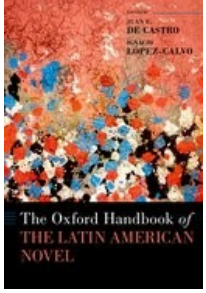

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CHAPTER

4 The Regional Novel and the Novel of the Mexican Revolution on Common Ground

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the common ground tread by the Latin American regional novel and the novel of the Mexican Revolution, namely, a shared preoccupation with questions of land sovereignty and land ownership. While the two narrative modes are often considered separate literary phenomena, this chapter argues for evaluating them together as critical responses to the reorganization of Latin American economies, politics, and cultures by neocolonial interests. Focusing on an emblematic novel from each category—José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (*The Vortex*, 1924) and Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (*The Eagle and the Serpent*, 1928), this analysis charts a more expansive geography of the presence of *tierra* in the Latin American novel and proposes an alternative shared legacy of such works.

Keywords: regional novel, telluric novel, novel of the Mexican Revolution, land, neocolonialism, extractivism, economic liberalization, technological modernity, Martín Luis Guzmán, José Eustasio Rivera

Subject: Literary Studies - World, Literary Studies (Fiction, Novelists, and Prose Writers), Literature

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THE culmination of the regional novel—a primarily South American phenomenon—and the novel of the Mexican Revolution coincide temporally, and though they are sometimes interpreted as separate trends (Rutherford; González Echevarría, *Modern Latin American*), they are generally considered as part of the same literary movement (Franco; Gollnick). Cases for grouping them together are loosely rooted in periodization—they appear in the early decades of the twentieth century, primarily between 1920 and 1950—and in a shared set of topics or aesthetic concerns, namely their perceived provincialism (Vargas Llosa 7), the predominance of landscape over characters (Rodríguez Monegal 45), and a conservativism toward literary innovation (Rama 25–26). In general, regional novels narrate the particularities of rural realities as a literary response to questions of "Latin America's cultural specificity" with regard to Europe and the United States (Alonso 37). The novel of the Mexican Revolution, on the other hand, reflects critically on the armed phase of the revolution from approximately 1910 to 1920, with particular attention to the ways in which the peasant class demanded political recognition through the conflict (Williams, The Mexican Exception 50). Both tend toward national allegory set in the "interior" provincial regions of their respective nations beyond the infrastructural reach and cultural influence of the capital cities. These early twentieth-century novels are generally written by urban intellectuals, most often men, from a locus of cultural exteriority. In terms of genre, each mode's literary realism frequently draws on naturalism, romanticism, *costumbrismo*, and *modernismo* to convey a sense of rural life through the use of regional vernacular, popular forms, representations of character types and local customs, and landscape descriptions.

p. 76 This article's point of departure is an unexplored commonality across these narrative modes, namely, their close relationship with changing configurations of Latin American *tierra*. Regional novels—also known as *novelas de la tierra* or telluric novels—bring undeveloped land into high relief, almost as a protagonist of the story.[1] Likewise, in Mexico the revolutionary slogan "Tierra y libertad" (Land and Liberty) situates land rights as a central motive force at the heart of the Mexican Revolution. In light of the importance of land in the novel of the Mexican Revolution, it has recently been reassessed for its proto-ecocritical discourse (Anderson; Oloff; Fornoff). Regional novels, likewise, now form part of the Latin American environmental canon. Despite these commonalities, a rigorous comparative study of the function of land in the two modes has yet to be undertaken. Indeed, when Raymond L. Williams, focusing on early twentieth-century novels, argues that "land" is "the key word for an initial approach to the Latin American novel," he omits the novel of the Mexican Revolution from his consideration (67).

To till the common ground of the regional novel and the novel of the Mexican Revolution, we focus on the meaning of land in both literary phenomena as a response to the systemic codification of Latin American terrain as capital in the first half of the twentieth century. To this end, we explore how these two literary modes may be read alongside and against each other in order to open up as yet unplumbed comparative analyses. Concretely, we examine both traditions as literary explorations of land's significance in light of its reconfiguration as the economic base of "commodity-driven republics" (Beckman ix). From 1870 to 1930, Latin American countries focused on the production of raw materials for manufacture and sale abroad as the only viable pathway to economic liberalization (Beckman ix). Whether the commodity was rubber in the Amazon, crude oil in Mexico and Venezuela, or agriculture and livestock in Argentina, the large-scale exportation of Latin American resources indelibly bound the region's lands to global supply chains. Predictably, a shift occurs in the popular imaginary and political rhetoric surrounding land, and that rhetoric permeates novels that, in the ensuing decades, thematize and critique emerging relationships with land.

We examine the novelistic tropes and discourses that represent, romanticize, and denounce changing relationships to land across several novels, focusing on two emblematic works from each tradition: José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (*The Vortex* 1924) and Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (*The Eagle and the Serpent* 1928). In each case, we argue that land is deployed symbolically to ground or deracinate national projects, as authors contend with neocolonial powers to define land's its cultural, economic, and political significance. In proposing both kinds of novels as telluric literature, we do not negate the specific geohistorical circumstances out of which each text emerges and to which each responds. Instead, we propose that disparate sociopolitical contexts arose in reaction to the broader insertion of the Latin American republics into a neocolonial order. By excavating each tradition's relationship to land, we identify literary landscapes from Mexico to Argentina that portray the ruins of ill-devised paths to modernization. Those landscapes suggest that, intent on modernizing the nation, the intellectual and political class often overlooked the voracious expansiveness of the neocolonial gaze.

