
Deborah Cohn*
Indiana University, Bloomington

This essay explores the positions of Mexico's intelligentsia on the nation's choice of cultural models during the 1950s and 1960s. It traces the consolidation of a hegemonic group of intellectuals who sought to establish a cosmopolitan definition of Mexican culture, and it studies the media and institutions that they used to disseminate their views. It also studies the relationship between the cosmopolitan intellectuals and the State. On the one hand, their internationalism dovetailed with Mexico's political and economic strategies after World War II; on the other, both their projects and their freedom of expression were sometimes supported and sometimes restricted by the State.

Este artículo estudia las posiciones tomadas por un grupo de intelectuales mexicanos respecto a los modelos culturales a seguir durante los 50 y 60. Se deslinda la consolidación de un grupo hegemónico de intelectuales que abogaban por una visión cosmopolita de la cultura nacional, y se estudian los medios y las instituciones por medio de los cuales se diseminaba esta visión.

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También se analiza la relación entre los intelectuales cosmopolitas y el Estado: por un lado, la orientación internacionalista de aquéllos reflejaba estrategias políticas y económicas oficiales después la segunda Guerra Mundial; por otro, los proyectos y la libertad de expresión de la inteligencia a veces fueron apoyados y a veces restringidos por el aparato estatal.

From the end of the Mexican Revolution through most of the twentieth century, constructions of *lo mexicano* alternated between a State-supported cultural nationalism and a critical cosmopolitanism embraced by many of the nation’s intellectuals. From the late 1940s through the late 1960s in particular, a period that marked the height of national self-exploration in the form of the debate over *mexicanidad*, the latter vision prevailed: a tightly-knit group of internationalizing intellectuals dominated cultural production through their monopoly of popular and elite media, seeking to legitimate a cosmopolitan definition of Mexican culture. From the late 1950s on, this group was referred to (often by writers who could not break into it) as “la mafia,” a designation that was immortalized by Luis Guillermo Piazza in his eponymous 1967 novel. It was primarily comprised of young writers who were, for the most part, born in the 1920s and early 1930s and who began participating in na-

1. As early as 1957, for example, Elías Nandino and Alfredo Hurtado, editors of *Estaciones: Revista literaria de México* (1956–1960), declared that one of their journal’s goals was to combat “la crítica de mafia y de mutuo halago, tratando, a la vez, de extinguir las políticas de grupos que tanto daño hacen al genuino desenvolvimiento de nuestra literatura.” Elías Nandino and Alfredo Hurtado, “Palabras preliminares [II],” *Estaciones* 2, no. 5 (Spring 1957): 3. See Kristine Vanden Berghe’s discussion of “la mafia” in her unpublished M.A. thesis, “La Cultura en México (1959–1972) en dos suplementos: ‘México en la Cultura’, de *Novedades* y ‘La Cultura en México’, de *Siempre!’” (University of Leuven, 1989), 20–30. I am grateful to Vanden Berghe for providing me with a copy of her work, which offers a careful study of the field of cultural production in Mexico City through the lens of these two supplements, and which complements many of the issues that I discuss in this study.

2. These fields correspond to what Bourdieu has labeled the “field of large-scale production,” or “popular” culture and the “field of restricted production,” or “high” culture, respectively. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by Randal Johnson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995). 39. It should be noted that, while the group’s work appeared in media accessible to a general public, it tended to focus more on “high” culture than on the “popular” culture that was quickly making inroads into Mexican culture during this period with the introduction of television, radio, film, etc. Carlos Monsiváis stands out as an exception to this trend, for he has long written about television and treated popular culture in general as a serious critical phenomenon.
tional culture in the 1950s. A general sense of group identity and cohesion developed among them as they worked together at numerous periodicals and literary establishments during the 1950s and 1960s, often under the leadership of more established writers, most notably Fernando Benítez, Jaime García Terrés, and Octavio Paz. Their affiliations with these cultural institutions, in fact, formed part of the group’s identity, and they are often collectively referred to as the “generación de Medio Siglo” or the “generación de la Casa del Lago.” While monopolizing periodicals, publishing houses, and the media in general, this group advocated internationalism, set the standards for literary canonization, and, in effect, determined the course of Mexican culture by deciding who and what was “in” or “out.” After a brief discussion of key issues in the study of the intelligentsia, the State, and model(s) of national identity, my study will begin with an overview of the development of the cosmopolitanism-nationalism debate of the 1930s and 1940s and the changing socio-political context that it engaged, which sets the stage for the development of a hegemonic avant-garde intelligentsia. Next, I look at the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on the process and means of legitimation of the internationalizing construction of Mexican culture and of the intel-

3. Both Benítez (born in 1910) and Paz (born in 1914) were members of what Enrique Krauze calls the “generación de 1929.” See “Cuatro estaciones de la cultura mexicana,” in Enrique Krauze, La historia cuenta. (México: Tusquets Editores México, S.A., 1998) and had already published widely and established their reputations by the time the younger writers were beginning their careers.

4. The former designation is often used to refer to the group of young writers affiliated with the journal Medio Siglo (1951–1957); its membership varies, though, depending on the critic. Armando Pereira identifies this group as including Inés Arredondo, Héberto Batis, Juan García Ponce, Jorge Ibargüengoitia, Juan Vicente Melo, Sergio Pitó, and Carlos Valdés. “La generación del medio siglo: un momento de transición de la cultura mexicana,”Literatura mexicana 6, no. 1 (1995): 200. Others include Arredondo, Salvador Elizondo, García Ponce, Melo, Pacheco, and Pitó. See Juan García Ponce y la generación de medio siglo (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1998). Krauze’s list is the most inclusive, identifying the following writers, scholars, and artists: Arredondo, Batis, Emmanuel Carballo, Emilio Carballido, Rosario Castellanos, José de la Colina, Amparo Dávila, Elizondo, Margit Frenk, Carlos Fuentes, Jaime García Terrés, García Ponce, Margo Glantz, Juan José Gurrola, Ibargüengoitia, Vicente Leñero, Melo, Piazza, Pitó, Vicente Rojo, Tomás Segovia, and Gabriel Zaid, among others. Krauze, “‘Cuatro estaciones,’” 183–84. Batis essentially equates the “generation” with himself and the members of the Dirección de Difusión Cultural (DDC) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which I shall discuss presently: Juan José Arreola, Carballo, Fuentes, García Ponce, Gurrola, Melo, José Emilio Pacheco, and Segovia. Interview by author, Mexico, June 19, 2000. He further avows that “una cosa . . . elitista en gustos: una defensa de los valores literarios, vengan de donde vengan; un repudio a lo nacionalista, a lo oficialista, a lo ‘mexicano’ . . . es lo que a nosotros nos unió más,” quoted in Sergio González Levet, Letras y opiniones (Mexico: Ediciones Punto y Aparte, 1980, 39. The Casa del Lago was part of the DDC, and will be discussed when I describe the group’s activities.
lectual infrastructure underlying and promoting it—that is, on the con-
solidation over time of this avant-garde intelligentsia’s authority as ar-
biters of cultural legitimacy with the power to determine the course of
the debate.

The influence and cultural agency of the Mexican intelligentsia are
far-reaching. They have long had a direct impact on government and pol-
icy and, in turn, have themselves been influenced by the field of power:
at times critical, at times complicit, they have pressured the government
to effect change, been tempted into publicly supporting its policies, and/
or have been forced into silence. Throughout much of the twentieth cen-
tury, their activities were sometimes encouraged and sometimes hindered
by the internal and external policies of each president. To this day, politi-
cians in general are often advised by intellectuals; they also are taught by
and study with them throughout all levels of their education. Former Pres-
ident Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) in particular capitalized upon the ties
linking intellectuals and the State by cultivating a coterie of intellectuals
who would accompany him on his travels and by fostering good will by
setting up a system of grants supporting artistic activity. Vicente Fox sim-
ilarly enlisted Jorge Castañeda for his presidential campaign in 2000 as a
means of gaining access to and the support of the audience that Castañeda,
as a public intellectual, could reach; Fox has since given positions in his
government to Castañeda and numerous other writers in order to culti-
vate these ties. Over the years, intellectuals’ access to educators and the
reading public has allowed them to disseminate their political views and
preferences quite widely. Starting in the late 1940s, their ability to broad-
cast their vision of *lo mexicano* and the attendant criteria for identifying
“good literature” had significant implications for the question of cano-
nezation, for the ascendance of an avant garde with an upper-class, cosmo-
politan sensibility entailed a process of selection whereby authors, move-
ments, and themes were blocked from attaining canonical status, while
numerous issues and social groups were elided altogether from contem-
porary formulations of national and regional identity.  

5. The identity constructions that I examine in this paper were clearly formulated
by an elite whose notions of “the literary” and “the national” were based on exclusive as-
sumptions that reflected their own interests and ultimately reproduced their privileged
place in the cultural hierarchy. As I discuss here, the debates about *lo mexicano* were
dominated by masculine voices. Also, despite the centrality of the discourse of *mestizaje*
to official national and cultural identity politics from the Revolution on, and despite the
reappraisal of indigenous culture and history and the attendant literary movement known
as indigenism (represented by authors such as Rosario Castellanos), the sensibility reflected
in the literature that dominated the market during this period is largely creole, upper-class,
and cosmopolitan. As Anne Doremus has argued, neither Samuel Ramos nor Octavio Paz
“considered mestizaje a significant factor in the development of the national character. In
Gender in particular played a critical role in the process of elaborating both lo mexicano and notions of “good literature.” As critics such as Jean Franco (Plotting Women) and Robert Irwin have argued, for years constructions of Mexican identity were essentially gendered masculine. In 1934, Samuel Ramos wrote El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, a foundational essay that sparked a debate on the topic of mexicanidad that dominated cultural polemics for the next three decades. As Irwin notes, “through Ramos, masculinity became the central issue in discourse on lo mexicano.” The imbrication of masculinity and constructions of national identity continued in the work of one of Ramos’s greatest interlocutors, Octavio Paz. In El laberinto de la soledad, Paz asserted that Mexican men consider themselves to be “hijos de la Malinche” and “hijos de la chingada” who “must continually overcome the conquest of Mexico by asserting their masculinity and proving themselves to be grandes chingones.” But even as Ramos’s and Paz’s essays cemented certain gender stereotypes, they also prompted new questionings thereof, and from the 1940s onward, notions of gender, gender roles, and national gender stereotypes underwent significant transformations in both society and literature.

It should not be surprising, then, that for much of the twentieth century the actual dynamics of the group of intellectuals that I study in this paper were also dominated by masculine gender paradigms. As I noted before, well-established male writers such as Benítez, García Terrés, Paz, and Alfonso Reyes founded journals, headed cultural institutions, and supported and promoted the younger generation of writers who rose to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, though, several women writers began to gain recognition during these years, most of their view, indigenous culture made little impact on the Mexican psyche.” Doremus, “Indigenism, Mestizaje, and National Identity in Mexico during the 1940s and the 1950s,” MS/EM 17, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 384. I would suggest that this assessment also applies to many of the writers of the group that I discuss in this paper. The efforts and underlying assumptions of this group thus need to be studied because they represent the invisible literary history of the period and had a determining effect on the process of literary canonization.

6. See, in particular, the introduction and chapter 4 of Robert McKee Irwin, Mexican Masculinities (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

7. Ibid., 189. See 187-93 for further elaboration of this topic.


noticeably Rosario Castellanos, Elena Garro, and Elena Poniatowska, among other writers, journalists, actors, painters, and activists; there was also a journal, Rehilete, published solely by women. The situation has continued to change, and while circumstances are hardly ideal, today women writers and intellectuals occupy more public positions and prominent roles in the literary community, and are published much more widely. The feminist movement played an important role in this process by giving women writers a sense of empowerment and entitlement to participate as equals in what had been a male-dominated system. The political radicalism of the late 60s—and, in particular, the student movement and the backlash against it—was absolutely crucial to these changes as well. During this period, as I shall show, increasing political centralization (and crackdowns) precipitated decentralization in the intellectual community; paradoxically, new publications and opportunities proliferated, and literary groups such as that headed by Paz—while remaining extremely influential—no longer represented the only direction in Mexican cultural debates. Also, as Jean Franco writes, “the critique of official nationalism, particularly after 1968, opened a space for women’s writing of which they took full advantage...to show the articulation of patriarchy and nationalism.”

