LITERARY CULTURES OF LATIN AMERICA

A COMPARATIVE HISTORY

Mario J. Valdés
and
Djelal Kadir
Editors

Volume I
CONFIGURATIONS OF LITERARY CULTURE

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
2004
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors are pleased to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals and institutions to the realization of this *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*. The project began in 1994 and was completed in 2004.

**Phase One: Rethinking Literary History, 1994–1996**
Mario J. Valdés organized a weeklong meeting of twenty-five scholars from various disciplines to respond to his position paper on “Rethinking Literary History,” under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation of New York in the Bellagio Conference Center in Lake Como, Italy.

**Phase Two: Meetings, 1996–1998**
Three meetings at the University of Toronto of the twenty-seven Research Coordinators, the salary of the Administrative Director, the Research Centre, and staff were funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Toronto. The salary of the Director of the Project was funded by Northern Telecom through the Northern Telecom Professorship in Ibero-American Studies. A meeting at Duke University organized by Alberto Moreiras was funded by the research office of Duke University. A meeting in Bogotá, Colombia, organized by Victoria Peralta was funded by the Colombian Research Council. A meeting in St. Louis organized by Randolph Pope was funded by the Washington University Research Fund. A meeting at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, organized by Mario J. Valdés, was funded by that institution. A meeting in Rio de Janeiro organized by Eduardo de Faria Coutinho was funded by the Brazilian Research Council.

The ten parts of *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History* were coordinated by the following scholars:

**Volume One**
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Part Four: Renato Cordeiro Gomes and Marilia Rothier Cardoso (Brazil), Djalal Kadir (United States).

**Phase Three: Translation and Revision, 1998–2001**
Two-thirds of the 205 texts in the *History* were written in languages other than English and were translated. Translation services were paid out of the operating budget of the Research Centre. The following are our translators: from Portuguese, Nair Maria Anaya-Ferreira, Idelber Avelar, Stephen A. Berg, Paulo Henrique Britto, Thomas Laborie Burns, Maria Clara Galery, Glacia Renate Gonçalves, Paulo Lemos Horta, and Lísa Horta Moriconi; from Spanish, Charlotte Broad de Mena, Colman Hogan, Jessica Johnson, and Suzanne D. Stephens; from French, Marie Carrière and Wendy J. Eberle.

**Phase Four: Copyediting, 2001–2004**
Texts were edited by Linda Hutcheon and María Elena de Valdés. Documentation of texts and dates of authors was completed by María Elena de Valdés and her staff.

We wish to thank Susan Yates of Publication Services for her valuable assistance throughout this long copyediting period.

We also wish to acknowledge the kind permission given by the following photographers and artist for the reproduction of their work: Jack Delano, Lois Greenfield, Sebastião Salgado, and Jack Vartoogian (photographers), and María Luisa de Villa (artist).

Finally, the project would not have been possible without the full cooperation and support of the John P. Robarts Research Library of the University of Toronto, the Chief Librarian Carol R. Moore, and her staff.
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One of the main contributions of Latin American cultural studies has been the reappraisal of the ways in which the receivers of discourse produce signification. Jesús Martín-Barbero summarizes this general theoretical change by highlighting the shift from media studies (with its attendant technological or political determinism) to the study of the mediations in the production of meaning in social communication. A more precise way of putting this is to describe the displacement that occurs in moving from the analysis of discourse and its intrinsic signification to the analysis of the social production of meaning: “Communication is not exhausted by the message. After all the time I have dedicated to semiotics, I realized that thinking about communication from the perspective of discourse analysis condemned us to thinking about signification but not about meaning, because in order to speak about the meaning of communication one has to speak about what that communication means to people” (Martín-Barbero 1995, 16). These collective processes of struggling to define social semiosis have a long history on the continent and form an important part of the history of the constitution of culture itself in Latin America (Martín-Barbero 1995, 31). My purpose here is to study these processes in relation to the historically variable forms of reception and reading practices conceived of as means of cultural production.

My hypothesis is twofold: first, that the relations between state and Church with respect to reading and the formation of readership and the relations between this readership and the text have undergone profound transformations throughout the history of Latin America; second, that these relations are not only merely another aspect of, but are crucial to, the forms and production of literature in the Americas. Within the confines of this essay, focusing mainly on the situation in Mexico, Argentina, and Chile, I shall make several comprehensive propositions that enable us to determine two macromoments—the Colonial and the nineteenth century—in an historical study of reading in Latin America. Central to this study are the relations among Church, state, and readership, as well as the relations between readers and texts. In both cases what are, in social terms, negotiated and disputed are the forms of authority and relative legitimacy of each of the actors involved in the determination of the meaning, function, and target audiences of cultural texts. A precondition of this semiotic debate on texts, this determination of the socially legible spaces (de Certeau) and of the actualizing practices (Bennett 1990), is the issue of access and circulation. During the period I call the colonizing moment, the Church attempted to curtail the indigenous population’s access to their sources of cultural production (written and oral memories produced and transmitted through the mother-child dialogue, and between priests or intellectuals and the local population in general) in order to replace these with new rites, texts, and communicative processes of an evangelizing nature. In the second moment under study, the proliferation and circulation of published and journalistic material opened the doors to a new agential space: that of the market. Unlike the earlier communicative processes, which, even if they did produce subordinate and loyal subjects, were clearly collective in orientation, those that were set in the marketing context of postcolonial countries during the nineteenth century were lived as (and gave the illusion of being) individual subjectivizing processes. The reader, now silent and private, experienced his or her own relation of distance from the text as an eminently personal process. Although both types of reader formations were, by definition, collective and social, the reader—text relation differed in emphasis. To these concerns should be added the market of popular writing, to which I shall return later. In all these cases, an economy of the circulation of texts presides over the forms of assigning meaning that determine their possible signification.

Reading, Production, Text

As a preliminary, reading as a cultural practice needs to be reconceptualized. Terry Eagleton’s words in his essay discrediting reception studies, ironically entitled “The Revolt of the Reader,” are a good reflection of the skepticism and even the disdain with which a sector of traditional criticism (Marxist and others) views these studies: “The growth of the Reader’s Liberation Movement (RLM) over the past few decades has struck a decisive blow for oppressed readers everywhere, brutally proletarianized as they have been by the authorial class” (18). Having characterized the history of reception studies and humorously classified its right, central, and left wings, Eagleton concludes: “A socialist criticism is not primarily concerned with the consumer’s revolution. Its task is to take over the means of production” (184). Dana Polan calls this the survival, in some contemporary Marxist trends, of a romantic vision of production that presupposes that, after this pristine and original moment, the social process of circulation and exchange of commodities and meanings is in a kind of decadence and disgrace (38).

The most recent studies on reading have endeavored precisely to counter the traditional materialist assaults, such as that of Eagleton, maintaining, on the contrary, that reception, understood as a collective activity that is culturally determined, is one of the most important aspects of the process of the social production of meaning. Far from being a reflection of the consumers’ revolution, reception is the communicational moment per se in the circulation of social discourses. For example, as Michel de Certeau has indicated: “The efficiency of production implies the inertia of consumption-as-a-receptacle… By challenging ‘consumption’ as it is conceived and (of course) confirmed by these
authorial enterprises, we may be able to discover creativity where it has been denied [that] any exists" (167). Following this argument, Néstor García Canclini asks "whether by consuming we are not doing something that sustains, nurtures and, up to a certain point, constitutes a new sense of citizenship," to which he replies: "To consume is to participate in the dispute for that which society produces and for the ways of using it" (1995, 27, 44). If we recuperate the collective and productive aspects of reception, García Canclini believes, it is possible to state that "The territorial boundaries and political history of a nation, for example, are of little help in defining it at this stage. Instead it survives as an interpretative community of consumers, whose traditional eating and linguistic habits lead them to relate in a particular way to the objects and information circulating on the international networks" (1995, 50-51).

Martín Barbero has, in turn, emphasized just how inadequate traditional modes of analyzing contents and styles are for the comprehension of many genres of mass and popular communication. By focusing exclusively on the text or on the forms of authorial production one loses sight of the fact that what is most important in soap operas, for example, are the spaces of resignification created by the receivers in a subsequent dialogue with others: "the perception women have of a soap opera varies a lot when they tell friends and neighbours the story. . . . What the viewers see is not so significant as the dialogue. A soap opera is successful because it gives people the opportunity to talk about their lives" (1995, 56).