The Regional Novel

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Though regional novels were immensely popular at the time of their publication, in the 1960s, authors of the Latin American Boom would characterize regionalism's deliberate focus on rural cultures as literary provincialism. Despite the fact that authors like Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, and Julio Cortázar were heavily indebted to the tropes and themes developed by regional authors, they nonetheless took the nomenclature *novela de la tierra* literally, famously construing such novels as "the coarse, unfinished foundation of the structure [of the new Latin American novel], whose principal function is to give support to the building erected on them" (Alonso 38).[2] This rhetorical campaign to distance the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Boom novels from the supposed provincial conservativism of their predecessors proved successful, and for many years regionalism lay "lost or disregarded between the great literary achievements of the twentieth century: *modernismo* and *vanguardismo*" (French 8).

Several important studies by Roberto González Echevarría, Carlos Alonso, Jennifer French, Charlotte Rogers, and Lesley Wylie have since reassessed regionalism's contributions to the literary tradition. Each author insists that regional literature is in fact self-consciously critical of its seemingly unsophisticated qualities as a response to Latin American modernity. If regionalist writers foregrounded the natural world to "the detriment of their characters and plot" (French 28), González Echevarría suggests that they did so in

order to question nature's centrality in constructing the geopolitical identity of the region since the time of the conquest (*The Voice* 44). Alonso also focuses on regionalism's engagement with cultural specificity, recasting its provincialism as a fraught discursive project to assess Latin American literary autochthony in the face of the globalization of European and US discourses of modernity. French's study, through a historical materialist lens, reads regionalism's depiction of nature as a response to "neo-colonial pressures on the production of agricultural and extractive goods" (36). Furthermore, her emphasis on *The Vortex*'s development of a "radical environmentalism" has been influential in the ecocritical reappraisal of regionalist discourse mentioned above (153).[3]

The ecocritical moments in the telluric novel undoubtedly relate to its preoccupation with Latin America's rapid incursion into the global market by way of resource extraction. Latin America's commodity-driven economic liberalization, as detailed by Ericka Beckman, meant that land was the motor of economic and technological modernization. Additionally, as Scott DeVries has highlighted, the resulting political ecology had lasting environmental consequences. Industrialized monoculture caused "various tree infestations, fungal epidemics, and other crop blights" leading to "land exhaustion, desertification, and the widespread use of harmful pesticides" (162). This geopolitical reality explains why Alonso stresses the rhetorical quality of Latin American modernity: everywhere foreign capital was surveying and destroying Latin American
p. 78 lands in service of a globalized economy. The region's pampas, plains, and jungles, therefore, did not ↳ belong to Latin American elites any more than they had prior to independence. By considering the regional novel as a drama about the challenges of locating national character in such expropriated lands, we expand the approaches to reassessing regionalism and reconfigure regional novels—against the grain—as discouraging portents of a baseless Latin American modernity. Such cynicism, in turn, brings regionalism's concerns in line with those of the novel of the Mexican Revolution.

The three most discussed regional novels are the Colombian poet Rivera's only novel *The Vortex* (1924), Ricardo Güiraldes's Argentine bildungsroman *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), and the Venezuelan author Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* (1929).[4] Of these, *The Vortex* has been deemed exceptional for refusing the opportunistic synthesis so typical of the genre. The narrative possesses all of the formal qualities of a regional novel, including elaborate geographic details, local vocabulary glossed at the back of the text, phonetic depictions of regional speech, and Eurocentric ethnographic descriptions of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Additionally, the first-person account of Arturo Cova's journey from Bogotá to the Colombian plains and into the transnational Amazonian region is thematically recognizable as the regionalist quest of an elite urban *criollo* male into the national frontier. But whereas *Doña Bárbara* and *Don Segundo Sombra* feature protagonists who ultimately imagine themselves and their countries—however imperfectly—through the plains and pampas, respectively, *The Vortex* closes tragically with "The jungle devoured them!" (219),[5] referring to Cova, his love interest, and their new baby. Furthermore, everywhere Cova turns in the antagonistic forest, he encounters foreigners: Peruvians, Venezuelans, Turks, Syrians, Italians, and Lebanese. Some of the last words frantically penned by Cova censure the deplorable deficiencies in Colombia's cartographic record, which Cova blames for the foreign nightmare of the Colombian hinterlands. In some ways, Rivera's irreparably fragmented Colombian national geography resonates more closely with the disillusion of the novel of the Mexican Revolution than the regional novel. By focusing on this seeming outlier, though, we reveal how even some of the more idiosyncratic elements of the novel respond to the neocolonial land appropriation that inflects all of the regional novels, and thus the work serves as a sort of bridge between the regional novel and the novel of the Mexican Revolution.

