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## Nonsynchronism and Resistance as Praxis in Miguel Ángel Asturias

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Miguel Ángel Asturias' use of Tohil, Mayan god of fire, war and rain, at the close of *El Señor Presidente* unifies the two poles traditionally used by critics to establish binary opposition within his writings: the focus on social realism (centered in his *El Señor Presidente*, the *Trilogía bananera* and *Weekend en Guatemala*) and the focus on neoindigenist Mayan mythology (as depicted in works such as *Hombres de maíz*, *Mulata de tal* and *Maladrón*)<sup>1</sup>. While this type of reductionism might be credited for

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<sup>1</sup> Consider for example the bibliographic sketch in Otto-Raúl González' *Miguel Ángel Asturias, el gran lengua*, 18-21, among many others. These attempts to justify Asturias' works in terms of thematic poles likely owes something to Seymour Menton's acclaim for *El Señor Presidente*, as "sin duda, la mejor novela" of Asturias, and disdain for *Hombres de maíz* for its "método artificial que emplea el autor para atar todos los cabos sueltos o, mejor dicho, para enlazar con hiedras los distintos troncos individuales" in his well-established *Historia crítica de la novela guatemalteca* (195, 222). Many subsequent studies have in turn attempted to justify Asturias' more mythically-conditioned production as more worthy of critical attention, as the critical editions of *Hombres de maíz* (1998) and *Mulata de Tal* (2000), published in the Colección Archivos and edited by Gerald Martin and Arturo Arias, respectively, have taken a clear critical move in this direction. One might also note Íber Verdugo's establishment of five distinct categories of Asturias'

reviving critical opinion of *Hombres de maíz* in the past three decades, allowing it to be regarded as something more than “confusa antes que difícil y de mal estructurada antes que compleja,” the focus of this study is rooted in a demonstration of the critical connection between these two facets of Asturias’ work in order to comprehend the presence of indigenist elements as part of an overall ideological strategy (Martin, “Destinos” 508). In some admittedly limited sense, the concern for *indigenismo* relates directly to the reality of Asturias’ work, as the reading I will give, primarily of *El Señor Presidente* but of Asturias’ second novel as well, is largely an argument concerning the temporal strategy that underlies the political concerns of both established historical figures and revolutionary individuals and movements within these works. Through this framework, Asturias provides a very apt means by which individuals and communities develop and utilize agency, understanding the theoretical foundation for ideological struggle for social power as it emerges through a need for a viable form of praxis. Though in the works of Asturias such praxis generally configures through indigenist concerns, it is most substantially configured through systems of temporality in conflict with anachronism and its political function, seen both as a political tool and a means of ideological opposition.

Tohil’s presence in *El Señor Presidente*, which occurs most explicitly in the novel’s thirty-seventh chapter, titled “El baile de Tohil,” comes as the President of the republic seeks the support of Cara de Ángel in his superfluous attempt to secure reelection. From an open window of the President’s office, Cara de Ángel watches as:

De una penumbra color de estiércol vino un hombrecillo con cara de güisquil viejo, lengua entre los carrillos, espinas en la frente, sin orejas, que llevaba al ombligo un cordón velludo adornado de cabezas de guerreros y hojas de ayote.... Un grito se untó a la oscuridad que trepaba a los árboles y se oyeron cerca y lejos las voces plañideras de las tribus que, abandonadas en la selva, ciega de nacimiento, luchaban con sus tripas—animales del hambre—, con sus gargantas—pájaros de la sed—y su miedo, y sus bascas, y sus

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literary production, a move that on one level provides greater specification, yet which is no less arbitrary (see his essay in the critical edition of *Viernes de Dolores*, xiv).

necesidades corporales, reclamando a Tohil, *Dador del Fuego*, que les devolviera el ocote encendido de la luz. (308)

This scene recalls what is perhaps the overriding theme of the novel, revealed in the *Pelele's* vision of the Manzana-Rosa del Ave del Paraíso, as he flees the city after attacking and killing the Coronel José Parrales Sonriente. The dialectical tension between the levels of waking reality and dreamt reality, embodied in *el Pelele's* dream, demonstrates the inability to fully separate these poles, and as Gerald Martin provides: “given that such a polarity exists, what are we to say is the border between its terms?” (“*Señor*” 236). Thus, as Cara de Ángel views the realization of Tohil from the President’s office, there is scarcely a separation between a conscious and unconscious comprehension of the origin of the vision, save that the “palpitación subterránea de reloj subterráneo que marca horas fatales empezaba para Cara de Ángel” immediately prior to his act of witnessing (307).

The lack of narrative clarity at this stage has likewise provided a lack of clarity in the critical reception of the chapter; Mario Roberto Morales, for example, reads Cara de Ángel’s vision as an amalgamation of the dictator with his favored collaborator: “Cara de Ángel se constituye inconscientemente en el lado luminoso del Señor Presidente mediante una visión fantástica... siguiendo la lógica de la dialéctica amo-esclavo, el objeto de deseo de Cara de Ángel no es otro que el mismo Señor Presidente” (705). Teresita Rodríguez understands the vision not as a mere combination of the two figures, but rather as an inversion: “La imagen, sin duda, anticipa la visión de Tohil, pero en este caso está invertido: Cara de Ángel sueña con asesinar al dictador” (45). Stephen Henighan understands this scene to open into the larger social context:

Viewed from beneath Cara de Ángel’s ‘cejas negras,’ these primary elements of the novel’s symbolic structure—illumination, nature, greenness, whiteness, the all-enveloping night—coalesce into a hallucination in which a Mayan ceremony acts out the origins of the Guatemalan people’s vulnerability to the appeal represented by a dictatorship such as that of the President... In order to regain the torch whose loss they lament—a versatile image invoking both *ladino* shame at inhabiting a ‘backward’ country and Mayan melancholy at the obliteration of past

grandeur—the people are willing to accept a worse-than-Faustian pact. (178)

As an exceptionally polysemous text, I would argue that all of these possibilities are present within the chapter, though Henighan's opening into the social ramifications of Cara de Ángel's vision, its psychological implications notwithstanding, coincide largely with the concerns of political practice and revolution in the text. As will be seen below, though, the revolutionary space is by no means restricted to Mayan descendants paying homage to their image of Tohil, embodied in the person of the President. As Gerald Martin recognizes in his notes to the critical edition of the novel, the title of the original manuscript of *El Señor Presidente* was *Tohil*, though Asturias also considered “Los mendigos políticos” and *Malebolge*, before settling on the novel's final title for the 1946 edition, a series of shifts that suggest “el progresivo entretejimiento en ella de lo local y lo universal” (341). Asturias' concerns in the novel would then seem to exist on both the mythic plain of a Mayan cosmography and the more contemporary historical reality of the Guatemala in which Asturias was raised. While the title “*Tohil*” situates the novel's representations in terms of a distinctly Mayan mythology, the concern for the social is likewise made functional through the implicit collective of Mayan society, and universalizes into the concerns of a general population under the aegis of the dictatorial figure. It is precisely in the unification of this collective population that our concerns here will rest, as the President's command of the populace by no means unifies entirely, much as the figures of resistance struggle to embody the concerns of those connected with the capital city, and the relative successes of these two segments of the population regulate the ability of either group to configure their political viewpoint into successful ideological practice.