Finally, Tony Bennett (1990) has established what is, ultimately, the property of every text: the fact that it belongs to a public and political sphere dominated by certain discursive and reading formations that unquestionably condition the production of their meanings. The idea of a "reading formation" derives from Michel Foucault's study of discursive formations. In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault defines a discursive formation as a certain regularity of relations among discourses that jell in one historically determined moment and space to offer an illusory (but legitimate) image of the totality of social discourses (21-70). Bennett understands a reading formation as a "set of discursive and intertextual determinations which organize and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways" (1987, 70). It is worth mentioning that this definition presupposes that both text and reading are socially and historically construed. That is to say, we are not speaking about one text that has been given different interpretations throughout its life, but of texts and readings that vary in similar ways as a result of an actualization in the here and now of their oppositional relations to other texts (discursive formation) and other reading practices (reading formation). This implies that literature is not connected, or at least not principally linked, with the forms of social power by the type of representational-ideological relation proposed by traditional Marxism. Literature is not, then, simply and directly, an ideology whose main function is the production of subjects receptive to its pacifying messages. It is the social and institutional mechanisms by means of which specific texts are used and socially deployed that constitute literature in its concrete and variable forms of social existence (see Bennett 1990).

Following this line of argument, we may contend that to read a text is to construct it, to make it signify within a social space. If every text, literary or otherwise, inevitably forms part of a semiosis that is, in principle, limitless, one of the first things that should be studied historically is the way in which texts are read, so to speak, within the limits and possibilities laid down by the practices and the spaces that institutional procedures construct in a given moment. Although I shall study two macromoments in the history of reading on the continent, I would like to put them into context by indicating the periodization of these moments in relation to those that precede, are included within, and follow the two under study. The first concerns the parallel and independent development of forms of "literacy" in pre-Columbian America and in Europe. During the second moment, the ideology of the book and the letter clash with the forms of indigenous knowledge, which from that time onward were apparently deemed inferior. This is the colonizing moment. The third moment is the emergence of a popular, Baroque, and Catholic culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Morandé). The fourth is the Bourbon moment in the eighteenth century, in which the modern state reared its head on the continent in order to dispute the Church's hegemony in the citizens' formation of subjectivities. The fifth is the nineteenth century, when a proto-mass and a proto-mass-media culture emerged that coincided with the political problem of national cultures, which was debated as much by state intellectuals as by those struggling outside that context. The dominant characteristics of this stage were an expansive and popular newspaper culture, the deconsecration of the book, the mechanization and economizing of its production, and a growing tendency toward mass cultural consumption. During the sixth moment, this national culture was effectively mass produced under the inspiration and force, as a rule, of cultural campaigns encouraged by the state in its attempt to construct hegemony at a time when the people and the middle classes dominated the age, that is, of populism and popular nationalism. The last moment is that of the transnationalization of the means of mass communication and some forms of consumption and cultural production. Some of the basic territorializing and subjectivizing processes promoted by the nation-states and the Catholic Church have reached a state of crisis and face significant challenges, as do the discursive and reading formations that have characterized Latin American modernity. Globalization thus requires that the following be reconsidered: the traditional practices for the formation of citizens and worshippers, the modes of production and accumulation of cultural capital, the traditional hierarchical forms, and the symbolic profitability of the different cultural spheres.

The Colonizing Moment

Contrary to the perception held by most people, Rolena Adorno (when discussing Irving Leonard and other scholars' contributions to this topic) asserts that during the first colonial period (which I shall call the colonizing moment in order to distinguish it from the colonial period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), the Church, and specifically the Inquisition that acted as its censor, seemed to take little interest in banning works of fiction, simply because these books had no dogmatic content (Adorno 1992, xvi). At least in relation to prohibition (the writs of 1531 and 1543), even if the practical results are debatable, the Spanish state, in turn, was indeed concerned with the need to ban the reading of literary fiction for reasons we might call Platonic: It fires the imagination; it persuades, seduces, and stimulates. The justification for the
prohibition of works of fiction under these two royal writs was sustained by the idea that these books would corrupt not so much the soldiers as the Indians. Thus, the Queen's writ of 1531 for the officials at the Clearing House in Seville who controlled the entry of goods to America, states (in a modernized version): "I have been informed that many Romance books, vain and profane histories such as the Amadis and others of this sort have been taken to the Indies and that this is an evil exercise for the Indians and a thing which they should not spend their time on or read and hence I order you from this day forward not to grant consent to or permit anyone whatsoever to take any stories or profane things through except those concerning the Christian religion" (Torre Revello iii). Despite this writ, the censorship of works of fiction did not appear to concern the ecclesiastical authorities unduly at the time; rather, they were not very efficient in actually putting it into practice (Torre Revello 40; Leal xlii). However, they were very efficient in promoting religious texts that formed part of the evangelizing (and thus legitimizing) mission in the Indian communities. As we shall see, the Church was energetically and zealously committed to the so-called persecution and eradication of every sign of idolatrous worship. In the nineteenth century, the Church discovered that the expansion of the forms of mass reproduction of works of fiction constituted a space that severely threatened their hegemony in important social sectors.

During the first colonial period, the subjectivity that the Church considered had to be conquered and reconstructed was that of the indigenous population (Gruziński 186-228). There were two aspects to the formation of subjectivities. The negative aspect was based on the control of printed material (which included as much the persecution of ritual idolatry as that of the discourses in which the formalized part of indigenous memory was stored) and the curtailment of the maternal oral relation by imposing a third entity, the Church, which acted as a collective mother. The positive aspect of this new subjectivity was grounded in the practice of forming intellectuals and in the task of general mediation undertaken by the priests at the heart of the process of social semiosis that sought to convert the Indians into good Christians, that is, into obedient and Catholic workers.

The first (negative) aspect of this process was the making of a fetish of writing (see Lienhard), thus installing the dominance of the ideology of the Book and the Letter (see Mignolo 1995). As Martin Lienhard (41) points out: "The destruction of the ancient system, based on a balanced articulation of the stored and the live word, and the imposition of a new system in which the absolute authority of 'divine' European writing made the diabolic ancient 'writings' illegal, at the same time marginalizing oral communication, constitute the background for the emergence of 'Latin American' literature." Lienhard alludes here to the configuration of a discursive formation in pre-Hispanic societies. Both the Mesoamerican glyphic and the Quechan quipu were essentially administrative forms for filing data and for fixing constituted and storabile knowledge. The natural complement to these written discourses was speech. The oral form was used for discourses concerning tradition and history, such as stories and reflections that we usually place under the umbrella term of philosophy. (I shall discuss this complementariness of orality and writing in pre-Hispanic cultures later.)

In order to displace and reposition the indigenous discursive and reading formations, the missionaries undertook the twofold and paradoxical task of extirpating and preserving indigenous oral and written discourses. This resulted in the corpus of Indian-Hispanic writings that culminated in the work of Bernardino de Sahagún. This writing is an antecedent to the indigenous ethnography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which constructs an artificial ethnic discourse of the Other addressed to a readership outside the "exotic" culture (Lienhard 190). Unlike this discourse, the collections and chronicles of the colonizing moment were, in the end, unable to contain the subversive semiotic possibilities running through the translated and modified indigenous discourses, which would potentially be significant when reinterpreted by autochthonous readers: "What was in the end the 'explosive' character of the chronicles contaminated by indigenous discourse undoubtedly explains the censorship to which they fell victim. However excellent their official intentions (expropriation of idolatry, demonstrations of indigenous barbarity...) might have been, hardly any were printed during the period" (Lienhard 52).

When describing the discursive mechanisms that established a meeting point between the indigenous Brazilian oral tradition and the European written discourses, José Horta Nunes has studied—mainly using the methods of discourse analysis—the position constructed and prepared for the Brazilian reader, that is, the hybrid inheritor of these two discourse formations in this textual tradition: "The missionaries introduce a practice of reading oriented by the objectives of catechism and colonization. This activity develops, on the one hand, in the practice of the discourse of conversation, in the sermons, conferences, etc, and, on the other hand, in the production of new knowledge about the New World, be it in the form of reports, catechisms, grammars, or dictionaries. These activities and symbolic objects determine the construction of a position for the reader in Brazil, on the path between the discoursivity of the European and the discoursivity of the Indian" (103). This positioning of the Brazilian reader is organized within a semiotic mechanism that aspires to be total and comprehensive. A space is created so that, to each question from the indigenous oral discourse, there is one, and only one, correct Christian answer or interpretation in the written catechism discourse: "The situation of contact by missionaries manifests its form in structuring the questions and answers, determining the meanings to be read, and prohibiting the production of other interpretations" (Horta Nunes 102).