The Vortex's skepticism toward the possibility of national integration begins as a tale about a criollo elite's desire to root himself in an idealized rural countryside. Cova flees with his love interest Alicia for the eastward-lying plains of Casanare after having offended Bogotá's high society with their affair. In an epigraph to the diary left behind by Cova—the novel itself—he explains, "Ruthless fate *uprooted me* from incipient prosperity" (our emphasis).[6] Because *The Vortex* entered the canon as a social realist novela de la tierra about the crimes of the Amazon rubber boom (1850–1920), most criticism has focused on the second and third parts of the text, which unfold in the jungle. However, before Cova takes up the cause of those enslaved by rubber production, he spends time in the plains obsessed with the selfish pursuit of re-rooting himself in Colombian soil in order to cultivate a new path to prosperity. With the possibility of a cattle-
p. 79 rounding business venture, he daydreams about returning to Bogotá with his ↳ accumulated wealth, buying a house, recounting his adventures in the plains, and gathering friends in his garden to recite poetry (125). The image is rife with critical irony. The elite urban poet, whose verses, as one character indicates, "bind to the heart of the fatherland his dispersed children and create national subjects even in foreign lands" (our translation),[7] lacks the requisite skills for success in cattle rounding. He is neither Gallegos's

protagonist Santos Luzardo, who seems to have retained muscle memory for breaking horses from his youth in the Venezuelan plains, nor is he a humble child, like Güiraldes's narrator, poised to learn. Nonetheless, Cova bullheadedly dreams of comfortably reaping riches from the national periphery to attain property ownership in the city, where he can appreciate a highly manicured version of "nature" in his domestic space. Eventually, Cova romanticizes a future life in the plains, too, settling in a house built with his own hands (161), but these daydreams are as much a fiction as his poetry's intimacy with the land. Beckman characterizes the novel's engagement with exaggerated *modernista* tropes and aesthetics as a critique of the "empty signifiers of a 'civilization' that does not recognize the exploitation on which it is built" (180). Cova's fantasies develop a similar critique of Colombian intellectuals as detached opportunists who literally and metaphorically claim ownership over other peoples' land.

The presence of the British empire interrupts Cova's delusions. The city dandy cannot claim Casanare for himself or, by extension, for Colombian criollo society at large, because the British already have. French examines the absence of the Peruvian Amazon Company, a part-British rubber conglomerate, in the later jungle scenes as a deliberate omission that "severs the ties between the criollo aristocracy to which Cova belongs and the British capitalists" (154). But the British empire appears overtly in the first section of the novel in Casanare. There, the local currency is the pound sterling, and the man who brings British notes to the plains is the rubber baron Narciso Barrera, the personification of rubber profit seeking. Cova and his companions ultimately leave for the jungle because Barrera has monopolized the sale of commodities locally, cutting Cova's friend Franco off from his usual source of revenue. When the men resort to cattle rounding for income, an angry bull pierces one of Barrera's men through the ear and severs his head (176). In response, Barrera hangs another man in Franco's barn and frames Cova and his companions as the murderers, forcing them to flee the law. Rivera depicts British capital in collusion with local legal institutions and as responsible for gruesome deaths and economic downfall well beyond the sites of rubber extraction. In the wake of the 1903 US annexation of Panama, this depiction of frayed national sovereignty outside of the capital city constituted a goading critique of Colombian nationhood. Thus, as Cova's fantasies eclipse his awareness of local realities, *The Vortex* implicates criollos' pursuit of individual wealth—via land ownership—as causal in the destruction of both rural ways of life and the national economy by foreign entities.

The jungle awakens Cova's class consciousness, altogether dormant in Casanare. Once in "the vortex," he confronts more of the rubber economy's corporeal waste, a poignant metaphor for extractivism's annihilation of the Colombian body politic. Two Maipurean guides drown in whirlpools like so many nameless Indigenous bodies lost to the rubber trade.[8] Clemente Silva, a key character, exposes his disfigured
p. 80 back scarred ↳ by the whip of rubber overseers as a sort of carnal echo of the tapped rubber trees. He arrives on the scene with maggot-infested leech wounds that present his body as an undead corpse in service of rubber extraction: "Maggots in me, while I'm still alive!" (118).[9] Silva tells stories of workers fleeing the debt peonage that bound them to rubber camps only to be devoured down to the bone by carnivorous ants. Cova's proximity to these human casualties of extractivism compels a shift in his interests from personal wealth to retribution for abused and enslaved rubber tappers within Colombia's national borders. Whereas neocolonialism presented a threat only to his aspired social status in the plains, once closer to rubber's economic base, he discovers a vital threat to the country's most disenfranchised, though it is worth noting that even in this awakening, Indigenous peoples are only marginally included in the poet's concerns.

Cova's privilege limits the scope of his understanding. Furthermore, because he remains temperamental, volatile, and immature throughout the text, readers are led to dislike him and distrust not only the story he tells but also his strategies to resolve the crisis. The grandiose role he assumes in reporting rubber crimes and informing Colombian officials about what is really happening in the country's jungles—especially in light of the earlier highly publicized international outcry over rubber abuses—resembles white saviorism more than disinterested altruism.[10] Until the very end, Cova remains caught between trying to save his sense of self as part of the criollo elite and ending the exploitation of other Colombian bodies. He never understands that his unskilled urbanite fantasies of comfortable wealth would necessarily hinge on a colonial labor hierarchy resembling, to a certain degree, the structure of the rubber economy. Indeed, Antonio Gómez Restrepo (46) and Alfonso González (196) have compared Cova and friends to conquistadors romping through the jungle. On an allegorical level, the elite subject can neither perceive nor resolve the contradiction between his advocacy and his positionality; he cannot save both himself and the country as a collective because his version of prosperity depends on the exploitation of others. Therefore, the novel's closing scene indicates that the self-important, internally colonizing subject must disappear in order for the

country to forge a path away from the kind of colonial violence initiated with the conquest, but even in his absence, neocolonial economic interests remain.

