silva, Monsiváis). Within these analyses, imaginary cities and utopian spaces have received important critical attention by scholars who study the transformation of these constructions in Latin American literary imagination (Aínsa, Heffes, Boholavsky and González de Oleaga). Recently, increased interest in the notion of non-spaces, or non-spatial sites, such as darkness and emptiness, has highlighted the prevalence of troubling metaphors in representations of urban complexities in late twentieth-century Spanish American literature (Kressner).

Another consideration of space is offered by Ecocriticism, a critical current whose commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry into the relationship between literature and the natural world has led Lawrence Buell to characterize it as "more issue-driven than methodology-driven" (700). This eclectic and critically diverse movement aims to bring the nonhuman world to the forefront, mainly by studying the textual representations of nature and of humanity's relationship with the natural environment. By decentering the human from the narrative—in a shift that echoes the reconsideration of spatial and temporal hierarchies constituent to the "Spatial Turn"—the

Ecocritical approach to literature views the natural world, more than mere setting for human action, as dialectically intertwined with human culture. Cheryll Glotfelty has expressed this concern as a focus on the interconnections between nature, on the one hand, and culture (particularly language and literature) on the other. From a critical perspective, Ecocriticism serves the realm of literature; as theoretical discourse, it can be seen to “[negotiate] between the human and nonhuman” (Glotfelty xix). The “nature-first” critical approach of the 1990s underwent subsequent challenge within Ecocriticism from those who advocate a more socially conscious literary engagement with the environment. Enriching this critical discussion, scholars from different disciplines called for a radicalization of ecological discourses. David Harvey assails the persistence of dualistic thought, reminding us of the profound implication at play between the natural world and human (particularly economic) systems; he calls for the confrontation of class, gender, and race in the discursive forums where environmental justice and ecological modernization are negotiated (“What is Green and Makes the Environment Go Round?”).

This broadening of concern, more in keeping with Latin American literary traditions of social awareness, has supported ecocritical readings that recognize human concerns as interwoven with the environmental issues addressed in the region’s literature. Ecocritical questioning has debilitated binaries deeply entrenched in Latin American discourses of identity and the national, including human/non-human, civilization/barbarism (Skinner in this volume), and urban/rural (Camps, Williams in this volume). From explorations of the rise of environmental awareness in literature and analyses of the critique of modernization in representations of nature (Marcone) to studies of economic, historical, and political influences on the discourse of nature in the regional novel (French), in Caribbean literature (DeLoughrey, Gosson, Handley), and in contemporary fiction (Barbas-Rhoden), Latin American environmental criticism is expanding its inquiry to include an array of literary genres from different historical moments. Moreover, critics are deploying diverse methodologies, such as feminism (Ybarra), postcolonial studies (DeLoughrey, Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies*), and literary history (Rivera-Barnes and Hoeg), among others, in conjunction with Ecocriticism and, in the process, exposing the cultural complexities attendant to the Latin American literary representation of nature. Situating the essays in this volume within the wide array of critical perspectives on space and nature offers us an expanded view of rivers as locus for the literary exploration of questions of power, identity, resistance, and discontent.

How, then, have writers ranging from the sixteenth-century Spanish Indies—Spanish America—all the way to early-twenty-first-century Latin America, engaged rivers? What larger literary ideas have been generated by description of particular rivers within this vast region? Taken together, the

critical contributions that make up the present volume reveal that the river provides a distinctive space for the symbolic negotiation of the critical consciousness that shapes collective memories and subjectivities; it offers an arena for grappling with and mediating the crisis of representation brought about by political, cultural, and epistemological changes.