Two operations were central to the missionaries' success in this task. On the one hand, they had to plumb the depths of the indigenous oral discourse by means of written representations of dialogues and colloquies between the Indians and the missionaries, in which the former are translated and responded to in exact terms by the latter. That is to say, the missionaries wrote down the characteristic oral situations of autochthonous teaching and learning in order to reinscribe them within a Christian frame. On the other hand, the missionaries introduced the indigenous people to new knowledge and produced grammars and dictionaries, thus applying this same operation of translating one discourse into another. This became a further instrument in their mission of indoctrination.

The purpose of these textual mechanisms was to anticipate and control the Indians' interpretative semiotic responses. It is worth noting that this attempt at semiotic control occurred at the same time as the indigenous oral discourse was given expression. For this reason, this discourse is artificially constrained to a series of questions and answers, which, though
extensive, limits the scope of what is utterable and pertinent in a situation that is, strictly speaking, structured in a highly hierarchical manner, even if it is formally dialogic. Perhaps the most famous example is Los coloquios de los doce primeros misioneros de México [The Colloquia of the First Twelve Missionaries to Mexico] by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1500–1590), which Fray Gonzalbo describes as "something like a Summa contra Gentiles, planned and developed for the Nahua world" (1988, 19).

The Queen’s Royal Writ to the Viceroy of Mexico in 1536 placing a ban on the reading of works of fiction ratified their strategic importance. Besides being concerned with the direct moral effects of these works, what worried the Spanish Crown were what we could call their indirect ideological effects:

Some days ago the Emperor and King gave the ruling that books of Romances of profane matters and fables should not be taken to those parts so that the Indians who knew how to read would not become addicted to them, leaving to one side the books of good and healthy doctrine, and upon reading them would not learn bad habits and so that, once it was known those books of vain histories had been composed without approval, our Holy Scriptures and books by other holy Doctors would not lose authority and credibility. For these people who have no deeply rooted Faith believe that all our books are of one authority and manner. (Torre Revello iv)

In other words, the most important reason for banning the reading and circulation of works of fiction was that they might contaminate the colonial discursive formation. Much more detrimental to imperial plans than the direct representations of reprehensible moral acts was the idea that works of fiction, as discourses that shared the space with those of Catholic indoctrination and conversion, could subvert in the indigenous imaginary, as the Queen thought, the status and superior ideological effect of other written discourses, which the fetishizing of writing attempted to impose on Indian audiences. This subversive crack in the educational codes and hierarchies of the Spanish priests would never disappear, because it was impossible to make a genuine and effective tabula rasa of the forms of discourse and of the production of meaning in pre-Hispanic cultures.

Cultural Semiosis

Walter Mignolo has made an extended study of what he calls "the question of the letter" and of writing (what Lienhard designates as the fetishization of writing), as well as of what he terms the processes of "colonial semiosis." The ideology of the letter and the book fundamentally consist of confusing alphabetic writing and the book, which are no more than instruments for the preservation and communication of social knowledge, with the essence and existence of this knowledge. In this way, the conquistadors ascribed the "absence" of books and letters in native cultures to an alleged lack of civilization and history. In this framework, a "lack of letters" was equivalent to a "lack of history," and orality became prehistory. This denied the pre-Hispanic cultures the right to coexist as such with the Europeans in the history of humanity: They were immediately assigned to a time and space destined to be conquered and mastered by the truth of the written history of Christianity. In contrast to this prejudice, still so ingrained today, Mignolo proposes an understanding of the indigenous discursive and receptive formations that takes as its premise that orality is not an "antecedent" of "literacy" but an equivalent system of the practice and conceptualization of socially relevant discourses. For our purposes here, it is worth mentioning that, in these pre-Hispanic discursive formations, certain formal discursive genres in prose (the tlahuitolli and, particularly, the teotlaitollli of religious discourse and haehuatlaitollli of the wisdom of the elders) coexisted with other forms of poetic discourse in the sense that the communicators' bodies were an essential part of both delivery and reception. These are the cuauhtli or canto-poetry in which music and rhythm accompanied the oral discourse (León Portilla 1989, 31–41). (I shall discuss the collective and corporal nature of these processes later.)

With the help of specialists and ethnographers, Mignolo has proposed the study of "a significant oral literary production and a conceptualization of the same based on a philosophy of language" that focuses on orality rather than on writing (Mignolo 1993, 552). As in the case of the various versions of the books of Chilam Balam collected and preserved for centuries by different Mayan communities, this raises the issue of the presence of discursive hybridity in the pre-Hispanic and European traditions. In these, "the European script that the friars were so eager to transmit in order to be more effective in the Christianization of the natives was used by the Amerindians to stabilize their past, to adapt themselves to the present, to transmit their traditions to future generations, and, in summary, to resist the colonizazion of language" (Mignolo 1995, 207).

This gave rise to forms of adaptation and hybridity, forms of resignifying metropolitan discourses and a strategic exploitation of the available technologies—all of which have characterized the life and processes of cultural (re)production in Latin America (Adorno 1996, 35–37; Garcia Canclini). In order to study the historical processes of these encounters of discursive and reading formations, which are in a position of inequality in relation to political, military and, thus, epistemological power, Mignolo has coined the term "colonial semiotics." This, he proposes, helps us to overcome the ideology of the book and the letter by questioning the epistemological location of the cognitive colonial subject and the evolutionary and Eurocentric hierarchical arrangement of what are really coexistent and equivalent systems of encoding and transmitting socially and culturally relevant information. In America, these systems—the Amerindian (based on orality and alternative modes of graphic representation) and the European (based on writing and the book)—soon established a great variety of relations of interference and hybridity, which, it appears, can best be studied by using the term "colonial semiosis" (Mignolo 1995, 1–25).

Few people have given such clear and subtle insights into this process of mestizo or hybridized indigenous cultural production in the first colonizing moment as Serge Gruziński in La colonización de la imaginario [The Colonization of the Imaginary]. This study stresses the importance of understanding the historical forms of the constitution of a cultural imaginary in their frequently contradictory and complex facets. For our purposes, it is interesting to note his emphasis on the forms of cultural appropriation and resignification effected in different ways by the different sectors of a subaltern entity. This wider focus reveals, in the forms of subjectivization and in the mechanisms of reading and appropriation, that there are other forms of producing culture that are generally invisible to the learned eye focusing on the creative individuality of a specific author. In general terms, Gruziński indicates the existence of two submoments in the history of this process of colonial acculturation. During the first, the educational and religious enterprise undertaken by the missionaries attempted
to reproduce the pre-Hispanic sociocultural divisions for the benefit of their evangelizing mission. To this end, they prepared, on the one hand, two kinds of receivers: the elite, who possessed all the elements of semiotic production (reading and writing) in a bilingual, at times even multilingual (Nahuatl, Latin, Spanish), culture, and the people, who received the priests' explanations in their native tongue. In this way, they reproduced the stratification that already existed in pre-Columbian Mexican schools: calmicas, schools for the nobles, and telopochcalli for the people (López Austin 33). On the other hand, the missionaries found they needed and thus developed mixed discursive forms, which enabled them to make the most of the genres of pre-Hispanic oral culture in order to present them in a Christianized written form and content. They thus revived the ancient cantares (poems set to music) so that they could teach the plain songs and Gregorian chants, and at the same time, they recycled and Christianized the stylistic conventions characteristic of indigenous discourse such as flowers, butterflies, andquetzal feathers (Gruzinski 15–76). In the same way, at least during the sixteenth century, they developed, if to a lesser degree, mixed forms of catechisms and hieroglyphic confessions in which the Christian doctrine and sins were represented graphically following pre-Hispanic conventions. They thus created the so-called Indian Humanism of New Spain, represented by the Colegio de Tlatelolco, the College of Indian Grammarians, as its founder Fray Juan de Zumárraga (1408–1548) called it (Orozco Romero 200) and Church Nahuatl, which, in Gruzinski's second proposed submoment, governed the relations of the Indians with the clergy and with the doctrine throughout the colonial period (Gruzinski 67; Bianco 89).

