

CHAPTER ONE

Desiring Paris

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*The Latin American Conception  
of the Lettered City, 1840 to 1960*

Y el mundo vierte sobre París su vasta corriente como en la concavidad maravillosa de una gigantesca copa de oro. Vierte su energía, su entusiasmo, su aspiración, su ensueño, y París todo lo recibe y todo lo embellece cual con el mágico influjo de un imperio secreto.

Rubén Darío, *Peregrinaciones*

Aller à Paris, c'est pour nous un retour.

—Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Buenos Aires*

The epigraphs above frame Paris's contradictions for Latin America. Expectations of the city that range from the fantastic to the familiar encompass a social spectrum that extends from the elite diplomat to the marginal bohemian. The depictions of Paris vacillate between images of orgiastic decadence and ennobling tradition. The city is heralded as an artistic and erotic utopia, but it also is reproached for its destructive effect on naive visitors. These contradictions in Latin American imagery for Paris expose some of the conflicts at the core of urban identity.

This chapter traces the social, aesthetic, and erotic roles of Paris in shaping Latin American urban consciousness. From Sarmiento through the *modernistas* and regional writers, Latin American writing has manipulated a cluster of conflicting desires associated with Paris. Intellectuals and writers draw on varying

combinations of these desires to satisfy the region's political motives, aesthetic models, and gender paradigms during particular historical periods. Since the early independence period, *criollo* culture has had to confront and define itself with European urban models in its continuing attempt to determine political and aesthetic boundaries. The Paris written into Latin American cultural consciousness has emerged from this persistent confrontation.

Writing that praises Paris from a vantage point of New World fabrication and yearning reveals tensions that are more complex than the psychological commonplace of expectation followed by disappointment. Idealizations and disenchantments cancel each other out, collapsing the oppositions, in writing whose very exaggeration reveals its ambivalence. The Paris constructed in Latin America has political, semiotic, and aesthetic components that intensify the psychological. In particular, class associations cast the city as an expansive and interactive social space. Beyond the cosmopolitan mingling of classes prescribed in the modern urban realm (see Ross), the city's imaginative possibilities for those across the Atlantic extend to a broad scope of otherwise disparate groups. Competing images of sexuality, status, and style undermine the Latin American version of Parisian hierarchies. The interplay of these concurrent and sometimes competing pressures destabilizes Paris's imagined Latin American foundation. With this array of itineraries, invented Paris entices readers to embark on the *viaje a Europa* but leaves its vicarious travellers to sort out conflicting propaganda.

### PARIS AS PRESTIGE: SARMIENTO

Paris as a modern, urban model found one of its first narrative voices in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Sarmiento is known for his Eurocentric vision for Latin America's early nation building. His travel writings (*Viajes 1845–1847*), illustrate his search for Latin American cultural identity outside of Argentina in descriptions of his visits to Europe, North Africa, and the United States. *Viajes* presents his romanticized perspective of Europe in which Paris metonymically represents Europe and is emblematic of "civilization." His travel writings form the foundation of the aesthetically and intellectually seductive "viaje a Europa" that elite Latin Americans considered socially essential. Mary Louise Pratt considers Sarmiento an infiltrator in his region's "cultural Mecca" (*Imperial*

Eyes 191]. David Viñas calls the legendary trip to Europe a search for privileged aesthetic sanctification and gluttonous consumption (see his "El viaje a Europa" in *De Sarmiento a Cortázar* 129–99). When Sarmiento announces that he has arrived in the "Francia de nuestros sueños," he invokes a collective dream that is a space for consuming European goods.<sup>1</sup>

Sarmiento's writing creates a hierarchical relationship between Paris and Latin America. Paris is perfection and harmony, the artistic and organizational model that inspires Latin American progress. Foreigners are supposed to conform and adapt to Parisian behaviors. Outsiders must learn how to *flâner*, how to wander, observe and take in the spectacle of "la encantada vida de Paris" (116). Although he eventually designated the United States' public education system as the solution to Argentina's cultural and political problems, his faith in the French as models for world culture was unflinching:

El francés de hoy es el guerrero mas audaz, el poeta mas ardiente, el sabio mas profundo, el elegante mas frívolo, el ciudadano mas celoso, el jóven mas dado a los placeres, el artista mas delicado, i el hombre mas blando en su trato con los otros. Sus ideas i sus modas, sus hombres i sus novelas, son hoy el modelo i la pauta de todas las otras naciones. (142)

Sarmiento's enumeration couples "novelas" with "hombres," as though Frenchmen engender books in a logical succession. He commends the French for their confident discretion, and his adjectives acclaim their energetic enthusiasm and intensity.