*Ernst Bloch's “Nonsynchronism” and the deficiencies of its dialectic*

While the novel of dictatorship serves as one of the most representative of Latin American modes, and its movement into the temporal planes of the “new historical novel” or the “epic novel”<sup>2</sup> allows for

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<sup>2</sup> Here I use the term preferred by Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos to designate novels traditionally labeled as “magical realist,” including *Cien años de soledad*, *Hombres de maíz*, *Pedro Páramo* or *El reino de este mundo*, and which express a

a significantly more ample critical discourse, dictatorship of course is by no means restricted to Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The liabilities of working through literary representations of dictatorship through a largely Latin American context are perhaps not profound, as in many ways it configures the shared cultural and historical experience of nearly all nations in the region. Nevertheless, the admission of extra-Latin American figures whose own experiences of dictatorship and exile in many ways mirror the events dealt with by Asturias and others provide a level of insight that has been largely absent from dictatorship studies in the Americas. Here I think generally of the writers of the Frankfurt School, and specifically of the writings of German cultural critic Ernst Bloch. The turn I would like to take at this point, then, is to integrate the writings of Bloch into the discourse of temporality Asturias uses in the novel, as a means of demonstrating the viability of the chronotopic structure visible in this work, and to show where the limitations of Bloch's arguments lie to open the possibilities of interpreting resistance in Asturias' greater body of literature.

Bloch's reputation within the context of the Frankfurt School is undoubtedly diminished in comparison to his colleagues Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, as well as to the more periphery Walter Benjamin, and this occlusion is particularly pronounced in the Spanish-speaking world, where few of his works have consistently remained in print. This lack of accessibility is due in part to the Germanic focus of his writings, which likewise accounts for his relative obscurity in the United States, though outside of his essay "Regarding Expressionism," which Georg Lukács famously responded to with his "Realism in the Balance"<sup>3</sup>, he is perhaps best known for "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," written in May of 1932, as the rise of National Socialism seemed immanent to many individuals of the German left, and later appended with an explication of the rise of Hitler, published in Moscow in 1937. The utility of Bloch's "nonsynchronism" lies in its

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distinctly Latin American chronotope as the means to integrating mythic elements, though without falling back on fetishized forms of Latin American cultural production. See his article "The 'Epic Novel,'" which concerns the emergence of the forms of nationalism that underscore the rise of this genre.

<sup>3</sup> See Adorno, et. al. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso, 1980.

comprehension of the temporal framework that anticipates the rise of the National Socialist party in Germany, as this structure of temporality allows for the political utility of establishing and exploiting uneven levels of a class' consciousness, and expands outside of this German context as distinct classes work through their own development within the economic and social frameworks of their societies. Bloch effectively explains the concept of nonsynchronism as he states:

The foundation of the nonsynchronous contradiction is the unfulfilled fairy tale of the good old days, the unresolved myth of dark old being or of nature. Here there is a past which, in places, is not only not past in terms of classes, but not even completely redeemed materially. (35)<sup>4</sup>

Foundationally, the mythic past to which Bloch refers does not coincide with any real stage of development within either a class or a society, but rather concerns the consciousness of a class, which for Bloch implicates primarily the middle class [*Mittelstand*] as too divorced from the means of production to comprehend the true level of development to which their society pertains. The fact that the middle class in particular requires no grounded historical reality in order to place itself in some sense of a temporal framework is key here, as it serves as the class most easily exploited by a dictatorial figure or party, essentially because it cannot see through ideology to its true position.

The peasantry [*Bauerntum*] for Bloch represent the class closest to any real sense of the nonsynchronous, as their connection with the means of production is immediate, and this provides for a unique ability to comprehend the implements of the past, precisely through their inability to be removed from production through mechanistic development:

Granted, the peasant is shrewd in calculating: he has given up his traditional costume, furniture and many old-fashioned ways, and by no means under compulsion. But even if the peasant responds to economic problems with refreshing sobriety, even if the home-spun sayings he uses are not all from native soil, the sobriety he has is still not

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<sup>4</sup> Translations of Bloch's essay are by Mark Ritter. Ritter's 1977 translation is only of the original essay, and not of Bloch's addendum from 1937. The original reads: "Das Fundament des ungleichzeitigen Widerspruchs ist das unerfüllte Märchen der guten alten Zeit, der ungelöste Mythos des dunkeln alten Seins oder der Natur; hier ist, streckenweise, nicht bloß klassenmäßig unvergangene, sondern auch materiell noch nicht ganz abgegoltene Vergangenheit" (122).

from today, and the peasant still wears his old costume wherever silence and denseness, wherever traditional customs and beliefs hold sway. He stubbornly defends his economically obsolete position and is more difficult to replace by the machine than was the artisan a hundred years ago. His is more difficult to replace simply because he controls his means of production... (24)<sup>5</sup>

While this condition provides for the separation of classes in Germany in the 1930s, it is clear that within the context of a less-developed nation, one significantly more dependent upon agricultural production to maintain the national economy (and here we consider Guatemala in the 1920s and 30s, tied predominately to the production of grains, chiefly corn),<sup>6</sup> the peasantry's connection to the implements of the past becomes more pronounced. The detachment of these two social classes, then, magnified in other national contexts, situates them both nonsynchronously, as they share an attachment to an earlier temporal referent; the distinction, however, lies in the middle class' comprehension of this past through what Bloch terms a synchronous contradiction [*ungleichzeitige Widerspruch*], and which leads to an impeded future [*verhinderte Zukunft*] when it is taken on as the conscious condition of a social class. The peasantry, in opposition, casts off the past, but does so fully aware of the connection it holds to a true (i.e. economically grounded) historical experience.