The Origins of the Debate: The 1930s and 1940s

The identity debates of the mid-twentieth century were sparked in the 1930s, when a host of issues conspired to increase national pride and introspection even as Mexico’s culture industry became irrevocably intertwined with that of Spanish America and the West. Ramos was fun-
damental in this process. He posited in *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* that Mexicans suffered collectively from an inferiority complex that they needed to overcome in order to successfully resist foreign cultural influences and participate in the modern world more effectively. He criticized the excessive reliance on and imitation of European culture in the efforts at developing a national identity at the same time that he acknowledged the importance of European models to Mexican history and culture. During these same years, the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) inspired a period of intense nationalistic pride and confidence in Mexico's capabilities. Additionally, Cárdenas's support for the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War (in which he saw the idealism and spirit that had originally characterized Mexico's own Revolution) and his welcoming of Republican refugees had lasting consequences for Mexico's cultural orientation and infrastructure. In 1938, for example, the Casa de España (which became the Colegio de México in 1940) was founded, giving a home to many prominent scholars. Also, the exiles were quickly integrated into the nation's intellectual life, participating actively in its numerous cultural media and cliques and infusing it with European cultural currents, as well as an acute consciousness of events in Spain and the rest of Europe.12 As Danny Anderson points out, the Civil War also radically altered the patterns of publishing in Spain.

ish: it weakened Spain’s book industry, creating a need to supply the Iberian and Spanish-American markets. Along with several publishers in Argentina, the Fondo de Cultura Económica, founded in 1934, was well-positioned to step in and fill the void. It is difficult nowadays to imagine a publisher as a major player in a nation’s cultural life, but that has been precisely the Fondo’s role. For many years, the Fondo was the pride and joy of the nationalists and cosmopolitanists alike: as I shall detail presently, it promoted new and traditional Mexican writers in order to disseminate knowledge of the nation’s literature; it published editions of great works of Western literature in the hopes of sharing Western culture with the Mexican reading public; and it took a proactive role in circulating works written in different Spanish American nations as part of a widespread project of developing and establishing a pan-Spanish American identity, a sense of the region as united by a common past and a shared destiny. In its list of publications, the interest in promoting Mexican history and culture converged for several decades with the desire to move Mexico into an international cultural arena.

The cultural buoyancy of this period spilled over into the 1940s and 1950s, when Mexico experienced a period of modernization, growth, economic strength, and its greatest political stability since the Porfirato. The population began to increase, virtually doubling between 1940 and 1960; waves of immigrants moved from rural areas to the cities, dramatically altering the nation’s demographics; and the nation’s literacy rate jumped from 46% to 66.5% during this same period, resulting in a much bigger audience for literature and mass media, the creation of numerous new presses, and, ultimately, larger editions of published works. Also, while the United States’ and Europe’s attention was turned towards Europe during World War II, overall, Mexico’s economy was strengthened: exports rose 100% between 1939 and 1945, while imports declined. And as cultural contact (including imports such as books and...
journals) with Europe and the United States diminished, the nation (along
with others in Latin America) began to rely more heavily on its own re-
sources. The resulting national confidence was reflected in the cultural
effervescence of the period. The intellectual infrastructure expanded as
literary journals reflecting both nationalist and cosmopolitan interests
proliferated. To give but a few examples: Antonio Castro Leal, a promi-
nent critic and cultural traditionalist, directed the short-lived Revista de
literatura mexicana; and Paz, Efraín Huerta, Rafael Solana, and several
others founded Taller (1938–1941), while Ali Chumacero, José Luis Marti-
zez, Leopoldo Zea, and Jorge González Durán published Tierra Nueva
(1940–1942), journals that sought a balance between tradition and the
avant-garde. Also, in 1942, Cuadernos Americanos—the “vocero del
nacionalismo literario,” according to Carlos Monsiváis—was founded in
Mexico. This journal had an enormous impact on the professionalization
of the study of Latin America, providing a venue for scholarly work on
the region in much the same way that the Fondo de Cultura had recently
opened up opportunities for the publication of academic and literary
works on Mexico and Latin America. It fostered the developing sense of
a transregional identity, contributing to the integration of Mexican aca-
demia into a Latin American sphere, even as its “continental policy” tended
to overlook European and U.S. ideas and events.

The presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) was committed to eco-
nomic development and strengthening the nation’s infrastructure through
large scale industrialization and a number of large public works projects.
Alemán actively set out to cultivate relations with other developed nations,
wooing foreign capital in general and U.S. capital in particular. (During
the course of his presidency, Alemán met with President Truman twice,
once in Washington and once when Truman visited Mexico City.) Al-
though relations between Mexico and the United States had been strained

18. See Sara Sefchovich’s México país de ideas, país de novelas (Mexico: Grijalbo,
1987), especially pages 141–181, for a discussion of these and other changes and currents
accompanying the modernization that characterized Mexico from the 1950s through the
1970s; specifically, she discusses the cosmopolitanism of these years as a cultural corol-
ary to the processes of development and industrialization that were transforming Mex-
ico’s social and political spheres, a search for cultural autonomy that parallels the quest
for economic sufficiency through modernization.

19. José Luis Martinez and Christopher Dominguez Michael, La literatura mexicana
del siglo XX (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1995), 189.

20. Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas sobre la cultura mexicana en el siglo XX,” in Historia

21. John Brushwood notes that Octavio Barreda has identified a desire to counter-
balance this regional emphasis as one of the reasons motivating his founding of El hijo-
pródigo in 1943. Brushwood, Narrative Innovation and Political Change in Mexico (New
York: Peter Lang, 1989, 36.
during Cárdenas’s presidency, Mexico was an important U.S. ally during the Second World War, and as Cold War tensions mounted, the United States actively promoted and supported economic ties to its southern neighbor. Mexico’s efforts at industrialization benefitted from U.S. funds and loans from the Export-Import Bank, as well as from close ties to U.S. business interests; tourism became an important source of foreign exchange; and trade relations in general increased between the two nations. The foundations of Mexico’s “economic miracle” were thus laid even as the United States gained increasing control over the nation’s economy.

In this manner, State policies and political relations created an increasingly international context for cultural activity, a context that continued during the presidencies of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952–1958) and Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964), who continued Alemán’s policy of promoting foreign investment in Mexico. Cultural development also received many official stimuli under Alemán: the Bellas Artes Department of the Secretaría de Educación Pública was reorganized in late 1946 into the more autonomous Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) as part of what Alemán saw as the state’s “obligación nacional de impulsar el arte”;\(^\text{22}\) also, ground was broken for a newer and larger campus for the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Ciudad Universitaria (CU) in the south of the city, where the campus remains today.\(^\text{23}\) These years also witnessed a widespread surge of interest in the nation’s past and present: the Instituto Nacional Indigenista was founded in 1948, and the Instituto de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana in 1953; great archeological discoveries at Palenque, Tulum, Tula, and many other ruins were made, and in 1949, the discovery of the remains of Cuauhtémoc set off a national furor.

**El laberinto de la soledad and the Consolidation of the Cosmopolitan Position**

Octavio Paz’s landmark *El laberinto de la soledad*, first published in 1950, was both emblematic of and itself marked a key moment in the...

\(^{22}\) Quoted in *Dos años y medio del INBA I* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1950), 15. The goals that the INBA set for itself reveal that it, too, was profoundly marked by the debate over nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Institutional reports identify these objectives as: “lograr una producción propia . . . informarse en una experiencia universal para mayor ensanchamiento de la propia personalidad . . . [e] impedir un localismo cerrado tanto como evitar la absorción de lo propio por lo ajeno.” *Dos años y medio, 18.* As “la institución nacionalista por excelencia,” the State’s role in this process would be to pursue: “I. El desarrollo de un arte propio. II. El conocimiento del arte universal. III. La protección del arte nacional.” Ibid.

\(^{23}\) The CU was inaugurated in 1952, just before Alemán left office, although it did not open until 1956.
consecration of the cosmopolitanist discourse on Mexican identity and
culture. Paz himself, of course, was a key player in Mexican cultural ac-
tivity during this period. While he was often abroad, he continued to
support intellectuals in Mexico in many ways, as well as exposing them
to new trends in Western and Eastern cultures. As Huberto Batis re-
calls, Paz “conoce a los surrealistas, viene a México y nos habla de los
surrealistas . . . También nos habla de la poesía japonesa porque va a
Japón . . . Entonces, nos está trayendo el mundo . . . Es un agente
exógeno que nos está trayendo siempre virus extranjerizantes . . . Siem-
pre tiene la ventana abierta al mundo y nos enseña a mirar hacia afuera
y no estar solos y encerrados aquí.” Works such as Libertad bajo pal-
abra and El arco y la lira served as touchstones for crystalizing the ideas
of the younger generation of writers. In El laberinto de la soledad, Paz
put forth a vision of lo mexicano that embraced the nation’s au-
tochthonous heritage and Western influences alike. In particular, he
identified solitude as one of the defining traits of the Mexican character,
tracing its origins to both the nation’s own historical experiences and
the social and political dynamics of the post-World War II era. While soli-
tude was, on the one hand, alienating by definition, it was nevertheless
a bridge that joined Mexicans to everyone else in the postwar “night-
mare of history,” in which the playing field between the West (as me-
tropolis, center, “civilization”) and the many marginalized—frequently,
former colonial—nations was now seen as having been leveled: “Hoy el
centro, el núcleo de la sociedad mundial, se ha disgregado y todos nos
hemos convertido en seres periféricos, hasta los europeos y los norteam-
ericanos. Todos estamos al margen porque ya no hay centro.” Paz’s re-
lated assertion that “Somos, por primera vez en nuestra historia, con-
temporáneos de todos los hombres” is a dominant leitmotif not just of
his essay but of Mexican literature and literary criticism of this period
in general, as well as of what is known as the “Boom” in Spanish Amer-
ican literature, in which authors such as Carlos Fuentes as well as Julio
Cortázar, José Donoso, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa
first rose to fame in the United States, Europe, and beyond. With the

24. After Paz’s return to Mexico in the early 1970s, he took on an even more criti-
cal role in building cultural institutions such as Plural and Vuelta and the networks
that these encompassed.
25. Batis, interview.
26. Octavio Paz, El laberinto de la soledad, edited by Enrico Mario Santi (Madrid:
 Cátedra, 1993), 317.
27. Paz, Laberinto, 340. Time and again, this phrase or a variation thereof was used
proudly in Boom criticism; it was as much a comment on the quality of the literature be-
ing produced as it was a mechanism for claiming a place for the field within the interna-
tional literary mainstream.
West in crisis, Mexico, Latin America, and the periphery in general were viewed as having the chance to become agents, rather than objects, of historical and cultural change.28

Paradoxically, the overturning of the West’s traditional power relations did not challenge the preeminent role afforded to its culture. On the contrary, Paz, like the other figures discussed in this study, considered this to be a time when Mexico and other developing nations were well-positioned to enter the West’s cultural mainstream (couched here and elsewhere as “universal” culture and/or history). The following characterization by Paz of *El laberinto*—but one of many similar descriptions—responds to precisely this goal:29 he maintained that the essay was

un esfuerzo por desentrañar el sentido de nuestra relación con el mundo y . . . por situarnos en el mundo . . . dentro de la corriente histórica mundial (no ya como objetos sino, así sea parcialmente, como agentes de los cambios que se esperan en todo el planeta). En contra de las ideas de Ramos no sólo rechazo la posibilidad . . . de una ‘filosofía mexicana’ sino que afirmo expresamente que la historia de México-o sea: nuestra vida concreta-desemboca en la Historia Universal. Nada más alejado del nacionalismo—y de su reverso: el cosmopolitismo—de la generación anterior. (Para mí el nacionalismo válido es otro y está abierto al mundo.)30

In the conjunction of the local and the universal, then, he identified a path that he hoped would lead the nation out forever from behind what José Luis Cuevas deemed the “cortina de nopal” and into solidarity with the rest of the world.


