

## CHAPTER 1

### *The Post-Boom*

To write about the Post-Boom in the contemporary Spanish American novel is in reality to risk a few generalizations, based on selective evidence, for fellow critics to modify and refine, if they notice them, from the standpoint of their own expertise. The field is vast and evolving, the required materials are hardly to be found under one roof, and there is no consensus at present about relevant authors, periodization, or methodology. Nonetheless, it seems increasingly clear that something began to change significantly in Spanish American fiction during the mid-1970s, and a lapse of twenty years should be enough to make possible some tentative remarks. Indeed there is already a growing body of material on the Post-Boom<sup>1</sup> with useful indications about how to proceed.

Inevitably the first step is to try to characterize the Boom in such a way as to facilitate the task of showing how the Post-Boom is different. This is no easy task, for the Boom itself was a very complex phenomenon with a number of contradictory creative patterns existing within it. To complicate matters further, some of the major Boom writers, including García Márquez, Fuentes, Donoso, and Vargas Llosa, have undergone an evolution that has brought them on occasion to some extent into line with what are often perceived to be major features of Post-Boom writing. In the case of Cortázar we even have a 1978 essay on contemporary literature that advocates an approach that, in its support for sociopolitical commitment and emphasis on specifically American preoccupations, reads like a Post-Boom manifesto.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it is clear that factors shaping the Post-Boom became evident quite early in the Boom period itself, so that if we take the view that Puig and Sarduy (especially) illustrate the transition from the Boom to the Post-Boom, as seems correct, we have to see a certain overlap developing even during what appear to be the peak years of the earlier movement, that is, the 1960s. Finally, as D. W. Foster has reminded us,<sup>3</sup> alongside the Boom writers there were always others, like David Viñas and Mario Benedetti, who in retrospect represent a kind of prolongation of the broadly realistic, pre-Boom pattern of writing, linking it to certain aspects of the Post-Boom.

Despite the attendant problems, however, it is not unreasonable to characterize the Boom more or less in the terms which I, Duncan, and Sklodowska have at different times proposed. Attempting to sum up the conclusions of my *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* in 1981, I postulated the following as characteristics of the Boom:

1. La desaparición de la vieja novela "criollista" o "telúrica," de tema rural, y la emergencia del neoindigenismo de Asturias y Arguedas.
2. La desaparición de la novela "comprometida" y la emergencia de la novela "metafísica."
3. La tendencia a subordinar la observación a la fantasía creadora y la mitificación de la realidad.
4. La tendencia a enfatizar los aspectos ambiguos, irracionales y misteriosos de la realidad y de la personalidad, desembocando a veces en lo absurdo como metáfora de la existencia humana.
5. La tendencia a desconfiar del concepto de amor como soporte existencial y de enfatizar, en cambio, la incomunicación y la soledad del individuo. Anti-romanticismo.
6. La tendencia a quitar valor al concepto de la muerte en un mundo que es ya de por sí infernal.
7. La rebelión contra toda forma de tabúes morales, sobre todo los relacionados con la religión y la sexualidad. La tendencia paralela a explorar la tenebrosa magnitud de nuestra vida secreta.
8. Un mayor empleo de elementos eróticos y humorísticos.
9. La tendencia a abandonar la estructura lineal, ordenada y lógica, típica de la novela tradicional (y que reflejaba un mundo concebido como más o menos ordenado y comprensible), reemplazándola con otra estructura basada en la evolución espiritual del protagonista, o bien con estructuras experimentales que reflejan la multiplicidad de lo real.
10. La tendencia a subvertir el concepto del tiempo cronológico lineal.
11. La tendencia a abandonar los escenarios realistas de la novela tradicional, reemplazándolos con espacios imaginarios.
12. La tendencia a reemplazar al narrador omnisciente en tercera persona con narradores múltiples o ambiguos.
13. Un mayor empleo de elementos simbólicos.<sup>4</sup>

If at that time I had read Jitrik's *El no-existente caballero*,<sup>5</sup> I should have added a reference to the shift in the methods of presentation of fictional characters that he mentions.

In 1986 J. Ann Duncan basically agreed, while reducing the list to seven outstanding features.<sup>6</sup> Finally in 1991, Sklodowska picked out thirteen characteristic features of the new novel in Spanish America as a whole.<sup>7</sup> While many of them are similar to those identified by Duncan and myself, others are more applicable to the work of writers in the period following the Boom. Still, the common features of these lists seem to be based on one fundamental assumption, that what above all characterizes the Boom writers is their radical questioning of

- a. reality
- b. the writer's task

This questioning is seen as having led to the rejection of old-style realism, with its simple assumptions about time and cause and effect, and to its replacement, on the one hand, by a heightened sense of the mystery and ambiguity of things and, on the other, by a greater reliance on fantasy and the creative imagination. In addition, new areas of reality, both social and individual, came to be explored. To express this shifting vision, new, experimental narrative strategies had to be developed. These included deliberate abandonment of linear, chronological narrative, of conventional character-presentation and of obtrusive authorial authority, a much more sophisticated view than previously of the role of language in fiction, and, as a general consequence a greater tendency toward "writerly" rather than reader-friendly fiction, often with the inclusion of a certain challenge to the reader. Fuentes attempted to sum it all up in three key-words: "mito, lenguaje y estructura."<sup>8</sup> Among the overall effects is believed to be that of lifting Spanish American fiction to a new level of universality.

