

Preface

The present study offers readings of Colombian novels published from 1844 to 1987. It represents the development, over a period of several years, of certain theoretical and empirical assumptions and is based on three fundamental premises. The first of these premises concerns the extraordinary regionalism that has existed historically in the territory we call Colombia. In chapter 1, I discuss briefly how Colombia in fact developed into the four semi-autonomous regions that comprised it for slightly more than a century (the 1830s to the 1950s). The second premise is that many, if not most, Colombian novels have functioned as objects of an ideological dialogue, an issue that is addressed in chapter 2 and referred to throughout the study. Writing has always occupied an absolutely central role in Colombia and has been intimately associated with politics. Publishing books has been a political act, often subversive in nature. The third premise is that Colombian culture and the respective regional cultures of these four semi-autonomous regions of the past have been affected in varying degrees by what Walter Ong, in his study *Orality and Literacy* (1982), has identified as the noetics of orality and writing.¹ More specifically, I analyze how oral noetics have been present in the Colombian novel and affected it over the past century and a half. In chapters 3 through 6 I discuss specific Colombian novels using Ong's study and his related work as one of the most important theoretical bases, even though *Orality and Literacy* in itself is not a theory of the novel (nor, in fact, "theory" of anything). Generally speaking, I am concerned with what Ong calls the technology of writing. Whereas the subject of Ong's work is the differences between orality and literacy, I analyze how these two different modes of expression have affected literary works. Even though I find Ong's conceptual

framework useful in discussing the orality of regional traditions, my adherence to some of his work should not be construed as an endorsement of all the propositions presented in *Orality and Literacy*.

This project has other theoretical bases beyond those suggested in the three premises set forth above. In a study that considers more than one hundred novels, I use as a constant point of departure certain principles and concepts of narratology developed by Gérard Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan.² Whatever the relationship these novels might have with ideological context and orality, they have in common the fact that they are all narratives. Consequently, narratological issues are essential for this study. In the case of all novels, but particularly those analyzed in detail in chapters 3 through 6, fundamental narratological questions posed consistently are, How do these texts function as narrative? and, How do they create an experience for the reader? In addition, readers acquainted with the work of Terry Eagleton will note his direct and indirect influence.³ An underlying supposition present throughout the book is that the Colombian novel in one way or another expresses certain relationships to oral culture and/or writing culture. The latter is explored in the standard relationship one novel may have to another; this relationship, of course, is fundamentally a study of intertextuality. (Intertextuality as a theoretical issue is approached most directly in chapter 6.)

I intend to offer both a broad overview of novelistic production in Colombia from 1844 to 1987 and readings of selected individual texts. Part One, "Colombia in Its Novel," consists of two chapters that introduce Colombia and its novel within a broad historical and ideological context. Chapter 1 presents a brief history of Colombia and its regions. The division of Colombia's nineteenth- and twentieth-century political history into six periods provides the historical background and ideological context for the discussion of novels in chapter 2. The emphasis is not on the "classic" texts of traditional Colombian literary history but rather on a broad range of novels seen as the product of historical contingencies. Following the lead of Jane Tompkins, I see classic texts not as the ineffable products of genius but as bearers of a set of regional, national, social, economic, institutional, and professional interests.⁴

In Part Two, "The Novel in Its Region," the study moves into the novels of the four regions in four consecutive chapters.⁵ Chapter 3 deals with the Interior Highland Tradition centered in Bogotá (called in Spanish the *altiplano cundi-boyacense*), which includes Tolima, Huila, and Santander. After a brief introduction to this Interior Highland Tradition (often referred to in the text simply as Highland

tradition), the main focus of chapter 3 is the analysis of the novels *Manuela* (1858) by Eugenio Díaz, *Diana cazadora* (1915) by Clímaco Soto Borda, *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustasio Rivera, and *El buen salvaje* (1966) by Eduardo Caballero Calderón. The novelistic tradition of the Costa is the focus of chapter 4, which includes analyses of *Ingermina* (1844) by Juan José Nieto, *Cosme* (1927) by José Félix Fuenmayor, *La casa grande* (1962) by Alvaro Cepeda Samudio, *Respirando el verano* (1962) by Héctor Rojas Herazo, and *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. Chapter 5, defining the Antioquian Tradition, deals with *Frutos de mi tierra* (1896) by Tomás Carrasquilla, *Toá* (1933) by César Uribe Piedrahita, *Risaralda* (1935) by Bernardo Arias Trujillo, and *El día señalado* (1964) by Manuel Mejía Vallejo. In chapter 6, on the novelistic tradition of the Greater Cauca (Gran Cauca), I analyze *María* (1867) by Jorge Isaacs, *El alférez real* (1886) by Eustaquio Palacios, *Las estrellas son negras* (1949) by Arnoldo Palacios, and *El bazar de los idiotas* (1974) by Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal.