29. Paz’s acknowledgment of Ramos as an “estímulo” for *El laberinto* but a lesser influence than Leopoldo Zea and Alfonso Reyes similarly emblematizes this paradigm. Paz distinguished his work from that of Ramos by couching it in terms that affirmed his outward-looking stance, claiming that his predecessor “hace un análisis psicoanalítico de un tipo aislado y omite el examen histórico, la vida de relación (es decir, estudia al mexicano como individuo, no en su historia . . .) . . . [ni] se ocupa de la historia de México ni de la relación vital de los mexicanos con ciertas ideologías universales; finalmente, no le interesa situarnos en el mundo . . . nuestra Revolución es un fragmento de la ola de revoluciones del siglo veinte que desemboca en la Historia Universal.” “Respuesta; y algo más,” *México en la Cultura*, February 25, 1960: 2.

An International Vision in Literature, Criticism, and Publishing

Paz’s vision was, as I have suggested, widely shared. In fact, the presence—specifically, fusion—of Western and autochthonous cultural traditions in works published during the 1950s and 1960s became the determining criterion for literary canonization, as well as the basis for a new critical paradigm that served the cosmopolitanists as a key strategy of legitimation. It should be clarified that cosmopolitanism was never meant to be a means of eluding Mexico and its problems, and nationalists and cosmopolitanists alike shared a deep concern for the nation and for resolving its difficulties. Nevertheless, the two camps tended to view one another as polar opposites, and on several occasions during the twentieth century, they directly lashed out at one another: authors such as Ermilo Abreu Gómez and even the State itself accused the cosmopolitanists of being extranjerizantes and condemned them for turning their backs on Mexico, while the latter, in turn, recriminated the former for being culturally nearsighted and for preventing the nation from assuming its rightful place in the Western community. While advocates of cosmopolitanism were artepuristas who promoted the ideal of a literature grounded in aesthetic principles, they nevertheless felt that their commitment to revolutionary art would produce progressive works. They believed that the greatest challenge facing Mexican culture was surmounting a nationalist tendency that (to use their

31. Luis Villoro’s “La cultura mexicana de 1910 a 1960,” Historia Mexicana 10, no. 2 (October–December, 1960) demonstrates the powerful hold of this paradigm on cultural historians as well. The article both traces the course of the debate between nationalism and cosmopolitanism from 1910 to 1960 and is a product of it. In his assessment of this trajectory as one of gradual liberation from an inauthentic culture that does not reflect the nation’s reality and that must be shattered in order to return to the society’s authentic origins (see especially, Ibid., 197–200), Villoro further reveals his strong debt to Paz’s philosophies. The Mexican Revolution, Villoro writes, “parece un rasgo de un movimiento continental que la abarca . . . también forma parte del proceso mundial más decisivo de estos años: la revolución agraria y de liberación nacional de los países dependentes” while the novel “abandona los temas locales, o los trata a modo de instancias de temas humanos generales.” Ibid., 217, 218. He concludes, moreover, that the Revolution’s most precious gift to the intelligentsia was to “hacer posible la apropiación de la cultura universal, sin perder autenticidad.” Ibid., 219; italics in original.

32. As Vanden Berghe observes, these authors claimed that “el escritor comprometido con su lenguaje . . . artisticamente revolucionario, no puede menos que escribir una obra con repercusiones socialmente progresistas.” Vanden Berghe, “La cultura,” 94. Those following this current, however, avoided using the term “arte puro” to describe themselves, presumably for fear of being labeled “torremarfilista” or inconsequential. Vanden Berghe, “La cultura,” 93.
most frequent metaphors) strove to preserve a Mexican “essence” from “contamination” by erecting walls that would protect it from foreign influences. Instead, they felt that other traditions offered tools that did not violate this spirit but, rather, could be appropriated and assimilated in a manner that allowed them to convey the nation’s history, experiences, and identity. Thus cosmopolitanism was intended to open Mexican culture up to new influences that would contribute to the formation of a modern national identity and allow Mexico to participate more fully in the international cultural arena. To this end, the group promoted works that they considered to be representative of this view of Mexican literature not just as Mexican but as “universal”—and, often, Spanish American—as well. That is, for them, “Mexicanness” was not a circumscribed, national or nationalist quality, but, in keeping with their internationalizing emphasis, continuous with regional and Western cultural production. It was hoped that this emphasis would assist the nation in developing a modern identity and participating more fully in the international arena. Thus did the intelligentsia deliberately parallel in the cultural arena the Western(izing) orientation of the politics and economics that were implemented by a series of presidents during this period.

An example of the efforts to legitimate the intersection of cosmopolitan ideals and national concerns may be seen in the reception of the 1953 publication of La poesía mexicana moderna, a much-awaited anthology edited by Antonio Castro Leal, a representative of the old guard in criticism. In 1954, Octavio Paz published a scathing review of the anthology: he criticized the work for its omissions—Castro Leal included primarily nineteenth-century writers in his collection of “modern” poets—but also because his aesthetic criteria were equally archaic (he expected poetry to rhyme and follow fixed metric patterns). For Paz and his cohort, who had absorbed the liberating influences of surrealism and Euro-American modernism and saw in these movements the way of the future for Mexican literature, Castro Leal’s traditionalism was untenable. Paz’s review, then, marked a formal parting of the ways between the vision of modernity of the cultural nationalists and that of the new guard that came to overshadow them. And in 1966, Paz, Chumacero, José Emilio Pacheco, and Homero Aridjis put their criteria into action and published their own anthology of Mexican poetry—Poesía en movimiento. México 1915–1966—much of which was profoundly marked by a modern, experimental aesthetic. Additionally, rather than being limited by national boundaries, the editors believed that Mexican literature was

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33. Díaz Arciniega, interview, 1999; Martínez and Domínguez Michael, La literatura mexicana, 180.
rooted in cosmopolitanism and, as such, part of the Spanish American—and, ultimately, universal—tradition. "La poesía de los mexicanos es parte de una tradición más vasta: la de la poesía de lengua castellana escrita en Hispanoamérica en la época moderna," wrote Paz in his prologue to the anthology. "Subrayo el carácter hispanoamericano de nuestros autores porque . . . no hay una poesía argentina, mexicana o venezolana: hay una poesía hispanoamericana . . . una tradición y un estilo hispanoamericanos."34

These universalizing criteria were likewise used to judge prose fiction (both Mexican and, on a broader scale, that of the Spanish American Boom) at this time, in Mexico’s intellectual journals and popular supplements alike. This may be seen in particular in the critical acclaim surrounding the 1955 publication of Juan Rulfo’s novel, *Pedro Páramo*, which drew heavily on techniques used by modernist writers such as William Faulkner, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, and which quickly became a hit both in Mexico and abroad. The novel’s success was attributed by many to precisely its fusion of the regional and the universal. One critic speaks of Rulfo’s consolidation of “[las] dos virtudes esenciales del buen escritor”: Mexican themes and "un estilo enteramente de hoy, moderno de acuerdo con la manera de pensar de la literatura desarrollada en otros idiomas.”35 Archibaldo Burns comments on Rulfo’s connections “a la mejor tradición literaria, clásica y moderna”; he further notes that, while the novel draws on modernist authors, it is, in the end, “[una] creación auténticamente mexicana,” while Rulfo’s spirit likewise is not “contaminado por nacionalismos sofocantes, y quién más mexicano.”36 Carlos Blanco Aguinaga similarly wrote that “Rulfo aparece en las letras mexicanas lleno de la angustia sin solución del hombre contemporáneo, y aparece—concretísima realidad nacional—in el después de la Revolución que presagiaba el descreído Solís en *Los de Abajo*.”37 Mariana Frenk, in turn, speaks of the novel as “la visión de un poeta de lo que es el hombre, su vida, su sufrimiento y su morir; visión del hombre sobre esta tierra, bajo este cielo, en México y dondequiera, hoy y siempre,” and identifies its theme as “tomado de la realidad humana en lo general, mexicana en lo partic-


ular.” 38 Finally, Vargas Llosa discusses the fusion of these tendencies as emblematic of the universalization of the contemporary Spanish American novel in general: Rulfo, he writes, “erige un pequeño universo sin tiempo . . . que es, al mismo tiempo que mito literario, una radiografía del alma mexicana.” 39

A frequent variation on the strategy of hailing the fusion of Mexican and Western literary traditions was the identification (evident in the criticism of Rulfo) of two main trends in contemporary Mexican literature. On the one hand, there was realist—that is, didactic, documentary—literature: this was looked down upon as a traditional mode practiced since the nineteenth century and generally used to criticize local and national conditions; it was generally viewed as the literary correlative to social and political nationalism. On the other hand was fantasy or imaginative fiction, generally equated with belles lettres, which reflected the influence of modern writing—representative of the “universal” or “Western” approach to literature—and was therefore considered to be innovative, tied neither to tradition nor to the representation of the local.

One of the inaugural events of this debate was the 1947 publication of Agustín Yáñez’s Al filo del agua, which fused two previously competing currents in Mexican literature: the novel of the Revolution, in which social content was paramount, and the experimental stylistics and themes of Euro-American modernism, which was making inroads into Spanish American fiction at the time. Yáñez’s novel heralded the end of a tradition that was nationalist in content and realist in style; it opened Mexican narrative up to foreign influences even as it demonstrated that these did not entail foregoing Mexican subject matter and concerns.

The promotion of cultural activities that bridged Mexican and modern, Western culture was also evident in publishing activities during this period. In 1948, for example, Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, an Argentine, was appointed director of the Fondo de Cultura. He immediately began to de-

39. Mario Vargas Llosa, “Novela primitiva y novela de creación en América Latina,” Revista de la Universidad de México 23, no. 10 (June 1969): 31. Pedro Páramo was, of course, not the only novel whose criticism foregrounded its regional and international relevance and degree of accomplishment. For example, Emmanuel Carballo similarly declared that Cien años de soledad “no reniega de los descubrimientos de la nueva novela ni de las conquistas que están presentes en la tradición. Así puede satisfactoriamente entregar a los lectores una obra americana que es también . . . una obra que nada tiene que envidiar a las que se escriben en otras partes del mundo . . . García Márquez acierta al escribir esta novela que es de Aracataca, de Colombia, de América Latina y del mundo.” See Carballo, “Gabriel García Márquez, un gran novelista latinoamericano,” Revista de la Universidad de México 23, no. 3 (November 1967): 16.
velop strategies for increasing the audience for Mexican literature—both nationally and internationally—as well as for disseminating works from other Spanish American nations throughout the region and bringing Spanish American literature to the attention of European readers. As part of this program, in 1952, the Fondo launched its “Letras Mexicanas” series, which put numerous classics back into circulation as well as initiating the careers of a new generation of Mexican authors. This series alone first brought to the public what have since become some of the nation’s most canonical works: Rulfo’s El llano en llamas and Pedro Páramo; Rosario Castellanos’s Baltín Canán; Carlos Fuentes’s La región más transparente and Las buenas conciencias; and Paz’s El laberinto de la soledad. At the same time, Juan José Arreola began to edit the series “Los Presentes,” which published works by established and young authors from Mexico and beyond, including Fuentes’s, Poniatowska’s, and Tomás Segovia’s first books, as well as others by Max Aub, Cortázar, José Revueltas, Reyes, and Zea.40 These two series, moreover, promoted many works that were stylistically innovative and international in theme, consciously cultivating a cosmopolitan vision of contemporary Mexican literature.