We should notice, however, at this point, that what seemed to many non-Spanish American critics to be a move away from the overt *americanismo* of the dominant type of pre-Boom novel, recently reinterpreted by Carlos Alonso and Roberto González-Echevarría,<sup>9</sup> to others was no such thing. Angel Rama, for instance, insisted that for many Spanish American readers the Boom continued at a deeper and more sophisticated level the search for a continental identity which had been at the heart of *criollismo*.<sup>10</sup> In this he was followed by no less a Boom writer than Cortázar.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, García Márquez, in his Nobel Prize speech, said, "La interpretación de nuestra realidad con esquemas ajenos sólo contribuye a hacernos cada vez más desconocidos."<sup>12</sup> Thus, in contrast to what was alluded to above and has commonly been taken for granted, namely, the cosmopolitanization of Spanish American fiction in the Boom period, it is possible for a more ethnocentric critic like Inca Rumold to assert that, "La búsqueda de una identidad nacional había

llegado a ser, pues, la clave de la nueva literatura latinoamericana,”<sup>13</sup> and to seek to relate the “writerly” innovations of the Boom novelists to “un esfuerzo consciente por parte de los escritores para llegar a una imagen nacional” (p. 22). How far one would go along with this view is a moot point. But the fact that it forms part of the ongoing discussion of the Boom indicates that the “return” to the interpretation of the here and now of Spanish America, thought to be one of the defining elements of Post-Boom writing, might be less of a return than it seems. It follows that, in discussing the new movement, caution must be exercised in perceiving in it too radical a break with the immediate past. Rather, we should perhaps envisage a gradual intensification of certain tendencies which were always present in some degree in the Boom, but which in the high Boom period were overshadowed: a change of emphasis rather than a new departure.

Nevertheless, the most generally held view seems to be that which postulates a deliberate reaction against certain aspects of the Boom novels and argues that the Post-Boom partly defines itself in terms of what it rejects. For clearly defined ideological reasons, Alejo Carpentier was among the first to call for a halt to technical innovation and for a return to a simpler concept of fiction. A highly professional novelist, he was fully cognizant of the novelties which the Boom writers had introduced and which have at times been seen as the main factor which produced the famous *salto de calidad* between their work and that and that of novelists of an earlier generation. He himself had been a contributor to the trend, notably in “Viaje a la semilla” and other stories in *Guerra del tiempo* (1958). But near the end of his life, and partly as a consequence of his return to Castro’s Cuba, where he came under pressure to accommodate his theory of the novel to the new political realities there, he radically modified his stance. In “Problemática del tiempo y del idioma en la moderna novela latinoamericana” (1975) and more bluntly in “La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo” (1979), he insisted that the contemporary novel was in crisis, but that happily, in Latin America at least, the way forward was clear: “la nueva novela latinoamericana tiende hacia lo épico y para responder a las aspiraciones de un tiempo épico habrá de ser épica,” that is to say “de acción grande y pública.” It also must be strongly socially orientated: “debe tener al individuo siempre relacionado con la masa que lo circunda, con el mundo en gestación que lo esculpe.” Implicitly, it should deal above all with social upheaval.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing particularly unfamiliar about this, coming as it does from a writer who by now had declared his adherence to Marxism. But Carpentier went on to mention five characteristics that it seemed to him in the late 1970s (i.e., at the end of the Boom) that the next phase of the novel in Latin America should incor-

porate. These are: melodrama, manicheism, political involvement, urban settings, and finally "la aceptación de giros sintácticos y de modismos esencialmente latinoamericanos."<sup>15</sup> The thrust of his argument is plain: there is a need to return to more popular and socially orientated novels.

Interestingly, at approximately the same time, a much younger novelist from the other end of the continent, the Chilean Antonio Skármeta, who has been described by his Argentinian fellow-novelist Mempo Gardinelli as "quizá el más representativo autor del posboom,"<sup>16</sup> was also discussing characteristics of the Post-Boom as he saw them emerging in his own generation (he was born in 1940). If one were to attempt to date the birth of the new movement specifically, an appropriate date might be 1975, the date of the Boom's last great blockbuster and perhaps its swan song, Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, but more especially of Skármeta's *Soñé que la nieve ardía*. The story deals with the last phase of the Allende government in Chile and the *pinochetazo* which brought it to an end. It is not irrelevant to notice that the novel was finished in exile and thus belongs, in one sense, to a significant sector of Post-Boom fiction, the novel of exile. Holding a degree from New York's Columbia University, Skármeta is a teacher of Spanish American literature as well as a writer and movie maker. It is possible to argue that partly because of his scholarly formation, he is the most self-aware of the Post-Boom novelists and that his relevant critical writings provide us with some of the most reliable insights into the movement from Boom to Post-Boom. I am comforted to find that Gutiérrez Mouat concurs in this view.<sup>17</sup>

Of key importance for our present concerns are Skármeta's essays "Tendencias en la más nueva narrativa hispanoamericana" (1975), "La novísima generación: varias características y un límite" (1976), and especially his crucial "Al fin y al cabo es su propia vida la cosa más cercana que cada escritor tiene para echar mano" (1979).<sup>18</sup> In the first of these he analyzes critically the refusal of the Boom writers to accept "el rostro convencional de la realidad" (p. 758) and their avoidance of plot-centered novels, overt political commitment and proletarian characters and settings. Using Vargas Llosa's *Zavalita* (from *Conversación en La Catedral*, 1969) as an archetypal fictional figure of the Boom, he attacks his older contemporaries for their obsession with passive, bourgeois figures who were unable to transform their dissatisfaction with life and society into efforts directed at changing and renovating the surrounding system. In the second article he takes issue even more openly with what, as he points out, Fernando Alegría had already called "el circo de la supertécnica," characteristic of the Boom, in which "la obra queda espejándose en su propia estética" (p. 11).

Underlying many of Skármeta's comments is his acute consciousness of the proximity of the Boom and an explicit desire to distance himself

from it. He is not an aggressively “parricidal” figure, but it is clear that he felt the pressure of his older contemporaries and, at the end of the 1970s, wished to avoid being regarded as holding on to their coattails. Speaking of the formative period of writers of his age group in Chile, he declared in “Al fin y al cabo”:

“Ya es hora que afirme de que nuestra vinculación con la narrativa latinoamericana en aquella época inicial . . . del ingenioso premio Seix-Barral, la rayuelización del universo por Sudamericana, era prácticamente nula. Cuando estas obras llegan . . . nosotros hemos avanzado ya en una dirección que en algunos casos entronca con la obra de ellos [i.e., the Boom novelists], en otros difiere, y en otros acepta la vertiginosa influencia de su éxito. Pero en nuestros inicios, los tratos con la literatura van, en el caso de la narrativa, por senderos muy alejados de los latinoamericanos. Al contrario, huíamos de ellos. (p.134)

They fled even faster from the *criollismo* and regionalism of the pre-Boom novel. In which direction they fled is not made completely clear, though Skármeta does specifically mention Camus, Kerouac and the films of Jean-Luc Godard. But he is careful to explain that this does not mean that his generation surrendered passively to the cultural imperialism of Europe and North America.