The project of colonization in the decades following the arrival of Europeans in the Indies depended on practices of geographical description and mapping as means of interpreting the lands and peoples encountered and of transforming its topographies to align with the master narratives propelling the venture of territorial expansion. Writing the history of the Americas, as Ricardo Padrón argues, “is inseparable [from] the foundational cartography that defines them as a coherent space” (181). The transformation of New World topographies into utopian landscapes, and the subsequent use of inherited notions of space and place to justify the imposition of particular systems of ethics on the region and its peoples, was key in the development of the complex ideas and practices associated with what we understand as early modern colonialism. Adopting rivers as the center of their explicative framework, writers effected a clinamen, or swerve, to the interpretation of the same body of philosophical and scientific knowledge to challenge opposing viewpoints within the debate. Alonso de Santa Cruz is an example of how discontent with the ontological and geopolitical principles driving conquest and colonization took shape in genres dedicated to the abridgement of histories, such as the epitome, and through literary practices, such as chorographic description (the depiction of local or particular places). A cosmographer, cartographer, chronicler, and astronomer to Charles V and Philip II, Santa Cruz reconfigured the Great River of the Magdalena in the New Kingdom of Granada, an act that was constitutive to the debates that shaped a coherent notion of the *orbis terrarum* from knowledge brought by transatlantic and transpacific exploration. Emplacing the political and historical onto the riverscape, Santa Cruz challenged inherited cosmographies and proposed a new theorization of the Amerindian. His refashioning of the Magdalena yields new visions of the global from local perspectives—a vital intersection, as Denis Cosgrove reminds us (*Apollo's Eye* 16)—laying bare the political and moral consequences of the colonial enterprise and, moreover, re-envisioning the very notion of global worlds (for a study on challenges to systems of ethics and a reconsideration of globality from local perspectives, see Pettinaroli in this volume).

The economic order that came with the project of global expansion imposed by the Spanish monarchy was surpassed in the next century by the functioning of a mercantile system that developed as an organic force with no identifiable principles and grew at precipitous rates. Urban centers like Mexico City, where the politics of urbanization were at the service of the new economic order, epitomized this change. The waters in the city's lake

threatened the presumably organic nature of the mercantile order. Key figures in colonial politics contributed to the literary elaboration of a perfect *urbe*. Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, a chronicler of the city, eulogized the urban center's ostensible European likeness in his *Mexico in 1554*. Overseer of the Patronato Real in New Spain, Eugenio Salazar y Alarcón transformed Mexico City's mythological origins to connect Mexico to the Pacific through subterranean rivers in his 1585 "Descripción de la Laguna de Mexico" (Pettinaroli). And Bernardo de Balbuena's *Grandeza Mexicana* (1604) celebrates the city as the "hinge" of a new global world order (Fuchs and Martínez-San Miguel). Yet, as Thomas Gage and other less-idealizing travelers remind us, sinking buildings, constant floods, and chaotic activity affecting all demographic groups in the city were a constant in metropolitan life. Reconsideration of the poetic treatment of the waters of the lake in *Grandeza Mexicana* suggests a sense of disquiet in the elaboration of a new heterotopia. Balbuena's discrete treatment of waters and indigenous people renders them obstinate surpluses and ontological menaces to mercantile rationality. These threats were solved soon after, in 1607, by way of the aquatic technologies of drainage—a scientific solution to the problem that Balbuena poses in the poetic realm. Through the poetics of the fluvial, the eulogy articulates the inassimilable categories of nature, the social, and the economic and announces a "new history" where the drainage system is "the economy of the economy" that facilitates the sordid consolidation of mercantilism (see Del Valle in this volume).

Debates about writing the history of the New World grew in intensity during the eighteenth century. At this time, arguments in favor of epistemology as a basis for the field, an area of study that had traditionally relied on sixteenth-century chronicles and descriptions written by Europeans, lost authority. Concurrently, philosophical travelers from throughout Europe imposed a new sensibility of scientific objectivity in which lessons about human society and nature were derived from the practice of observation. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra observes, this refashioning of the value of sources and of observers was related to the rise of a "bourgeois public sphere" in which reliability and credibility were circumscribed to unemotional, presumably masculine (hence objective) critical perspectives (2). Adopting evolutionary and teleological narratives, these approaches to history privileged new types of evidence, such as rivers, mountains, fossils, and grammar, among others, in determining the nature of American peoples and geographies. In particular, the humidity emerging from the rivers and environment of tropical America served as evidence of the presumably degenerate character of the indigenous and even of the *criollo* (creole) inhabitants. In the Iberian world, a number of authors under Bourbon sponsorship disputed this critique for what they perceived to be an attack on Spanish colonialism. Rivers gained new hermeneutic utility in challenging these ostensibly degenerate tropicalities that critics had found

inherent to the Spanish American landscape. Adopting Enlightenment aesthetics and the empirical discourse of objectivity deployed by European critics, writers focused on fluvial courses in order to challenge these aesthetics, essaying a new, secular view of the tropics as frontiers of productivity. Missionary Filippo Salvatore Gilij's *Saggio di storia americana* (1780) is as an example of this type of Jesuit Tropicalization, as the movement could be termed. His description and mapping of the Orinoco transform the river as an object of epistemic value. While advancing ecological imperialism, he contests historiographical challenges from European critics by re-contextualizing the humidity of the rivers and the heat in the region within discourses of productivity, thereby generating a new rhetoric of the tropics (see Arias in this volume).