The working-class popular traditions of French urban life seem to attract Sarmiento as much as its high culture refinements.<sup>2</sup> Sarmiento paradoxically honors the French for their orderly and delicate taste, as well as for their spontaneous frivolity. Paris's image in his writing overflows the rigid structures he also admires to include the city's public street dances. He praises the neighborhood street festivals, such as the *fête* of Montmartre or the festivities of Bastille Day that celebrate another side of the City of Light.

Paris for Sarmiento embodies the contradictory forces of civilizing "order" and romantic "freedom," a pervasive tension throughout his writing.<sup>3</sup> He associates institutional organization and efficiency with the French and their capital, along with impetuosity and social mobility. He calls Paris a *torbellino*, a *prisma*, and

a *santuario*, a range of images that discloses the multiplicity of roles the city plays. Sarmiento ardently hopes to acquire the French appearance and behavior that he associates with higher social class. He calls this process the foreigner's "rudo aprendizaje . . . por ensayar sus dedos torpes en este instrumento de que sólo aquellos insignes artistas arrancan inagotables armonías" (165). Arrival in Paris implies having ascended to an intellectual and artistic haven, and to have left behind the earthy materiality of Latin America. "Hay regiones demasiado altas, cuya atmósfera no pueden respirar los que han nacido en las tierras bajas. . . ." (6). Paris represents a corrective mold for Latin American institutions, behavior, and style. A number of Latin American statesmen and literary historians throughout the nineteenth century looked to France for political and aesthetic models.<sup>4</sup> Like Sarmiento, these political and literary figures incorporated Paris's promise of distinction into their New World cultural and political visions.

### MODERNISTA DESIRE

In the continual Latin American dialogue with European models, the French capital plays a dialogical role in the assertion of a local aesthetic. During the last half of the nineteenth century, the romantic novel and its sentimental landscapes reposition the literary scene in the renewed emphasis on home ground. An affirmation of the countryside asserted an American emotional geography and downplayed the European colonial past.<sup>5</sup> However, postindependence nationalistic fervor began to wane. The withdrawal of French imperialist activity in Latin America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century cleared the way for reexploring Paris. By the 1880s, Paris resurfaced in its role of distinction, elegance, and sensuality.

Memoirs, chronicles, and essays from the *modernista* period embellish Sarmiento's Paris of social prestige, expanding into the realm of the sensual and sexual. The *modernistas* stress the city's refinement and voluptuousness.

Una Atenas que fuera Citeres . . . y algunas veces Lesbos: tal definía París sin pensar que es indefinible. Al cabo de algunos años se le comprende más, lo que equivale a decir que se le quiere mejor. Al confuso entusiasmo de bárbaro, sucede una helena y lúcida devoción. (García Calderón, *Frivolamente* vi)

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This fragment from one of Ventura García Calderón's collections of Parisian chronicles associates Paris with classical permanence, mystical devotion, and erotic fantasy. The "barbarous" observer in the aforementioned passage experiences Paris beyond words and concepts. The city's undefinability resists logical linguistic description, and thus it pertains to the realm of the senses and impressions.

These early twentieth-century laudatory appraisals of Paris echo Sarmiento's pervasive *afrancesado* attitude toward Latin American culture. The Paris drawn by these Latin American sketches communicates a culmination of style and class that contrasts with home: "A ejemplo de tus parques civilizados que obedecen a una oculta geometría, quiero mondar cada mañana el alma bárbara" (García Calderón, *Cantilenas* 17). Once again, Paris is praised for its institutional structures and civilizing geometric creations. All of these chroniclers compare Paris to Athens, Rome, and Alexandria, identifying it as a seat of Western civilization.