Skármeta provided a list of Post-Boom characteristics in the generation to which he saw himself as belonging. Although his list was rather longer than the comparable one offered by Carpentier, in one or two respects he echoed the older novelist, especially with regard to urban settings: “Aquí está el punto de arranque de nuestra literatura: la urbe latinoamericana—ya no la aldea, la pampa, la selva, la provincia—caótica, turbulenta, contradictoria, plagada de pícaros, de masas emigrantes de los predios rurales traídas por la nueva industrialización. Todo esto con unas ganas enormes de vivir, amar, aventurar, contribuir a cambiar la sociedad” (p. 135). The last phrase is noteworthy. It is their lack of social commitment as well as their ingrained tendency to subvert what Skármeta calls “esta realidad que por comodidad llamamos realidad”<sup>19</sup> that primarily motivates his attack on the Boom writers. As late as 1984, in an article on Rulfo, he writes, apropos of them and their work:

“se trata en estos autores de mostrar lo conocido, de conocer más al mundo ya escrito que ellos reescriben. De eso se trata en la narrativa de esta generación. No de cambiarlo. Semejante ausencia lleva necesariamente a un recorte de la realidad: los personajes de todas esas obras carecen de peso social, de clase, son cifras para ilustrar mitos.”<sup>20</sup>

These words proclaim the social commitment that Carpentier had also advocated. Indeed Skármeta noted: “Nuestra generación entró de lleno a participar en la vida social, y en numerosos casos lo hizo en la forma

más explícita de la militancia partidaria" ("Al fin y al cabo" p. 134). If we were to ask for an example of the kind of "epic" novel, with the novelist in the role of a modern-day *Cronista de Indias* dealing with dramatic public events, which Carpentier had envisaged, one could hardly find a better example than Skármeta's *La insurrección* (1981), with its story of an entire Nicaraguan community united heroically against the oppression of the Somoza regime.

Let us review the remaining characteristics of the novel in his generation which Skármeta mentioned in 1979. They are:

1. Sexuality: "La sexualidad y su ejercicio pasará a ser un tema privilegiado de la generación: suprimidas las causas traumáticas, se entrega a una desenfrenada exploración del erotismo" (p. 132)
2. Exuberance: "vida y más vida en su comunicable fiebre"; "la afirmación de la vida frente a sus limitaciones" (p. 135)
3. Spontaneity: "desconfianza ante todo lo que coartara la espontaneidad" (p. 135)
4. *Cotidianeidad*: "nosotros nos acercamos a la cotidianeidad con la obsesión de un miope" (p. 138)
5. Fantasy: "la aceptación de la cotidianeidad como punto de arranque para la fantasía" (p. 136)
6. Colloquiality: "la coloquialidad era asumida sin escrúpulos . . . encontramos en el lenguaje coloquial la herramienta adecuada para trabajar la realidad" (p. 136)

and, oddly enough,

7. Intranscendence: "Lo que en Cortázar es una dramática y regocijada búsqueda de la trascendencia . . . es en los más jóvenes una desproblematizada asunción de la humilde cotidianeidad como fuente autoabastecedora de vida e inspiración. En este sentido, nuestra actitud primordial es intrascendente" (p. 138)

Summing up his comments on his generation's work, as he saw it in 1979, Skármeta concludes: "La narrativa más joven . . . es vocacionalmente antipretenciosa, pragmáticamente anti-cultural, sensible a lo banal, y más que reordenadora del mundo . . . es simplemente presentadora de él" (p. 139). He continues: "La más nueva narrativa se debate en este proceso que se podría caracterizar como infrarreal en motivos y personajes, *pop* en actitud y realista-lírico en su lenguaje" (p. 140). Apart from writers of his own generation in Chile, Skármeta named as

relevant: José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, and Jorge Aguilar Mora (Mexico); Luis Rafael Sánchez (Puerto Rico); Manuel Puig and Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer (Argentina); Reinaldo Arenas and Miguel Barnet (Cuba), Oscar Collazos (Colombia); and Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua).

These remarks by Skármeta offer one of the best currently available approaches to the Post-Boom. They remind us that the assumptions made by the Boom writers—whether about reality, the human condition, and society or about narrative techniques and the relationship of language to any possible exterior referent—were to be in some cases directly contradicted in the next generation. We find Skármeta's views generally confirmed, if not actually repeated, by other writers. Mempo Giardinelli, an Argentinian novelist, for example, in the article already referred to, also postulates a return to "realismo poético" and to colloquialism. In addition, he indicates the experience of exile (whether interior or exterior) as a major influence on many recent novelists. But most of all, he emphasizes a change of tone: "en la literatura del posboom no hay resignación ni pesimismo." In the light of the extreme pessimism characteristic of large areas of Boom fiction, this seems to be an important shift.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed it was recognized as such by another leading Post-Boom writer, Isabel Allende. In an interview, she observes that despite differences and geographical separation, writers in the Post-Boom stay in touch with each other's work: "leemos lo que cada uno publica. Y hay puntos comunes . . . pertenecemos a una generación que ha experimentado más o menos las mismas cosas, y tal vez por eso hay puntos comunes en lo que contamos . . . [somos] voces divididas que conforman un coro más o menos armónico de acuerdo a una época."<sup>22</sup> Which are, in her view the points in common? There are two in particular: a return to the love-ideal as part of the means of coming to terms with existence, and a greater degree of optimism than before. "Somos gente más esperanzada," she asserts. "Este es un punto bien importante de lo que ha marcado a nuestra ola de literatura. Por ejemplo en la actitud frente al amor somos más optimistas, no estamos marcados por ese pesimismo sartreano, existencialista, propio de la posguerra. Hay una especie de renovación—yo diría de romanticismo, del amor, de los sentimientos, de la alegría de vivir, de la sensualidad. Y una posición mucho más optimista frente al futuro y vida" (p. 76). In Boom novels, we recall, love is almost never treated as a significant element in the way characters confront the existential situation in the hope of finding a harmonious and fulfilling solution to its dilemmas.