The utility of this formation for the rise of dictatorship lies precisely in the exploitation of these disparate temporal frames, as the dictator enables the middle class to construct its consciousness through the false

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<sup>5</sup> "Zwar rechnet der Bauer vorzüglich, hat seine Trachten, Möbel, viel alten Zuschnitt aufgegeben und keineswegs nur gezwungen. Aber reagiert der Bauer auf wirtschaftliche Fragen auch erfrischend nüchtern, sind die handgewebten Phrasen, die er jetzt gebraucht, auch nicht alle bodenständig, so ist das Nüchterne doch nicht von heute, so trägt überall, wo schweigen und Dumpfheit, Herkommen der Sitte und des Glaubens statthat, der Bauer alte Tracht. Seinen wirtschaftlich überalterten Ort verteidigt er zäh, ist schwerer durch die Maschine zu verdrängen als vor hundert Jahren der Handwerker. Er ist schon deshalb schwerer zu verdrängen, weil er die Produktionsmittel noch in der Hand hat..." (106).

<sup>6</sup> According to Mario Monteforte Toledo, as late as 1955, 68% of the population of Guatemala worked in the agricultural sector, with 11.5% involved in manufacturing, the latter earning twice the salary of the former (472). He writes, "Las hortalizas las cultivan casi exclusivamente los indios, a orillas de ríos o lagos, en los Departamentos de Guatemala, Quetzaltenango, Sacatepéquez y Sololá. Todos los intentos que se han hecho para introducir estos cultivos por métodos modernos han fracasado porque no pueden competir con los costos de producción del campesino indio" (447).

past: the dictator exploits the contradiction inherent in the *petit bourgeois* class precisely because it is a class that “lacks a history” [*der »geschichtslosen« Klasse des Kleinbürgertums*], and thus cannot fall back upon material experience in understanding its position in the capitalist world (35 [122]). In a quote bearing remarkably well upon a discussion of Asturias’ cultural context, Bloch states:

...the nihilism of bourgeois life, this becoming-a-commodity, becoming alienated from the entire world, shows preserved nonsynchronisms in a doubly “natural” way and preserved “nature” in a doubly magical way. And so campfires and sacrificial smoke burn in the people’s hall. Trumpet blasts announce the *Führer* in a more than Wilhelminian manner; the thin little gardens of ideology that falsify the myth become materially overheated and spring up—in a frenzied middle class—into a jungle. (30)<sup>7</sup>

The primitive invocation allows us an easy entrance into the Guatemalan context, though the limitations of Bloch’s dialectic emerge here through the separation of a peasantry configured as an urban class and an indigenous population tied to the jungle. Inevitably, the conflict between a landed bourgeoisie and a increasingly landless yet not urban proletariat is central to much of Guatemalan literature in middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both in the works of Asturias and many of his contemporaries and inheritors, such as Flavio Herrera or Mario Monteforte Toledo.

If we are not able to conflate these two classes, then the distinction between the rural indigenous as a class integrally aware of its historical condition and the urban peasantry whose connection to the historical constructs of their Mayan ancestry bears itself out in Guatemala, much as Bloch witnesses in Germany. Bloch’s ability to bridge the class distinction, however, relies upon the emergent class consciousness of the urban peasantry, in a move that recalls Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness*:

Recognizing himself as a commodity, the worker reveals at the same time the commodity character of capitalist society, a state as raving

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<sup>7</sup> “...der Nihilismus des bürgerlichen Lebens, dieses Zur-Ware-Werden, Entäußert-Werden der ganzen Welt zeigt hier erhaltene Ungleichzeitigkeiten doppelt »naturhaft« und erhaltene »Natur« doppelt magisch. So brennen denn Lagerfeuer und Opferrauch im völkischen Saal. Posaunenstöße künden stärker als nur wilhelminisch den Führer an, die dünnen Gärtchen Ideologie, welche den Mythos falsifizieren, verschwülen real und gehen – in einer rasenden Mittelmasse – als Dschungel auf” (115).

as it is ghostly. He does this—as the new class—and cannot be mistaken for the old, and also his “humanity” or his “life,” which he opposes to reification, cannot be historically determined at any point. The proletarian as the self-dissolution of bourgeois society, indeed, of all class society, is the subjectively and objectively incarnate contradiction of synchronous society itself, and his revolution—as the fruit of dialectical *knowledge* of synchronous contradictions—does not take exception to any figures or memories, nor in the first instance, to any contents from the past. Rather, it activates purely the future society with which the present one is pregnant and towards which the nihilisms and anarchies of present society seek to transform themselves. (33-4)<sup>8</sup>

The notion of revolution hinted at towards the close of this passage is central, yet is equally problematic in Bloch as in Lukács’ early Marxist writings, as it depends upon a call to a class conscious of its historical condition, yet contains no functional means by which such consciousness is to be attained. Clearly the function of the proletarian class as a fundamentally historical class, capable of observing its situation in capitalism in terms of its positioning *vis-à-vis* the material mode of production, depends upon its comprehension of the link to its own primitive past, yet as such does not stand in for a revolutionary model. Its idealism is situated in terms of class consciousness emerging as its historical awareness yields an understanding of the social positioning of the class – the proletariat understands its grounding in the past, and thus can see through the ideology of a dictatorship undermining this history. In contrast, the utility of Asturias in terms of nonsynchronism demonstrates the opposite model: the revolutionary potential of a materialist social awareness goes on to yield a consciousness of the historical position of the indigenous class. As such, it allows for an ideological response to the anachronous contradictions latent in a false nonsynchronism, but which

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<sup>8</sup> “Der sich als Ware erkennende Arbeiter enthüllt zugleich den ebenso rasenden wie spukhaften Warencharakter der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft, ohne daß er –als neue Klasse – mit Altem zu täuschen wäre, ohne daß auch der »Mensch« oder das »Leben«, das er der Verdinglichung entgegengesetzt, bereits irgendwo geschichtlich bestimmt wäre. Der Proletarier als Selbstauflösung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, ja, jeder Klassengesellschaft überhaupt, ist der subjektiv wie objektiv leibhaftige Widerspruch der gleichzeitigen Gesellschaft selbst, und seine Revolution –als Frucht der dialektischen *Erkenntnis* gleichzeitiger Widersprüche – moniert keine Gestalten und Erinnerungen, zunächst auch keinerlei Gehalte der Vergangenheit. Sondern aktiviert rein die Zukunftsgesellschaft, mit der die jetzige schwanger geht, zu der hin die Anarchien und Nihilismen der jetzigen ihren Umschlag suchen” (119-20).

emerges organically from the peasantry's comprehension of its social needs and not of the abuse of its historical position.