The Latin American yearning for Paris forms part of the growing urban sensibility of modernity. A specific genre emerged for capturing the vitality and sensuality of the period's artistic and cultural world capital. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, the modern *crónica* became instrumental in disseminating a codified *modernista* aesthetics of Paris.<sup>6</sup> The prose poems recount events in the city, fragments of a trip, and scenic impressions to capture a modern, urban state of mind. Related to the French journalistic "chronique" of the nineteenth century, a sort of Parisian *artículo de costumbres*, the *crónica* allows for the lyrical subjectivity of the narrative voice. A response to the popularity of travel diaries during the period, the *crónica* employs many of the tropes of travel writing. The genre also registers the boost in mechanical efficiency of the industrial revolution that encouraged concise literary forms. An avid Latin American readership at home anticipated these poetic and sensual bulletins as necessary supplements to their vicarious eroticism involving Paris.

The *crónica* flourished in journalistic venues both in France and in Latin America. In his discussion on Latin American journalism in Paris during this period, Marc Cheymol asserts that modern Latin American literature is founded in the journalistic fervor of Paris during the "Années Folles." Both Darío and Enrique Gómez Carrillo edited journals in Paris printed in Spanish. The prominent French journals on Latin America published in Paris, such as *Revue de l'Argentine* and *Revue de L'Amérique Latine*, "ont été à la fois le reflet et le moteur de l'évolution des lettres hispanoaméricaines . . . une sorte de tribune où cette littérature a pu prendre

conscience d'elle-même" (Cheymol, "Les Revues"). This vigorous journalistic production reached beyond the expatriate community, as readership about Paris in Latin America remained strong. Darío's column, "Parisiana," appeared in *La Nación* in Buenos Aires, and Nestor Vitor contributed frequent columns entitled "Cartas de Paris" and "O Mundo, de Paris" for Brazilian dailies (Vitor 87-140); Pedro Balmacedo Toro wrote a regular column for the Chilean daily *La Epoca* without ever visiting Paris.<sup>7</sup> The Parisian chronicles also were collected and successfully published as books, such as Darío's *Parisiana*, published in 1908.<sup>8</sup>

Enrique Gómez Carrillo, the most widely published Latin American *modernista* chronicler in Paris in the early twentieth century, announced the *crónica's* aesthetic mission in poetic declarations. He stated that travel narratives should record sensations and insisted on an artistic, subjective but sensory (rather than autobiographical) reportage:

Por mi parte, yo no busco nunca en los libros de viaje el alma de los países que me interesan. Lo que busco es algo más frívolo, más sutil, más positivo: la sensación. Todo viajero artista, en efecto, podría titular su libro: *Sensaciones* . . . el cuadro lejano es una imagen interpretada por un visionario. (Páginas 7)

This stylistic prescription announces the travel narrative's intentions: to paint a verbal picture of a subjective encounter with a new place. As though he were writing a spiritual diary, the narrator should "exhale, en una prosa sensible y armoniosa, las sensaciones de su alma" (12). These texts evoke the nineteenth century *flâneur*, the Baudelairian urban drifter. The wandering narrators of the *modernista* chronicles assume the role of "machines recording sensations" (García Calderón, *Frivolamente* 36). This new genre was expected to fill in the emotional and sensorial void in urban, mechanized surroundings.

Paris dominated the chronicle where Latin American narrators recounted events such as the 1900 World's Fair, art exhibitions, and fashion debuts. Paris headed up sections not only in travel books but in Darío's prose poems and short tales, in fanciful literary and artistic reviews. In Gómez Carrillo's anthology *Páginas escogidas*, the first section is called "En Europa." It begins with a short essay, "La psicología del viajero," which identifies travel to Paris as the trip of all trips. Paris is representative here of all European or Western civilization.

The *modernistas* approached Paris as the foreign, unfamiliar other with the "saudade utópico pelo desconhecido."<sup>9</sup> Paris held magnetic powers over artists and intellectuals, who converted "her" into lover, siren, sanctuary, classical goddess, or bewitching enchantress.

In modernista prose about Paris, the city's modern image always promises sensuality and erotic potential. During this period of Spanish American cultural affirmation, the *modernista* gaze on Paris might seem contradictory to the movement's advocacy of political and cultural autonomy. However, in the logic of these texts, the possibility of sexual freedom reverses their dependence on a Europeanizing urban aesthetic. Ventura García Calderón calls Paris "the seductive paradise we dream of in our twenties, evoking a youthful mood of erotic adventure" ("Pour quoi . . ." 22). In his chronicles, he strives to communicate Paris's sensual sublimity where, for him, women are never over thirty years old (*Frivolamente* 111). The chronicles recommend Paris as the site for sexual initiation of young Latin American men.