Humboldt followed the course of the Orinoco during a half-year's trek in 1800 that fired his imagination and put his innovative poetics, based on a subtle balancing of scientific observation and aesthetic experience, to perhaps their most serious test. This tropical river, with its riotous biological and botanical density and its main artery located in the midst of the rainforest, called forth some of Humboldt's most compelling prose; it also overwhelmed him at times with its sheer vastness and complexity. A close reading of two texts from *Aspects of Nature* (1808), "The Cataracts of the Orinoco" and "Nocturnal Life of Animals in the Primeval Forest," reveals Humboldt's struggle with the overpowering materiality of the river. His pages embody less a harmonious fusion than a frustrating gap between the scientific and the aesthetic, between detailed observation and phenomenological perceptions of the natural world. And yet to see this as a mere "failure" of Humboldt's poetics (as the author himself seems to have done) is to overlook his far-reaching influence. Indeed, Humboldt's struggle to "write the Orinoco," for all its frustrations, also provides glimpses of the early lineaments of environmental and ecological thought in the region (see Marcone in this volume).

During the nation-building period after the region's wars of independence in the nineteenth century, authors sought in nature suitable metaphors for Latin American national and regional identity. The roaring rivers, the vast pampas, the magnificent jungles, were believed to explain Latin America's differences and thus to elicit a unique cultural production. However, as González Echevarría asserts, this "myth of nature" was an ideologically charged notion used politically to blur class distinctions and artistically to define Latin American literature as independent of Spanish cultural influence (126). The linking of nature to cultural and national identity, a notion promoted by Latin American intellectuals of the period, was a conscious mechanism for advancing political and literary agendas central to the consolidation of these national projects. The directionality of rivers and their ability to connect distant communities across the national territory—among other characteristics of rivers, served authors as metaphors

for national destiny and unity. Cartographically, as Mark D. Anderson argues in this volume, they symbolized veins and arteries transporting the nation's blood: an organic representation of the national topography that echoed the metaphoric transformation of rivers under the continuing influence of old theories of water circulation in open cosmographic models of the world. Nevertheless, promoting a vision of a unified national identity was a daunting task considering the racial, cultural, and political diversity in the region. It is not surprising, then, that authors also turned to the representation of rivers to grapple with tensions and discontent in the face of the contradictions and limitations of the newly configured societies. Rivers, with their contradictory symbolic meanings, embodied the inconsistencies that these newly configured societies contained as well as the challenges facing the territorial integration of the nation as represented in the fluvial metaphor.

This elusive quest for national specificity through patriotic poetry, essays, and novels that exalted nature was converging, too, with a less studied historical and ideological event: the invention of the Aryan and the birth of archeology. Born as a comparative philological pursuit in the 1830s, the search for the origins of Aryan or Indo-European tongues, and thus for proof of their superiority, shifted to notions of race in the projects of physical anthropologists, politicians, economists, and other intellectuals seeking to locate the origin of Western European civilization in the cradle of the Aryan race. In the Americas, the implications of this proposal threatened intellectuals, politicians, and scientists and, dissatisfied by its implications for their place in the world, they advanced their own, contested claim to the origins of what Ruth Hill coins pre-Columbian Aryanism ("Primeval Whiteness"). Writing from a variety of fields, these authors asserted that the vestiges of Old World Aryanism were none other than the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations—or that they were themselves the seminal Aryans who had generated a derivative branch in the Old World. Rivers, streams, and other bodies of water—including the Atlantic Ocean—held evidence of this in their riverbeds and seascapes. In regards to the River Plate basin, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's lesser-studied writings and speeches serve as an example of this "New World Aryanism." A historian, politician, and amateur archeologist, he contributed to the nationalization of Aryanism by way of what Christopher Matthews labels the transformation of indigenous peoples into "anachronisms" detached from the modern world (274) or relics from other stages of humanity (see Hill in this volume). Through his localization of American Aryanism in the rivers of Argentina, Sarmiento and others like him contributed to the positivistic efforts of Latin American elites to articulate reclamation projects that erased and transformed the ostensibly degenerate origins of contemporary descendants of the indigenous American civilizations.