It was perhaps the success of the missionaries' educational program for the indigenous elite that condemned the project represented by the College. The first Mexican Council of 1555 "not only ordered the confiscation of all the sermons the Indians held in their possession, but also urged close attention to be paid to the texts given to them in the future, so that they could not falsify or distort them" (Gruzinski 63). The second Council in 1565 gave the same recommendation. Gruzinski points out how these measures added both to the extent to which reading was encouraged among the indigenous elite and to their ability to reproduce written materials that escaped ecclesiastical control (63). Following the spirit that inspired this control of the text and reading of the Bible, the Counter-Reformation Church decided to put an end to the missionaries' utopian project and promoted, from then on during this second submoment, uniform and limited catechization of the indigenous peoples in Church Nahuatl, which the early Indian intellectuals had helped to elaborate. This meant that the formation of relatively independent reading subjects (the subjectivization of the elite) was replaced by a more universal and homogeneous mode of viewing the indigenous population, who, realizing that they had no access to the priesthood, were at once perceived as "external neophytes and spiritual minors," as they would be throughout their colonial existence (Gruzinski 74; Gonzalbo 90, 98, 1988, 44). This change in policy altered the relation between subject and text. These relations were now mediated and strictly limited by the intervention that produced and regulated the semiotics that the priests sought to carry out in key spaces and discourse, such as confesiones and manuals of moral edification. Sonia Corcuera has used the phrase "from Love to Fear" to describe this shift in policy on the part of the Church before and after the Council of Trent. This phrase illustrates the transition from the full incorporation of the indigenous population to Christianity, which characterized the first period, to the pessimistic turn that catechization took when the priests felt obliged "to reduce and simplify the teaching contents in order to adapt them to the lesser ability and to the particular intelligence of the natives" (Corcuera 19).

The early attempts to control the literacy of the indigenous elite produced another lasting historical consequence. They marked the quasi-disappearance of the pre-Hispanic elite oral tradition connected with the "reading" of the paintings and glyphs and the beginning of an almost complete identification of orality with the indigenous culture "of the rural and urban masses" (Gruzinski 65). A natural result was the cultural configuration still familiar to us today, whereby the oral tradition is associated with the people and the countryside, and the latter with the elite living in urban centers (see Rama; Lienhard). The mass influx of the lower middle class into the large urban centers during the second half of the nineteenth century stimulated, as we shall see, a renaissance in the productive relations between orality and writing in the form of collective reading, cordel literature, and the art of peyadores or gaucho singers (see Figure 1).

Second Moment: The Nineteenth Century, Patrician Culture-Bourgeois Culture

The colonizing configuration was followed by the real colonial moment and then the Bourbon efforts to control and direct the flow of ideas from the European Enlightenment by carefully selecting those that best suited the authoritarian and Catholic realities of America. From the time of Independence, the postcolonial states and their elitist leaders, who had often used the subversive potential of letters and the press to champion the Independence cause, attempted to reposition literature (and the production of discourse in general) within the national discursive formation. This was developed gradually and through a somewhat contradictory process. While the entry and access of the people to these discourses was limited and rationed, there was, on the one hand, an explosion of printed discourses (made possible by both liberal and conservative contributions) and, on the other, a secular attack led by the liberals on the ideological perspective inspiring the ecclesiastical censure of this thriving publishing market.

During the nineteenth century, the expansion of literature within the domestic sphere, which reached not only the female elite but also the middle classes, made the Church understand that one of the most powerful forms of secularization by which liberal ideas threatened their survival in the former colonies was now precisely the proliferation of publications addressed not only to the masculine elite in the public sphere but to an ever increasing circle of other readers (see Poiblete 1999). In 1871 Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834–1893) indirectly mentioned the change taking effect at the time: Ya se ve: las mujeres antes no sabían nada; el ideal del clero era la mujer ignorante, y con razón. Para dominarla a su sabor, era preciso que nada supiera. Una mujer que apenas supiera leer en devociónario, era lo más propio para hacer un instrumento ciego. Y todavía en los países atrasados, como España y México, se cree por la gente antigua que la mujer debe ser ignorante. (quoted in Ruedas de la Serna, 226)

One can already see it: before women did not know anything. The priest's ideal was, with good reason, the ignorant woman. In order to dominate her as wished, it was essential that she knew...
nothing. A woman who could just about read her prayer book was the most suited to become a blind instrument. And in backward countries, such as Spain and Mexico, the belief is still held by old fashioned people that the woman should be ignorant.

Ambrosio Fornet states that in Cuba in the nineteenth century, “before the newspaper became a familiar object for the popular classes, religious propaganda in its various printed forms was the only ‘echo’ which reached all social strata” (Fornet 60).

Within this framework, the reading of literature or, more broadly speaking, of the socially circulating discourses, underwent a series of transformations determined by several new historical developments. Just as there was a growing tendency for the mass circulation of books and printed matter—obvious, at least, to the men of the time (Henríquez Ureña 59–94; Fornet; Subercaseaux 1993), so was there a separation between Church and State during the nineteenth century. These institutions no longer had the degree of identification and complementarity that had distinguished them during the colonial period (see Pike; Harnett). The control of the production, circulation, and interpretation of printed matter proved much more complicated and hence ineffective as soon as the secular and religious agencies began to differ in opinion. Moreover, this rise in the circulation of books and in printed matter (especially newspapers and periodicals) meant that the object of control had to be redefined. From every perspective, this was the decisive factor. Of course, the proliferation of discourses went hand in glove with the relative but important diversification of the sectors that had direct access—that is, not mediated by the priests—to this reading material. In other words, those subject to control also had to be redefined. The Indians had now been replaced by the women, first of the upper and then of the middle classes, and toward the end of the century by lower-middle-class artisans and traders. This persistent shift from the scarce and elitist book to the newspaper and relatively large amount of mass-printed matter occurred as if written discourse—which had been subsumed and colonized in the book both in its own medieval European origin (in documents, scrolls, folios) and the forms of non-alphabetic...
two kinds of reading (the intensive and the extensive, the learned masculine and the frivolous, light feminine reading), and, on the other, the discursive hierarchy that makes the distinction between "the news items, stories and frivolous and light literature in general," in other words, novelistic prose, and poetry, the literary genre par excellence in Caro's opinion. In fact, the title of his article, "Light Ideological Excursion," the name of the newspaper (El Tradicionista), which Caro founded and edited and in which the article appeared, and, finally, his search for foreign learned readers are all signs of the climate and the new commercial pressures with which he was forced to come to terms in the completely new configuration proposed by what we would today call the publishing market. He discovered that underlying that distinctive sense of belonging to the same national reading formation was a form of cultural communion in which, at least in relation to certain discourses such as fiction, the "classes of readers" lost their clarity of definition, thereby merging with each other and dissolving into a more middle class and comprehensive national bourgeois public than the aristocracy of yesteryear.

**Intensive-Extensive Reading and National Reading**

During the better part of the nineteenth century, the Church had consolidated its hold on society and had restated its sociopolitical justification in the heart of the postcolonial states through its control and indoctrination of women, extolling women's virtue as submissive acceptance of their place in society and as full compliance with sociocultural norms in all levels of society, but especially in the popular sector. The popularization of reading, particularly of fiction, must have made the clergy aware of a pervasive threat in the reawakening of a sense of repression with the return of discourses other than those favored by the church, discourses spoken from one impassioned heart to another, which the clergy had tried so hard, over a period of three hundred years, and at great cost, to eradicate from the American colonies. The discourses against popular fiction were the same as those Jean-Jacques Rousseau had used to express his censorial and paradoxical fanaticism. When studying the extraordinary case of the Frenchman Jean Ranson, an assiduous and fervent reader of Rousseau's literary work, Robert Darnton confronted the task of historicizing reading. Darnton combines his discussion of the surviving forty-seven letters containing the readings of this good, provincial, bourgeois man, who in many respects resembles the new readership of what we shall later call national fiction in Latin America, with Rousseau's work and reaches some conclusions that are very useful for this study. The paradox of the situation of the author of Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse was that he had spoken out boldly against the novel and that now he himself had written one. "Rousseau's reply in the preface is deceptively simple: 'This novel is not a novel'" (Darnton 1985, 229). With this work, Rousseau had indeed proposed the creation of "another cultural form, an anti-literature literature, in which he could defend the cause of virtue by appealing directly to the unsophisticated" (Darnton 1985, 231).

Whereas Rousseau's proposal was a reaction against what he considered the prevailing corruption in the French literary salons, which even in the case of the French Encyclopedists did little more, in his opinion, than reproduce the elitism and moral decadence of the ancien régime, liberal projects in Latin America promoting a national novel essentially attempted to address the same problem. At issue was how to write literature...
that would not only entertain readers but also educate them with the kind of knowledge and moral discipline required by the liberal champions of the new republics. The novelist Alberto Blest Gana (1830–1920), traditionally considered the father of the Chilean novel, believed he had solved the problem with his national costumbrista novel. He developed this theme in his famous speech of 1861 entitled “La literatura chilena. Algunas consideraciones sobre ella” [1977, “Reflections on Chilean Literature”], delivered on the incorporation of the Faculty of Humanities into the University of Chile. It essentially dealt with the need to counter the proliferation of serialized foreign novels in the newspapers of the time with a national product.