Paris becomes personalized, possessed, loved, and coveted in all of these desire-filled chronicles. These narrators often fuse the lover and the mistress in order to merge illicit sexual experimentation with the emotional domain of romance. Paris is cast as the metaphorical lover for a collective generation of male fantasies: "[d]e todo el viaje y de todos los viajes, tú constituyes en verdad nuestro único placer infinito . . ." (Gómez Carrillo 17, emphasis added). Darío declares, "mi madre y mi nodriza es Francia la dulce" (*Peregrinaciones* 410). In his preface to *Prosas profanas*, he exclaims, "mi esposa es de mi tierra; mi querida, de París" (11). Paris is admired, yearned for, adorned with words. At a distance, the city is nostalgically remembered until the anticipated return:

La separación ha aumentado en nuestra alma el amor por ti. Encontrándonos de nuevo en tu seno, experimentamos la febril alegría de la mujer enamorada que, después de una ausencia, se halla entre los brazos de su amante. (Gómez Carrillo 17)

Here Gómez Carrillo makes Paris the lover's haven, the return to the ultimate sensual experience. Paris was inscribed as the provider of missing erotic opportunities in Latin America. A chronicled version of someone else's trip provided the vicarious experimentation longed for at home.

The Europeanizing view of literary prestige persisted in urban centers in Latin America through the *modernista* movement and beyond. The journalistic dynamism of the "Années Folles" established Paris as *the* international literary capital to many Latin American urban intellectuals. Once writers had published at home, they were expected to prove themselves by publishing in Paris. A Latin American writer journeyed to the French capital, carrying with him his locally published work:

No le han bastado a este hombre los elogios que en su tierra logró su obra. Necesita ahora los elogios de París. Necesita que, desde París, su gloria se refleje sobre el mundo. (Gache 37)

According to the legend of Paris's cultural command, its literary (or artistic) products radiated worldwide. Just as the city presumably lifted the erotic restraints of Latin American culture, so Paris as a literary capital was expected to break through artistic and literary borders as well.

Paris as an international literary capital offered Latin Americans contact not just with France but with the cultural activity of other expatriate artists. The transcultural nature of the literary capital was supposed to turn a vocation of letters into an imperative rather than a choice, making the writer's presence there "*une manière qui lève les servitudes et les obstacles de l'entreprise littéraire*" (Bessière in Brunel 185). To escape the role of the provincial, struggling writer at home, the Latin American intellectual came to Paris to be transformed into a citizen of the world who had transcended geographic and cultural boundaries.

In his introduction to an exhaustive study of Paris as a literary center, Pierre Brunel defines a literary capital as the "*tête écrivante*" that exerts "*l'hégémonie de la parole*" (1-2). Brunel characterizes a literary capital as a city that offers the activity of publishing, interviews, and meetings; a city with the infrastructure of media and cultural institutions; and a center that supports translations. It is a space that opens itself worldwide:

la capitale littéraire est chef d'un lieu dont les frontières ne sont pas fixes. . . . Un domaine plus vaste se dessine qui peut même chercher à *s'étendre au monde entier*. (Brunel 3, emphasis added)



Paris is, in fact, where many first editions in Spanish were published just after the First World War. There were European publishers especially committed to Latin American literature. Garnier dedicated a large part of its publishing to authors in Spanish, including translations of French authors and original texts in Spanish. The entrance to the Garnier bookstore and publishing house was known as the "sublime puerta" to Latin Americans seeking literary success in France and distribution within Latin America (Needell, quoted in Hardoy and Morse 182). The Paul Ollendorff bookstore and publishing house in Paris almost entirely dedicated its business to publishing and distributing Hispanic writers in the early part of this century. These French publishers took advantage of the Latin American rejection of and disassociation from Spanish cultural models and industry. Literary entrepreneurs like Garnier and Ollendorff recognized an ignored market that they could develop at home and abroad. While publishers in Latin America continued to print European authors, perpetuating a dependence on European literary culture, European publishers were appropriating the production of Latin American letters.