At this time, there was also a movement to renew and modernize theater. In 1956, Poesía en Voz Alta, an experimental theater group that was part of the UNAM’s efforts to bring theater—and culture in general—to a broader public, held the first of its eight performances.41 The ensemble, which was first directed by Arreola, rejected realism and other practices characterizing contemporary Mexican theater; the contributions of Paz and Leonora Carrington, among others, and the production of surrealist and foreign works (as well as works by contemporary Mexican authors), affirmed its commitment not just to a renovation, but to a modernization of Mexican theater. In the words of its first program, it sought to “remonta[r] al origen mismo del teatro occidental” by stripping contemporary theater of unnecessary techniques and artifice:42

40. Between 1954 and 1956, Arreola edited and published sixty titles; forty more were published under the subsequent direction of Pedro Frank de Andre. For a detailed study of the series, consult Victor Daniel Rogers’s dissertation: “Cosmopolitan Designs and Twentieth-Century Literary Culture: ‘Colección Los Presentes’ and the Emergence of the Professional Writer” (University of Kansas, 1997).

41. The first four programs were staged in 1956 and 1957; the fifth was put on from 1957 to 1959; the sixth in 1959; the seventh in 1960; and the eighth in 1965. Performances were held at several venues in different areas of Mexico City. For more information on the group, consult Roni Unger’s Poesía en Voz Alta in the Theater of Mexico (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981); see also Orso Arreola, El último juglar: Memorias de Juan José Arreola (Mexico: Editorial Diana, 1998), 312–21, for a personal view of the movement.

42. Quoted in Arreola, El último juglar, 312.
“buscaban reunir los presupuestos del teatro español del Siglo de Oro con los de las vanguardias europeas, en particular el teatro breve de [Federico García] Lorca, e incorporar elementos de carácter popular.”43 Productions included classical Spanish works as well as others by Garro, Eugene Ionescu, Lorca, and Paz.

The Centralization of Cosmopolitan Cultural Production

The intelligentsia began to extend the reach of the internationalist discourse through various cultural centers and groups coalescing during this period. In the early 1950s, for example, under the leadership of José Gaos, a Spanish refugee, and Leopoldo Zea, the Grupo Hyperión set itself the task of forging a “filosofía de lo mexicano,” a philosophy grounded in Mexican reality and experiences that would at the same time be a means of exploring and explaining universal themes. As a result of his prominence and in keeping with the atmosphere of cultural aperture, in 1960, Zea was chosen to head the newly-founded Dirección General de Cultura in the Ministry of Foreign Relations, an office whose goal was to “estimular el intercambio cultural de México con otros pueblos y difundir nuestra cultura en el extranjero.”44

Another development that was to have tremendous implications for the consolidation of the intellectual infrastructure was the founding by Fernando Benítez of México en la cultura, a weekly cultural supplement that appeared in the Sunday edition of Novedades, one of the nation’s most widely read newspapers, from 1949 to 1961.45 For his staff, Benítez recruited leading exponents of the avant-garde, exiled Spanish intellectuals, and the younger, emerging generation of cosmopolitan writers and critics. Agustí Bartra, Emmanuel Carballo, Castellanos, Chumacero, Fuentes, Monsiváis, Pacheco, Poniatowska, and many others were regular contributors through the 1950s and 1960s. These writers, many of whom also worked together in the Dirección de Difusión Cultural (DDC) of the UNAM, at the Centro Mexicano de Escritores, and in numerous other journals and cultural institutions, had become well-established while (and in large measure as a result of) working under Benítez. Their sense of cohesion as a group was keenly evident in 1961, when Benítez was fired for the supplement’s sympathy for the Cuban Revolution and its general left-wing orientation—impermissible sins as far as the conservative Novedades was concerned: the entire

45. See Vanden Berghe’s thesis for a thorough analysis of the supplements, their staff, and their aesthetic and political philosophies, as well as their ties to other institutions.
staff resigned in order to accompany him to another newspaper, *Siempre*, whose owner, José Pagés Llergo, had invited him to start up the supplement, renamed *La Cultura en México*, anew. The supplement was one of the most significant players in the cultural debates because it extended the debate over cosmopolitanism at the heart of “high” culture throughout the nation by infusing it into a popular medium that reached thousands of readers of different backgrounds, classes, and educational levels. It carried pieces on the same topics covered by the literary journals that were often written by the same authors.

*México en la Cultura* and *La Cultura en México* published articles on cultural events and debates in Mexico, the United States, Europe, and beyond; special issues were dedicated to the classics and canonical European authors. Essentially, whatever made cultural headlines in Europe or the United States was reported in Mexico within a week. But while feature articles were devoted to world, Spanish American, and Mexican authors alike, Mexican literature and cultural activity were the supplement’s staples: weekly columns (e.g., “Autores y libros,” “Reseña de revistas”) were devoted to reviewing what Mexican authors were doing, how Mexican books were being received, both in Mexico and abroad, what and whom Mexican journals and publishers were publishing, and how the Mexican publishing industry was flourishing, both nationally and internationally.


47. As a result of the ousting, Benítez received both sympathy and an offer of financial support for starting up a new supplement from president López Mateos. The supplement fell out of favor with the president in early 1962, however, when it denounced the assassination of agrarian leader Rubén Jaramillo and his family: the president, who considered Jaramillo an antagonist, took the supplement’s coverage of the murder as a personal affront and withdrew his assistance. Gabriel Zaid further claims that he tried to eliminate the supplement altogether, but to no avail. Zaid, *Cómo leer en bicicleta: problemas de la cultura y el poder en México* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1975), 163; Gustavo García, “Perfil: Fernando Benítez: hijo de la Revolución,” *Letras Libres* (March, 1999): 96; Víctor Díaz Arciniega, interview by author, Mexico City, June 12, 2000.

48. Additionally, the supplement and literary journals alike adhered to a very similar format, including many similar features, as well as the topics of the weekly columns and the annual assessments of Mexican cultural developments.

49. While international reviews were generally covered in “Autores y libros,” articles such as Clara Passafari’s “Al filo del agua triunfa en Polonia,” in which, in keeping with the prevailing literary criteria, she declares that “Yáñez tomó los procedimientos técnicos más avanzados y se esforzó por asimilarlos a la idiosincrasia mexicana.” *La Cultura en México*, (April 17, 1966: xix)—and Claude Couffon’s “El semanario ‘Les Lettres Françaises’ habla del arte de Juan Rulfo” (*La Cultura en México*, March 2, 1967) also appeared in the supplement periodically.
internationally.\textsuperscript{50} new works were reviewed and thereby brought to the attention of an enormous audience in an effort to expand the readership for Mexican literature; and there were frequent discussions of lo mexicano,\textsuperscript{51} assessments of the state of contemporary Mexican literature,\textsuperscript{52} essays on recent trends in literature and philosophy, excerpts from new works, and interviews with authors and intellectuals. As the supplement was so widely read, and considered by so many to reflect the pulse of Mexican culture, positive or negative coverage—or even, in some cases, a simple lack of attention—could have a tremendous impact on a book’s sales and on an author’s career, as well, ultimately, as on the type or style of literature being produced. Although the core team of writers associated with the supplement denies the existence of a mafia,\textsuperscript{53} and

\textsuperscript{50} In 1955, for example, ‘Autores y libros’ noted (on May 15 and again on June 5) that Orfila Reynal had recently traveled throughout South America in order to expand the Fondo’s mandate. The columnist’s admiration for the editor was such that he claimed the publisher as a “mexicano honorario—nuestro ya no sólo por americano, sino por haberse unido incondicionalmente a la lucha que México libra por la cultura de la América hispana,”\textit{ibid.}, 2. See also Carballo’s “Los pasos de gigante de la industria editorial mexicana,”\textit{México en la Cultura}, (January 4, 1960), in which he concludes that “El libro mexicano comienza a ganar la batalla nacional y en algunos años podrá competir, con posibilidades de éxito, en el mercado internacional,”\textit{ibid.}, 2, or his “Cambios fundamentales de la industria editorial.”\textit{La Cultura en México} (September 9, 1964), where he notes that “Por motivos económicos, disminuye el nacionalismo. Razón: las editoriales poderosas exportan, más o menos, el sesenta por ciento de su producción. El desarrollo convierte el nacionalismo en un panamericanismo” (xxv). Anniversaries of the Fondo’s founding—e.g., in 1959 and 1964—were also commemorated with articles and special issues. Finally, the October 10, 1966, issue had Siglo XXI, the press recently founded by Orfila Reynal (as shall be detailed presently), as its main subject. As Vanden Berghe notes, because of many personal connections between the Fondo and the supplement (most notably, both Chumacero and Carballo occupied important positions at the press), for many years, the former received more coverage—through articles, reviews, and ads—than any other Mexican press. See ‘La cultura.’\textsuperscript{55} When Orfila Reynal moved to Siglo XXI, however,\textit{La Cultura en México} transferred its attention to the new press.\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{51} For example, in 1955, at the height of the Grupo Hyperión’s activities, Leopoldo Zea published an article in the supplement on “México en Diálogo con el Occidente y el Mundo.” Here he affirms that Mexico occupies a privileged position in the new world order in which Europe looks to the New World as “capaz de enseñar y colaborar en una tarea que debe ser universal si en verdad se aspira a una cultura de signo universal,” and that “lo más positivo de México trasciende al exterior comprometiéndonos más y más en una tarea de carácter universal, para la cual se cree ya con capacidad a nuestro país en particular y a la América Latina en general.”\textit{Ibid.}, (August 15, 1955): 5.

\textsuperscript{52} In addition to the usual bulletins and updates, for example, the June 27, 1960, issue was devoted to the topic of “La tarea en marcha de los novelistas mexicanos.” It included articles by Carballo, Chumacero, and José Luis Martínez, as well as excerpts from works by Benítez, Castellanos, Fuentes, José Revueltas, and Yáñez.

\textsuperscript{53} Vanden Berghe, ‘La cultura,’ 23 ff.; Eduardo Mejía, interview by author, Mexico City, June 8, 2001.
although authors such as Vicente Leñero and José Agustín, who were not otherwise affiliated with the group, were published and heavily promoted by the supplement, as Kristine Vanden Berghe details, the writers who most frequently contributed to the supplement received a disproportionate share of promotion and publicity in its pages. Additionally, reviews of Mexican journals appearing in the supplement were primarily dedicated to those whose collaborators also contributed frequently to the supplement; for the same reason, until 1965, the Fondo likewise received more publicity, both direct and indirect, than other Mexican presses.

The supplement’s coverage of Mexican culture foregrounded the more cosmopolitan and avant-garde developments—both aesthetic and political, in many cases, for its commitment to change also entailed legitimating new cultural movements. This is evident, for example, in essays by Emmanuel Carballo, who was one of the most regular contributors to the supplement and whose almost formulaic evaluations of new works—he consistently gave high praise to works addressing Mexican themes that were written in a modernist or experimental style and excoriated those exhibiting realist qualities—exemplified the aforementioned internationalizing critical paradigm. In a representative article on the new Mexican novel, for example, he praises young authors experimenting with “imaginative”—as opposed to “realist”—fiction for

Cohn, Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950–1968 161

56. Ibid., 51.
57. Ibid., 52–56.
59. His review of Dolores Castro’s La ciudad y el viento offers an example of the latter. Carballo describes the work as ‘una ‘novela’ anacrónica. Vieja por el estilo, la estructura y el tratamiento que da a la anécdota. Recuerda, sin alcanzar siquiera sus limitaciones, dos novelas de nuestro siglo diecinueve . . . Aquélla y éstas no pasan de ser obras costumbristas que retratan la vida en ciudades menores de la provincia. A [los otros autores] los salva, al menos, su poderosa capacidad para la sátira. Por aquellos años, además, el costumbrismo era un recurso más o menos válido. Hoy día, en cambio, es enemigo mortal de los prosistas.’ Carballo, “Costumbrismo y mortaja,” La Cultura en México, (August 29, 1962): xvi). He likewise considers Castellanos’s Oficio de tinieblas to be a “novela tradicional en el uso del tiempo y el espacio,” and criticizes the author for “acometer[iendo] esta novela con procedimientos anacrónicos, válidos única y exclusivamente para la novela realista del siglo XIX.” Carballo, “Poesía y prosa, imaginación y realidad,” La Cultura en México, (November 18, 1964). In contrast, he views Los convidados de agosto to be her “mejor libro de prosa narrativa . . . porque se desembaraza de cualquier preocupación antropológica . . . porque el realismo no excluye la imaginación,” although he feels that she has yet to forget “un axioma que ha sido funesto para nuestras letras: que el cuentista—y el novelista—no debe demostrar sino mostrar los hechos que narra, olvidar asimismo una de nuestras mayores deficiencias: el propósito didáctico.” Carballo, “Poesía y prosa.”
having "conquistado . . . el sueño de más de una centuria: fundir en la novela . . . los más diversos valores: los estéticos, los morales . . . sin que ninguno de ellos ejerza hegemonía. Se nutren en la tradición y no desdénan, sino antes bien practican, los nuevos caminos de la prosa narrativa."60 He further considers Fuentes to be la imagen ideal de nuestros escritores durante estos años . . . [porque] se deja ver como un escritor nutrido en la tradición—nacional y universal—y al mismo tiempo como un escritor culto que conoce la literatura de su tiempo . . . como ningún escritor joven mexicano . . . Después de Al filo del agua . . . y Pedro Páramo, La región más transparente es la novela más provechosa que se ha escrito en México de 1947 a la fecha . . . [La región] pone una corona en la tumba de la novela nacionalista . . . y se lanza a que la reconozcan como uno de los signos del México que pugna por formar parte de un mundo que se esfuerza por hacer valer sus derechos.61