As narratives of origins were fundamental to the nation-building

projects, so too was the inclusion of the nation's landscapes in a national discourse promoting a sense of shared cultural identity. This initiative to promote national affirmation through the exaltation of national geography was grounded in the fact that, as Antonio Candido explains, "one of the assumptions, explicit or latent, of Latin American literature, was this mutual contamination, generally euphoric, of land and country, the grandeur of the second being considered as a kind of unfolding of the strength of the first" (36). Following this logic, the building of the Brazilian nation during the 1890s was threatened by the existence of marginal geographies that were part of the national territory yet stood beyond the grasp of the federal government and its institutions. These areas were a national negative space embodied in the notion of *sertão*, the wilderness or backlands, a space that came to represent the unknown or the resistance to national control and symbolization. The Amazon River basin was one of these places. A fantastical space in the colonial imaginary, its waterscape was seen by authors as an aquatic ambiguity blocking the path of the Brazilian Republic. Writers like Euclides da Cunha and Alberto Rangel in the early twentieth century surveyed the river with the goal, as journalists, of incorporating it into the national imaginary under sponsorship of the government. Invoking naturalism as a translation of biological meaning, they failed to territorialize the Amazonian fluvial environment. The tropes of frustration and disappointment in their representations render the aquatic landscape ambiguous, suggesting a failure in the empirical subjectivity through which they attempted to emplot Brazil's national destiny onto the geography. Ironically, the next generation of Brazilian modernists adopts these tropes and celebrates them as part of a revisionist reexamination of national identity (see Anderson in this volume).

The creation of national ideologies was also supported by foundational novels, which, as Doris Sommer asserts, translated heterosexual romance into a discourse of national consolidation. In these national romances, the stories of star-crossed lovers who attempt to overcome their racial, economic, regional, and political differences functioned as an allegory of national destiny. Following a Romantic sensibility, the land was often presented as a projection of the protagonists, anthropomorphized in such a way that it embodied their emotions and their struggles (DeVries 538). However, such representations of nature were not free of ambivalence, and rivers in particular exposed the seams in what was meant to be a uniform binding of national identities. In *Cumandá* (1879), Ecuador's national novel by Juan León Mera, the fluvial landscape both helps the protagonists and is hostile to them. The constantly shifting meaning of the river and its contradictory relationship with the protagonists mobilizes but also undermines the racial and political discourses traditionally associated with this novel. If Sommer's attention to romantic love as a trope for national consciousness unveils a notion of identity politics tied mainly to notions of

race and gender, a look at the ambiguity of the fluid space of the river and its conflicting relationships with the protagonists highlights the importance of nature as an alternative context in which a national future that transcends racial and political differences is possible. Reading the fluid space of the river in *Cumandá* from the critical perspective of Ecocriticism exposes the ways in which this novel affirms an identity politics beyond race and gender while also essaying an environmentalist discourse that developed fully in the following century (see Skinner in this volume).

The ontological, aesthetic, and political frameworks that prescribed notions of national identity during the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century drew challenges over the succeeding decades. Rejecting attempts at epistemic certainty and unity of meanings in the grand narratives of earlier periods, postmodern representations of the river in the twentieth century expose fissures in the promises of these narratives. More significantly, the river in this context becomes a vehicle to convey disenchantment with the ideas of progress and globalization as well as a loss of faith in modernization—a sentiment that is at the core of postmodernism in Latin America. This sense of disenchantment involves not only a loss of hope, as Norbert Lechner reminds us, but also a resignification of reality (153–4). Authors engage rivers to expose and critique human power structures and the overwhelming onslaught of the global, to offer warnings about the perils of modernization, and to bring social and environmental concerns to light. To do so, writers turn rivers into ecological wastelands, victims of industrial exploitation, and witnesses to historical violence, while discrediting the earlier, totalizing discourses of nature—regardless of whether they sought an illusory imperial stability or a romantic national unity.