*Nonsynchronism and the maintenance of dictatorship*

Cara de Ángel's vision of Tohil and its connection to the dictator brings together the Mayan deity and the head of the nation within the novel (and closely recalls Guatemalan dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera), yet the function of a nonsynchronic model configures public support for the dictatorship within the novel's depiction of waking reality as well. Immediately prior to the appearance of Tohil, the reelection of the dictator is configured through a propaganda machine that fundamentally invokes a mythic temporal space. Posters hung in support of the dictator clearly express a referent of the future, demanding the election of "el Estadista más completo de nuestros tiempos, aquél a quien la Historia saludará Grande entre los Grandes, Sabio entre los Sabios, Liberal Pensador y Demócrata" (302). This frame is further placed as an opposition between a seemingly known but yet decidedly mythic figure, embodied in the space of a familiar recent past, and the dismissive possibility of "aventurar la barca del Estado en lo que no conocemos" (302). The final invocation of the *pueblo* to realize this false dilemma and act in concert with the will of the dictator's political machine demonstrates a cynical understanding of the political power of the nonsynchronous contradiction, yet one which is viable within a middle class lacking a materialist past.

The functionality of the nonsynchronous contradiction bears out further as a seemingly random "desguachipado"<sup>9</sup> takes up the cause of the propaganda, invoking Nietzsche in a comparative historical frame to Germany, and which would seem to bear upon the rise of Hitler:

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<sup>9</sup> Gerald Martin indicates the possibility that this figure could variously represent either José Santos Chocano, Rubén Darío, who spent time in Guatemala in 1915 at Estrada Cabrera's expense, or Máximo Soto Hall, whose novel *La sombra de la casa blanca* Asturias felt to condone dictatorship in the *Américas* (Asturias, *Paris* 284-5). See Martin's notes to the novel, 420-21. Coincidentally, Valladares Rubio informs us that "Parece haber sido don Máximo Soto Hall quien insinuó a Cabrera la idea de llevar a Guatemala al poeta moribundo [Darío]: era la ocasión de mostrar una magnanimidad resonante y teatral, a que era dado el carácter histriónico del dictador," this as the poet was close to dying of alcoholism (468).

i... Cuando aquel alemán que no comprendieron en Alemania, no Goethe, no Kant, no Schopenhauer, trató del Superlativo del Hombre, fue presintiendo, sindudamente, que de Padre Cosmos y Madre Naturaleza, iba a nacer en el corazón de América, el primer hombre superior que haya jamás existido. Hablo, señores, de ese romaneador de auroras que la Patria llama Benemérito, Jefe del Partido y Protector de la Juventud Estudiosa; hablo, señores, del Señor Presidente Constitucional de la República, como, sin duda, vosotros todos habéis comprendido, por ser él el Prohombre de Nitche, el Superúnico... Lo digo y lo repito desde lo alto de esta tribu! (302-3)

The ability of the crowd to perceive the place of the president within this temporal framework, as the bearer of a what could only emerge as an impeded future, implicates the class distinction between the bourgeoisie of the city and their inevitable separation from an indigenous peasantry immune to the invocation of a historical context that they could not possibly comprehend. The figure of the outsider in this case, separated from the other individuals in the bar through not only his physical description, of “melena negra y ojos talcosos,” but also his comprehension of a Germanic tradition far removed from the educative level of his audience (302). Only Mister Gengis, the novel’s American capitalist figure, can understand the function of the poet’s discourse, as he responds “Mi gust-o cómo habla este poeta, pero yo cre-e que debe ser muy triste ser poeta; sólo ser licenciado debe de ser la más treste cosa del mundo. ¡Y ya me voy a beber el otro whisky! ¡Otro whisky –gritó– para este super-hiper-ferro-casi-carri-lero!” (304). His dismissal of the poet’s invocation, then, simultaneously belies the narrator’s cynical rejection of the underlying economic motives of the American’s presence. In this sense, I would disagree with Giuseppe Bellini’s claim that he is “uno dei pochi ‘gringos’ positivi nell’opera di Asturias” (40); he is ultimately drawn purely in terms of his class interest, and that interest is grounded only through his desire to use the dictatorship for his own material gain.

The public’s ability to be carried along into the historically anachronistic mediation of the dictator’s presence is perhaps even more notable during the celebration of the national holiday (Chapter XIV, “¡Todo el Orbe cante!”), as the president is acclaimed by the people:

¡Señor, Señor, llenos están los cielos y la tierra de vuestra gloria! Las señoras sentían el divino poder del Dios Amado. Sacerdotes de mucha envidia le incensaban. Los juristas se veían en un torneo de Alfonso el Sabio. Los diplomáticos, excelencias de Tiflis, se daban grandes tonos consintiéndose en Versalles, en la Corte del Rey Sol. Los periodistas nacionales y extranjeros se relamían en presencia del redivivo Pericles. ¡Señor, Señor, llenos están los cielos y la tierra de vuestra gloria! Los poetas se creían en Atenas, así lo pregonaban al mundo. Un escultor de santos se consideraba Fidias y sonreía poniendo los ojos en blanco y frotándose las manos, al oír que se vivaba en las calles el nombre del egregio gobernante.... (114-15)

The leveling of the historical and geographic space, which mediates the presence of the dictator through well-established figures of autocratic rule, and which would seem to indicate a shift towards the anachronistic, in fact belies the nonsynchronic nature of the dictator's rule through its hyperbolic point of reference.<sup>10</sup> Inevitably, this concern for anachronism has a grounding in the social reality of Asturias' day, as he writes in 1928, "En nuestros países todo se reduce a multiplicar las palabras, sujetos como estamos a una ideología anterior a nuestro siglo, que reivindica, para la oratoria romántica del patriotismo, lo que en otras partes es acción" (*Paris* 315). The conscious desire of the public to see in the dictator the historical referents of the past, then, provides the means by which power is constructed through the presence of the greater middle class, precisely because of their complete lack of connection to the productive mechanism of society. Notably absent in this clamor are the representatives of a proletarian class, and as such Asturias' presentation of the *pueblo* provides for a clear social schism, which is then exploited as the action of the novel shifts to the jungle.