Like Skármeta's, Allende's affirmations run almost completely counter to what we have come to expect from writers in the high Boom period. We discern, alongside the reevaluation of love and the sense of



optimism, unrepentant ethnocentricity and radical commitment: "Siento que soy latina, que represento lo latino y si mi obra puede dar voz a esa mayoría silenciada habré cumplido con una pequeña misión porque la gran tarea está en el plano político."<sup>23</sup> "Mi trabajo [es] un aporte al esfuerzo común por la causa de la libertad, la justicia y la fraternidad, en la cual creo," she proclaimed in 1985.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in contrast to many of the Boom writers, she does not see her books primarily as pure literary artefacts, verbal creations: "Un libro," she declares, "no es un fin en sí mismo, es un medio para alcanzar a otra persona, darle una mano, contarle aquello que para mí es importante y, si es posible, sacudir a mi lector, emocionarlo, ganarlo para las causas que son mías."<sup>25</sup> By the same token, she accepts that her writing breaks with two of the basic "writerly" values of the Boom: "I am not detached or ironical."<sup>26</sup> And, again in genuine Post-Boom fashion: "El testimonio de primera mano me parece fundamental."<sup>27</sup> In this sense, one of the contributions of Allende to our understanding of the Post-Boom is her emphasis on its political radicalism, at least initially. As we shall see in the next chapter, both Benedetti and Viñas, as well as certain critics, attack the Boom writers for their lack of radicalism, their tendency to embrace a "liberal" solution that masks their acceptance, as a middle-class group, of the culture of dependency. Up to a point, the Post-Boom incorporates, in works such as Allende's *De amor y de sombra*, Skármeta's *La insurrección* or Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco*, a more radical response. At an extreme stands a figure such as the Nicaraguan—Sandenista—writer Sergio Ramírez, who asserted uncompromisingly in 1987:

"como un acto profético la literatura no puede servirse sino de una realidad total. Política, ideología, represiones, heroísmo, masacres, fracasos, traiciones, luchas, frustraciones, esperanzas, son aun materia novelable en Latinoamérica y seguirán siéndolo porque la realidad no se agota; el novelista toma el papel de intérprete entre otros muchos que se arroga y quiere hablar en nombre de un inconsciente colectivo largamente silenciado y soterrado bajo un cúmulo de retórica falsa y pervertida. Y en esto el escritor no pude dejar de cumplir un acto político, porque la realidad es política."<sup>28</sup>

However, such a view requires qualification. For meanwhile, with greater hindsight, Giardinelli, for example, had changed his mind after his 1986 article. If, as has been suggested, for example, by Jaime Mejía Duque,<sup>29</sup> that an important event triggering Boom fiction was the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, it is no less evident that behind much Post-Boom writing lie the dictatorial regimes of the 1970s, especially in the Southern Cone of Latin America. Indeed this perhaps helps to explain why the Post-Boom sentiment manifest itself more in

Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay than, for instance, in Mexico. Both Skármeta and Giardinelli recognized that in regimes a setback for the agendas of the progressive middle-class intelligentsia had occurred that stimulated a revision of ideas. The former, in 1981, affirmed à propos of his situation and that of fellow-exile writers:

Cuando nos enfrentamos a otros mundos, relativizamos nuestros conceptos, cuestionamos nuestras creencias como una manera de acceder a la cultura y la política. Por ejemplo: uno de los grandes problemas que hemos tenido en el fracaso de nuestras experiencias pro socialistas o pro democráticas en general, ha sido el sectarismo evidente, la incomprensión que hemos tenido para saber detectar quienes serían nuestros aliados eventuales, y cierto veneno retórico . . . descubrimos que nuestra retórica es ridícula.<sup>30</sup>

For his part, Giardinelli declared in 1988: "Nosotros fuimos derrotados. Hoy mi visión no tiene el optimismo que tenía hace quince años."<sup>31</sup> Two years later, speaking specifically of the Post-Boom, Giardinelli reiterated his conviction that it was not an optimistic movement. Relevant to its origins, he argued, were: "el fiasco del 68, de Vietnam, de la perdida revolución social latinoamericana y la llamada 'muerte de las utopías.'"<sup>32</sup> In consequence, he went on, among the features of the Post-Boom were rebelliousness and pain: "esta escritura contiene una elevada carga de frustración, de dolor y de tristeza por todo lo que nos pasó en los 70s y 80s, una carga de desazón, rabia y rebeldía" (p. 31). For the rest, his account of Post-Boom characteristics is familiar. He mentions a change of tone and style compared with the Boom, the impact of exile, humor, a greater degree of political moderation, a more reader-friendly technique, signs of the influence of the media, the emergence of an important group of women writers, and a certain tendency to deal with disagreeable subject matter (pp. 31–32).

Without fully accepting Giardinelli's simplistic identification of Post-Boom and postmodernism, we can see that his comments partly accord with and partly contradict others reported above. His ideas underline the "pluralist," complex nature of the Post-Boom and the fact that professional writers who comment on it have their own work primarily in view. But, as always in discussions of the Post-Boom, what emerges as central is the return to confidence in the writer's ability to handle reality. In an interview also published in 1990, Giardinelli reiterated his belief that fiction inevitably reflects the social and political reality in which the writer operates: "Me nutrí y me nutro de lo que se llama 'realidad' y creo que mi deber como escritor es dar cuenta de ella."<sup>33</sup>

Whether this produced a certain sceptical pessimism, as in his case, or a strengthened allegiance to libertarian ideals, as in the case of

Allende, what contact with the reality of authoritarian regimes helped to reawaken among Post-Boom writers was the sense of a different relationship between fiction and its sociopolitical context. Teresa Porzecanski, who lived through the terror in Uruguay, called it "la desidealización del mundo."<sup>34</sup> In the Boom, as we saw in Oscar Collazos's somewhat notorious *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura*,<sup>35</sup> writers tended to be content to believe that innovative works or art in themselves operate against the status quo and have a social effect. Hence the writer's first duty was to revolutionize writing. The Post-Boom writers seem increasingly to have perceived that this was a myth. Under the tragic impact of events in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Central America, they tended to return, therefore, to fiction with greater emphasis on content, directness of impact, denunciation, documentality, or protest.