Contemporary Colombian literature offers a compelling panorama of the range of ways in which authors address the representation of rivers as sites of social and political disenchantment. Gabriel García Márquez, Fernando Vallejo, Héctor Abad Faciolince, and Laura Restrepo, among others, represent a nation collapsed under the weight of ecological destruction and historical violence through the recurrent image of polluted rivers whose currents carry floating corpses. The differences in their uses of what has become an iconic image of Colombia's violence demonstrate that discontent takes many forms and each reveals a particular understanding of the nation's realities. This is evidenced by a comparative study of two of the most influential novels addressing the topic of the Magdalena River: Gabriel García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985) and Laura Restrepo's novel *La novia oscura* (1999). Despite similarities in the two authors' use of the Magdalena as a symbol of the nation's decay, Restrepo's depiction of the river challenges García Márquez's representations of a disjunction between personal and collective history while also questioning his way of apprehending national reality through the fluvial metaphor. In

this way, Restrepo's depiction of the Magdalena is not only a condemnation of Colombia's reality but also of the literary tradition—particularly in García Márquez's novel—that has restricted the river to an emblem of Colombia's moral deterioration and has not explored its potential as a vehicle of reflection on the ties between individual and community (see Mutis in this volume).

Frustration with local social and political realities, expressed through the fluvial metaphor, is also embedded in Central American literature. Such metaphors continue as an inextricable component of the literary tradition of *testimonio* by aiding authors in their denunciation of and resistance to oppression stemming from the civil wars from the 1970s to the early 1990s in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. In many of these works, authors represent flowing waters as witnesses to violence, oppression, and loss of political innocence. Two examples of this practice are the testimonial poems "Réquiem para el Sumpul" (1983) by Mercedes Durand and *Swimming in El Río Sumpul* (2005) by Elsie B.C. Rivas. The importance of place and the wealth of meanings that the river metaphor affords in these testimonial poems signal a departure from the traditional emphasis by such critics as John Beverly and George Yúdice on the human witness in testimonial discourse. Presenting the river as physical evidence of human oppression both transfers the concept of witness to the nonhuman natural world, thus exposing connections between place and memory, and also defies the anti-literary nature of *testimonio*. A careful reconsideration of the river as a witness results in an expanded conceptualization of the genre, one brought about through critical dialogue with the conventional models of testimonial literature and Trauma Studies (see Kane in this volume).

In a Janus-like stasis, postmodern perspectives in historiographical novels afford authors the possibility of representing rivers in a way that at once rewrites the past and, as Linda Hutcheon proposes, opens it up to the present (110). Authors discredit the totalizing discourses of Spanish conquest and dismantle illusory imperial narratives seeking to convey a homogeneous sense of territoriality. They transform fluvial spaces into sites of resistance to the stable subject position in spatio-historiographic narratives and transgress the spatio-logical principles of the Renaissance. William Ospina's two novels *Ursúa* (2005) and *El país de la canela* (2008) exemplify this challenge to the discursiveness of historiography. His novels connect fluvial discourses with alternative interpretations of past and present and further connect waters to acts and problems of storytelling, which is understood as an alternative to the authoritarian discourse of colonization. His depictions of the Amazon River in these novels serve as a narrative site of resistance to the colonial and neocolonial conquests of land and exploitations of its natural resources (see Kressner in this volume).

The physical transformation of rivers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through technologies of containment (e.g., channeling, tubing,

redirection to hydroelectric plants) turns their waters into what Wyman Herendeen calls “a vaguer entity” hidden behind hydroelectric plants, paved over with roads, disguised and distant from human contact (6). Concurrent with the phenomenon of rural-urban migrations, and due in part to the cosmopolitan orientation of authors returning from urban centers in Europe, Latin American fiction gradually moves away from rural themes and toward the city. In this context, earlier representations of the river are displaced and re-inscribed by appeal to the notion of *relève*, which Jacques Derrida defines as that which displaces and replaces something and at the same time fulfills and supports the former functions of the earlier thing, both negating and preserving its original meaning (19–20, 43, 121). In this stasis, authors struggle with earlier representations, opting instead to transfigure them into phantasmal entities like that fluid urban social type, the flaneur (the emblematic figure of urban and modern experience addressed in Walter Benjamin’s work), as well as urban sewers and bridges, and also as simple acts of vanishing in the literary realm. The spatiality of these fluvial transfigurations remains, while they are replaced by new embodiments of waters that both negate and preserve former meanings. From the regional novels that present rivers as nostalgic reminders of a lost past to the urban fictions that reconfigure rivers as *cloacas* (sewers) to deploy novel landscapes of disquiet, the symbolical significance of flowing waters remains constant in Latin American literature in the twentieth and twenty-first century (for an overview of the displacement and transformation of rivers in this period, see Williams in this volume).