Felipe Martínez-Pinzón has characterized *The Vortex*'s hopelessness as a "party pooper" during a time of "capitalist euphoria" and "optimism" in Bogotá (167). A cursory reading of the novel as part of the regionalist corpus may also suggest that among regional novels, *The Vortex* is a downer. However, when considering *Don Segundo Sombra* and *Doña Bárbara* through the lens of criollo relationships to the land, a parallel pessimism emerges. In Güiraldes's bildungsroman, *a guacho* (regional Quechua term for a young orphan) finds a mother in the Argentine plains and a father in a gaucho, but they constantly run into Englishmen and their property lines, signaling both British investment in the cattle industry and the anachronism of gaucho life: "There was by now no need for the gaucho rodeos to separate, sell, and trade livestock whose owners were identified by branded cattle; the fences took care of that" (DeVries 162). The
p. 81 narrator will be conveniently called away from the pampa by an unexpected inheritance at the end of ↳ the novel, a foreshadowed plot twist that allows him to remain a gaucho at heart without having to constantly trip over the barbed wires of neocolonial geopolitics.

Though *Doña Bárbara* is a more triumphant tale of an acculturated *llanero* (a man from the Venezuelan plains) who returns "home" from Caracas and successfully recovers his property and sense of belonging, the protagonist, Santos Luzardo, initially intends to assess the property for sale to fund his studies in Europe. His plans of profiting from his family's parcel and embracing European modernity are thwarted by two inconvenient factors: the traumatized Indigenous woman, doña Bárbara, symbol of Venezuelan barbarism, and the caricature of US imperialism, the American usurper Míster Danger.[11] Though *Doña Bárbara* takes place prior to President Juan Vicente Gómez's opening of oil fields to Royal Dutch Shell and Rockefeller's Standard Oil—well underway at the time of writing—Gallegos's "not-so-veiled indictment of [Gómez's] dictatorial regime" implicates the nefarious American as a symbol of the selling off of the Venezuelan subsoil (Alonso 109). Both characters must disappear: doña Bárbara, because, "like the native she is … she belongs to the past, and her kind has no future in the new Venezuela," and Míster Danger, because corrupt American interests threaten the just and rational exploitation of natural resources that Luzardo proposes with the oft-referenced metaphor of property divisions (Barrueto 192). As in *The Vortex*, the elite subject's victory depends on exclusion: only by literally fencing out both neocolonial land-grabbing and Indigenous peoples can the elite maintain their connection to the land.

In each case, regional novels depict criollos' imagined relationships to their nations' lands as mere fairytale. These novels focus on characters who envision their countries and themselves as national subjects through a relationship of entitlement to lands far from the cities and towns from which they come. Thus, the regional novel—disguised as provincial costumbrismo—takes aim at the hypocrisy of the urban elite, whose attachment to anachronistic fantasies of land tenure makes them complicit in selling the very source of their inspiration and subjugating the peoples living there in the process.

The Novel of the Mexican Revolution

In Mexico, land is both setting and catalyst for the politicized struggle of the people. The motto of the Mexican Revolution, "Tierra y libertad," underscores two of the central conflicts of the civil war: the longstanding grievances of peasants and tenant farmers who worked for wealthy landowners in near slave-like conditions, and the opposition to the thirty-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who ruled without regard for democratic elections or presidential term limits. Thus, following Díaz's fraudulent 1910 election to a seventh term, a broad coalition coalesced to demand a return to constitutional governance. Among the revolutionaries were nationalists and progressives, as well as Indigenous people and landless peasants who fought to implement long-sought agrarian reform, including the expropriation of land from the elite for
p. 82 redistribution, ↳ the nationalization of land, and the reestablishment of *ejidos* (common lands). General Emiliano Zapata best articulated this demand in his "Plan de Ayala" (1911), which displayed dissatisfaction with the incrementalism of Díaz's successor, President Francisco Madero,[12] particularly in terms of property rights and land reform. Fittingly, Zapata was the first to brandish the maxim "Tierra y libertad," and his troops were chiefly comprised of the disenfranchised individuals who would benefit most from an agrarian agenda.

Despite the centrality of land reform to the revolutionary struggle, the second term of the revolutionary motto—libertad—has received more critical attention due to the ways in which canonical novels foreground

political and popular struggles and the aspirations of the revolution and its leaders. This thematic focus is likely because, as Carlos Monsiváis makes clear, one of the core unifying elements of the novel of the Mexican Revolution is the sustained meditation on the failures and violence of the time period (375).[13] Notwithstanding the populist motives detailed above, the revolution turned into a power grab for its military cadre, and the demands of the masses that made up the bulk of the revolutionary armies were left unfulfilled. Horacio Legrás underscores how early critical assessments of literature of the revolution home in on this disillusion, which is related to the fact that, in many ways, the Mexican Revolution "was not *really* a revolution. It lacked programs and did not alter the form of the state in favor of those who carried on the fights" (*Literature* 113, original emphasis).