Turning briefly from the views of Boom writers to those of critics, we can see two relevant tendencies. One, which was also present in the remarks of Skármeta and Giardinelli, is to draw attention to what are regarded as major shortcomings in the outlook and work of the Boom writers, shortcomings that justify the change of course undertaken by their younger contemporaries. The other is to attempt to characterize the Post-Boom as such. While the second critical tendency is more productive, the first should not be overlooked. Probably its most vocal representative is Hernán Vidal in his *Literatura hispanoamericana e ideología liberal: surgimiento y crisis*,<sup>36</sup> especially chapter 3, "Narrativa del Boom." Vidal vehemently rejects the view of some of the Boom writers that to revolutionize literature was a step towards revolutionizing society. On the contrary, he asserts: "Dando un mentís a sus afirmaciones revolucionarias a través de su propia práctica literaria, su crítica tiene procedencia intraliberal, a partir de actitudes ideológicas, complejos temáticos y simbólicos, además de concepciones de la función social del escritor que más bien tienden a reforzar el orden social que critican" (p. 68). He sees the Boom as the literary equivalent of the internationalization of Latin American industry by the multinational companies during the fifties and sixties. The Boom writers' "universalization" of fiction brought with it "una creciente alienación de la realidad nacional" (p. 73) and a sense of indifference toward social problems. "La obra literaria fue concebida como mundo ficticio heterónimo, cuyas leyes tienen sólo validez interna; el escritor construía 'artefactos' literarios condicionados por sus 'demonios personales' . . . Es decir, debemos entender las teorizaciones literarias de los escritores del *boom* dentro del marco ideológico del desarrollismo burgués en su época de auge" (p. 86). The Boom, in other words, was the literary manifestation of "dependency"

on the part of Spanish American middle-class intellectuals as a social group. Their view of reality, Vidal asserts, was both limited and distorted; their mythification of reality was an attempt to escape from the process of history and their major characters were devitalized and excentric: "de trasfondo cultural diferente a la norma" (p. 104), marginal and degraded. In brief, the Boom represents a "callejón ideológico sin salida" (p. 109). This is not the place to discuss the obvious reductivism of Vidal's approach or its derivation from Viñas's *De Sarmiento a Cortázar*. What is more important is the way in which his essay clearly illustrates a reaction to the Boom that leaves abundant room for a change in direction.

Hardly less extreme in his approach is Juan Manuel Marcos, especially in his *De García Márquez al Post-Boom*.<sup>37</sup> Earlier, in *Roa Bastos, precursor del Post-Boom*,<sup>38</sup> he had begun to feel his way toward a concept of Post-Boom writing based essentially on *Yo, el Supremo* (1974), seen both as a parodic demythification of Paraguayan history and a remythification of certain aspects of it in the interests of the masses (esp. pp. 93-94). The book suffers from the author's failure to create a clear distinction between Boom and Post-Boom, but in his second book on the topic he is much more explicit, arguing that the Boom writers were essentially the lackeys of the sociopolitical establishment in Spanish America and produced elitist, cosmopolitan fiction which was at once thematically abstract and ideologically confused. By contrast:

Autores de la nueva generación, desmantelando la tradición borgiana, socavando el narcisismo pequeño burgués, parodiando el discurso establecido, carnavalizando la palabra hegemónica . . . se encuentran hoy a la vanguardia de lo que provisoriamente se podía llamar el "postboom. . ." Estos nuevos autores comparten el compromiso por mostrar con un realismo sin simplificaciones, basado en el arte compilatorio del habla coloquial, ya la revolución antisomocista como ha hecho Antonio Skármeta, ya el callejón sin salida de la plutocracia bogotana que ha descrito Helena Araújo, ya la crisis interna del típico exiliado de los sesenta que ha confesado con fuego y deslumbrante poesía callejera Mempo Giardinelli. (p. 11)

Later he affirms

Los relatos del "postboom" despliegan un discurso que, lejos de reclamar la admiración del lector por la orfebrería individual del poeta, configuran un trama de situaciones y tipos que se iluminan y complementan para establecer una imagen dialéctica del conflicto social y lingüístico . . . Esta nueva escritura invierte el código tradicional con que la crítica canónica del "boom" ha evaluado el género. Estas breves narraciones radican su valor en aquello que no tienen, de que se han despojado, de que se han sabido desnudar. (pp. 18-19)

The key phrase here is “un realismo sin simplificaciones,” while the crux of the approach is the affirmation that the representative writers are Skármeta, Giardinelli and Araújo. Marcos’s approach raises two basic problems. One is that the return to (a new form of) realism and social preoccupation is only one of the strands that make up Post-Boom writing, albeit probably the central one. The other, and much more difficult problem, which Marcos ignores, is concerned with how it is possible to return to any form of realism after the Boom’s radical criticism of both our ability to perceive reality and the capacity of language to express it. Leenhardt comments:

La novela realista, como forma épica problemática, admite los antagonismos en la sociedad y les da forma. Sin embargo, no sobrevivirá más que el tiempo en que el antagonismo permanezca fundado sobre una concepción de la realidad compartida por los adversarios. Tan pronto como, por el contrario, las reglas del juego social dejan de ser respetadas por uno de los protagonistas, o surja una duda al respecto, toda figuración clásica se tornará imposible. Mientras la cuestión de las acciones no sea abordada, el significado de las palabras se constituirá en un problema. O [*sic*] en razón de que la narración realista está indisolublemente ligada a la figuración de las acciones—lo que Lukács denomina la *Gestaltung*—esta última se hace imposible pues se halla sujeta a incertidumbre de orden epistemológico o semántico.<sup>39</sup>

This hits the nail on the head. To the extent that they advocate a return to any conventional form of realism, in other words to a “principle of intelligibility,” writers and critics in the Post-Boom find themselves, willy-nilly, open to the objection that their whole approach is based on unjustified assumptions about the nature both of reality and language.