The commonly fictionalized theme of Paris as an international literary or artistic capital (see chapter 3 on Manuel Scorza) not only drew many Latin Americans to Europe but also fueled the projects of urban modernity in Latin America itself. The literary capital expands the literate city that is already powerful locally and regionally into an extensive international network of publishing, advertising, and media contacts. It becomes a determiner of wider canons and discursive strategies and reigns over ever-broadening intellectual territory.<sup>10</sup> Travel to Paris, with its adjustments and sacrifices, is only a minute piece of the literary capital's story of cultural control. More vital than individual stories of success or failure, illusion and frustration, the *image* of Paris as a literary capital for Latin America retains its force. The realities and practicalities of the international literary market have been less significant to the Latin American construct of Paris than the illusory faith in its literary promise.

### A FAILED UTOPIA

In a short article entitled "París y los escritores extranjeros," Darío discusses the intoxicating effect of Paris on international writers and describes their process of "parisinación." Even Darío admits that his Paris was a fantasy and that he wrote more about Paris

from Latin America before he actually went there to live. He quotes Tulio Cestero, a writer from the Dominican Republic, living in Paris at the time, who described Paris as an in-conquerable, fleeting vision that, "a los que llegan fuertes, jóvenes, sanos, con la primavera en el alma, París los devuelve enfermos, viejos, rotos" (OC v. 1, 467-68). Brutal artistic competition and social alienation begin to wear away the city's glossy veneer.

Latin American writing in generations following the *modernistas* accentuates the cruel reality behind Paris's glamorous facade. Narratives such as Ricardo Güiraldes's *Raucha* (1917) and Sebastián Salazar Bondy's *Pobre gente de París* (1958) reveal the persistent integration of the French capital into Latin American fiction in an attempt to forge an aesthetic identity. These texts mix Paris's allure from afar with its ultimate disenchantment. Paris is transformed into a decadent and destructive agent, a change that parallels the shift from an aesthetic of pleasure and luxury toward a revelation of urban modernity's high cost.

Although these texts span several decades and were written from the perspective of different countries and regions in Latin America, *Raucha* and *Pobre gente de París* similarly embrace the illusion of Paris in order to uncover its seamy desolation. These narratives accord French women the archetypical role of seductresses and prostitutes who exploit the protagonists' mythification of Paris and orchestrate their disillusionment. *Raucha* is Güiraldes's autobiographical novella that juxtaposes rural life on the Argentine pampas with scenes in Paris. The city becomes the dialectical counterpoint to the Latin American countryside in this prototype for his later novel *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926).

The novella begins with Raucha's mother's death and his father's decision to move his sons to his *estancia* for the consolation of the pampa. Raucha is attracted to the *peones'* work and learns the ways of the ranch before receiving any formal education. However, when he does enter the *colegio*, he has already learned some French, geography, and history. Every summer, while reacquainting himself with rural life on the ranch, he reads French literature and dreams of "civilizaciones modernas de las grandes capitales" (65). He begins to resent his isolation from the urban world, becomes obsessed with Paris, and finally arranges to travel there. In Paris he seeks to satisfy his erotic fantasies. He ultimately falls ill, weakened from his sexual exploits in the city-turned-devouring-mistress. Only a reunion with the Argentine pampa can restore his physical and spiritual health. *Copyrighted Material*

Sexuality monopolizes Raucho's Parisian (mis)adventure and saturates the novella's urban space:

Un principio de cópula flota sobre las parejas de hombres y mujeres, o simplemente de mujeres, que se abandonan copa en mano sobre las banquetas, esbozando caricias trucas, que les electriza e impulsa a excesos. (100)

Güiraldes parodies the *modernistas'* emphasis on the sensual and evocation of the erotic in *RaUCHO* in the protagonist's exaggerated obsessions. Paris becomes a dangerous place where women and the city together destroy eager foreigners. The city is compared to a growing and debilitating cancer, and only the natural landscapes of home can halt its progression.

*RaUCHO* bridges the cultural politics of the *modernistas* with that of the *novela de la tierra* movement. Cristóbal Pera, in his chapter "Del París 'Artificial' a la América 'Natural,'" explores the shift from the *modernistas'* cosmopolitan sensibility to nationalistic localism. Paris comes to embody artificiality, disease, and death after a long generation of writing that only endowed it with the most lofty or pleurably illicit opportunities.