Asturias' use of Pericles in particular provides a link to the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera, on whom the title was ironically bestowed by his political opponents, and while its attribution is credited to Joaquín

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<sup>10</sup> Following Bloch's model, this aspect of the novel would coincide with what he terms the "subjectively nonsynchronous," that which the public's desire to shift into a different temporal frame, absent the concrete markers of a nonsynchronous past: "As a simply torpid not wanting of the Now, this contradicting factor is *subjectively* nonsynchronous" (31) ["Als bloß dumpfes Nichtwollen des Jetzt ist dies Widersprechende *subjektiv* ungleichzeitig" (116)].

Méndez<sup>11</sup> as early as the 1920s, it later emerges in the historical accounts of both Rafael Arévalo Martínez and Manuel Valladares Rubio. As Valladares Rubio states: “el literato Joaquín Méndez llamó Pericles a Cabrera, reclamando los mármoles pentélicos para eternizar su figura y los lauros olímpicos para su frente de pensador” (476). This language is particularly apt, as the emphasis on the Parnassian overwhelmingly characterized the reign of Estrada Cabrera. Valladares writes:

La imaginación pagana de Rafael Spínola, Secretario de Cabrera, concibió festejar a los niños y consagrar la enseñanza con formas y pompas helénicas, tal vez más por anhelos de poesía que por afán de bombo oficial; y el cálculo egoísta del Presidente aprovechó en el acto para fines políticos la festividad de Minerva premiando los esfuerzos escolares. (475)

Along with the *Fiesta de Minerva*, celebrated annually beginning in 1902 in commemoration of Estrada Cabrera’s rise to the presidency, the dictator mediated his regime through Hellenism with the construction of the *Templo de Minerva*, used as early as 1902 (and destroyed in 1952), and the production of *Álbumes de Minerva*, which as Arévalo Martínez describes were: “un lujoso volumen de gran formato y ciento sesenta y dos páginas en papel porcelana, profusa y preciosamente ilustradas. La edición debe haber costado una ingente suma” (93).

The extension of the president’s presentation as a Greek demigod was configured through poetry dedicated in his honor, including by José Santos Chocano and Rubén Darío<sup>12</sup>, providing cultural weight to his administration, and more significantly for our understanding, through education. As Valladares explains above, the utility of the *Fiesta de Minerva* was as much purely educational as generally ideological, and thus its cultural and educational value related directly to the instruction of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Martin’s notes to *El Señor Presidente*, 384.

<sup>12</sup> Arévalo Martínez includes a poem by Chocano entitled “Pro Minerva,” which includes the lines: “Salta, bajo tu golpe de Vulcano, / Minerva como un símbolo viviente; / pero la haces tener en el presente / cabeza griega y corazón cristiano....” Darío’s poem, “Pallas Athenea,” states: “Y tal sigue su culto oculto / hasta que a través del tumulto / de los siglos, su fuente abrega / almas nuevas en tierra nueva, / cuando el conjuro de un Varón / todo energía y reflexión, / el templo minervino eleva / que simboliza y que renueva / el recuerdo del Partenón. / Aquí reapareció la austera, / la gran Minerva luminosa; / su diestra alzó el gesto de la diosa / la mano de Estrada Cabrera” (94; 96-7).

*pueblo* as to the president's connection to the past. Fundamentally this allows for the practical use of power mediated through the public in terms of concrete implements of the past. As Bloch states: "The *objectively* nonsynchronous is that which is far from and alien to the present; it includes both *declining remnants* and, above all, uncompleted *past*, which has not yet been 'sublated' by capitalism" (31)<sup>13</sup>. This is made most manifest here in terms of temples, historical representations and educational materials that situate the public in some form of direct union with a (mythic) past. The instruction of this sense of an objective nonsynchronism within Guatemalan society, then, served essentially the role of an Althusserian ISA, allowing for the public to understand their connection to the past in false terms, in anticipation that the paradigms of the Hellenic world would enable the emergence of a conceivable future.

Among the biographical studies of Estrada Cabrera, particular attention is due Carlos Wyld Ospina's *El autócrata*, in terms of its fundamental comprehension of the utility of historiography in evaluating the past and its use by the dictator, and here in terms of the esteem Asturias attached to the work. In 1929, the year Wyld Ospina's work was published, Asturias, working as a journalist for several newspapers while in Paris, published a review of the book in which he states:

*El autócrata*, en nuestra humilde opinión, es de los libros que si llegan a manos de los ciudadanos desposeídos de fanatismos políticos, además de satisfacerles, les dan esperanzas de regeneración, porque su campanada señala que ha nacido ya en Guatemala una época distinta de la que vivimos hasta la caída de Estrada Cabrera, que la juventud que ahora se educa ya no cree bajo ala palabra de honor del maestro las mentiras históricas de que están preñados nuestros libros escolares, mentiras que a la postre hacen más daño que bien a las figuras del liberalismo, ya que a fuerza de aire las han ancaramado a alturas de las cuales después hemos tenido la pena de bajarlas con riesgo de que se rompan al caer. (*Paris* 412)

The understanding of the educational importance of Wyld Ospina's work is quite telling in this regard through the attention it pays to Estrada Cabrera's abuse of education as a means of holding power. Wyld Ospina

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<sup>13</sup> "Das *objektiv* Ungleichzeitige ist das zur Gegenwart Ferne und Fremde; es umgreift also *untergehende Reste* wie vor allem *unaufgearbeitete Vergangenheit*, die kapitalistisch noch nicht »aufgehoben« ist" (117).

writes of Estrada Cabrera's own attachment to the implements of the past that raised him:

Estrada Cabrera mismo, que siempre pretendió aparecer como el primero en todo y que, en su fuero interno, despreciaba a los héroes del liberalismo, mantuvo en el pueblo el culto de aquellos hombres, especialmente en la juventud, a la que se le ha educado, desde los tiempos de la dominación española, en el dogma político que excluye el libre examen. (133)

The ability of Estrada Cabrera to maintain a façade of individual historical achievement in the face of the cult of the hero with which the people were educated belies the historically nonsynchronous within the regime which largely informed *El Señor Presidente*. Wyld Ospina's overriding understanding of the historiographic means by which the dictatorship could be judged, configured through the recognition of Estrada Cabrera's use of history, thus works through its subject in terms which enable the emergence of a resistance situated firmly against the dictator's abuse of power. As he states early on in his work: "Al hombre público hay que juzgarlo dentro su época. Lo contrario sería prescindir de la realidad, no sólo social sino biológica, y hacer de la persona humana un maniquí anatómico de piezas desmontables," thus clearly rejecting the reified subject as the object of its history (31).