This objection has so far not been pressed home. Instead what has emerged as central to the discussion of the Post-Boom as a purely literary phenomenon is the issue of narrative experimentation versus some form of neorealism, the epistemological and semantic basis for which is simply taken for granted. Much criticism of the Boom writers has been in one guise or another “political” criticism from writers and critics with left-wing sympathies, for example, Skármeta, Vidal, and Marcos. It immediately tempts us to identify the Boom with modernism, which, as Huyssen has pointed out was also “chided by the left as the elitist, arrogant and mystifying master-code of bourgeois culture.”<sup>40</sup> They tend to oppose radical forms of experimentation not so much in themselves as because they are alleged to encourage elitism and to distract the reader from what is seen as the really appropriate strategy: that of concentrating attention on themes of social injustice, authoritarianism, the will to revolution, and so on. However, a slightly different strand of criticism, one less developed than the other, takes issue with the Boom writers’

exploitation of new fictional techniques on the grounds that it has been pushed too far. In the discussion at the 1979 symposium that led to the publication of *Más allá del Boom*, Luis Rafael Sánchez is reported as having asserted that “la gran trampa del boom había sido crear la expectativa de que cada nueva novela sería un acto sobre la cuerda floja más osado aún. Lo estridente había venido a ser el criterio por el cual un autor era juzgado excepcional” (p. 298). To date, the critic who has reacted most strongly against Boom experimentalism as a literary rather than a political aberration is Peter Earle. In a rather intemperate article he makes no bones about postulating “a hypothesis by which the literary process is seen as a continuing movement away from representational meaning or symbol toward abstraction and unintelligibility.”<sup>41</sup> While granting that some “interesting abstractionist experiments are undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 25), he characterizes extreme Boom experimentalism as “the cult of creative nothingness” (p. 25). In Earle’s view, the Post-Boom, by contrast, is governed primarily by the fact that “consciously or subconsciously, writers want to recover [the] world’s ethical center” (p. 29). This, he argues, joining hands with the left-wing writers and critics, represents a return to Spanish American fiction’s traditional mainstream, which was always more “ethical” (i.e., content centered) than “aesthetic” (i.e., “writerly” and experimental). Earle’s article begs a great many questions, chiefly because it fails to confront the question of the dynamic that underlies experimentation in literature: consciousness of a need to find new ways to express a new vision of the human condition. Nonetheless it articulates a widespread criticism of the Boom that helps to explain the urge in the Post-Boom to recover greater immediacy of impact on the nonelite reader.

Those critics who have attempted to describe the Post-Boom as such have produced a number of other very useful items. They include an updated version of a 1978 *Texto Crítico* 1978 article by Juan Armando Epple that is now called “El contexto histórico-generacional de la literatura de Antonio Skármeta.”<sup>42</sup> Another is the introduction by Angel Rama to his 1981 anthology of new fiction, *Novísimos narradores hispanoamericanos en marcha*; this has been republished as “Los contestatorios del poder” in his *La novela latinoamericana, 1920–80*.<sup>43</sup> Epple makes an important point, which will be confirmed presently by Duncan, when he reminds us that “no toda la literatura que se escribe hoy, me refiero a lo que produce un conocimiento ‘nuevo’ del mundo, está siendo escrito por jóvenes, y no todos los jóvenes están escribiendo una literatura nueva” (p. 103). That is to say, alongside the authentic Post-Boom, there is a highly creative prolongation of the Boom itself, whose patterns continue to be exploited both by the established Boom writers and by younger writers who, instead of reacting against it, push its tech-

niques and attitudes to new limits. So far as the truly Post-Boom writers are concerned, Epple suggests that they exhibit three distinguishing characteristics: "la parodia de los géneros literarios y los códigos oficiales del lenguaje"; "la caracterización protagónica del estrato adolescente y juvenil de la sociedad"; and "la incorporación a la textualidad narrativa de la expresividad poética, como forma natural de decir" (p. 107). These give us in fact the three Ps of the Post-Boom: parody, poetry and "pop."

Unquestionably the most important element here is the reference to the role in the Post-Boom of youth culture: television and films, pop music, sport, casual sex, and drugs: a fun-culture that provides the context for accounts of the rites of passage into adult life. What more than anything established this tendency to "instalar en los personajes adolescentes el núcleo básico de la experiencia y la aprensión de lo real"<sup>44</sup> was, of course, the huge success of the first two novels of Manuel Puig, *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1968) and *Boquitas pintadas* (1969). But Puig did not initiate the trend; the initiator was Gustavo Sainz, who, as his compatriot and fellow-novelist José Agustín has pointed out, was "one of the first authors to write about youth while still being young himself."<sup>45</sup> *Gazapo* (1965) was the key work, followed in 1974 by the enchanting *La Princesa del Palacio de Hierro*. I have argued that an even earlier example of the trend was Skármeta's prize-winning short story "La Cenicienta en San Francisco" (1963), which later introduced his first collection of tales, *El entusiasmo* (1967).<sup>46</sup> All this seems to confirm that while the Boom itself was still developing during the 1960s, the Post-Boom was already in gestation.

Such is the view of Angel Rama, who in a 1985 interview included Skármeta, Puig, and Sainz among "el conjunto de escritores que han aparecido en los 60 [y] . . . que han ido construyendo una nueva literatura."<sup>47</sup> He describes it as "una literatura urbana, muy sostenida en el habla . . . mucho más libre, más desembarazada y, al mismo tiempo, más realista." Calling it "una fuerza que efectivamente muestra un nuevo mundo," Rama mentions in passing, alongside the influence of the mass media, especially the cinema and pop music, an interesting characteristic already hinted at by Skármeta: the renewed preoccupation with Latin American society itself, its contemporary lifestyle and specific problems, rather than emphasizing the general human condition as it just happens to manifest itself in a Latin American setting. This seems to be what Rama is alluding to when he asserts that "gran parte de los narradores . . . trabajan dentro de la tradición del continente": a conscious return to the primacy of "lo americano."