[E]ste desplazamiento en las imágenes que remiten a París está relacionado dialécticamente con la renovada vocación nacionalista que opone lo "nacional" a lo "cosmopolita," lo "natural" americano a lo "artificial" parisino, el poder "regenerador" de la naturaleza a la "enfermedad" que se incuba en las ciudades. (Pera 159)

Güiraldes writes *RaUCHO* into a polarity of cosmopolitan Paris versus Latin American natural spaces. The novel's structure relies on a continuum of rural male vigor and its inevitable depletion in the sexual excesses of the city.

The emergence of the *novela de la tierra* and popular *criollista* literature in Latin America coincide with this period of Paris's challenged prominence. With the threat of increasing intervention from the United States in the Caribbean and Central America, and the impact of modernization in the cities, a renewed interest in local topics surged. Increasing immigration from Europe, particularly into the Southern Cone, spurred *criollo* culture to affirm its own identity by rejecting foreign influence.<sup>11</sup> New literary forms

and styles countered the idea of civilization that relied on foreign cultural standards and modern urbanization with a local, utopian vision based on the power and attraction of the countryside. Land became a cultural metaphor, *patria* and nature fused to form a referent of cultural origin.<sup>12</sup> The American landscape's untamed barbarism is idealized as the creative vitality necessary for changing social structures. The vastness of the plain in Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara*, the *pampa* in Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, and the consuming jungle in José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* exalt South American natural environment as a determining influence on individual lives and national destinies.

However, these novels inscribe "civilization" on the other side of their nationalistic and naturalistic coin. While they display initial resistance to European aesthetic modeling, they merely recast it. Literacy, legality, territory documents, land ownership, and racial dominance represent the strategies of urban writing culture transferred to rural settings. Despite the apparent shift in emphasis from Europe to Latin America, both writers and characters maintained connections to European educational and legal centers of authority.<sup>13</sup> Güiraldes dressed his own *literato* image in two costumes: "el del aristócrata que enseñó en París a bailar el tango y el del gaucho con que fue más de una vez retratado" (Rodríguez-Alcalá 616). *Don Segundo Sombra* introduces the *gaucho letrado*, a synthesis of the city with the *interior*. Beatriz Sarlo identifies the novel as Güiraldes's nostalgic, utopian solution to the urban domain's severe discontinuities due to the region's influx of immigrants and to the process of urban modernization (*Una modernidad periférica* 31–43). Although Güiraldes seemed to steer away from Sarmiento's view that Latin American salvation lay in the Europeanization of local culture, he replaced it with his vision of the idealized, literate gaucho that he had to go to Paris to acquire.

Sebastián Salazar Bondy's *Pobre gente de París* contemporizes Raucha's Parisian debacle in a group of short stories about a generation of young Latin American artists and intellectuals in Paris and the sacrifices they make to realize their "viaje a Europa." In the nineteenth century, the voyage to Paris was only possible for the wealthy, urban elite in Latin America. The economic crisis of the early 1930s in Europe, and the subsequent devaluation of the French franc, suddenly made the elitist voyage to Paris possible for less affluent artists and intellectuals. A new generation from a more varied class background began to write its own version of Parisian bohemia. The post-World War II era continued to see a

more artistically marginal and economically unstable community of Latin Americans gathered in Paris. Their writing also recorded the underside of the prestigious luxury dreamed of in America.

Salazar Bondy's title comes from a popular Peruvian song that evokes the struggle and poverty of foreigners trying to attain glory in Paris.<sup>14</sup> The main character and narrator of the frame story, Juan, arrives in Paris "henchido de pura emoción y tembloroso como a una cita de amor" (Salazar Bondy 11). A few months later, he confesses that "aun no podía decir que la ciudad tantas veces soñada me hubiera deparado alguna verdadera satisfacción" (9). It hurts his pride to admit that he has been the "víctima de un espejismo, de una pueril fantasmagoría" (9). Juan and his fellow artists face solitude and poverty in Paris. Their desperate desire to experience and find success in Paris shows them willing to travel to and stay in Paris at almost all cost, such as the young Venezuelan painter who sleeps with a military official in order to acquire a scholarship for study abroad. Once in Paris, the students degradingly collect and sell used paper and receive donations of old clothes from those who take pity on them.