What was at stake becomes clear when one realizes that the same publishing situation that had so successfully developed literary production in Chile had meant the end of the liberal literary project of the 1830s in Cuba, where the socio-political and economic colonial conditions were somewhat different. Pomet points out the paradox that “Cuban narrative was left without subscribers or publishers precisely when more novels were being published and bought by readers in Cuba” (124). Their national literature had been displaced by serialized French novels and foreign romance fiction, thanks to the imperatives of the publishing market. As we shall see in the case of Chile, this denationalization of the literature that was circulating in the country was not, however, the only possible or necessary consequence of the publishing explosion and of the appearance of a new kind of reading public. This de-Cubanization, as we might call it, was a sign, even in Cuba, of the irruption into the traditional space of letters of a radically new readership (women, although mainly from the upper classes at first), which had quite a different sensitivity and literary taste from the learned elite.

Instead of trying to summarize or comment in extenso on that essay by Alberto Blest Gana (see, instead, Poblete 1999), I shall discuss the consequences of his proposal for this historical view of reading. In the first scene of his first novel, Una escena social [A Social Scene], published in serial form in 1853, Bleston had written:

"Todo eso es falso, dije un día, cerrando indignado un tomo de 'La Nueva Heloísa,' 'Detesto esos virtudes lacrimosas, tan recatadas en el sentimentalismo que lloran sobre una falta cometida hasta encontrar de nuevo la ocasión de cometerla. Y lleno de despecho contra el pobre ciudadano de Genebra [Rousseau], arrojé el libro hacia la extremidad opuesta de la mesa y apoyé mi frente sobre la mano izquierda, arrodillado en la cual sollozaba largos instantes en meditación. (Blest Gana n.d., 51)"

All this is false, I said one day, indignantly closing a volume of La Nouvelle Heloïse. I detest those lachrymose virtues, so damably sensible that they cry over a mistake they've made until they find another occasion to do it again. And so, disdainful of that peaceful citizen from Geneva [Rousseau], I threw the book across the table and rested my brow on my left hand, an attitude I often strike when meditating for a while.

What is worth stressing here is his dramatization of what I would call the historical conditions of the reading situation in Chile during the second half of the nineteenth century. The passage begins on a clearly metareflexive level. This is a novel that opens with a reader indignantly closing another novel. The novel we read is a national Chilean novel and the one closed is a famous work by a French author. Bleston Gana starts his literary career and his first novel, then, by proceeding to close a foreign novel; hence, the reading of the national novel begins when the reading of the foreign novel has been concluded. In this equation, one thing makes the other possible. The opening requires a closure, a beginning and an end. The question he poses is: Where does one begin and the other end? So as often happens, the border seems to unite them precisely at the moment when it separates them. Immediately afterward, the national reader-character adopts a pensive gesture typical of European sentimental literature, which Rousseau had championed and in which the Chilean protagonist would recognize the Romantic reference.

In this dramatization, the reader of a Social Scene reproduces, on another level, the paradox of the reader-character who is indignant about "those lachrymose virtues, so damably sensible that they cry over a mistake they've made until they find another occasion to do it again." The nineteenth-century reader of a Chilean work immediately has to confront his or her moral ambiguity as a reader of novels. One could even say that the phrase perfectly describes the seductive and irresistible mechanism that the contemporaries of Bleston Gana identified, from their different ideological trenches, as the salient characteristic of novelistic fiction. The paradox here is that beginning to read is to return simultaneously to the space of the release of libidinal drives and to the site of its censure and control. Opening and closure join hands there. This highly stylized gesture of the first national reader includes, moreover, the dilemma to which the Chilean national novel, or at least that proposed by Bleston Gana, attempts to respond. In this frozen moment, when the European Romantic model was utilized in order to be spurred as irrelevant, we witness the official birth of a literature whose originality and autonomy were sustained by creative dependence upon foreign models. Rather than showing a parasitic relationship, this scene truly reproduces its historical conditions of emergence.

Like Rousseau, Bleston Gana proposed in this way to develop what he called a novel "of national customs" in which the Chilean reader could relate his or her own life to the text he or she was reading in such a manner that the effect would not only prove socially productive, but also be personally entertaining and transformational. That is to say, the subjective experience of reading fiction would become an act of constructing the nation. This transformation in reading practice, which attempted to combine the former ideals of moral edification through the written word with the new and modern demands of the publishing world driven fundamentally by the desire to stimulate consumption, is best understood in the context of one of the few macro-hypotheses of periodization in historical studies of reading.

In the history of European reading, Rolf Engelsing has proposed that we consider the shift from intensive to extensive reading. By intensive reading Engelsing understands discerning, thorough, and attentive readings of a few religious texts. Engelsing's model is the Protestant reading of the Bible; in Latin America during the first half of the nineteenth century, the equivalent would be the catechisms and prayer books that had been the first national best-sellers. This kind of reading had prevailed among Europeans from the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century. According to Engelsing, a change took place at this time because the greater availability of books and writings altered reading habits and modes. Extensive reading is faster and performed on many different texts circulating in the developing publishing market (Engelsing; Chartier 1994; Darnton 1990). Domingo
Faustino Sarmiento had already understood the importance of the place of the Bible in Protestant culture, and he wondered what book could occupy a similar place in Catholic culture. His response compares the intensive and constant practice of reading the Bible in Protestant countries with the extensive reading of novels:

Para ser católico es necesario ante todo tener fe. El catolicismo lo dice. Para ser protestante es preciso saber leer para leer la Biblia. ... ¿Qué es el libro del católico? ... ¡Nombre! ... un libro enciclopédico ... un libro que sea cuento que interese, fantasía que exalte el espíritu, enigma que aguée la inteligencia, poesía que remonte la imaginación ... Mostraré ese libro. No existe. (Sarmiento 1887–1900b, 159–60)

To be a Catholic it is necessary, first and foremost, to have faith. Catholicism dictates it. To be Protestant one must be able to read in order to read the Bible. ... What is the Catholic's book? ... Name it! ... An encyclopedic book ... a book that contains an interesting story, a fantasy that exalts the spirit, an enigma that excites the intellect, poetry that gives flight to the imagination ... Show me this book. It does not exist.

In this text of 1856, Sarmiento alludes to the educational and progressive functions that the intensive reading of the Bible or the extensive reading of novels and serials served or might serve. He thus reveals that one of the keys to his plan for mass literacy was to exploit popular readers' potential interest in fiction. As we know, this fundamental cultural expansion was, in Sarmiento's opinion, one of the prerequisites for the extraordinary industrial and commercial development in the United States of America, the model republic: "the most effective way of raising the intellectual level of a nation, disseminating education to every social class, is to encourage the habit of reading until it becomes a distinctive feature of character and practice, as it has in Germany and the United States." (Sarmiento 1887–1900a, 396).

In 1876, the Chilean Alfredo Ovalle, responding at that time to advancements in the publishing industry in general and, in particular, to the abundance of periodicals (and within them of serialized fiction), proposed, in an article called "Los libros y los lectores" ("Books and Readers"), that readers should return to the intensive forms of reading one or two essential books and abandon superficial extensive reading: "The widespread belief that all a person has to do is read many books in whatever way is as mistaken as that of a certain political tendency. ... That is why the proverb "Tiene homínis libri" is so true. Who could be wiser than he who truly masters the Holy Bible or who could be a better linguist than he who has conversed more with Cervantes?" (Ovalle 264).

In a related move, Blest Gana, armed with what I have called his "powerful transactional liberalism" (Poblete 1999, 85), proposed to his national public that, instead of accepting the cheap and facile consumerism that the mass French literary publishing industry offered them, they should decide to read a new type of national text. Based on everyday situations and realities that all could appreciate, it would not be prohibitively or discriminately dense; such an approach would permit and demand discerning reading, which would at the same time be more rewarding and entertaining. In sum, he proposed a return to semi-intensive reading, transformed by a nationalist approach: "A menos de ser un libro cuya comprensión demande conocimientos previos y especiales, las producciones de amena literatura encuentran en nuestros ciclos ilustrados una acogida benevolente y cordial" (Blest Gana 1859, 51) ("Unless it is a book that demands previous and special knowledge for its understanding, the production of light literature will find a warm and benevolent welcome in our enlightened circles").