Rama's prologue to *Novísimos narradores hispanoamericanos en marcha* dilutes the impact of the Post-Boom by trying to say too much and by mentioning too many names without putting them into clearly

defined categories. Still, it reiterates familiar characteristics, above all the "recuperación del realismo," with a corresponding shift of allegiances which has brought a renewal of interest in relevant older writers from Roberto Arlt to Mario Benedetti. Rama also lists a parallel "retorno a la historia, en el intento de otorgar sentido a la aventura del hombre americano," urban settings, exile perspective (in some cases), colloquialism, "rechazo de la retórica," youth themes, pop culture, humor, and sexuality.<sup>48</sup> More particularly since this was until recently a neglected aspect of the Post-Boom "la masiva irrupción de escritoras." Two features of Rama's essay deserve further discussion. One concerns the joint impact of exile experience and the return to a strong interest in the destinies of Latin America itself. In one of his late interviews Cortázar had expressed to Saúl Sosnowski a certain disquiet about precisely this aspect of the Post-Boom, that is, its failure to confront adequately the questions "¿qué es un latinoamericano, cuál es la identidad de un latinoamericano?" He went on to say: "Yo creo que no se ha contestado en parte porque nuestra nueva literatura, la literatura de los últimos 20 años, es una literatura joven . . . todo está todavía por hacerse y entonces la búsqueda de los problemas de identidad debe ser, me imagino, un proceso muy lento."<sup>49</sup>

Rama is clearly conscious of this aspect of the Post-Boom and refers specifically to the "challenge" faced by "aquellos escritores que aspiran a preservar lo que llaman la 'identidad' de los hombres de sus culturas."<sup>50</sup> It is interesting that such an old-established (and perhaps old-fashioned) concept as the search for the foundations of national or racial identity should still have currency among young writers of today in Latin America. Rama correctly views it with suspicion and tends to associate it with a rigid and conservative idea of Latin American-ness. We cannot fault his advocacy of the counterconcept of "integración transculturadora" as one of the imperatives of the Post-Boom: the effort, that is, to incorporate Latin American culture into that of the end of the twentieth century, while at the same time preserving its "identidad esencial." The other feature of Rama's essay that strikes the alert reader is the absence of any systematic attempt to face the question of changes in fictional technique. Apart from noting, as other commentators do, the use of colloquial language and mentioning the impact of the cinema, all that Rama really suggests is that there is an absence of distance between the youthful authors and their often youthful characters, an (implicitly uncritical) identification between author and work. Puig would have to be an exception, since he often uses pop culture—in *Boquitas pintadas*, for example—to comment critically on the outlook and lifestyle of his characters.

The novelist who has been most outspoken in his remarks about a change in fictional technique in the Post-Boom period is José Donoso. If



we can identify some early signs of an emerging new creative pattern with the novels and short stories already mentioned of Puig, Sainz, and Skármeta in the 1960s (to which we must add, as González Echevarría has shown, those of Sarduy: *Gestos* [1963] and *De donde son los cantantes* [1967]),<sup>51</sup> a major indicator that the shift had taken place was the publication in 1978 of Donoso's *Casa de campo*, for in it Donoso makes fun of the technical innovations characteristic of Boom novels. Specifically, at the beginning of chapter 2 he addresses the reader in his own voice. He does so primarily to insist on the fictionality of the story that is being read and hence to render more difficult reader-identification with the action. But also Donoso is concerned with breaking a lance in favor of "las viejas maquinarias narrativas, hoy en descrédito" (i.e., those of the realist period), which he feels can still be technically effective. The most prominent among these older techniques is, as we see from *Casa de campo* itself, that of authorial omniscience. Skármeta in *Ardiente paciencia* (1985), perhaps significantly, causes his narrator to make the same point in the prologue: "En tanto que otros son maestros del relato lírico en primera persona, de la novela dentro de la novela, del metalenguaje, de la distorsión de tiempos y espacios, yo seguí . . . sobre todo aferrado a lo que un profesor de literatura designó con asco: un narrador omnisciente."

The underlying idea is that of a return to greater simplicity. In an interview with Ronald Christ in 1982, Donoso asked: "Now, in a way, hasn't the time come to turn back a little bit? . . . Of course, one has to arrive at the limit of things to be able to turn back . . . And the whole thing is that we have got to the limit of things."<sup>52</sup> He went on to predict the end of the big, ambitious, "encyclopedic" novels of the Boom (we think of Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, for example) and to advocate shorter, more plot-centered and in general more accessible fiction. His own *La misteriosa desaparición de la marquesita de Loria* (1980) is an example. But Philip Swanson, in excellent articles and in his book, argues that behind its apparent simplicity of content, a Post-Boom Donoso is subverting realism from within.<sup>53</sup> An interesting feature of this subversion is the use of "a recognizably realistic style which is counteracted by the introduction of fantasy."<sup>54</sup> This is very much what we find in Isabel Allende's first three novels also. It perhaps corresponds to Skármeta's idea of linking the everyday and the lyrical. Swanson has contributed to the discussion the realization that we must always ask, in respect of Post-Boom writers, what ingredient it is that they add to a realistic style or outlook to carry it beyond old-style realism.

In 1986, Donoso's views received support from Vargas Llosa in an interview with Raymond Williams. Asked about the difference between his early (implicitly Boom) novels and his more recent (implicitly Post-Boom) ones, Vargas Llosa replied:

The main difference I can see . . . was my attitude about form. I was so thrilled with form that it was very visible. In *The Green House* form was ever-present and quite evident. As was the case with many Latin American novels in the sixties, for me form was almost like a theme or a character in the novel. Since then things have changed. Now I am interested in being less explicit about form itself.

Commenting on the current situation in fiction in Latin America, he went on to say:

We Latin American writers discovered the technical and formal possibilities of the novel in the fifties and sixties. The idea was to experiment with form, and to show it.

Now, he affirmed, he proposed to hide the structure and technique in the story, "to be more invisible." But, he concluded, this could not be generalized: "Many Latin American writers still want to carry out a formal revolution. And this has become in some cases a kind of new tradition—the tradition of experimentation and of being modern."<sup>55</sup> Here we have in a nutshell the problem facing certain critics of the Post-Boom: how to handle a movement that both contains a reaction against overt formal experimentation and at the same time prolongs the Boom tradition of technical innovation. At the same time, Vargas Llosa's acknowledged shift in *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) and *Historia de Mayta* (1984) to greater emphasis on historical and political themes, to say nothing of his subsequent incursions into the detective-type novel and to the semipornographic novel (*¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* [1986] and *Elogio de la madrastra* [1988]), illustrate the ability of the Boom writers to achieve the transition to more popular genres.