As has been widely discussed, the novel of the Mexican Revolution is not defined in terms of formal characteristics or genre, but rather in regard to thematic concerns (Monsiváis 375; Glantz 870; Castro Leal 17; Olea Franco 481). In general, these works treat the events and milieu during the decade of military activity beginning in 1910; however, some texts, such as Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua* (*The Edge of the Storm* 1947) and José Vasconcelos's *Ulises criollo* (*A Mexican Ulysses* 1935), also focalize the buildup to the armed conflict. Despite the wide-ranging formal characteristics of the texts, some dominant stylistic traits emerge. Works frequently contain autobiographical elements that reflect the lives and experiences of their authors, such as Martín Luis Guzmán's *The Eagle and the Serpent*, Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho. Relatos de la lucha en el Norte de México* (*Cartucho: Tales of the Struggle in Northern Mexico* 1931), José Rubén Romero's *Apuntes de un lugareño* (*Notes of a Villager* 1932), and José Vasconcelos's *A Mexican Ulysses* and *La tormenta* (*The Storm* 1936). Many of the novels of the revolution—following Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs* 1916) as a sort of urtext of the genre—have an episodic structure, chronicling battles and confrontations, as well as political and popular tensions, in vignettes and through encounters with myriad characters, both historical and fictional. As John Rutherford details, in 1925, at a moment when Mexico was seeking to define its national culture, Francisco Monterde recuperated Azuela's novel for the national literary scene by praising it in the national press as an example of "modern Mexican literature" (217). Following the delayed canonization of Azuela's novel, other authors began reflecting on the armed conflict, and dozens of novels of the Mexican Revolution appeared in the ensuing decades, which accounts for why most works are penned well after the military conflict has ended.

p. 83 We now turn to Guzmán's *The Eagle and the Serpent*, which underscores how geopolitical and economic anxieties are made manifest in the treatment of land in the novel of the Mexican Revolution. In particular, the relationship between economic class and land is of fundamental concern to the revolutionary struggle and literary depictions of the conflict period. In Guzmán's novel, anxieties about land take the form of encounters between the lettered class and the often illiterate masses of the rural lower class, the disruptive effects of burgeoning technological modernity, and the onset of neocolonial extractive capitalism—the latter of which unveils apprehensions about the eminence of the United States and this northern neighbor's influence on Mexican cultural, political, and economic development and autonomy. Thus, despite the overtly political nature of the novel of the Mexican Revolution, the works' preoccupation with land and land rights reveals an unaddressed connection to the telluric novel of South America.

Guzmán's semi-autobiographical novel proffers a self-aware critique of the ways in which the ideals and objectives of the Mexican Revolution were nearly universally betrayed by the political ambitions and character faults of its leaders. The text chronicles the years 1913–1915, as the narrator-protagonist Luis Guzmán flits from revolutionist camp to revolutionist camp, meeting generals, attending dances, wooing women, and dining on fare to which regular soldiers in the armies do not have access.[14] Many of these trivial episodes are described in terms of battle,[15] thus emphasizing the absurd nature of the military and political elite who often determine the direction of the war safely distant from the front lines. With few exceptions, the revolutionary leaders that Luis meets are a great disappointment—inept, selfish, or dangerously ambitious. In *The Eagle and the Serpent*, the lofty goals of the revolution are betrayed by its cynical and power-hungry leadership, and Guzmán's writings have been dubbed a sort of *mea culpa* by an author complicit in the decadence of the revolutionary elite (Bruce-Novoa 137).

The depiction of General Pancho Villa stands out in this critique. Whereas the narrator views most revolutionary generals as opportunistic cynics, Villa is represented as a reactive leader of pure animal instinct. Sophie Esch writes of the profound chasm that exists between Luis as cultured intellectual and Villa as a violent man guided by a "politics of the firearm" (76). Esch's reading unveils how each is "disarmed" in his confrontation with the Other: the narrator by Villa's raw emotion and affection, and Villa is literally disarmed—the narrator takes his pistol away—by Luis's eloquence and reasoning (74–76). The novel

underscores the difference between the narrator as urban intellectual and Villa as rural outlaw. Upon seeing Villa one morning, the narrator remarks: "The glitter in his eyes made me realize suddenly that mankind is not of one species, but of many, and that these species are separated by limitless space, have no common denominator. An abyss cleaves them, and it may cause vertigo to look from one of these worlds to the other, which lies opposite" (292).[16] The depiction of Villa has been read under the rubric of "civilization and barbarism" (Parra; Abeyta)—a trope also typical of the regional novel.[17] Similar tendencies of cultural elitism populate other novels of the Mexican revolution, such as Azuela's *The Underdogs*, in which narrator
p. 84 Luis Cervantes (Cervantes, of course, alluding to the author of *Don Quijote*) is a "curro," ↳ or middle- or upper-class intellectual from the city who looks down on Indigenous and mestizo peasants (Waisman 137).

The contradistinction between Luis and Villa indexes a fundamental disconnect between the lettered elite and the rural peasant classes, and this gulf becomes visible in each figure's differential relationship to land. Villa's unparalleled genius as a strategist and combatant is linked to his connection to nature. In one episode, the narrator is mesmerized when Villa attempts the seemingly impossible task of shooting a casing from twenty paces away with a bullet of the same caliber: "[his] pastime, in spite of the sanguinary memories his pistol evoked, was strangely in keeping with the smile of the light and the profound peace of the countryside" (281).[18] In contrast to the bond that Villa, the former "outlaw in the hills" (282),[19] maintains with the land, Luis and his upper echelon peers have a more utilitarian view of the earth. Whereas Villa lives in an almost symbiotic relationship to land, the military and political elite conceive of it as a way to enrich themselves and their cause and to bring Mexico into the modern present. Their extractive relationship to land is particularly salient in regard to the technologies of industrial modernity.