The national novel thus accomplished in practice the ideal of the new "anti-literature" reading of literature that Rousseau had offered his readers. In it, everyday life and the heart of each citizen would be directly exposed (supposedly without the mediation of traditional lettered discourses) to the impression of the word that sought to be as seductive as it was truthful and didactic. For this reason, the national novel, as Blest Gana perceived it, took great care not to demand more than what every Chilean already possessed by the mere fact of belonging to this respectable society. Poetry, in turn, exacted a particular preparation that put it beyond the bounds of many of these citizens:

La novela, con efecto, cuenta entre la generalidad de los lectores, con un número mucho mayor de aficionados que la poesía, porque la primera está al alcance de todos, mientras que para gustar de la segunda, se ha menester de un espíritu más connotatural con los preceptos del arte. ... Mientras que la poesía conserva siempre para él, el valor de la apariencia de las antigüedades idólos cuyo lenguaje era comprensible únicamente a los sacerdotes del culto pagano, la novela por el contrario, tiene un especial encanto para toda clase de inteligencias, habla el lenguaje de todos, pinta cuadros que cada cual puede a su manera comprender y aplicar y lleva la civilización hasta las clases menos cultas de la sociedad, por el atractivo de escenas de la vida ordinaria contadas con un lenguaje fácil y sello. (Blest Gana 1877, 119)

The novel really has many more followers among the common run of readers than poetry, because the former is within everyone's reach, whereas one needs a spirit en las letras de art to enjoy the latter. ... Whereas poetry always gives the appearance to the common people of the ancient idols whose language was comprehensible only to the priests of pagan worship, the novel holds a special charm for all kinds of intelligence, its language is accessible to all, it paints pictures each person can understand and apply in his own way, and it takes civilization to the least educated social classes, on account of the appeal of its scenes drawn from everyday life narrated in simple and easy language.

It is pertinent to note in passing that Blest Gana makes explicit reference to the ecclesiastical, if pagan, control of social discourses and to the contrast between this esotericism and the novel, which he favors.

In a critical article published in 1864 upon the publication of another of Blest Gana's novels, El ideal de un calavera [A Foolish Ideal], Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna summarized the traditional, and still influential, perception among the learned of the day:

La novela se considera, pues, entre consejeros como una impertinencia, como un peligro, casi como un acto de mala educación, y en consecuencia los novelistas pasan por seres raros, mitad pecadores y mitad calaveras, que es preciso mirar con desconfianza, y cuyos libros no pueden leerse sino a hurtadillas, metiéndolos con astuto cuidado dentro de los sendos volúmenes del libro cristiano para que no se enfade la mamá, ni muerda el capitán o la llevara. (239)

We consider the novel an impertinence, a danger, almost an act of bad education, and consequently novelists are perceived as strange beings, half sinners and half scoundrels, who are best looked upon with mistrust and whose books can be read only on the sly, by placing each astutely within a volume of the Christian Year in order to avert mother's wrath or the complaints of housekeeper and priest.
This quotation clarifies several points in our discussion. To begin with, one understands why Blest Gana opened his first novel with that scene in which censorship, pleasure, and reading are interwoven by alluding simultaneously to the dangers and the possibilities that the culture of the period attributed to the novelistic genre. One also perceives up to what point Blest Gana's *costumbres* novel responds to and directly represents one of the Chilean customs that most concerned the Church during this period: the insertion of the private and individual reader of fiction in the formerly quasi-exclusive space of pious texts. The hybrid Blest Gana produced in the didactic novel, then, proceeds "astutely" to legitimize another kind of reading that previously one could only do "on the sly." It thus puts the functions that the Church and State had historically assigned to written discourse and reading in touch with a new literary genre and readership.

Clearly this was not a solution that satisfied everyone. At the other end of the ideological spectrum, Miguel Antonio Caro revealed the point at which the novel as a cultural practice demanded an ideological response on the conservative hand. According to Caro's cultural hierarchy, poetry, as a divinely inspired discourse, was uppermost. For this reason, he stated, when commenting on Jorge Isaacs's (1837–1895) work, that: "Mr. Isaacs is well-known in Colombia and in other Spanish American regions as a novelist and a poet, or, rather, exclusively as a poet, because *Maria* is not a novel (and, if considered such, it would be a bad novel), it is an idyll, a dream of love" (Caro 1962a, 1051). Regretting that Isaacs had not received any financial reward for his poetic work, Caro declared: "After the publication of *Maria* and his *Poesias*; written when he was a spiritualist and believer, Mr. Isaacs has not written a book or anything of literary merit in twenty years. It appears that materialism has sterilized him." And he went on to say: "Sins are committed against the Holy Ghost, and, in another order of ideas, sins are committed against poetry for which there is no forgiveness... This is what we deplore and this is what the muses have not pardoned, because a materialist poet is an antimony, an impossibility" (1962a, 1050–51).

This defense of poetry and attack on the novel and the materialism of the time were, to Caro's mind, the results of a cultural proposition that endeavored to make Colombian education and literature revert to the frame of classical humanism (see Chapter 29 in Volume III). By this model, Greek and Latin poetry, as reinterpreted in a Christian and Catholic vein, was uppermost in the cultural hierarchy and openly met the functions of social distinction based on accumulated cultural capital: "literary studies simultaneously arouse, refine, and enhance intelligence... The illustrious Macaulay established... that classical studies mark the dividing line between gentleman and savage. And could we, without seriously damaging civilization, dispense with this branch of public education, of this salutary corrective to democracies, so prone as they are to vulgarity and disorder?" (Caro 1962c, 1382). The defense of the rare and the select contained within it a desire to recuperate traditional intensive reading. This would, as we saw earlier, act as a corrective resistance, in general terms, to the egalitarian cultural and political pressures that characterized, in Caro's opinion, modern democracies; in particular, it would act as a resistance to the extensive reading typical of "frivolous and light literature addressed to another kind of readership." According to Caro, the devoted and intense reading of studies and the careful deciphering of classical texts were the only reading practices that merited consideration.

Trying once more to create an opposition between the reading of novels and the Catholic reading of religious books, Sarmiento described the traditional learned culture of the Argentinean patriot and lawyer Dalmacio Vélez Sarsfield (1800–1875) in the following way:

Murió sin haber leído una sola novela en toda su vida; y se lamentaba a veces de no entender el libreto de las operas, por no estar en antecedentes del drama que había servido de tema [es decir, por no poder filiarlo a un texto teatral, un procedimiento típico de la cultura letrada tradicional]. Ésta que parece una originalidad en quien tanto tenía el poema épico de Virgilio, que parecería abrir el ánimo a los goce de la imaginación, era sin embargo efecto de un defecto de la antigua educación monárquica de nuestras Universidades. El sentimiento de lo bello no sólo no era cultivado por ningún estudio, sino que quedaba atrofiado el que nos viene de la naturaleza. Las bellas artes, las formas, la imaginación no tuvieron un altar en aquellos claustros de muros blancos y sombrías en que se manchaba la luna, o se repetían autores de derecho o de teología. (Sarmiento 1887–1900c, 312)

He died without having read a single novel in his entire life; and at times he regretted that he could not understand the opera libretti, because he was not familiar with the drama that might have served as the theme [that is, not to be able to affiliate it with a model text, a typical procedure in traditional learned culture]. That which appears to be an originality in a person who so possessed Virgil's epic poem that he seemed to open the spirit to the flights of fancy, was, however, the effect of a defect of ancient monarchical education in our Universities. The sentiment of beauty was not only not cultivated by any study, but also atrophied which comes to us from nature. The fine arts, the forms, the imagination had no altar in those cloistered halls of plain and somber walls behind which Latin was mummered, or authors of law and theology were recited.

To illustrate the effects this kind of reading would have on those who had had no training in traditional humanism, Sarmiento gave the following example:

Dadle a una rúina de quince años un libro de los que llamamos serios. No lo leerá, porque no puede concentrar su móvil atención, porque su inteligencia carece de nociones, y sus ojos no están habituosos a recorrer, sin fatiga y con rapidez, ese entrelazado de letras, de signos y de notas que contiene un libro; y sus ojos se rinden y el sueño los cierra. (1887–1900b, 169)

Give a fifteen-year-old girl one of the books you would call serious. She will not read it, because she cannot focus her wandering attention, because her intelligence lacks the notions and she is not used to running her eyes, tirelessly and rapidly, through that puzzle of words, signs, and notes that a book contains; and her eyes would surrender and sleep would close them.

Nonetheless, the novels published in the newspapers, and thereby accessible to a new and potentially mass public, gave everyone the opportunity to exercise their dulled reading abilities. As a practice of everyday life, the reading of novels developed both intelligence and sensitivity and, in this way, made "civilization" more widely known among those who "sin su aguijón no habrían jamás tomado un libro en las manos" (Sarmiento, 1887–1900b, 160) ("would never have picked up a book without this stimulus").