I submit a double response to the inevitable question of the criteria for selecting these particular seventeen novels. On the one hand, I believe most of them represent a general consensus among readers and critics of the Colombian novel as "major" works.⁶ On the other hand, in those regions or periods where there has been a paucity of criticism, I have chosen works I consider "representative" of the region and the period. This is the case for relatively ignored novels such as *Las estrellas son negras* by the Afro-Colombian writer Arnoldo Palacios. The broad vision of the Colombian novel I have produced, combining chapter 2 with the remaining chapters, recognizes Jane Tompkins's proposition (with respect to the American novel) that "major" novelists did not develop in response to a sudden perception of the greatness of a few literary geniuses; they emerged from a series of interconnected ideological circumstances that moved the publication, criticism, and, finally, institutionalization of the novel (Colombian, in this instance) in a certain direction.⁷

Part Three, "After Regionalism," contains two chapters that discuss the contemporary Colombian novel and propose conclusions. While one of the premises of this project is that Colombia consisted of four semi-autonomous regions for over a century, it is equally important to emphasize that radical modernization and changes in communication have resulted in a nation as unified as most over the past three decades. Consequently, chapter 7 treats the postregionalist novel published from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. (For certain practical reasons that will become evident in the reading of the first six chapters, the exact years covered are 1965 to 1987. I have ar-

bitrarily chosen 1987 as the cutoff date for this study.) With modernization, primary oral cultures have also vanished. Consequently, in this chapter I attempt to establish the main trends of the Colombian novel over the past two decades under the general categories of the "modern" and "postmodern" novel. Chapter 8 consists of brief conclusions.

In almost all cases I have eschewed providing plot synopses of the novels discussed or mentioned. In many of the analyses I have used Gérard Genette's proposed formulation of a nuclear verb or essential sentence which synthesizes a novel's action. For example, Genette essentializes the action of *The Odyssey* as "Ulysses returns to Ithaca" and of *A la recherche du temps perdu* as "Marcel becomes a writer." These synthetic formulations will provide some idea of plot. Readers in need of detailed plot information should consult Antonio Curcio Altamar's history of the Colombian novel, Donald McGrady's overview of the Colombian historical novel, and Kessel Schwartz's *New History of Spanish-American Fiction*.

I have attempted to avoid excessive specialized terminology. Nevertheless, a brief introduction to concepts and terminology of Ong and Genette may be useful. Ong makes important distinctions between "primary oral cultures" of persons with no knowledge of writing and "writing cultures" and demonstrates how the noetics of individuals from these two cultures are radically different. He points out that we (as readers) are so literate that it is difficult for us to conceive of an oral universe of communication or thought except as a variant of a literate universe. He demonstrates that writing is not just a kind of complement to oral speech but a transformer of verbalization. In chapter 3 of *Orality and Literacy*, titled "Some Psychodynamics of Orality," Ong outlines in detail the characteristics of primary oral cultures. Besides the mnemonic formula character of verbal expression, primary oral cultures include nine further basic characteristics. They are (1) additive rather than subordinative, (2) aggregative rather than analytic, (3) redundant or "copious," (4) conservative or traditionalist, (5) close to the human lifeworld, (6) agonistically toned, (7) empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, (8) homeostatic, and (9) situational rather than abstract. Following Ong's procedure, I use the terms *primary oral culture* and simply *oral culture* interchangeably throughout this text. Colombia has only one region—the Costa—with both a strong oral culture in the twentieth century and a novel that assimilates it, *Cien años de soledad*. Consequently, important factors in this study will be issues such as the distinction between merely oral effects (conversational elements in literary style, approximations of infor-

mal speech patterns, the use of colloquial language in dialogue or the narration) and oral residue (habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture). As I will demonstrate, factors of orality are significant even in the novel of the Highland area, the strongest writing culture of the four regions and the least affected by orality.