Perhaps Carballo’s criteria—as well as those of his cohort—are best summed up in his proud 1966 declaration that “las novelas y cuentos mexicanos, sin perder sus cualidades nativas, comienzan a ser universales.”62

Along with México en la Cultura and La Cultura en México, the Dirección de Difusión Cultural (DDC) became the other key pole in Mexico City’s field of cultural production and outreach; these were the only sites in the cultural infrastructure where intellectual and popular culture converged. The DDC was committed to bringing culture and arts to the general public through the publication of inexpensive books at the university’s press,63 as well as by sponsoring performances and activities at a variety of venues around the city.64 One of its best-known projects was the Casa del Lago, a cultural center inaugurated in 1959 and housed in a mansion built during the Porfiriato in the Bosque de Chapultepec. As part


64. In general, as many of the participants in the DDC also wrote for Benítez’s supplements, these activities and publications were regularly announced and reviewed in the cultural supplements, illustrating yet again the concentration of cultural media in the hands
of the DDC (and with many of the same participants), it sought to extend
the university into the streets: it offered courses, lectures, round table
discussions, exhibitions, theater, ballet, recitals, films, and much, much
more. Many claim that its most successful period was from its inception
until 1967, with Arreola as director initially, then Segovia (1961–1963),
and, finally, Juan Vicente Melo. During these years, organizers considered
the Casa del Lago to be a key player in the dissemination of international
cultural currents.65 The consciousness of the Casa del Lago’s avant-garde
program is made explicit in José de la Colina’s 1965 observation that the
center “ha[bía] cargado sobre ella casi toda la labor de vanguardia,” and
that it had had a key role in “la formación de un público . . . [que] se está
convirtiendo en público de vanguardia” —a public whose existence, in
turn, “alienta nuestra esperanza de que algún día la vanguardia se con-
funda con la tradición.”66

The DDC had its heyday from 1953 to 1965, under the direction of
García Terrés; so, too, did its monthly journal, the Revista de la Univer-
sidad de México, to which the most prominent Mexican and Spanish
American writers of the day contributed pieces on current literary themes
and debates.67 García Terrés’s deeply cosmopolitan philosophy, which un-
derlay his aspirations for the DDC and the Revista, was perhaps best
summed up in his declaration to an audience at the INBA in 1959 that:

Quienes determinan el ambiente literario mexicano no suelen ver con buenos
ojos que alguien experimente valores crecidos en los recintos de las literaturas
extranjeras. Alegan la importancia de la tradición, como si la tradición fuera un
huerto cerrado, incontaminado, no fertilizable por la absorción de otros hallaz-
gos. Ignoran nuestros nacionalistas que la única tradición importante es la que
cada uno recrea, revive, de entre la totalidad del acervo humano . . . De lo que
se trata es de expresar lo que efectivamente hemos vivido y estamos viviendo,
con ayuda de propios y ajenos, aprovechando las luces legadas por unos y otros . . . Hay que defender y reafirmar lo nacional, pero no en tanto que nacional, sino en tanto que humano.68

That this philosophy continued to guide the DDC and its projects even after García Terrés left in 1965 to become ambassador to Greece is evident, for example, in a questionnaire on the topic of nationalism that was included in two issues of the Revista in 1967, and which featured responses by Pacheco, Fernando Salmerón, and Rufino Tamayo.69 Pacheco’s statement, which echoes the ideas expounded by Jorge Luis Borges in “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” eloquently reflects the ideas of all of the figures surveyed: “nuestros artistas saben que cuanto pinten, compongan, escriban . . . se hallará fatal, inexorablemente determinado por su condición de mexicanos; pero que no hay razón alguna para que no dispongan de lo que pertenece a todos los hombres—y así, convirtiendo, nacionalizando esas ‘influencias’, enriquezcán con sus propios matices la tradición de la cultura mexicana.”70

El Centro Mexicano de Escritores was another institution where many of the young writers affiliated with México en la Cultura, La Cultura en México, the Fondo, and the DDC worked together.71 Founded in 1951 with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Center’s lists


69. See “Discusiones,” Revista de la Universidad de México, 21, no. 7 (March 1967) and 21, no. 8 (April 1967).

70. Quoted in “Discusiones” (March 1967): 33.

71. Casa del Tiempo dedicated a special issue, vol. 1, no. 11 (July 1981), to the thirtieth anniversary of the Centro with interviews and retrospective pieces that provide useful background information and history on the institution. Also, in 1999, Martha Domínguez Cuevas, secretary to the Center since the early 1950s, published Los becarios del Centro Mexicano de Escritores (Mexico: Editorial Aldus, S.A.), which offers biographical information on all of the Center’s grantees, as well as selections of interviews with and criticism on its most famous alumni.
of grantees read like a “Who’s Who” in Mexican letters. Aridjis, Arreola, Emilio Carballido, Carballo, Castellanos, Chumacero, Fuentes, Juan García Ponce, Jorge Ibargüengoitia, Poniatowska, Rulfo, and Segovia all had fellowships during the Center’s first decade. Here, then, they reinforced the connections that bound them together over the years, concentrating power in the hands of a small cultural elite. Additionally, the maestros—themselves established authors—who led the weekly workshops with the grantees had a determining role in Mexican literature. For example, in addition to being a becario, from 1967 to 1983, Juan Rulfo was one of the Center’s maestros; during this period, his vision, style, and themes marked the works of the young writers under his tutelage. While some grantees turned their back on the Center in later years, the profound impact that it has had on the course of Mexican literature simply cannot be denied: here, literary paradigms were formed and ideas about canonicity were perpetuated; here, too, the dominant intellectual group was strengthened and its westernizing orientation was reinforced.

**A Period of Periodicals: Cosmopolitanism and Spanish Americanism**

The conjunction of a cosmopolitan orientation, an interest in lo mexicano, and a desire to build a strong transnational identity also branded the many literary journals that sprang up in the 1950s and 1960s under the aegis of official organizations and individual sponsorship alike. *Las Letras Patrias* (1954–1958), published by the INBA, sought to forge and disseminate a Mexican literature and culture imbued with Western currents. Salvador Reyes Nevares’s recommendation that the perennial conflict between nationalists (who, according to the critic, “postulan una literatura sin contaminaciones” and for whom all literature “deb[e] tratar asuntos de la patria, y deb[e] de hacerlo además siguiendo modos igualmente nacionales. Nada de imitaciones. . . Nada de estar al acecho de las últimas técnicas europeas, para tratar de copiarlas en México”) and internationalists (who affirm that “las letras mexicanas deben estar abiertas a influencias extranjeras, porque no hay arte . . . que pueda prosperar y llegar a completa madurez si se encastilla en un recinto solo”) be resolved by tolerance of the “aparente imitador [cuyas] imitaciones pueden ser, al fin y al cabo, saludables adaptaciones a nuestro medio de usos que, siendo de origen extrano, tienen virtudes suficientes para engrandecer la sensibilidad de México, y para expresarla,” is emblematic of the prevailing views of the journal and intellectual infrastructure alike during this period. So, too, is his claim that “las tendencias traídas a México . . . sufren una transformación que les
impone el espíritu del país.” The editors of *Estaciones* (1956–1960) similarly aspired to merge the two currents: “Queremos ser mexicanos en nuestro impulso inicial . . . pero esto no nos hará sordos para atender a lo que, llegado desde fuera de nuestras fronteras geográficas, signifique una aportación a nuestra cultura. Especialmente por lo que se refiere a la lengua española, intentaremos exaltar los lazos con los pueblos del continente hispanoamericano, que con hallarse tan cerca unos de otros no existe un conocimiento estrecho entre sus escritores.”73 *Cuadernos del Viento* (1960–1967), directed by Huberto Batis and Carlos Valdés, also declared in its first issue that “estamos empezando a superar las formas más precarias del nacionalismo en nuestra literatura; los escritores mexicanos queremos tratar con aspiración de universalidad los temas nacionales.”74

Of the journals set up during this period, the *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, founded by Fuentes and Carballo in 1955 and benefitting from the patronage of both Reyes and Paz, was the most influential and most representative of the climate of cultural aperture and literary experimentation.75 It promoted Mexican, Latin American, North American, and European writers alike. In an article from the journal’s first issue that is a touchstone for its (and the contemporary) philosophy towards nationalism, Jorge Portilla analyzes the label *extranjerizante*, which was frequently applied to the writers working under Benítez and García Terrés, as follows:

Significa que ese escritor extranjerizante no es, propiamente hablando, un escritor mexicano, y que no lo es . . . porque escribe a la manera de los escritores franceses, ingleses, españoles o norteamericanos. Esto supone la aceptación previa de que México no es una nación más, participante de la comunidad universal, sino un compartimiento estanco de la cultura humana. Que no tenemos nada en común con los hombres de otras nacionalidades . . . que los mexicanos tenemos una excelencia, que puede contaminarse al contacto de lo extranjero.76

74. Quoted in Huberto Batis, *Lo que Cuadernos del Viento nos dejó* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 50.
75. The *Revista* lasted until 1965, although several changes in the editorial board took place: Fuentes and Carballo directed it until 1958; Segovia and Antonio Alatorre (and, later, Segovia and García Ponce) were the editors from 1959 to 1962; and García Ponce directed it alone until it ceased publication in 1965.
The journal's rejection of cultural nationalism and aesthetic traditionalism is also evident in its very title, a reworking of that of Castro Leal’s *Revista de literatura mexicana*.

As should be evident by now, Emmanuel Carballo was one of the more ubiquitous members of this group, a one-man culture industry committed to canonizing a cosmopolitanist poetics in Mexican literature:77 in addition to *México en la Cultura/La Cultura en México* (where he was the writer who most frequently assessed the state of Mexican letters, as well as writing annual reviews of the year's literary production) and the *Revista Mexicana*, he was also briefly on the editorial board of the *Revista de la Universidad de México* under García Terrés, as well as working in various capacities in the Fondo. Carballo was, additionally, one of the cosmopolitanists' most proactive publicists; he was acutely conscious of the group as such and of its role in moving Mexican culture into the international mainstream. To this end, he co-directed production at Empresas Editoriales, where he and other members of his generation published a number of books in the mid-1960s, many of which essentially commemorated and consecrated the accomplishments of his cohorts and their immediate predecessors: Pacheco took on the *Antología de la prosa mexicana del siglo XIX* while Monsiváis compiled the *Antología de la poesía mexicana del siglo XX*; Gastón García Cantú edited *El pensamiento de la reacción mexicana: historia documental 1810–1962*; and Carballo himself compiled *El cuento mexicano del siglo XX* and *Diecinueve protagonistas de la literatura mexicana del siglo XX*. He also commissioned and wrote the prologues for a series of autobiographies by several up-and-coming young writers active in the DDC or making their mark in the literary movement known as *la onda*: “Nuevos escritores mexicanos del siglo XX presentados por sí mismos.”78 Works by José Agustín, Salvador Elizondo, Melo, Monsiváis, Sergio Pitol, and Gus-

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77. So, too, was Fuentes. Consult Maarten van Delden’s *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998) for an excellent discussion of the “tension . . . between nationalism and cosmopolitanism” in Fuentes’s literary (and intellectual) career from the early years of his career through the 1990s.