*El autócrata* does extend many of the critiques made by Valladares Rubio and Arévalo Martínez, notably concerning Estrada Cabrera's integration of indigenous and mythic beliefs into his personal life, telling of one incident in particular:

Salía de allí a consultar con los brujos indios, que hiciera venir desde Momostenango y Totonicapán, y encerrarse con ellos para practicar operaciones de hechicería. Ansiaba conocer el porvenir y arrancarle al destino su secreto: para ello empeñábase en sacar horóscopos y auspicios. Cuando no recurría a las artes de los brujos, evocaba a los desencarnados y pretendía comunicar con el plano astral de la Naturaleza. (212)

The emphasis on the dictator's use of the temporal space is particularly apt, as it ultimately coincides with the temporal space utilized by Asturias' president, and in this manner his acclaim for Wyld Ospina's work is hardly surprising. Overall, Wyld Ospina's recognition of the temporal reality of

Latin America is worth noting, as it is configured through a diachronic lens, yet one which pays notice of the “flattening” of history through a comprehension of comparative historical experiences without locating the past within the present day (against which Bloch warns, 33). This is perhaps best encapsulated as Wyld Ospina works through the economic aspects of Estrada Cabrera’s dictatorship, understanding economic development through past civilizations:

Desde el punto de mira histórico, el mundo actual data de ayer no más. Es hijo de Roma; y el espíritu de la nación latina, que fue la cúspide más alta que en el mundo antiguo alcanzó la voluntad creadora y el genio de la organización, se reproduce esencialmente en las naciones de origen germánico que hoy encarnan el tipo de civilización imperante. En la historia, el espacio de tiempo que separa a los romanos de los anglosajones—inventores de la democracia actual—es un instante. Muchos cambios ha sufrido sin duda, de entonces acá, la mecánica social; pero pocos, o quizá ninguno básico, el modo de ser colectivo en lo que atañe a las direcciones cardinales de la civilización. (251)

Wyld Ospina’s concern for the social construction of historical development (which is in turn mediated through economic development, as will be explored below) elucidates the separation between the historiography of Asturias and the temporal mechanisms which characterized Estrada Cabrera’s regime (or the Señor Presidente’s, for that matter), and yet which also distinguishes Wyld Ospina’s historiography from that of Arévalo Martínez or Valladares Rubio. Despite the historical grounding of the latter two figures, Wyld Ospina understands Estrada Cabrera precisely through the social and economic basis of his rule, not as a mere chance historical occurrence, but rather decidedly as the product of a specific historical time. As Asturias’ ability to configure the overcoming of the nonsynchronic contradiction reveals, it is for him precisely through the social that revolution is enabled, though only when mediated through the concrete historical means at the disposal of the class capable of usurping the medium of that nonsynchronous contradiction’s abuse.

#### *Asturias’ revolutionary model*

At the time of the writing of *El Señor Presidente* (Asturias himself tells us that he wrote “Los mendigos políticos,” a story which served as a

precursor to the novel, in 1923, and the final draft of the novel was completed in 1932), Asturias' involvement with the student movement directed against Estrada Cabrera's regime had provided him with a strong sense of the utility and futility of political resistance. The *Club Unionista de Estudiantes Universitarios* and later the *Asociación de Estudiantes Unionistas*, both of which were linked the *Partido Unionista*, founded in Guatemala in 1899, provided Asturias the opportunity to view the means by which political resistance was possible, though the movement's stated goal, to prevent the perpetuation of dictatorship in Central America through the union of the traditional Central American nations<sup>14</sup>, could be said to have failed in this respect, even despite its involvement in the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera in 1920. By December 1921, José María Orellana had begun his five year dictatorship through the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera's successor Carlos Herrera, a reign which included the brief incarceration of Asturias for his participation with the newspaper *Tiempos Nuevos* in 1923.

The futility of the resistance movements in part led to Asturias' exile to Paris, which lasted from 1924 until 1933, though it was by no means an unproductive experience as it provided his education in the Mayan cosmography that grounded much of his later literary production. This stage in Asturias' life thus marks something of a divergence from the position taken in during his student years in Guatemala, best represented through his 1923 thesis "Sociología guatemalteca. El problema social del indio." As Henighan asserts, Asturias' time in Guatemala provided him with a sense of the situation of the indigenous community, though much of his comprehension of his own country was rooted in a call to an idealized Europe, of which he imagined himself a part:

Asturias arrived in the French capital as a Catholic bourgeois *ladino* whose law thesis had resounded with an aching need to consolidate his pseudo-European identity through closer contact with the French culture that had served him as a beacon throughout his adolescence and young adulthood. By crossing the Atlantic, he was following his own recommendations in *El problema social del indio*: he was improving himself by mingling with Europe. (25)

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<sup>14</sup> See for example the document "¡Enérgico grito de juventud!" from August 1919 (cited in Marroquín Rojas 50-55), which helps initiate the student movement by protesting the potential for a rigged election in Honduras by Alberto Membreño, and which was signed by Asturias.

We might justly claim, then, that his comprehension of Europe, and France in particular, was situated as a mythic intellectual pole to which he desired to accede; his time in Europe went on to allow him to enter a greater mythic space of the *indio* in Guatemala, though one which came to demonstrate an even greater sense of the peasantry's need for social justice. The complication of these poles is deliberate, as the socially real and the mythically real are largely inseparable within Asturias' literary production, though his Parisian experiences seem to be the point of awakening to a mythic consciousness of Guatemala, and which in turn serves as the most concrete marker of division between the thesis and the later literary works.

Asturias' thesis holds a particular fascination even today, in particular due to its treatment of a topic that bears on so much of his later literature, though I would argue also due to the veiled racism that seems so incongruous with the fundamental concern for the indigenous population of Guatemala that his writings demonstrate. It strikes me that this racism is difficult to override entirely without shifting to outright apologism, though as Pinto Soria indicates, Asturias in this instance was a product of his time, and not among its worst practitioners:

...los pocos estudios, como el de Batres Jáuregui, estaban plagados de prejuicios racistas; Karl Sapper o Franz Termer, alemanes con preocupaciones más científicas, no eran mejores: Tampoco Asturias, pero es indudable que la tesis no era simple requisito burocrático, sino tema que le interesaba vivamente. (11-12)

While we might thus take Asturias' judgments on the indigenous community with some degree of caution, I would have us side with Pinto Soria on at least the account that the thesis is as significant an object of attention with respect to the later literary production as the time he spent in Paris studying the Mayan civilization through an anthropological approach. As Pinto Soria tells us: "En la introducción, Asturias escribe que su objetivo es contribuir a la resolución del problema indígena. El lector, sin embargo, debe tener presente que la preocupación principal es Guatemala, y sólo después, en función de ella, el indígena" (22). In this respect it is easier to come to terms with the "Advertencia" that Asturias appended to the document in 1971, in which he continues speaking of

“mejorar al indio, a elevarlo para que se incorpore al Occidente,” though with the caveat that the social conditions of the indigenous community be elevated before the indigenous individual decides to accede to a western way of life (41-2).