The figure of the train—the literal and figurative engine of technological modernity and the earlier Industrial Revolution—becomes the charged symbol of Mexico's incompetence and stunted development in Guzmán's novel. Whereas railways are often associated with economic mobility, in *The Eagle and the Serpent*, the train becomes a chaotic space of unrealized potential and apocalyptic foreboding. The cars are dilapidated, with worn out and missing seats, torn curtains, and broken windows. The narrator observes that the "state of things was eloquently reflected in the passengers … At every point life on the train showed clearly a return to the primitive" (126).[20] People become confused with bundles of cargo and shed any remnant of civilized humanity, eating on the floor "among dirt and rubbish" (126).[21] Later, the military convoys take over the passenger and cargo lines for their machinations, transporting generals and their officers back and forth across Mexican terrain (309). Rails are no longer used for passenger and freight transport, but rather for military strategy, and thus are not monetarily or materially productive. The narrator observes that the trains "transport[ed] with lightning speed the armies and the ideas of the revolutionary tempest" (309).[22] However, these ideas go nowhere, merely zipping back and forth along the rails. In this light, the revolution institutes a sort of limbo, an ahistorical no-man's land between the Porfirian past and a future modern Mexico, symbolized by the senseless monopoly of land routes by revolutionary leadership.

A related anxiety is manifested in Campobello's *Cartucho*. In one vignette, a half-crazed man rants about the growing influence of mechanized technology—" 'Machines, land, plows, nothing but machinery and more machinery!' … 'The government doesn't understand. It doesn't see' " (36).[23] He is then strung up by a group of men on horseback and hung from a telegraph pole, and the child narrator watches him die as her train pulls away from the station. Whereas technology unveils the untapped potential of Mexican modernity in *The Eagle and the Serpent*, in *Cartucho*, the violence of the revolution is sutured to the trains and telegraph lines that scar the land.

p. 85 The ambiguous nature of technological modernity reaches its apotheosis in Guzmán's novel in an episode entitled "La carrera en las sombras" (163) ("Night Flight" 134). Luis travels to Hermosillo with General Rafael Buelna, an orderly, two officers, and a driver in Buelna's slapdash motorized handcar. They set out at night, passing through dangerous, unfamiliar terrain, with only a lantern hastily affixed to the motor to light their way (136–37). The narrator observes that the journey is both rash and ill-advised and that the passengers are risking their lives (138). Hours into the journey, Luis stares sleepily ahead, attempting to make out the rails and landscape in the dark night. Suddenly, shapes come into focus, and he witnesses a somnolent vision of the harmonious fusion of the Mexican landscape with the technological accoutrements of burgeoning modernity:

> My efforts to penetrate the darkness were finally rewarded. I could see as clearly as though the sun were shining: a perfect road, lined with trees on either side, telegraph poles, carefully laid ties;

> villages below, mountains against the horizon, silver-rimmed clouds in the sky. The track with all its ups and downs, its curves, its swerves, its crossings did not represent the least danger. It was a smooth, clear track on which one could not imagine the slightest obstacle. There was nothing to worry about; one could sleep... sleep... (139–40)[24]

As the narrator nods off, the handcar collides with something and is derailed, injuring some of its passengers and halting on the track. Legrás reads this dangerous journey and stumbling block as symbolic of the entire revolutionary endeavor, concluding that the unknown obstacle in the track is representative of the emergent political agency of the peasant masses, which is inconceivable to the Mexican elite, symbolized by Luis (*Literature* 127).

We would add to Legrás's reading, noting that the dreamlike vision comprises a harmonious mingling of two incommensurable actors: the urban elite and rural masses. The track, road, and telegraph poles symbolize the political-economic modernity sought by the elite, which, in his dream, Luis views as in sync with the natural world of the peasantry, figured by mountains, trees, and peaceful sky. Significantly, this vision violently dissipates when the narrator is jolted awake by the handcar crash, which is caused by what turns out to be a mule in the tracks (140). The tidy synthesis of these two bands of the Mexican revolutionary forces is thrown off course by the sterile mule, revealing an anxiety about the barrenness of the revolution and Mexico's nascent national project. Much like Rivera's critique of British profiteering during the rubber boom in *The Vortex*, the problematic figure of the train in *The Eagle and the Serpent* subtly points to the contradiction at the heart of Mexico's national project. As a commodity republic, Mexico sought to modernize and improve its economic lot via trains, agriculture, and mining, yet these natural resources and technologies were often expropriated by international interests, thus limiting the profits reaped by Mexican nationals.[25]

Ironically, considering that much of the Mexican rail was foreign owned, the chaos and deficiency of the Mexican rail systems stand in stark contrast to the representation of the United States in the novel. At
p. 86 various junctures Luis must cross over into ↳ US territory, which is depicted as clean and organized and as a space of abundant commodities. During one such trip, he travels from Nogales, Mexico, to Nogales, Arizona, and the juxtaposition of these two Nogales produces a conspicuous critique of US imperialism's hand in the disordered state of Mexican affairs. The United States appears as an extractive parasite, lapping up "remnants of the country's wealth which the Revolution sold for whatever it could get because it was in dire need of money" (142).[26] Even more pernicious, US entities acquire Mexican wealth—cattle, minerals, and other "national patrimony" (143)[27]—at depreciated prices, then use these riches to produce arms and supplies that are sold back to Mexicans so that they may purchase all the necessary supplies to continue killing one another (142).