78. *La onda* refers to the movement that began with the publication of Sáinz's *Gazapo* in 1965. La onda writers were young (born primarily between 1938 and 1951), and their works were profoundly marked by the social upheaval and changes of the 1960s: the student movements, the protests against the war in Vietnam, and U.S. anti-establishment and countercultural movements, including the sexual revolution, the Beat generation, and hippies (many of whom had found in Mexico a refuge from U.S. capitalist culture). These authors were also deeply influenced by U.S. rock music and popular culture. Like the intellectuals that I have discussed in this paper, writers associated with la onda also “resisted stereotypes of national underdevelopment by fashioning themselves as cosmopolitan sophisticates . . . [M]iddle-class teenagers aligned themselves with an international counterculture.” Rachel Adams, *Hipsters and jipitecas: Literary Countercultures on Both Sides*.
tavo Sáinz were published in 1966 (García Ponce’s and Fernando del Paso’s autobiographies were also advertised, but never published). This series in particular was clearly a myth-making enterprise intended to capitalize on and further promote the authors’ popularity, as well as the cosmopolitan and “artepurista” view of Mexican literature. As Carballo declares in his prologue to Melo’s work: “Comprometidos con el arte y de ningún modo ajenos a la sociedad en que viven, [estos prosistas] distinguen en sus textos los valores literarios de los valores sociales y políticos . . . En sus obras coexisten pacíficamente los modos de ser y actuar mexicanos y las exigencias universales que impone el tiempo presente.”

The cultural climate fostering cosmopolitanism reflected, as it had since the late 1940s, the contemporary international orientation of the Mexican State and its political and economic policies. President López Mateos—who was often referred to as “López Paseos” due to his frequent travels—actively promoted an agenda of international business and politics, continuing the patterns of development and industrialization that had gained strength under Alemán and Ruiz Cortines. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the United States, which had been a significant source of loans and funding for Mexico since the late 1940s, was deeply caught up in the Cold War. In order to develop a policy that would contain the spread of Communism in the Third World—concern about which had been heightened by the Cuban Revolution of 1959—the Kennedy administration looked to modernization theory, which argued that “the diffusion of political democracy throughout the developing world would serve and protect U.S. national interests.” As economic development and modernization were considered to be preconditions for the development of democratic politics (and, by extension of this rationale, political stability), the United States promoted economic growth by pouring foreign aid into developing countries. In Latin America in general,
this philosophy culminated in the Alliance for Progress, which sought
to accelerate development throughout the region and to which the
United States initially committed several billion dollars in economic as-
sistance. Mexico was of particular concern to the United States during
these years, for López Mateos alone among western political leaders
maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, refusing to condemn the Cas-
tro regime or to intervene in its internal affairs. (Despite his independ-
ent foreign policy, López Mateos was generally able to maintain positive
diplomatic relations with the United States.)

In 1956, still several years before the Cuban Revolution, the editors
of the Revista Mexicana de Literatura called upon the Fondo to develop
a series that would accomplish for the newly-burgeoning field of Span-
ish American literature what “Letras Mexicanas” was then achieving for
Mexican literature. Their words eloquently summarize the internation-
zealizing program of the moment, as well as anticipating the transnational
and (continental) “American” consciousness-building agenda of the Boom:

Viajar por Iberoamérica, es darse cuenta de hasta qué punto buena parte del
prestigio de México descansa sobre las columnas de libros del Fondo de Cultura
Económica. Se trata, acaso, de la presencia más viva . . . de nuestro espíritu en
América Latina, y del primer paso en la superación de nuestra tradicional apatía
hacia los pueblos de habla hispana. Una política mexicana de largo alcance . . .
debе por necesidad dirigirse a estos pueblos: en la acción y el pensamiento de
la comunidad hispanoamericana está nuestra verdadera grandeza. Y qué senda
mejor que la literatura . . . para alcanzar la mutua comprensión, garantía de la
convivencia creativa? Sería de desearse, en este sentido, que el Fondo diera
habida, al lado de su excelente colección de Letras Mexicanas, a otra análoga
de Letras hispanoamericanas. Es preciso darse cuenta de que nuestra literatura
sólo tiene significación profunda dentro del marco del idioma común . . . Superar
todas las fronteras—artificiales—que dividen a nuestras literaturas locales, es una
función a la que el Fondo debe enfrentarse, y debe ser meta constante de nues-
tros escritores . . . Una colección de Letras hispanoamericanas del Fondo de Cultura
Económica sería el punto de arranque ideal para una comunidad lite-
rraria basada en la instancia fraternal, en la fuerza activa y solidaria. En ella ten-
drían su lugar las nuevas generaciones de escritores en español . . .; en ella en-
contrarían todos estos escritores una poderosa palanca de difusión mundial . . .

The Cuban Revolution dramatically heightened the sense of cultural
change, aperture, and cosmopolitanism in Mexico and Spanish America
that Carballo and Fuentes articulate in the preceding passage. The Rev-
olution was supported by Boom authors and many of Mexico’s cosmo-
opolitan intellectuals, and a correlative antipathy to the United States’ po-

82. Carballo and Fuentes, “Talón de Aquiles,” Revista Mexicana de Literatura 3
political agenda was also shared by both sets of writers.\footnote{The support of Spanish American authors for the Cuban Revolution, as well as their anti-Americanism, was of great concern to U.S. government officials and private organizations such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, which had strong anti-Communist leanings. My current research project studies the role of Cold War politics in the promotion of Latin American literature in the United States by the State and by private forces during the 1960s. I argue that some of the interest in disseminating Latin American literature was motivated by a desire to make U.S. cultural activity attractive to Latin American writers and to counter Cuba’s influence on the latter by creating alternative, U.S.-based centers of cultural activity such as what is now the Americas Society. During the 1960s, political circumstances created an audience interested in learning about Spanish America, which encouraged publishers to sign authors from the region while, paradoxically, government agencies and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations subsidized the publication of works that were often both pro-Cuban and anti-American. This interest coincided with the increasing professionalization of Latin American writers, who became both market and media savvy. Fuentes is perhaps the best example of these phenomena. He played a key role in introducing Spanish American authors to U.S. writers, publishers, and agents. At the same time, though, his leftist politics led to confrontations with the U.S. government: in 1962, when he was invited by NBC for a televised debate with Richard Goodwin, President Kennedy’s special advisor on Latin American affairs, and again in 1969, he was denied a visa to enter the United States under the McCarran Walter Act, which was used to restrict visas on ideological grounds. García Terrés and the prominent Mexican conductor Carlos Chávez also had visa difficulties due to the McCarran Walter Act. In all three cases, U.S. writers and publishers rallied in their support, arguing that a positive reception in the United States would provide better grounds for being able to establish political dialogue and understanding.} The Westernizing Mexican project and the Spanish American movement intersected directly at several other points as well: Fuentes was a major figure in both, and promoted both through Mexican popular and intellectual media, as well as internationally.\footnote{His praise for \textit{Cien años de soledad}, which he viewed as representative of the new style that was transcending the limitations of the regionalist tradition that had for so long dominated Spanish American literature, echoes the universalizing tendency shared by his contemporaries: “Sitio del mito. Macondo. García Márquez, fabulista, sabe que la presencia se disuelve sin un sitio (lugar de resistencias) que sea todos los sitios: un lugar que los contenga a todos: sede del tiempo, consagración del tiempo, lugar de cita de la memoria y el deseo, presente donde todo puede re-comenzar . . . \textit{Cien años de soledad} . . . hace contemporáneos—todos los presentes de una zona de la imaginación que parecía perdida para las letras . . . No hay temas o religiones, en sí, locales o universales. No exi-} Donoso was in Mexico in the mid-1960s, staying at Fuentes’s home and, through Fuentes’s introduction to Benítez, writing for \textit{La Cultura en México};\footnote{Mejía, interview, 2000.} García Márquez also moved to Mexico in 1961, where he spent several years interacting with the intellectuals, writing for \textit{México en la Cultura} and the \textit{Revista Mexicana de
Cohn, *Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950–1968* 171

*Literatura*, among other publications, and publishing with Era; Vicente Rojo, one of the most renowned artists of the group, designed the cover for the first edition of *Cien años de soledad*, which was first announced to the public by Fuentes in his weekly column in *La Cultura en México* in 1966, the year before the novel was published; Boom works were analyzed, reviewed, and promoted in the Mexican media, often by some of the movement’s most distinguished critics (e.g., Emir Rodríguez Monegal, José Miguel Oviedo).\(^8^6\) Boom authors were interviewed in the supplements and contributed essays and fictional pieces to these and the literary journals;\(^8^7\) and Mexican publishing houses such as the Fondo and Joaquín Mortiz actively sought and published their works. The promotion of literature written in a modernist style brought the Mexican authors discussed in this paper even more closely in line with the Boom (as well as other Western cultural currents), which similarly drew on modernism’s formal experimentation and thematics to develop a literary idiom that was both intensely cosmopolitan and seen to be an original mode of expression for the region.\(^8^8\)

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86. Additionally, works such as Fuentes’s *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969) and Rodríguez Monegal’s *El Boom de la novela latinoamericana* (1972), which simultaneously characterized and canonized the movement, were first published in Mexican periodicals. The former appeared in *La Cultura en México* on 29 July 1964 and was originally given as a lecture at the Casa del Lago the same year. José Emilio Pacheco, “Mucho años después,” in Norma Klahn and Wilfrido H. Corral (eds.), *Los novelistas como críticos* (Mexico: Ediciones del Norte/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991): 467; originally published in *Casa de las Américas* 165 (July–December 1987), while the latter appeared in serial form in the February, March, April, and May, 1972, issues of *Plural*.

87. Vanden Berghe notes that Alejo Carpentier, Donoso, García Márquez, José Lezama Lima, and Vargas Llosa each published between six and eleven texts in Benítez’s supplements alone between 1962 and 1972, while Fuentes published seventy-one articles there, in addition to the many reviews and additional coverage of his work. Vanden Berghe, “La cultura,” 63.

88. Curiously, this use of a modernist aesthetic contrasts with the movement’s trajectory through the U.S. academy during the Cold War years, when, as Lawrence Schwartz details, it was cast as apolitical and defined by its treatment of universal concerns, while the realism and naturalism of the prewar years were considered “taint[ed] . . . by an overt political orientation and ties to international Communism and support of the Soviet Union.” Schwartz, *Creating Faulkner’s Reputation: The Politics of Modern Literary Criticism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988): 202. The recourse by these cosmopolitan Mexican writers and the Boom authors was, of course, not only not antithetical to Communism but, often, deeply imbued with it, even taking into account the split between authors’ politics and their works that has been discussed by critics such as Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Neil Larsen, *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
The 1960s: Nationalism and the State

As the 1960s progressed, however, the Mexican State increasingly sought to implement and enforce an inward-looking cultural nationalism. The fiftieth anniversary of the Mexican Revolution, perhaps most importantly, set in motion a powerful movement of national introspection: who are we now, people asked, and how did the Revolution contribute to our present circumstances? Accordingly, these years witnessed the proliferation of attempts to explore Mexico’s past in an effort to understand its present. Many of these, including the work of Miguel León-Portilla, were groundbreaking scholarly works on pre-Hispanic cultures and the Revolution. Others, however, contributed to the creation of a monolithic vision of the nation. While cultural media both studied and questioned the Revolution’s legacy (the 1964 publication of Jorge Ibargüengoitia’s Los relámpagos de agosto, a scathing demythification of the Revolution and other Mexican myths, was representative of this tendency), the government celebrated it with conferences, ceremonies, and parties, and numerous traditionalist views of its accomplishments were promoted.