Overwhelmingly what is taken from the thesis is the relation of the *indio* to the land, and in all cases Asturias is careful to notice the means by which the fortunes of the indigenous community were diminished as access to the land was removed. Working through the distinct historical stages he witnesses in the nation’s history he writes:

*Epoca prehispánica:* la situación económica, favorable. El indio, cuyo abolengo arquitectónico era grandioso, vivía cómodamente.... La agricultura era floreciente (muchos de los cultivos que hasta la fecha se hacen, se hacían entonces).

*Epoca Colonial:* La situación económica del indio era mala. Se le hizo vivir en ranchos de zacate seco y cañas.... El gobierno de la colonia para el indio no podía ser más desastroso. La agricultura indígena casi desapareció.

*Epoca de la Independencia a nuestros días:* La situación económica del indio ha empeorado. Sigue viviendo en ranchos.... perdió sus tierras y aumentó sus vicios con el aguardiente y la chicha, para fomentar rentas fiscales. (67)

The notion of land reform was not unique to Asturias, as many of the politically inclined members of the *Generación del '10*, including Wyld Ospina and Arévalo Martínez, or of the *Generación del '20*, including Asturias or Flavio Herrera, demonstrated a great deal of concern either for the *indio* to be capable of integrating into greater Guatemalan society, or for the nation itself to develop economically, without substantial land reform. Asturias writes in 1925, already living in Paris, that:

(Los guatemaltecos no pueden perdonar a Estrada Cabrera—gobierno de viejos—que haya hecho de Guatemala un pueblo cursi.) Al indio se le quitó hasta la tierra, diciéndole en cambio discursos patrióticos para sustituírsela por una patria construida con palabras efímeras. (*Paris* 68-9)

This claim, of course, brings us back around to the nonsynchronic contradiction that Estrada Cabrera attempted to impose on the indigenous population, and its significance in terms of Asturias’ desire for agrarian reform. We can compare this to Wyld Ospina, who in *El autócrata* writes:

Ocioso resulta agregar que una Administración corrompida y venal es el mejor aliado del capitalismo pirata. Bobada sería pedir, bajo tales circunstancias, el implantamiento de la única política salvadora y razonable a que he aludido: *la nacionalización de la tierra*. Y resulta también inevitable y lógico que suceda lo que precisamente ha venido ocurriendo después del 1871: *la desnacionalización de la tierra*. (257)

As such, the call for social justice for the peasant class is integrally tied to the position of that class specifically in terms of their access to land, and this materialist grounding goes further than simple calls for social justice in abstract terms. Wyld Ospina asserts that: “Quien posee la tierra es dueño del país,” and in this manner we might read the coincidence of this claim with Asturias’ configuration of the peasantry explicitly in the jungle, as a marker of his support for Wyld Ospina’s medium for socioeconomic change (252). Ultimately, this need for social justice is bound to the temporal concerns Asturias would go on to demonstrate in his literary works, but which emerge as early as his time in Paris, where they link to the social concerns that preceded his exile.

The separation of social classes into distinct paradigmatic groups as early as the thesis allows for Asturias’ use of the indigenous community in *El Señor Presidente* to be established in more binary terms than in *Hombres de maíz*; in the former, the clear division between the indigenous dwellers in the jungle and the *mestizo* population in the city allows us to mark off those spaces as more or less grounding the population of either group in terms of their connection to a materialist understanding of their class. This is not to say, however, that the jungle is removed entirely from the context of materialism, as the indigenous community demonstrates a profound comprehension of their material needs, as Asturias presents upon the death of General Canales:

Los hombres volvieron a las tareas cotidianas con disgusto; ya no querían seguir de animales domésticos y habían salido a la revolución de *Chamarrita*, como llamaban cariñosamente al general Canales, para cambiar de vida, y porque *Chamarrita* les ofrecía devolverles la tierra que con el pretexto de abolir las comunidades les arrebataron a la pura garnacha; repartir equitativamente las tomas de agua; suprimir el poste; implantar la tortilla obligatoria por dos años; crear cooperativas agrícolas para la importación de maquinaria, buenas semillas, animales de raza, abonos,

técnicos; facilitación y abaratamiento del transporte; exportación y venta de los productos; limitar la prensa a manos de personas electas por el pueblo y responsables directamente ante el mismo pueblo; abolir la escuela privada; crear impuestos proporcionales; abaratar las medicinas; fundir a los médicos y abogados y dar la libertad de cultos, entendida en el sentido de que los indios, sin ser perseguidos, pudiesen adorar a sus divinidades y rehacer sus templos. (297)

The exhaustive presentation of the socio-political platform required to allow for the implementation of social justice for the indigenous population aligns closely to the platform suggested by Asturias in his 1923 thesis, and while it is enabled through the presence of Canales, it is most significant in terms of the consciousness that arises within the indigenous population regarding the material need for social change. It is crucial, of course, to notice the overwhelming concern for the reality of the present; Asturias here uses the indigenous population expressly in counterposition to the use of the past by the president, thus demonstrating a nonsynchronous contradiction that is expressly rejected in the community most closely connected to an anachronous context.