The attention given to the fluvial in this volume recomposes the historical imagination wrought by authors, unveiling the spatial narratives that frame apparently innocent descriptions of rivers in the region. From multiple fields, including cosmography, scientific observation, aesthetics, and archeology, to diverse genres, such as the novel, poetry, testimonial narrative, historiography, and historiographical metafiction, writers have embraced the river as a means of articulating disquiet and discontent with imposed, closed notions of the world. While rhetorical approaches change, fluvial waters continues to provide authors with ways to challenge immaterial systems and principles that govern human destinies (ethics, economics, scientific perception, aesthetic experience, justice, nature, humanity, race, gender) and to free these notions from unwarranted certitude. By traversing river courses on journeys both physical and intellectual, authors dismantle the ontological tenets and epistemological frameworks that uphold inherited literary imaginaries, laying bare and thus calling into question their deployment as instruments of power.

It was a river that first announced the existence of an American continent to a European voyager—but in order to receive this message, that voyager had to exercise close powers of observation, reason, and imagination. This volume seeks to trace the varied paths of literary

engagement, in modulations other than the utopian, using a crucial feature of the region's material landscape. The chapters that comprise it help us to understand how, at various times and places, writers have seen in Spanish and Latin American rivers ordeals of human survival, contested symbols of identity, and complexity that beggars the power of human narrative: emblems of blighted hopes, arteries of future prosperity, and determinants of human culture. The literary map of Spanish and Latin America has had its enchanted streams, to be sure. Nevertheless, writers have also found others, marked by peril, perplexity, and possibility—rivers of discontent.

## Notes

1. For an extensive treatment of the debates to reconcile old cosmologies and cosmographies with new territories and their societies and of the transformation of the ancient, torrid Antipodes into the early-modern Tropics, see Wey Gómez. For a brief review see Pettinaroli in this volume.
2. For a more detailed discussion of the scholarship in the literary field in Colonial Latin America, see Arias and Meléndez's *Mapping Colonial Spanish America* and Meléndez's "Cultural Production of Space."

## Works Cited

- Abad Faciolince, Héctor H. *Angosta*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004. Print.
- Adorno, Rolena. *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988. Print.
- Aínsa, Fernando. *De la edad de oro a El Dorado. Génesis del discurso utópico americano*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992. Print.
- Arenal, Electa, and Stacey Schlauf. *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*. Rev. ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010. Print.
- Arias, Santa and Mariselle Meléndez. *Mapping Colonial Spanish America: Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture, and Experience*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002. Print.
- Balbuena, Bernardo de. *La grandeza mexicana y compendio apologético en alabanza de la poesía*. Mexico: Porrúa, 1604. Print.
- Barbas-Rhoden, Laura. *Ecological Imaginations in Latin American Fiction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.
- Beverly, John. "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio," *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*. Ed. Beverley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. 29–44. Print.
- Bohoslavsky, Ernesto L. and Marisa González de Oleaga. *El hilo rojo: Palabras y prácticas de la utopía en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. "The Ecocritical Insurgency" *New Literary History*, 30:3 (Summer, 1999): 699–712. Print.