The Mexican Ignacio M. Altamirano held a similar view:

Las novelas de [Juan] Mateos, cualesquiera que sean los defectos que les eché en cara la crítica, tienen el mérito de popularizar los acontecimientos de nuestra historia nacional, que de otro modo
permanecerían desconocidos a los ojos de la multitud, supuesto que los anales puramente históricos no son fáciles de adquirir por los pobres, ni agreda su lectura por carecer del encanto que la narración novedosa sabe darles. (Altamirano 1699, 265)

Whatever effects the critics might reproach him for, [Juan] Mateos's novels have the merit of popularizing the events of our national history, which the multitude would otherwise know nothing about, since the poor would find it difficult to acquire historical annals and would not enjoy reading them as they lack the enchantment of novelistic narration.

In Mexico in 1868, Altamirano combined the positions of Sarmiento and Blust Gana in his defense of the national novel as an instrument essential to the construction of the nation. Indicating the distance between the traditional and the nationalist conception of the novel, Altamirano wrote:

No hay que decir ahora que la novela es una composición inútil y frívola, de mero pasatiempo, y de cuya lectura no se saca provecho alguno, sino por el contrario, corrupción y estravios... generalmente hablando, la novela ocupa ya un lugar respetable en la literatura, y se siente su influencia en el progreso intelectual y moral de los pueblos modernos. (1868, 70)

There is no reason to say that the novel is a useless and frivolous composition, a mere pastime, from which one cannot derive any benefit; on the contrary, it has a respectable position in literature and one feels its influence on the mental and intellectual progress of modern countries.

Altamirano was alluding, moreover, to a decisive epochal transformation in the transition from patrician societies to national bourgeois societies in Latin America (see Romero 1976). By this I mean the change from the pedagogy, that focused on the Greek and Latin classics and stimulated memorization of their models by repeated reading, to that which gave priority to the citizens' immediate forms of identifying with their national quotidian contexts (see Poblete 1907): "Todo lo útil que nuestros antepasados no podían hacer comprender o estudiar al pueblo bajo formas establecidas desde la Antigüedad, lo pueden hoy los modernos bajo la forma agradable y atractiva de la novela" (Altamirano 1991, 70) "All the useful things that our forefathers could not make the people understand or study in the modes established from the time of Antiquity the moderns can do under the pleasant and attractive mode of the novel".

This methodological change did not really take effect until the positivistic educational reforms at the end of the nineteenth century. Proof of this is that Altamirano felt obliged to add the following appeasing remarks, which reestablished the hierarchies and the traditional differences in the various ways of accumulating cultural capital:

No concluimos este ensayo, sin advertir que nosotros hemos considerado la novela como lectura del pueblo, y hemos juzgado su importancia no por comparación con los otros géneros literarios, sino por la influencia que ha tenido y tendrá todavía en la educación de las masas. La novela es el libro de las masas. Las demás estaciones, desmoldos del atavío de la imaginación, y mejores por eso, sin duda, están reservadas a un círculo más inteligente y más dichoso, porque no tiene necesidad de fábulas y de poesía para sacar de ellos el provecho que de allí. (1991, 76)

We should not conclude this essay before pointing out that we have regarded the novel as reading material for the people and we have judged its importance not by comparing it with other literary genres but by the influence it has exerted and will exert on the education of the masses. The novel is the book of the masses. The other studies, base of the fineries of the imagination, and undoubtedly better for being so, are reserved for a more intelligent and fortunate circle of people, who do not need fables and poetry to derive whatever benefit they wish.

He thus reiterated that conciliatory-conservative gesture made by Alberto Blest Gana in Chile. In discursive and reading formations, even during the transition from the forms of literacy and cultural capital dominated by poetry and the classical writers to others in which journalistic and novelistic prose began to dominate, it appears that the new national intellectuals felt that the safest and most natural attitude was to acknowledge the legitimacy of the former and to be paternalistic toward the latter.

**Other Forms of Reading**

The identification of the shift from the intensive reading of a few texts, often memorized and vocalized, to the extensive and silent reading of many texts, which resulted in the deconsecration of the object and contents read, was one of the factors that permitted Blust Gana to formulate his proposal for a national semi-intensive reading readily accessible to a middle-class readership (or, to put it in other words, within the reach of the cultural capital and the interests of a very broad readership in this national society). This hypothesis of the shift from intensive to extensive reading forms one of three fundamental oppositions in current studies on the history of reading practices (Charter 1995, 143). Another opposition is the identification of the transition, in the Middle Ages in Europe, from a reading in which comprehension presupposes the vocalization of the text to a silent and purely visual reading. The third is between the reading of intimacy, enclosure, and solitude and collective readings in communal spaces. Before concluding this essay, I would like to discuss the third of these briefly within the context of Latin America.

The entry into the world of the silent and solitary reading of the national novel should not blind us to earlier and later reading practices on the continent. I have already mentioned the presence of a form of orality practiced by the elite and of an advanced rhetoric practiced by the indigenous peoples of Mexico (León Portilla 1989). To this we should add the cantopoesy texts preserved in the codex Cantares Mexicanos, and my concern here is to highlight the nature of their codification and performance. Largely a product of the colonial situation during the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the Cantares codified the invocations of ancient history and wisdom in very formal language. John Bierhorst underlines this point by quoting the Spanish missionaries' complaints when faced with the unfathomable esotericism of these cantares. Given their complicated semantic and syntactic structures and the art of the singer-poets or troubadours responsible for interpreting them, the Cantares are an example of the interweaving of poetry, music, dance, and religion that appeared to have characterized many pre-Hispanic cultural manifestations. Bierhorst states: "There is no reliable evidence that Aztec 'poetry' was ever recited apart from music or ever committed to writing for the enjoyment of the silent reader" (42). Miguel León Portilla stresses the symbiotic relation between speech and writing in the so-called reading of the pre-Hispanic Nahua and Mixtec codices learned at school by those aspiring to be elders or priests. The words amoxtoloc (follow the book) and itlapo (narrate or recite that which is contained in it) make León Portilla aware of this complex interdiction and complementarity of memorization based on formal speech.
and of the erudition necessary to decipher based on knowledge of pictographic language (León Portilla 1996, 19-71). The reading performances of the ancient Mexicans recall the historicity of our own acquired forms of textual deciphering and interpretation. That is to say, they indicate both the existence of other ways of reading and the productive character of our relationship with the text. They also reveal a different connection between the body of the reader and the text. For this reason, it is worth stressing the importance of the reader-interpreter in the Nahuatl world and in their conceptualization of sociosemiotic processes (Mignolo 1995, 109-18).

As much for the elders, whose bodies were the vessels of orally transmitted wisdom, as for the young men who had to master the rhetorical art of performance, the relation between body and discourse differed from that of the Europeans whose silent and solitary reading practices began to neutralize their bodies.

Ever since this time and moving on through the excesses of the Baroque fiestas and ceremonies to the nineteenth century, these collective forms of reading and performance would always represent a potential challenge to the domination of the men of letters, the book, and writing privileges on the continent. For example, some Cuban cigar factories introduced the custom towards the end of 1865 of paying a Reader who would read out loud in order to entertain and educate the others as they worked. The Reader's pay came from the contributions of his fellow workers. Under the sociopolitical conditions of Spanish colonialism, the initiative was, however, perceived as an intolerable threat and soon suppressed. The edict prohibiting it stated: "Tolerance of public readings has turned the artisans' meetings into political groups, and this simple and hard-working social class, who do not have the necessary instruction to be able to distinguish and discern the false theories from what is useful, lawful, and just, are easily dazzled and beguiled by the exaggerated interpretation of the doctrines they are listening to" (Fornet 189). Instead of these collective readings, in which the ruling class's semiotic control subsided as the workers' abilities for semantic processing were empowered by their collectivity, the official edict proposed that they should read, in the traditional school context, texts "approved by competent authorities" in which the meaning was intentionally limited: "The reading of books that contain the Christian doctrine, the statutes of good government and the regulations laid down by the authorities, lessons that teach one how to conduct oneself with moderation and courtesy, and treatises written on trades and the arts educate and teach the least privileged classes, making them honest parents and hard-working and useful citizens of the fatherland" (Fornet 189).

The subversive potential of the readings had, quite rightly, been recognized by the authorities. From 1884 to 1896, when they were once again prohibited, these collective readings in the Cuban cigar factories had sprung up once more, now dominated by the anarchic texts of José Llunás, Prondhon, and Bakumin. There were also collective readings in the cigar factories of the Cuban émigrés who were persecuted by the colonial government, in which, as Fornet puts it, they "spread the mamba ideology and created workshops which were true centres of revolutionary national culture" (Fornet 191).