French women in Paris are given the archetypal role of sex objects and seductresses in these stories. The young Latin American characters seek out these female figures—embodiments of their Parisianized erotic desire—who eventually contribute to their downfall. Juan pursues Caroline, who rents a room in the same boardinghouse. One day he finds her in bed with his rich uncle, who is visiting from Lima. Juan's naiveté never allowed him to see her before as a prostitute. The discovery of her prostitution leads to the final scene between Juan and another neighborhood prostitute. They are in a brothel where Juan will spend all of his money, and where he hears the familiar melancholy melody, "Pobre gente de París, no la pasa muy feliz . . ." <sup>15</sup>

Thus the collection of stories ends with a lament in Spanish about Paris. What had been "el sueño de los veinte años" (67) becomes a winding Parisian staircase, "una larga espiral de penumbras crecientes, los círculos, en verdad, de un estrecho infierno urbano" (45).<sup>16</sup> Suddenly there are no more miracles in Paris, as one of the stories' titles announces; both the first and last page of the collection mention failure. Paris, rather than being conquered and possessed, is a failed project. The city devours them all, consuming their savings, health, dignity, and sanity.<sup>17</sup>

The contemporary fiction analyzed in this book's subsequent chapters registers the tension between urban modernity as a European

export and American cultural and social independence. The New World has been an enduring participant in what critics now commonly call "global culture," a sort of double-edged imperialism in which regions and nations mutually define one another. Frederick Buell, in *National Culture and the New Global System*, examines the complex relationship between the local and the global, particularly for developing countries in contemporary circumstances. He states that currently we are living in an era

in which new nationalisms and ethnic fundamentalisms—ones that conceal their global sources—have sprung up side by side with a widespread movement dedicated to demystifying the ideology of national culture and foregrounding the international and intercultural relationships upon which it has in fact erected itself. (Buell 9)

The story of Paris in Latin American writing, or rather the story of a Latin American Paris, is permeated with the discrepancy of European dependency and fervent efforts toward cultural and political autonomy. The nationalism of the *novela de la tierra* movement, for example, was both nostalgically conservative and revolutionary. It emerged from the conflictive responses to modernity that Europe and the United States exerted over Latin America. This chapter has revealed Paris's role in nation-building projects and literary movements that play a role in the ongoing process of cultural definition.

Contesting colonial power through the importation of *another* set of European cultural norms prolonged a reliance on and allegiance to European tradition. Contemporary cultural movements confirm the persistence of imagined European urban space and its discursive power in Latin America. As a discouraged, armed Leftist states in Scorza's late 1970's novel, *La tumba del relámpago*, "[l]a rabia, el coraje, son de aquí, y las ideas son de allá" (235). More recent fiction from Latin America that explores displacement, exile, and transnationalism incorporates Paris in the continuing struggle for a cosmopolitan urban cultural identity.

This panoramic sketch of Paris written into Latin American conceptions of the urban, the modern, the culturally progressive, and the erotically liberating reveals the conflictual bargaining over cultural identity in a postcolonial situation. Even the texts that portray the disillusionment with Paris, such as Salazar Bondy's *Pobre gente de París* and Güiraldes's *Raucha*, employ the same

operative categories of cultural self-affirmation. The "place" these texts narrate is rarely the referential Paris, France, but rather an imagined space that is a repository for cultural yearnings. Latin American urban centers, while conscious of their local and regional institutional power, have had to seek aesthetic and imaginative models from both near and far. The "global" nature of this imperialism of the imaginary operates in both directions. European and American spaces perpetuate mutual otherness to exploit one another in affirming an array of identities.

Latin American writing proposes a dynamic role for Paris in the process of cultural identification. The city functions as both an established aesthetic construct and an increasingly intertextualized field. Paris has been a storehouse as well as a catalyst for aesthetic and thematic experimentation, linguistic play and crosscultural citation. Latin American writing sketches Paris as a zone of exploration for reencountering and challenging American ideas of European urban space. The cultural imagination that generates this Paris charts new districts located neither in France nor in Latin America. Its readers roam distant boulevards to reinvent a Paris mapped onto transnational urban identity.