- Candido, Antonio. "Literature and Underdevelopment" *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* Ed. Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, Abril Trigo. Duke University Press, 2004. 35–57. Print.
- Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Camps, Martín. "Barbarian Civilization: Travel and Landscape in *Don Segundo Sombra* and the Contemporary Argentinean Novel." *The Natural World in Latin American Literatures: Ecocritical Essays on Twentieth Century Writings*. Ed. Adrian Kane. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2010. 154–72. Print.
- Cervantes de Salazar, F. *México en 1554*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1554. Print.
- Le Riverend, Julio. *Cartas de relación de la conquista de América, textos originales de las cartas de Colón*. México: Editorial Nueva España, 1945. Print.
- Cosgrove, Denis. *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mappings*. London: Reaktion Books, 1999. Print.
- Cunha, Euclides da. *The Amazon: Land without History*. Trans. Ronald Souza. Ed. Lúcia Sá. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley. *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005. Print.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M, and George B. Handley. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On the Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Print.
- DeVries, Scott. "Swallowed: Political Ecology and Environmentalism in the Spanish American Novela de la Selva." *Hispania* 93.4 (2010): 535–46. Print.
- Durand, Mercedes. "Réquiem para el Sumpul." Ed Murguía and Paschke. *Volcán: Poems from Central America*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983. 6–8. Print.
- Ewalt, Margaret R. *Peripheral Wonders: Nature, Knowledge, and Enlightenment in the Eighteenth-Century Orinoco*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008. Print.
- Fuchs, Barbara, and Martínez-San Miguel, Yolanda. "La grandeza mexicana de Balbuena y el imaginario de una 'metrópolis colonial'." *Revista Iberoamericana* 75.228 (2009 July-Sept): 675–95. Print.
- Franco, Jean. *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.
- French, Jennifer L. *Nature, Neo-Colonialism and the Spanish-American Regional Writers*. Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2005. Print.
- García Canclini, Néstor. *Imaginario urbanos*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1997. Print.
- García Marquez, Gabriel. *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*. Barcelona: Plaza y Janés Editores, 1998. Print.
- Gage, T. *A New Survey of the West-Indies, 1648*. New York, R.M. McBride, 1929. Print.
- Gilij, Filippo Salvatore. *Saggio di storia americana o sia Storia naturale, civile, e sacra de regni, e delle provincie spagnuole di Terra-Ferma nell'America meridionale*. Rome: L. Perego erede Salvioni, 1780–1784. Print.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl. "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996. xv–xxxvii. Print.
- Gregory, Derek. *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994. Print.

- González Echevarría, Roberto. *The Voice of the Masters. Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. Print.
- Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Explanation in Geography*. London: Edward Arnold, 1969. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1989. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What's Green and Makes the Environment Go Round?" *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Frederick Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998. 327–355. Print.
- Hefes, Gisela. *Las ciudades imaginarias en la literatura latinoamericana*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2008. Print.
- Herendeen, Wyman H. *From Landscape to Literature: The River and the Myth of Geography*. Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1986. Print.
- Hill, Ruth. "Primeval Whiteness: White Supremacies, (Latin) American History, and the Transamerican Challenge to Critical Race Studies." *Teaching and Studying the Americas: Engaging Cultural Influences from Colonialism to the Present*. Eds. Michael Emerson, Caroline Levander, and Anthony Pinn. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 109–138. Print.
- Humboldt, Alexander von. *Aspects of Nature, In Different Lands and Different Climates: With Scientific Elucidations*. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850. Print.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- Kressner, Ilka. *Sites of Disquiet: The Non-Space in Spanish American Short Narratives and Their Cinematic Transformations*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, (forthcoming). Print.
- Lechner, Norbert. "A Disenchantment Called Postmodernism". *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*. Ed. John Beverley, Michael Aronna, José Oviedo. Duke University Press, 1995. 147–164. Print.
- Lambright, Anne, and Elisabeth Guerrero. *Unfolding the City: Women Write the City in Latin America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1974. Print.
- Marcone, Jorge. "De retorno a lo natural: La serpiente de oro, la 'novela de la selva' y la crítica ecológica." *Hispania* 81.2 (1998): 299–308. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Jungle Fever: Primitivism in Environmentalism, Rómulo Gallegos's Canaima, and the Romance of the Jungle." *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America: Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture*. Eds. Erik Camayd-Freixas, and José Eduardo González. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. 157–72. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Politics of Cultural Criticism and Sustainable Development in Amazonia: A Reading from the Spanish American Romance of the Jungle." *Hispanic Journal* 19:2 (Fall 1998), Special Issue on "Ecology and Latin American and Caribbean Literatures." Eds. Patrick Murphy, and Roberto Forns-Broggi. 281–94. Print.
- Matthews, Christopher N. "History to Prehistory: An Archaeology of Being Indian." *Archaeologies* 3.3 (December 2007): 271–95. Print.
- Meléndez, Mariselle. "Cultural Production of Space." *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. 173–91. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Patria, Criollos, and Blacks: Imagining the Nation in the *Mercurio peruano*, 1791–1795." *Colonial Latin American Review* 15.2 (2006): 207–27. Print.
- Mera, Juan León. *Cumandá, o un drama entre salvajes*. Ed. Ángel Esteban. Madrid: Cátedra, 1998. Print.

- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. Print.
- Mignolo and Boone *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994. Print.
- Monsiváis, Carlos. *Los rituales del caos*. México, D.F: Ediciones Era, 1995. Print.
- Moraña, Mabel. *Angel Rama y los estudios latinoamericanos*. Pittsburgh, PA: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Universidad de Pittsburgh, 1997. Print.
- Muñoz, Boris, and Silvia Spitta. *Más allá de la ciudad letrada: Crónicas y espacios urbanos*. Pittsburgh, Pa: Biblioteca de América, Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Universidad de Pittsburgh, 2003. Print.
- Myers, Kathleen Ann. *Neither Saints nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.
- O’Gorman, E. *La invención de América: investigación acerca de la estructura histórica del Nuevo Mundo y del sentido de su devenir*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958. Print.
- Ospina, William. *El país de la canela*. 1. ed. Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2008. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ursúa*. Bogotá: Alfaguara, 2005. Print.
- Padrón, Ricardo. *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.
- Pastor Bodmer, Beatriz. *El jardín y el peregrino: el pensamiento utópico en América Latina (1492–1695)*. 1. ed. México: Coordinación de Difusión Cultural, Dirección de Literatura/UNAM, 1999. Print.
- Paz Soldán, Edmundo, and Debra A. Castillo. *Latin American Literature and Mass Media*. New York: Garland Pub, 2001. Print.
- Pettinaroli, Elizabeth. “Emplacing the South Seas in Mexico: Eugenio Salazar y Alarcón’s ‘Descripción de la Laguna de México,’” *Colonial Latin American Review* 19.3 (2010): 373–91. Print.
- Piles, Steve. *Geographies of Resistance*. London; New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Rabasa, José. *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism*. 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. Print.
- Rama, Angel. *La ciudad letrada*. Hanover, N.H., U.S.A: Ediciones del Norte, 1984. Print.
- Rangel, Alberto. *Inferno verde: Cenas e cenários do Amazonas*. 1908. Ed. Tenório Telles. Introduction Marcos Frederico Krüger. Manaus: Valer, 2001. Print.
- Restrepo, Laura. *La novia oscura*. Bogotá: Alfaguara, 2005. Print.
- Rivas, Elsie B.C. *Swimming in El Río Sumpul*. Georgetown: Finishing Line Press, 2005. Print.
- Rivera-Barnes, Beatriz, and Jerry Hoeg. *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Salazar y Alarcón, Ed. “Descripción De La Laguna De México.” *Ensayo de una biblioteca española de libros raros y curiosos*. Madrid: Gredos, 1889. Print.
- Sarlo, Beatriz. *Instantáneas: Medios, ciudad y costumbres en el fin de siglo*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ariel, 1996. Print.
- Sarmiento, Domingo F. *Conflicto y armonías de las razas en América*. Introd. José Ingenieros. Buenos Aires: “La Cultura Argentina,” 1915. Print.

- Silva Téllez, Armando. *Imaginarios urbanos*. Bogotá, Colombia: Tercer Mundo Editores, 2000. Print.
- Simmel, Georg. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*. Ed. Donald N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971. Print.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Political Organization of Space*. Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers, 1971. Print.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Print.
- Vallejo, Fernando. *El desbarrancadero*. Madrid: Alfaguara/Santillana, 2001. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *La rambla paralela*. Bogotá, Colombia: Alfaguara, 2002. Print.
- Verdesio, Gustavo. *Forgotten Conquests: Rereading New World History from the Margins*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. Print.
- Wey-Gómez, Nicolás. *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008. Print.
- Ybarra, Priscilla Solís. "Borderlands as Bioregion: Jovita González, Gloria Anzaldúa, and the Twentieth Century Ecological Revolution in the Rio Grande Valley." *Melus: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 34.2 (2009): 175–89. Print.
- Yúdice, George. "Testimonio and Postmodernism." *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*. Georg Gugelberger. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. 42–57. Print.
- Zamora, Margarita. *Reading Columbus*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Print.

---

Pettinaroli, Elizabeth M. and Ana María Mutis. "Introduction." *Troubled Waters: Rivers in Latin American Imagination*. Eds. Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli and Ana María Mutis. *Hispanic Issues On Line* (Spring 2013): 1–18. Web.

---