Another phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century that Latin America shared with other regions was the development of written practices for circulating popular literatures. The work of German philologists Rudolf Lenz and Roberto Lehman-Nitsche, among others, has made it possible for us to study these practices today (see Subercaseaux 1988; Prieto). In their quest for specific and characteristic popular practices of precapitalist cultural formations, these nineteenth-century inheritors of the zealous work of collecting data undertaken by such colonial missionaries as Fray Bernando de Sahagún, compiled toward the end of the nineteenth century important collections of printed matter circulated among and consumed by the masses. This practice repeated, with significant modifications, the complex process of writing down, producing, and preserving the pre-Hispanic and colonial indigenous legacy. The written transcriptions enabled them to get in touch with different cultural traditions and modes of thought and circulation. Among the differences, I should highlight the popular origin of most of the producers and consumers and the mass character of the loose sheets, leaflets, collections of songs to "sing with guitar accompaniment," novels, and newspaper serials.

Like the reading in the cigar factories, different forms of appropriation and consumption of printed texts coexisted and complemented each other. On the one hand, the campaign for literacy promoted and capitalized upon by Sarmiento, Bleet Cana, Allamirano, and the other nation builders started to produce mass results. There thus emerged a growing sector of popular urban readers who demanded alternative literature and made its production possible. Although often read silently, this literature represented a fusion of many heterogeneous discursive traditions, among which the learned discourse of the elite was only one component. On the other hand, these collections are one of several sources that make us aware of the existence and scope of the collective performances and reading of popular discourses. They reflect the impact of printing and publishing on urban and rural spaces through the mass production of loose sheets and song books containing ten-line stanzas, lines celebrating God and man, milongas, vidalitas, and improvised verse duels between minstrels such as the payadas de contra-punto. These discursive types gave birth to what Guillermo Sunkel has called "poetic journalism" (the events of the day are narrated in verse) and "journalism without readers" (generally recited to an illiterate audience). In the twentieth century this became the industrialized world's sensationalist popular press, which exploited many of these popular themes, languages, and styles (Sunkel 80). Finally, we should not forget: the literatura de cordon (so named because of the cord it hung from when on sale) from the Northeast of Brazil. With historical origins similar to those of the Argentinean and Chilean songs and payadas, the Northeastern folhetos now enjoy mass distribution as a result of the strength of the publishing markets. Written in verse following the metric pattern of the sextilho (a stanza of six heptameters), these folhetos represent a popular combination of the possibilities of the written word, performance, and oral transmission. The so-called reading audiences of the literatura de cordon, who hear it at public readings or rural fairs, delight in its characteristic oral rendering: "Although a rise in the national literacy rate means that more people can now read folhetos, many still prefer the oral experience... [A] sizable percentage continues to read the story aloud even when they are alone. Many persons can memorize parts or even whole folhetos after reading them or even after hearing them. Individuals who prefer a group reading situation also tend to prefer a live poet to recordings of cordon tales" (Slater 34). Like the other forms of collective reading I have mentioned, cordon literature demonstrates the historical existence of reading and interpretative
practices that relativize the apparently ahistorical naturalness of our silent, visual, solitary, and static reading practice.

Conclusion
Pedro Henríquez Ureña underlines the great concern for education on the continent after Independence and the postcolonial process of the nineteenth century by stating in his Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica [A Concise History of Latin American Culture, 1966]: “In different places it was stipulated [at that time] that the converts should teach the people to read and write, as they had in the sixteenth century, but had subsequently neglected to do” (59). Although this is clearly a rhetorical exaggeration, it serves here as a final justification for my privileging of (only) two moments in the long history of the Americas. Besides the practical reasons mentioned at the beginning, these are two moments in which reading and writing emerge with greatest strength as important technologies in the formation of submissive subjects, worshippers, and/or citizens. During both moments, the State and the Church recognized the need to regulate the production and circulation of discourses and the forms of their deployment and interpretation. As we have seen, their attempt to do this meant they had to control social semiosis and some of the productive forms through which this was expressed; in other words, they controlled texts and reading practices. In the nineteenth century, a third element, the publishing market, complicated the earlier measures taken, because it put the relation between text and reader within the reach of a growing and increasingly diverse range of social subjects. The popular publishing market and the alternative reading practices arising from it “made it possible,” in Martín Barbero’s opinion, “for the popular classes to move from speech to writing and to change folklore into popular lore” (1987, 111).

The whole process was, of course, only possible so long as there was a continual rise in schooling and literacy rates throughout the nineteenth century. Newland has calculated that for the whole of Spanish America (the figures are higher in the large cities and for such countries as Argentina and Chile) the literacy rates, that is, reading and writing, are the following: “less than 10 per cent in 1800...15 per cent in 1850 and 27 per cent in 1900” (Newland 361). During the second half of the nineteenth century, the relative expansion of education and the eventual growth in the publishing market stimulated new forms of cultural appropriation that led to transformations in the symbolic hierarchies that had characterized discursive and reader formations until that time. Two cultural models became engaged in what would be a lengthy controversy, which in many places only ended with the positivistic educational reforms toward the end of the century, and in others continued until well into the twentieth century. I am referring here to two cultural macro-mechanisms in which reading and the relation between subject and text play a crucial role: on the one hand, the imitation of classical paradigms; on the other, the pseudo-individualizing and expressive subjectivization. The former consisted in internalizing and reproducing what was considered an atemporal, superior, and hierarchical model expressed in carefully chosen language (that is, the highly stratified cultural formation). An example of this mechanism is the evangelizing mission of the Church, whose forms run the gamut from the authoritarian and hierarchical relation (mediated by formal ecclesiastical language) between the faithful and the sacred text to the quasi-religious veneration of Greek and Roman humanistic culture on the part of the Catholic conservatives of the nineteenth century. The latter seeks, by means of less exclusive means and styles, a personal response located in nationalized time and spaces in reader and pupil (that is, the democratic and national cultural formations). Typical of this mechanism is the educational effort made on the part of the emerging nation-states to prepare citizens through a deep-rooted sense of their local cultural space. This was what Sarmiento responded to when campaigning for mass literacy, as did Alberto Blest and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano in their national novels. In both macro-mechanisms of cultural production, the Church, the State, and individual subjects tried to determine the ways in which texts could legitimately be deployed. These technologies of reading thus aspired, in a specific time and space, to control the semiosis of these texts, which, though potentially limitless, was historically constrained.

When discussing the possibilities and limitations of this new emphasis on readers and audiences in cultural and media studies, Jesús Martín Barbero maintains that, on the one hand, “the reinstatement of the subject as a receiver has foregrounded the existence in our society of alternative cultural forms and matrices to those of the hegemony, alternatives to the enlilite and ascetic culture of the book, such as popular cultures” (Martín Barbero 1997, 9-10), thereby creating a great potential for cultural democracy in Latin America. On the other hand, it is certainly true that “the questioning of the idea of the omnipotent sender cannot be confused or compared with neo-liberal ideology which deceivedly attributes all power to the consumer” and has made it impossible for society and State to make any political intervention in the regulation of production” (Martín Barbero 1997, 9). Similarly, in one of the key books on the theoretical reformulation of what Armand and Michelle Mattelart call “the return of the subject” (Mattelart and Mattelart 1988, 92), Néstor García Canclini expresses his concern about the possibility of confusing “media decentralization” (a growth in the supply of symbolic commodities that target and appeal to different audiences) with “media deregulation.” Media deregulation implies that, as the state withdraws from or is withdrawn from the cultural public sphere, the transnational and monopolistic corporations split both the supply of symbolic consumer goods and access to them into unequal segments (Garcia Canclini 1990, 347). In these circumstances, the study of mediations cannot afford to forget to analyze the properties, structure, and orientation of the media, or, as the Mattelarts put it: “A paradigm [such as that of the return of the subject] so full of potential for redesigning the social [cannot be used] to legitimize a techno-cractic project” (Mattelart and Mattelart 1997, 109).

In an attempt to eschew the Scylla and Charybdis of cultural studies, that is to say, the emphasis laid on structures and institutions and on subjects, I have proposed here an historical and theoretical study of the role of reading and readership in two moments in the history of Latin American literature. For this reason, it seemed important to outline the relations between the macro-agents that attempt to define the socially legible spaces (Church, State, and market) and the micro-agents or receivers who engage in historically specific reading practices in those written social spaces that we call texts.

Translation by Charlotte Broad

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