I use terminology from Gérard Genette with some regularity, particularly to identify with precision the nature of narrators. For example, describing a narrator as extradiegetic-heterodiegetic unequivocally identifies a narrator with a precision impossible if one were limited to concepts such as third-person omniscient, a patently ambiguous description of a narrator.⁸

By ideology I mean the ways in which what we say and believe connect with the power structure and power relations of the society in which we live, and I refer the reader to Terry Eagleton's *Theory of Literature*, which has informed my understanding of ideology.⁹ Accepting Eagleton's proposition on literature and ideology in general, I will argue in chapter 2 that literature *is* ideology in Colombia, particularly at the crucial turn-of-the-century juncture when the practices of literature and politics were so inextricably bound.

Some clarification may be in order concerning place-names. The Republic of Colombia has undergone several name changes over the centuries. During the Colonial period it was known as the Nuevo Reino de Granada, and in the republican period it was called Colombia (including Venezuela and Ecuador, 1819–1830), Nueva Granada (1832–1857), the Confederación Granadina (1857–1863), Estados Unidos de Colombia (1863–1886), and República de Colombia (1886–present). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this territory as the Nuevo Reino de Granada during the Colonial period and Colombia after 1810. The division of the country into departments has also evolved over the decades. I have chosen to identify regions in a fashion quite similar (but not exactly so) to the traditional regional divisions of the nineteenth century (see chapter 1). The *altiplano cundi-boyacense* and surrounding departments are identified in English as the Interior Highland Region. I have chosen to use the Spanish Costa for the Caribbean Coastal Region, since Coastal Region in English could give the false impression that it included only the coastal area itself, when in fact the departments of the Costa are numerous and cover much territory inland from Barranquilla and Cartagena. For example, Gabriel García Márquez is considered a *costeño* in Colombia, but his native Aracataca is inland. Greater Antioquia refers not only to the present-day state of An-

tioquia but also to the nineteenth-century unit, which included present-day Caldas, Risaralda and Quindío. Greater Cauca (referred to in Spanish as El Gran Cauca) includes several departments in the area. It is important to understand that these four regions, whether the English denominations I have chosen to use for them are ideal or not, represent cultural units that have historical ties in various facets of life, from political and economic to cultural and literary (again, see chapter 1 for further explanation).

Regional context is a fundamental factor in my reading of the seventeen novels analyzed in chapters 3 through 6. It should be noted from the outset, nevertheless, that three Colombian novels—*María*, *La vorágine*, and *Cien años de soledad*—are “national” works in the sense that they have successfully reached the nation’s readers and writers beyond a primarily regional context. Consequently, a novel such as *La vorágine* (indeed, Colombia’s first “best seller”) resulted in the publication of similar books in regions other than the Interior Highland. For this reason, I include the three novels in the chronologies of each region which appear in the appendix.

Of the extant critical studies on the Colombian novel, Antonio Curcio Altamar’s *Evolución de la novela en Colombia* (1957) and Seymour Menton’s *La novela colombiana: planetas y satélites* (1978) are the most significant predecessors of the present project. Curcio Altamar offers brief commentary, frequently of an impressionistic nature, on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel, mentioning over five hundred Colombian novels. Menton sets forth close readings of ten novels from Eugenio Díaz’s *Manuela* (1858) to Gustavo Álvarez Gardeazábal’s *El titiritero* (1977). Another seminal volume is Ernesto Porras Collantes’s *Bibliografía de la novela en Colombia* (1976). I refer to these valuable books frequently, and without them the present study would have been virtually impossible. Other recent books, not as all-encompassing as these three, are Fernando Ayala Poveda’s *Novelistas colombianos contemporáneos* (1983), Marvin Lewis’s *Treading the Ebony Path: Ideology and Violence in Contemporary Afro-Colombian Prose Fiction* (1987), Román López Tamés’s *La narrativa actual de Colombia y su contexto social* (1975), and Bogdan Piotrowski’s *La realidad nacional colombiana y su narrativa contemporánea* (1988).

The titles of the novels under discussion appear in the original Spanish. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of passages from novels are mine. In special cases, such as passages with subtle word play in the original Spanish text (such as that found in Moreno-Durán), I include both the original Spanish and my translation.

Several of these readings have been published in altered forms,

usually with a slightly different emphasis: "The Problem of Unity in Fiction: Narrator and Self in *María*," *MLN* 101, no. 2 (March 1986): 342–353; "La figura del autor y del escritor en *La vorágine*," *Discurso literario* 4, no. 2 (1987): 535–551; "Structure and Transformation of Reality in Alvarez Gardezabal: *El bazar de los idiotas*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1980): 245–261.

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