The narrative distrust of the United States reflects historical resentment. In the century preceding the revolution, the United States made its imperial aspirations in Mexico painfully known through the battles of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), which resulted in a loss of nearly one-third of Mexico's territory. Prior to the outbreak of the revolution, the United States bought up Mexican land for mining and oil drilling, and this international appropriation of land was one of the central motivations behind resistance to Porfirio Díaz. Moreover, US companies were infamous for underpaying Mexican laborers, strikebreaking, compensating workers in company scrip, and maintaining dangerous working conditions, which are the impetus behind the deadly 1906 Cananea and 1907 Río Blanco worker strikes. Likewise, the United States intervened in the Mexican Revolution, supporting those factions that it deemed most sympathetic to its geopolitical and economic interests. Just as in the clash between the rural peasantry and urban intellectual classes in Mexico, in literature, land becomes the fulcrum upon which the anxieties surrounding technological modernity and the ongoing threat of US imperialism emerge.

The Legacy of Land in the Regional Novel and the Novel of the Mexican Revolution

Our analysis brings to the fore how neocolonial incursions by foreign capital on Latin American soil permeated the aesthetic concerns of both the telluric novel and the novel of the Mexican Revolution, thus broadening the scope of their similarities. In Mexico, revolutionary forces waged a scattered and disorganized revolt against a conservative system deemed culpable for the inequities arising from land's new signification under accelerated modernization. By contrast, regarding the economic situation in Colombia, the center of rubber production shifted to Southeast Asia and concerns over illicit activities in the tropical lowlands temporarily abated. In Venezuela the caudillo stronghold of Juan Vicente Gómez continued to influence the petrostate's economic policies long after the end of his third presidential term, and in Argentina the British hold on industry would mark politics through Peronism and into the Falklands War. The paths ↳ worn by each country's confrontation with neocolonial powers diverged, but the novels we
p. 87 have examined here reveal that those paths were seeded with similar anxieties and aspirations.

Mexican authors and South American regionalists exhume land's distressed relationship to technologies of modernization, political representation, human violence and environmental devastation, socioeconomic status, and regional belonging. Our readings highlight how both literary modes either suffer from or critique—and in some cases both—a sort of lettered myopia regarding who has a hand in charting the future of land and politics. As we have demonstrated, the elite's willingness to pillage land and natural resources in the name of modernization fragments cultural projects of national integration, and authors of both regional novels and the novel of the Mexican Revolution write self-consciously against their own class interests, exposing the avarice and ignorance of Latin American elites before the question of land (dis)possession. They represent the effects of top-down impositions of modernizing processes as infrastructure—labor camps, railways, fences, telegraph poles, barbed wire—that pierce the land and disorder peoples' relationship to communal and open space. In turn, displaced workers, Indigenous peoples, campesinos, llaneros, and gauchos threaten the new partitioning of the land.

Future studies might engage comparatively with both kinds of novels to trace their shared legacy in contemporary narrative and other forms of cultural production that take up twenty-first-century iterations of land struggles, including extractivism, hydroelectric modernization, Indigenous sovereignty, and migration. The disenchantment affectively sown by the novels we have analyzed persistently registers the plundering of land and the systematic refusal to recognize the land rights and belonging of disenfranchised peoples—particularly Indigenous and rural mestizo citizens. This abuse and neglect became the political rallying cry behind organized revolts as diverse as Zapatismo in Mexico and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Today, not only do such vastly different forms of popular resistance generate political pressure, but they also disrupt literary history, fracturing the monologic quality of the land stories outlined here, in which "the underdogs" are stock characters in criollo stories. Both the regional novel and the novel of the Mexican Revolution criticize the kinds of injustices that will galvanize later generations to demand rights and restitution for decades of deterritorialization, displacement, and despoliation.

Notes

1. Regional novels are variously called by other names, including *criollista* or *costumbrista* novels, or sometimes by subcategories of novela de la tierra such as *novela campesina*, *novela de la selva*, or *novela gauchesca*.

2. Though the Boom authors strived to distinguish themselves from the regionalist writers, their continuity with their literary forebearers is indisputable: "The Boom novel would not have been possible without advances made in the preceding decades" (Gollnick 44).

3. Camps, DeVries, and Flores, among others, evaluate the regional novel ecocritically.

p. 88 4. In Brazil regionalism is closely associated with the *romance do Nordeste* (Northeastern novel) such as Rachel de Queiroz's *O quince* (1930), Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas secas* (1938), and José Lins do Rego's *Fogo morto* (1943). Antônio Cândido (159) makes a distinction between the Spanish American phenomenon of regionalism, which is temporally limited, and what he proposes as the longue durée of Brazilian regionalism, though in this respect, Cândido is not unlike Ángel Rama or José Miguel Oviedo, who likewise trace a long trajectory of regionalism in Spanish American literature beginning with independence.

5. “¡Los devoró la selva!” (Rivera 385). English translations of *The Vortex,* unless otherwise indicated, are taken from John Charles Chasteen.