Like Donoso and Vargas Llosa, several other Boom writers had evolved away from extreme complexity. In 1978 Fuentes had produced *La cabeza de la hidra*, a parodic thriller whose narrator, in chapter 39, deliberately draws the reader's attention to the fact that the book contains "escasas reflexiones internas." Vargas Llosa had already produced *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), which includes nine radio serials of an exaggeratedly popular and melodramatic kind as a background for a love story that shares some of their characteristics. The case of García Márquez is, as always, more complex; but not long after Donoso's 1982 interview with Ronald Christ he was to publish the most startling of all the illustrations of the internal shift taking place in the Boom: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985), which from its title on contradicted one of the basic Boom characteristics. In each of these cases a "low" or "popular" fictional genre is adapted to serve a different (but always, in the end, "higher") literary purpose, developing Puig's pioneering use of "pop" material in his early novels.

Among the critics who have most recently taken up the issue we are considering is Roberto González Echevarría, who addresses it in "Sarduy, the Boom and the Post-Boom" and *La ruta de Severo Sarduy*. In part his views accord with those of Donoso and Vargas Llosa. Where he differs is in his attempt to identify Boom writing with modernism, in the North American and European sense of the term, and therefore Post-Boom writing with postmodernism. He too, stresses the collapse of the "encyclopedic" novel: "lo que la narrativa postmoderna [i.e., of the Post-Boom] hace es abolir la nostalgia de la totalización."<sup>56</sup> In its place González Echevarría, following Lyotard, postulates a return to *narratividad*, a "retorno del relato," a rediscovery of linear storytelling without the fragmentation and the unexpected shifts in time sequence, undermining patterns of cause and effect, that were prominent in Boom novels from *Pedro Páramo* to *Terra Nostra*. But, he insists, this return to plot centeredness is not accompanied by any return to narrative authority on the part of the author/narrator: "Cuando el autor aparece en la obra . . . lo hace como un personaje más de la ficción sin poderes superiores . . . En la última novela hispanoamericana el relato es más importante que el lenguaje o el narrador" (p. 250). Similarly he argues that the Post-Boom no longer contains "un metadiscurso crítico, literario o cultural" (p. 251), a deep theme underlying the surface content, often involving "ironic reflexivity" on the part of the author about the processes of writing themselves. In view of the remarks by Rama and Cortázar, it is interesting that González Echevarría specifically singles out the search for Latin American identity as one of the deep themes that have been eliminated: "la novela del post-Boom abandona la saudade de la identidad" (p. 251). Finally he suggests that *mise en abîme*, internal reduplication and other forms of ambiguity are also less prominent in Post-Boom fiction, which instead presents an appearance of superficiality.

It will not escape the notice of careful readers that González Echevarría's account of the novel of the Post-Boom betrays a certain uneasiness and even ambivalence. For if the Post-Boom novel is presented as more plot centered, more reader orientated, less thematically and technically complex, it is hard not to think that in some way (as Donoso candidly suggested) it is a turning back. Like Swanson, González Echevarría hastenes to deprecate any such suggestion: "este retorno del relato no significa que haya un regreso a la novelística tradicional ni mucho menos" (p. 249). But can we be so sure, if we think, for example, of the novels of Isabel Allende, especially *De amor y de sombra* (1984)? The remarkable success of her work seems to be partly due to the presence of the characteristics—or some of them—that González Echevarría indicates, but the net result is in fact a much more traditional kind of narrative than we have recently been used to. The same seems to

be true of the Boom works that align themselves with the Post-Boom: is not García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* a case in point, compared with the "splintered mirror" effect of *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*? Nor should we completely overlook in this connection the renewal of popularity in the Post-Boom period of documentary fiction, much of which is not far removed from a traditional narrative stance.

In contrast to the views of the writers and critics so far mentioned are those of J. Ann Duncan. Her *Voices, Visions and a New Reality: Mexican Fiction since 1970* is the most carefully researched monograph on a single country's Post-Boom fiction to have appeared so far. Her choice of authors is, of course, selective. She admits that she has not included authors like Juan García Ponce and Angelina Muñoz, whose work might perhaps be seen as more in line with what we have been discussing. The importance of Duncan's book, however, lies in the fact that it shows how any attempt to associate fiction in the Post-Boom period exclusively with more "accessible" story-orientated works is quite partial, and, in Mexico, at least, ignores some of the evidence. Duncan reminds us how many examples there are of Mexican contemporary fiction which "generally relate nothing";<sup>57</sup> how, in contrast to the supposed absence of deep theme, much of the work of Carlos Montemayor, José Emilio Pacheco, and Esther Seligson "centers on the metaphysical quest" (p. 7); and how, contrary to the idea that that innovatory narrative techniques are out of favor, many of the younger Mexican novelists are still concerned with exploring "new ways of creating fiction" (p. 10). At the extreme she describes Humberto Guzmán as "antiliterary (in the traditional sense), antipsychological as well as anti-consumer-orientated art [and] opposed to social commitment in literature" (p. 94). Of Antonio Delgado's *Figuraciones en el fuego* (1980) she writes implacably: "it is not about anything; it is . . . it can be termed a novel only in that it is a more or less continuous piece of prose narrative . . . it does not tell a story, develop characters or deliver a message (p. 165). We are clearly a long way from other views of Post-Boom fiction, but rather close to R. L. Williams's emphasis on continuing radical experimentalism in his *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America*.

On the other hand sundry writers carry the reaction against the Boom to its logical extreme, publishing documentary narratives that, far from questioning reality, privilege it, usually for purposes of protest. This is an important part of Post-Boom narrative, as Foster, Jara and Vidal, and Skłodowska<sup>58</sup> have all shown. As an early example we might mention Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), which deals with the repression of the student demonstrations in Mexico in October 1968. Between the two extremes of *narrativa testimonial* and persisting experimentalism we find a range of novelists from the Cuban