The limitations of indigenous resistance (and here, indigenous in historiographic and not ethnic terms) expressed through the indications of a breakdown in the indigenous solidarity through the death of Canales are likewise significant, though a strong link to Asturias' other great early novel, *Hombres de maíz*, is ostensibly represented precisely through the death of Canales, who “había fallecido de repente, al acabar de comer, cuando salía a ponerse al frente de las tropas” (296). The mirroring of his death with that of the poisoned Gaspar Ilóm, who likewise rises from the dead before throwing himself into the river, much as “con cada uno de los que contaban lo sucedido, el general Canales salía de su tumba a repetir su muerte,” leads us directly into the discourse of the opening of *Hombres de maíz*, which likewise situates the context of indigenous resistance to *ladino* socioeconomic ideology (296). Inevitably, it is crucial to recall that *Hombres de maíz* is conditioned by a historical and social reality in Guatemala's history, and not merely through a Mayan mythological lens. As Dante Liano indicates:

Los cafataleros necesitaban tierra, mucha tierra, y la aspiración no era fácil de satisfacer.... Estaba surgiendo una multitud de pequeños y medianos cultivadores cuya avidez se dirigió hacia las tierra baldías o hacia los ejidos de los indios. En muchos casos, bastaba denunciar un terreno como ocioso para recibirlo en propiedad. Muchísimos se aprovecharon de la ignorancia de leyes y letras en que se tenía sumido al indio para arrebatarse, así, sus tierras. Son éstos los terrible ladinos de *Hombres de maíz*. (545)

As a marker of temporal resistance, conditioned through a comprehension of the actual social reality of the indigenous community, this transference from the political reality of *El Señor Presidente* into the cosmography of *Hombres de maíz* allows for a revision of the ability of resistance to emerge in practical terms. While *El Señor Presidente* does not provide us with a level of explicit indigenous resistance to the political structure of the president's regime, the death of Canales integrates into a congruous temporal structure as is seen in Asturias' later novel. As Arturo Arias states regarding the struggle within *Hombres de maíz*:

Técnicamente, la guerra es ganada por los ladinos. Gaspar se echará al río al ver a todos sus hombres exterminados por la policía. Sin embargo, en el plano mítico-simbólico se le atribuye una victoria mítica al Gaspar Ilóm por medio de los elementos discursivos que articulan una visión del mundo maya. Esta victoria emplea los recursos míticos del discurso simbólico indígena para justificar la transición del espíritu del Gaspar hacia los Tecún. Son estos últimos quienes mantendrán el espíritu de la guerra contra los maiceros negociantes. (565)

While a level of mythic victory is enabled in this case, it is imperative to likewise work through to a level of practical resistance, and here the link between the two novels might be seen as in no way accidental. *Hombres de maíz* functions in temporal terms largely on what might be labeled anachronism, as the embodiment of Gaspar Ilóm within the figure of Goyo Yic, and the subsequent sublation of María Tecún into María la Lluvia depends on us moving back into the figure of the indigenous chief and his wife in order to comprehend the social construct of Goyo Yic and his reunion with María Tecún. The introduction of Canales into this same fundamental construct depends on one further twisting of the time structure, as the temporally advanced figure of the general is united with

the earlier indigenous figure. (That this structure likewise seems to confuse the two main groups, indigenous and *ladino*, only further demonstrates the favoring of social reality over ethnic reality; Canales, after all, shows a significantly greater concern for the social reality of the indigenous community than any other *ladino* figure in the novel, and the implication is made that his presence is what allows the indigenous community to fundamentally comprehend their social reality.) By tracing this structure anachronically from Canales to Gaspar Ilóm to Goyo Yic, we observe the mythic joining of the three characters, and are able to understand the degree to which Asturias intends for them to be comprehended as a unified figure of resistance. By reversing this structure and observing them in strictly diachronic terms, the function of the social and economic needs of the indigenous class emerges clearly through the insistence upon a consciousness that unites the indigenous population expressly in terms of their fundamental needs, and which has tellingly persevered through the passage from the indigenous resistance of Gaspar Ilóm to the *ladinos* and up to the resistance of the unified indigenous community against the machinations of the dictatorship roughly one century later.

The emergence of *praxis* that is made visible in Asturias, then, arises both in terms of the rise of class consciousness and also as tangible (anti-dictatorial) political action. As a means of enabling the peasant indigenous class to comprehend their social position, Asturias' peasantry ostensibly works through their condition on socioeconomic terms, and not through the temporal contradiction imposed through dictatorship. In the face of nonsynchronism, then, the ability of the peasant class to override the false historical consciousness imposed upon the population cannot be configured in terms of the past, but rather explicitly through the contemporary social needs of that class. Inevitably, the peasantry, as the class most closely linked to past experience and thus the class most rooted in anachronism, arrives at a temporal grounding purely through the comprehension of the present day (and as Bloch provides, the peasantry is already conscious in the present time of its firm connection to the past, even as it sets the vestiges of the past aside). The move to social action, then, emerges through that continued focus on the remainder of the past,

which Asturias conditions in terms of the diachronic temporal progression from the Mayan Gaspar Ilóm to the non-indigenous General Canales, who embodies the ideological concerns of the peasantry, absent only their ethnic heritage. As such, the notion presented as early as Asturias' thesis, that the program for the indigenous is rooted directly in the needs of Guatemala as a nation, provides the groundwork for a political platform fully conscious of the oppression inherent in the dictatorial environment in which it was written.

It must be noted that Asturias' experience with the only temporary success of the *unionista* movement in the late 1910s and early 1920s disabused him of the idea that a program for social change is possible in some set of monolithic political terms, and the production of nearly all of *El Señor Presidente* and the beginnings of *Hombres de maíz* in the context of his Parisian exile exhibits a sense of pessimism concerning the emergence of concrete social change. It is thus little surprise that Ernst Bloch's conceptualization of nonsynchronism in the late 1920s and early 1930s shares much of this same pessimism, and perhaps a greater sense of fatalism, only to be confirmed in his removal to the United States in 1939 to escape the realized horrors of anti-Semitism. The ability of Asturias to arrive at a more concrete understanding of the means by which nonsynchronism could be overcome through the peasant class provides us with a clearer sense of the mechanism of class consciousness in general, particularly intriguing for an intellectual and writer who, despite his affinity for the concerns of the Left, did not configure his works in overtly Marxist terms. What remains, however, is an overriding concern for the social reality of the Guatemala that resided both within his imagination and in his vital experience, though always directed toward the integral social reality and social needs of its population. In this respect, I would choose to expand upon Dante Liano's understanding of *Hombres de maíz*, presented in his reading of the historical grounding of the novel:

¡Cierto que el indio de Asturias no existe, no es un reflejo fiel de la realidad! El indio de Asturias es la restitución de su dignidad mítica (o sea, de su estatuto cultural más profundo) a un ser humano que se arrastra, en el momento en que el novelista escribe, en el trabajo forzado, en la ignorancia impuesta, en la abyección del opresor. Asturias

parte de esa realidad histórica sin casi mencionarla para mostrar el lado opuesto, en operación vallejana: el indio sin ataduras, creaturas de imaginación. *Hombres de maíz* no es reflejo ni denuncia sino proyecto, restitución, investidura. (552)

This is not merely the integral reading of the *indio* of *Hombres de maíz* but of Asturias' work in more global terms, and its utility, even through a mythic consciousness, always corresponds to and simultaneously denounces that which undermines its social reality.

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