Editorial Aguilar, for example, published a two-volume set, La novela de la revolución mexicana, edited by the cultural traditionalist Antonio Castro Leal, in 1958 and 1960; also, between 1960 and 1962, the (government-funded) Fondo published four volumes of essays on México. Cincuenta años de Revolución, with a prologue by president López Mateos; and former president Emilio Portes Gil (1928–1930) published Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana in 1964. This tendency was complemented on the political front by a gradual tightening up and clo-

89. Some have also criticized the Museo Nacional de Antropología, founded in 1964, as an official monument to a traditionalist vision of the nation’s patrimony. Octavio Paz writes that the museum, which presents (in its cultural descriptions as well as architectural layout) the Maya, Huastec, and Toltec civilizations as stepping stones in the evolution of Aztec culture, depicts “all the diversity and complexity of two thousand years of Mesoamerican history . . . as a prologue to the last act, the apotheosis-apocalypse of México-Tenochtitlán.” Paz, “Critique of the Pyramid,” in The Labyrinth of Solitude, translated by Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1972): 323. He further traces the ‘Aztec model of domination,’ the foundational paradigm for that of contemporary Mexico, through the newly-independent republic, which “prolonged the centralist, authoritarian, Aztec-Spanish tradition,” and, finally, to the regime of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, which “sees itself, transfigured, in the world of the Aztecs.” Paz, “Critique of the Pyramid,” 324. According to Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, “this construction of the Aztec empire as both the centerpiece of the pre-Hispanic world and the antecedent of the independent Mexican nation negated cultural pluralism, idealized a strong central state, and falsified the pre-Columbian past.” Lomnitz-Adler, “An Intellectual’s Stock in the Factory of Mexico’s Ruins,” The American Journal of Sociology 103.4 (January 1998): 1064. See also Néstor García Canclini for a detailed discussion of the Museo (Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1990): 171 ff.
sure: efforts to democratize Mexico’s one-party system that had been set in motion by López Mateos were thwarted when Gustavo Díaz Ordaz took office in 1964 and annulled mayoral elections in two cities where opposition candidates had won.

The government’s increasing nationalism was accompanied by restrictions on freedom of expression that initiated a decade of conflict with the intelligentsia and upheaval in their infrastructure. Until this point, as Roderic Camp details in *Los intelectuales y el Estado en el México del Siglo XX*, many connections at both personal and institutional levels had linked the intelligentsia and the State. The State subsidized (and wielded no small amount of decision-making power over) the universities where many cultural activities were planned; as was previously noted, it provided the impetus and funds for the founding of the Colegio de México. At the same time, many of the elite who aspired to politics chose to attend the UNAM or, more recently, the Colegio de México, in order to begin networking, as well as for their training; as many of the intellectuals who later became active in the cultural circuit attended the same institutions, both the political and the cultural aspirants were often in the same circles. Also, a number of the people discussed in this paper additionally taught at the secondary and university levels students who later became leading public figures, influencing their ideas and, in turn, receiving patronage from them. In addition to its roles in the university, the State provided funding to numerous journals and newspapers, as well as other cultural projects and institutions (whether directly, as in the case of the INBA, or indirectly, as with the UNAM’s Casa del Lago); in a number of cases, the patronage (and other interventions) came directly from the president. Moreover, many established intellectuals went into government service over the years, in keeping with

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90. Roderic Ai Camp, *Los intelectuales y el Estado en el México del Siglo XX* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995). See in particular chapters 6, on patterns of employment among intellectuals; 7, on mentors (or patrons) and intellectual circles; and 8, on academies and cultural institutions.


92. López Mateos in particular was extremely active in fomenting cultural activity. As was previously noted, he offered Benítez the backing and funds to restart *México en la Cultura* after he left *Novedades*. Also, Batis notes that López Mateos’s Press Office purchased 100 subscriptions of *Cuadernos del Viento* as a means of subsidizing the journal. *Cuadernos*, 45. Furthermore, he memorably describes a breakfast with the president, Aridjis, Arreola, Rulfo, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Yáñez, at which López Mateos promised support (the aforementioned subscriptions, which were sent to public libraries) to *Cuadernos del Viento* and subsequently proceeded to give “una transfusión de urgencia” to Arreola and Aridjis to support their projects. *Cuadernos*, 46; also, interview, 2000. Through other connections in the Treasury and the INBA, Batis was able to sell advertising in his journal. *Cuadernos*, 46–47. Additionally, in 1972 (before *Excélsior* had fallen from the good graces
the longstanding Latin American tradition of the statesman-intellectual: to give but a few examples, José Vasconcelos (who also sought the presidency in the late 1920s), Jaime Torres Bodet, José Gorostiza, and Yáñez were Ministers of Public Education (the latter was also governor of Jalisco from 1953 to 1958 and was, in fact, chosen as the PRI candidate by then-president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines93), while García Terrés, José Luis Martínez, Paz, Reyes, and, in later years, Castellanos and Fuentes served as ambassadors for Mexico.

Starting in the 1960s, however, this synergy faltered as the State began to exercise its power more directly in cultural affairs, gradually encroaching upon the autonomy of the intelligentsia. Some restrictions were implemented in an indirect, nonconfrontational manner. As Robert Pierce details, newspapers and journals received indirect subsidies from the government through a state-owned business, Productora e Importadora de Papel, S.A. (PIPSA), which sold them paper at prices lower than market value.94 PIPSA would even provide some of its “approved” clients with more paper than they required, allowing them to sell it at a profit to buyers who did not have governmental approval;95 this unofficial income in some cases accounted for up to 40 percent of a newspaper’s income.96 On several occasions in the 1960s, PIPSA withheld paper from newspapers and journals: in June of 1962, the left-wing journal Política (whose editorial board at that time included Benítez, Fuentes, José de la Colina, and others) did not receive paper for two weeks, long enough to prevent it from publishing an article criticizing President Kennedy just before his visit to Mexico; in 1967, it ceased to give the journal paper altogether, causing it to fold; the government similarly forced Por Qué, another of the State—a situation which resulted in the 1976 ousting of the newspaper’s director, Julio Scherer), the private sector boycotted Excélsior “a causa de la postura editorial liberal, moderadamente crítica, del diario,” refusing to advertise in the paper and drastically jeopardizing its revenues. Camp, Los intelectuales, 266; see also Phillip Russell, Mexico in Transition (Austin: Colorado River Press, 1979): 141. President Echeverría ordered businesses in the public sector to purchase advertising in the paper, essentially saving it from bankruptcy. Camp, Los intelectuales, 266.

95. Despite such loopholes, Anne Rubenstein reports that “[b]etween 1940 and 1976, the newspapers that were independent of PIPSA never lasted more than a year.” Rubenstein, “Mass Media,” 640. PIPSA was not dissolved until the regime of Carlos Salinas (1988–1994). Ibid., 669.
96. Ibid., 640.
other journal critical of official corruption, to buy paper on the open market during the same period.97

The first face-to-face clash between the nationalist State and the cosmopolitan infrastructure came in November of 1965, when Díaz Ordaz had Orfila Reynal removed from his position as Director of the Fondo de Cultura Económica.98 The official reason given for his dismissal was that he was Argentine and that the Fondo, as a symbol of Mexican accomplishment, should be under Mexican leadership. Accordingly, he was replaced by Salvador Azuela—son of Mariano Azuela, author of Los de abajo—who was chosen because, according to Víctor Díaz Arciniega, the president viewed him as “la persona idónea para dirigir el Fondo de Cultura Económica e impulsar en él una orientación cultural en la que no se relegaran los asuntos nacionales. Azuela, al ser miembro del Seminario de Cultura Mexicana y de la Academia Mexicana de la Lengua, estaba identificado con los valores tradicionales de México.”99 In truth, however, the change of guards was motivated by something even more troubling. Following the Cuban Revolution, the Fondo had clearly demonstrated its support for this and other revolutionary movements; these were, of course, the years of liberation movements in Africa and Asia, as well as the civil rights and feminist movements. Also, in 1961, the Fondo published C. Wright Mills’s defense of the Cuban Revolution, Escucha, yanqui, which became one of its best-selling titles at the time.100 This put the Fondo in a precarious position with the government, which, although it refused to intervene in Cuba’s internal affairs, nevertheless worried about jeopardizing loans and other aid from the United States.

97. Camp, Los intelectuales, 272.
100. Escucha, yanqui was published in the Fondo’s Colección Popular series with a first edition of 20,000 copies. In contrast, from the 1950s through 1965, works in the Economics and Letras Mexicanas series, for example, had print runs of between 2000 and (rarely) 5000 books per edition; only the Colección Popular and Breviarios series published editions on a large scale, most of which were between 10,000 and 15,000 copies. Only four other first editions had a print run of 20,000 copies during Orfila Reynal’s entire tenure at the Fondo: the reprint of Mariano Azuela’s Los de abajo and Silva Herzog’s Breve historia de la revolución mexicana, both of which were published in 1960, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution; Ndabaningi Sithole’s El reto de Africa (1961); and Jorge Hernández Millares’s Atlas del Nuevo Mundo (1962) (Libro commemorativo del primer medio siglo Fondo de Cultura Económica (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984): 112–226. Reaction to Escucha, yanqui marked the beginning of the end of this phase of the Fondo. As Silva Herzog, a member of the press’s Board of Directors from the mid-1930s to 1965, details, the U.S. Embassy supposedly wrote a letter to the Mexican government protesting the Fondo’s publication of the work (even though it circulated freely
The conflict with the more conservative interests of the State came to a head in 1964, with the Fondo’s publication of Oscar Lewis’s *Los hijos de Sánchez*, in which Lewis illustrated the plight of what he called a “culture of poverty.” This work essentially caused a furor among cultural nationalists, even though it was widely-acclaimed in academic circles and by the intelligentsia, both in Mexico and abroad. Critics wanted nothing to interfere with the nation’s putting its best foot forward when it became the first developing country to host the 1968 Olympics, an honor that was seen as international recognition of the nation’s accession to modernity and an opportunity to show the world its accomplishments. The heretofore obscure Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística denounced the book as obscene, indecent, and “denigrante para nuestra patria” and its international reputation. The Sociedad also sued the Fondo, claiming that its “[opiniones] difamatorias y denigrantes contra el pueblo y el gobierno de México colocan a este libro dentro de los actos delicuosos definidos y sancionados en la Ley de Imprenta y en el Código Penal Vigente.” Although it lost, it became clear that one simply was not allowed to speak of the squalor that flourished in Mexico, and an “outsider”—an American anthropologist—in particular was not allowed to address the topic. Nor could one challenge the triumphalist attitude of a government that prided itself on an “economic miracle” that had supposedly ushered modernization and its benefits into the country.

For several years at this point, the State had tolerated criticism of its policies in a number of journals and periodicals. The publication of *Los hijos de Sánchez*, however, was the final straw: because of the Fondo’s international prestige and because of the government’s own direct links with the press—it subsidized the Fondo and had representatives on in the United States). Silva Herzog speculates that the Treasury Minister, Antonio Ortiz Mena, feared that releasing new editions of the work would jeopardize credit applications with international agencies (it must be noted that the Treasury provided the Fondo directly with a great deal of its funds and thus wielded considerable power over the press); whether this is true or not, Ortiz Mena did set in motion at this point a series of changes in the Fondo’s charter that ultimately disenfranchised the Board of Directors of its decision-making powers. Silva Herzog, “Breve historia,” 165–66.