6. “El destino implacable me desarraigó de la prosperidad incipiente” (Rivera 77, English translation ours).

7. “Encadenar al corazón de la patria los hijos dispersos y crearle súbditos en tierras extrañas” (114, English translation ours).

8. Recent estimates indicate that the infamous rubber company Casa Arana, which operated in Putumayo, Colombia, was responsible for 100,000 deaths (Velez-Ocampo et al.).

9. “¡Engusanado, engusanado y estando vivo!” (Rivera 246).

10. Cova’s arrogance becomes even more ridiculous when we consider that Benjamín Saldaña Rocca’s denunciations in the Iquitos newspaper *La felpa* circulate in the novel. Additionally, Roger Casement’s and Walter Hardenburg’s public outcry had already drawn national and international attention before Cova supposedly begins his manuscript.

11. Alonso first notes the caricaturesque quality of *Doña Barbara*’s characters as key to the novel’s allegorical function (117).

12. Madero came from a wealthy landowning family in northern Coahuila. An advocate of single term limits, he came to power in 1911 after Díaz was ousted by revolutionary forces. In 1913, he was assassinated after a military coup and replaced by conservative General Victoriano Huerta, who had participated in Madero’s ouster. Huerta was in power until revolutionary forces defeated the federal army in the Battle of Zacatecas in July 1914.

13. In the section “En lo moral” (“In terms of morality”), Monsiváis explains that the novel of the Mexican Revolution is characterized by: “disenchanted testimony, the demythification and deglamorization of an epic (because the corollary of bloodshed and military feats is uselessness and ascension of scoundrels to power)” (“el testimonio desencantado, la desmitificación y desglamorización de una épica [ya que el corolario de la sangre vertida y de las hazañas bélicas es la inutilidad, el encumbramiento de los bribones])” as well as “the frequent affirmation—even in the best moments of its prose—of cruelty and *physical* violence as the meaning of the revolution, which is exemplified by the chapter ‘The Carnival of Bullets’ of *The Eagle and the Serpent*” (“la consignación frecuente—incluso en algunos de los mejores momentos prosísticos—de la crueldad y de la violencia *físicas* como el sentido de la revolución. Ejemplo óptimo: el capítulo ‘La fiesta de las balas’ de *El águila y la serpiente*”; original emphasis, 375).

14. For clarity, to distinguish between the author and the narrator, we refer to the author as Guzmán and the narrator as Luis, as the protagonist is called both Luis Guzmán and Luisito in the novel.

15. See episode, “A Revolutionary Dance” (104–10; “Un baile revolucionario” 127–33) for a concrete example in which Luis and his friends “battle” (107; “combate” 130) the newly conquered Culiacán society, who did not want to send their daughters to a dance with the revolutionaries.

p. 89 16. “A mí los fulgores de sus ojos me revelaron de súbito que los hombres no pertenecemos a una sola especie, sino a muchas, y que de especie a especie hay, dentro del género humano, distancias infranqueables, mundos irreductibles a común término capaces de producir, si desde uno de ellos se mira al fondo del que se le opone, el vértigo de *lo otro*” (344–45). All English translations of *The Eagle and the Serpent* cited in the body of the article are drawn from Harriet de Onís’s 1965 translation.

17. The perhaps overused rubric of civilization and barbarism has organized a number of studies on the regional novel, and critics have also applied it to interpreting Guzmán’s novel. However, recent criticism has challenged the appropriateness of this model for the novel of the Mexican Revolution (Legrás, “Martín Luis Guzmán”; Esch).

18. “[Su] entretenimiento, pese a las sanguinarias evocaciones de la pistola, concordaba de extraña manera con la sonrisa de la luz y la profunda paz del campo” (332).

19. “De huida por la sierra” (333).

20. “Ese estado de cosas se reflejaba con enérgica elocuencia en los viajeros mismos … El tono de la vida a bordo del tren significaba por dondequiera un retorno a lo primitivo” (152).

21. “Con la mugre del suelo y su inmundicia” (153).

22. “Viajaban, con la rapidez del rayo, los ejércitos y las ideas animadoras del huracán revolucionario” (364).

23. “ ‘Máquinas, la tierra, arados, nada más que maquinarias y más maquinarias’ … ‘El gobierno no sabe, el gobierno no ve’ ” (89). Above English translation drawn from Doris Meyer and Irene Matthews’s 1988 translation.

24. “En fuerza de querer penetrar las sombras, acabé por ver. Vi como si el sol alumbrara: un camino perfecto, arboledas laterales, postes del telégrafo, durmientes cuidadosamente balastados; pueblos en el fondo, montañas en el horizonte, nubes orladas de plata en el cielo. La vía, con todos sus altibajos, con sus curvas, sus desviaciones, sus cambios, sus cruzamientos, no ofrecía el menor peligro. Era una vía limpia y despejada donde no se concebiría el obstáculo más leve. Se podía confiar, se podía dormir… dormir … ” (169).

25. Michael Matthews notes that much of the rail laid during the Porfiriato was backed by US capital and that foreign companies were often granted the contracts to build and operate the lines (27–30). Moreover, two of the main railroad lines, the Interoceanic and the Mexican Central, were owned by British and US entities, respectively (280).

26. “Los restos de la riqueza que la Revolución malbarataba por razones imperativas” (173).

27. “Patrimonio nacional” (143).

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