103. These ties continue to remain close to this day: from 1990 to 2000, for example, former president Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) was Director of the Fondo.
the Board of Governors and control over its leadership—the press’s cultural and political orientation finally proved too uncomfortable, and it was brought into line. With Azuela at the helm, the Fondo’s lists and attitudes became increasingly more nationalistic. Both the dismissal of Orfila Reynal and the press’s changing orientation were sharply criticized by the intellectuals in their other media, and many authors left the Fondo. And, as happened before with Benítez at *México en la Cul-

104. Díaz Arciniega, *Historia*, 141, 155

105. Azuela’s projects met with little resistance, for Ali Chumacero, the Fondo’s second-in-command (whose Mexican citizenship no one could deny), was also forced to resign in December of 1965, leaving Azuela to fill his position—as well as the others left vacant by the departure of those supporting Orfila Reynal. In response to Chumacero’s dismissal, Fuentes excoriated the press for its nationalism and anti-intellectualism, designating it Kafkahuamilpa “porque detrás de lo que sucede en el antiguo Fondo de Cultura hay ese encuentro de la burocracia y el folklore, del proceso sin justificaciones y el chauvinismo como justificación, que convierten a José K en un glandular mariachi de la realpolitik a la mexicana. Gregorio Samsa no sólo ha ingresado al PRI; ahora ocupa un asiento en la Junta de Gobierno del Fondo de Cultura. Y, como la Reina adipsosa y atarantada de la novela de Lewis Carroll, mira a su alrededor y aúlla: ‘Cortadles las cabezas!’ En la Junta de Gobierno . . . beben su champurrado el sombrero loco, el ratón soñoliento y el lebrel de marzo. Don Salvador Azuela en el país de las Maravillas: a cortar cabezas, que al fin nos sobran.” Fuentes, “Versiones,” *La Cultura en México*, (March 23, 1966): ii.

Under Azuela, economics—always one of the Fondo’s strongest lists—continued as before; Letras Mexicanas continued to average six publications a year as it had under Orfila Reynal, but largely lacked the “star power” that had previously characterized the series; and the Colección Popular, one of the strongest series during the early 1960s (publishing ten to twenty thousand copies each of six to thirteen books per year) dwindled to between one and five works per year. Azuela also seems to have largely weeded out the Vida y Pensamiento de México Series, which published twenty-five works between 1959 and 1966 (as Orfila Reynal did not leave the Fondo until late 1965, many of his lists and projects carried over into 1966), and replaced it with the Presencia de México series, which published fifteen works between 1968 and 1970. *Libro conmemorativo*, 106–255.

106. For example, the December 1, 1965, issue of *La Cultura en México*, with articles by Benítez, García Ponce, Pablo González Casanova, Monsiváis, and Poniatowska, as well as numerous others, was devoted to vindicating Orfila Reynal and excoriating the Fondo’s actions. The latter were framed by most as a lamentable victory for the enemy in the struggle for power with the nationalists, while Orfila Reynal was praised for his efforts to incorporate Mexico into Spanish America and the West. Benítez commended Orfila Reynal’s publications for having “integrado de algún modo una América desintegrada . . . unificado una América aislada. [y] establecido unos puentes rotos desde el principio de nuestra historia. . . . . Los libros que editó Orfila unificaron una América aislada e hicieron ver a millares que México no es un país de charros sino de hombres capaces de interesarse en las ideas.” Benítez, *La Cultura en México*, (December 1, 1965): iv. González Casanova similarly saluted him “por dar a conocer la cultura mexicana en el mundo entero, y lo mejor de la cultura universal en México e Hispanoamérica.” González Casanova, “Carta abierta al hispanoamericano Orfila Reynal,” *La Cultura en México*, (December 1, 1965): vi. The April 20, 1966, issue of the supplement, in turn, celebrated the startup of Siglo XXI Editores, S.A., while the October 8, 1966, issue—which was devoted to the new
and was to happen again in 1976 with Paz at Plural, a loyal crowd followed Orfila Reynal to (and provided significant financial support for) the publishing house that he founded the next year, Siglo XXI, which has continued to be a major player in Spanish American publishing. At the same time, when Azuela refused to reissue Los hijos de Sánchez, Joaquín Mortiz obtained the rights to the book and reprinted it—along with the court decision—as well as starting up a new series, “Obras de Oscar Lewis.” While perhaps an opportunistic move capitalizing on the publicity surrounding the work, this was nevertheless seen by the intellectual community as a show of solidarity.

The friction between Díaz Ordaz’s regime and the cosmopolitanist intellectuals came to a head again not long after this incident, this time in the other main center of Mexico’s cultural activity and infrastructure: the university. In 1966, Gastón García Cantú was named head of the DDC. García Cantú replaced García Terrés, who had made the UNAM a powerful center of cultural activity for the city as a whole. The atmosphere on campus grew increasingly oppressive under the new lead-
ership, which set out to purge the remainder of García Terrés’s staff from the DDC. The situation reached a head in 1967, when Juan Vicente Melo was accused of a crime that he had not committed, and García Cantú obliged him to resign from his position as director of the Casa del Lago; his contemporaries defended him, and were forced to resign their positions at the University. This move effectively eliminated the outward-looking current from the University and marked the beginning of the “generación de la Casa del Lago” and its projects.

The final blow—not just to the intelligentsia and their cosmopolitan cultural programs but to Mexican society as a whole—came, of course, in 1968, with the massacre of student protestors by the police and army in the Plaza de Tlatelolco. That day became a turning point in the Mexican psyche. The State, which for so many years had been

112. García Cantú could not technically dismiss them from their jobs, so instead he simply removed them from the DDC by relieving García Ponce, then managing editor of the Revista de la Universidad de México, and José de la Colina, director of the university’s film clubs, of their responsibilities and sending them home to write (while still collecting a paycheck). Batis, interview, 2000; Juan García Ponce, “Crónica de una época y sus consecuencias,” in Batis, Cuadernos, 194.

113. See Batis, Cuadernos, 182–3; García Ponce, Personas, lugares y anecdotas (Mexico: Joaquin Mortiz, 1996), 151–53; and Pereira, “La generación,” 210–11 for more extensive discussions of this event and its aftermath. There are also alternative explanations and judgments of these events. Alberto Hijar, for example, criticizes Melo’s management, claiming that the Casa del Lago became cliquish, hospitable only to those who “simulan cultura confundiendo lo internacional con lo cosmopolita y lo profundo con lo incomprendible.” Hijar, “Tempestad en la Casa del Lago,” Política (March 1–14, 1967): 51. He further accuses the DDC under García Terrés of having “alentado todo nacionalismo auténticamente crítico para alentar, en cambio, el nacionalismo ramplón para el nivel populacho—Consejo Nacional de Turismo, Hora Nacional, Instituto de la Juventud Mexicana, etc.—y la cultura cosmopolita en el nivel superior,” betraying its obligation as a public institution to reach the public and promote more critical and open thought (“Tempestad,” 52). Another source told me that one of the reasons given for Melo’s dismissal was his frequent use of the Casa for his own, personal purposes, including parties; see also Sergio González Levet’s interview with Batis in Letras, 26 for a similar suggestion.

114. García Ponce links these changes at the university to the government’s gradual clamping down when he writes that García Cantú’s “conducta como director de Difusión Cultural demostró... que la cultura había cambiado de dirección: ya no era un producto nacido de la voluntad de hacer arte o ciencia... sino un instrumento de poder.” García Ponce, “Crónica,” 195.

115. This incident of governmental repression, as Danny Anderson has pointed out, had a clear precedent in the fate of the railway labor disputes of 1958–1959 (letter to author, January 25, 2001); the activism of 1968 in general had additional precedents in the strikes of the teachers in 1960 and the doctors in 1965. The railway disputes began in 1958, while López Mateos was still Secretary of Labor, and threatened to upset the first few months of his presidency with a crisis in both transportation and labor. Evelyn Stevens, Protest and Response in Mexico (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology University Press, 1974), 111–12. After several months of frustrated negotiations for raises
heralded as the embodiment of the Revolution and the agent of its promises, was now clearly seen as an instrument of oppression and repression. For many people, the massacre signaled the end of belief in the State’s ability to resolve the nation’s problems, and in the legitimacy of the regime in general.\textsuperscript{116} It was also clear that challenges to its authority would only be met with more violence. The nation’s intellectuals joined in public protests following the event, but to no avail; Paz resigned from his position as Mexico’s ambassador to India immediately in public protest against the government’s actions. After 1968, the intellectuals and their infrastructure continued their activities, but in alienation from the State, for it was evident that public service and being the “conciencia crítica del pueblo” were no longer compatible roles.\textsuperscript{117} It was also clear that the government would have the last word in case of any difference of opinion.

Hopes for democratization of the political system after Díaz Ordaz left power were once again brought low with the massacre of students on June 10, 1971, by right-wing operatives presumed to be working under President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976). The intellectual community was divided by this massacre, however, for Echeverría had opened Mexico up to some reforms and had poured funds into cultural and intellectual activities in an effort to reconcile the government’s alienation from the intellectual community in the wake of 1968. In the controversy that ensued, some intellectuals sided with the president while others continued to seek independent and alternative venues for creation and criticism. This fissure heralded the breakdown of the intellectual community into several competing blocs. Paradoxically, this and other, later
instances of government intervention (e.g., the events at *Excélsior* in 1976 that resulted in the founding of several new papers and journals: *Proceso*, *Unomásuno*, and *Vuelta*) moved the nation’s media along the long and slow path to democratization that is still being paved today.

After 1968, the debate over nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, and over *mexicanidad* in and of itself, moved into the background, to be replaced by the question of socialism, revolution, or democracy, and the role of the intellectual and his or her relation to the State. What remained constant, however, was the fact that the debate was—and to a lesser extent, despite tremendous cultural decentralization and recognition of the role of the provinces in cultural production, is—carried out by well-defined groups of intellectuals who are still struggling to assert their primacy in a battle for hegemony. In fact, many of the same individuals who identified, defined, and canonized Mexico’s most pressing cultural and literary issues from the 1940s through the 1960s—e.g., Carballo, Chumacero, Fuentes, José Luis Martínez, Monsiváis, Pacheco, Poniatowska, and, until their recent deaths, Paz and Benítez (to name but a few)—continue today to be preeminent public figures and cultural authorities.

118. In July of 1999, *Letras Libres* published an ‘Arbol hemerográfico’ that illustrates the journal’s efforts to lay claim to cultural authority. Along the image of a tree with its roots, branches, and trunk, the genealogy lays out the development of Mexico’s journals, supplements, and literary groups from the late nineteenth century through the late 1990s; it is, perhaps, as interesting for what it leaves out as for what it includes. The Ateneo de la Juventud and Contemporáneos groups are at the base of the trunk, which gradually moves up through Barandal and Taller (journals directed by Paz in the late 1930s and early 1940s); next, the *Revista Mexicana de Literatura* in its first and second phases (with pictures of Fuentes, Carballo, Segovia, and García Ponce close to the trunk) are situated directly underneath the word ‘mafia’ carved into the bark; finally, the trunk is crowned by *plural* (founded by Paz in 1972 under Julio Scherer at *Excélsior*), *Vuelta* (which was founded by Paz in 1976 when Scherer was, essentially, deposed from *Excélsior* in another incident of governmental repression, and many of his staff resigned from the newspaper and went on to form their own papers and journals), and *Letras Libres*, the new incarnation of *Vuelta*, which was reorganized and renamed following Paz’s death. Paz’s picture also appears twice, close to the trunk. *Letras libres* thus presents itself as the culmination of a line of direct descent of cosmopolitanist cultural criticism. The supplements (and two pictures of Benítez), in contrast, are set off from the trunk, appearing close to branches. Although Monsiváis has been a ubiquitous figure in the Mexican media since the late 1950s, his picture only appears once, next to *La Cultura en México*, which he edited with Pacheco in the early 1970s; *Nexos*, which he directed for many years and which had a bitter rivalry with *Vuelta*, is similarly relegated to the sidelines. Additionally, Castro Leal’s *Revista de literatura mexicana* does not appear on the chart at all. Perhaps even more tellingly, only one woman—Rosario Castellanos—appears on the chart, while none of the journals devoted to feminist issues (such as *Fem*, *Debate Feminista*, and *La correa feminista*, which were founded in 1976, 1990, and 1991, respectively) appears, indicating that the much greater prominence of women and feminist issues within the cultural scene in Mexico has failed to penetrate all circles.
This continuity has in many respects guaranteed the stability and persistence of certain questions, issues, and, ultimately, positions.

Danny Anderson has demonstrated that studies of the “field of production in which actors and institutions struggle, compete, and negotiate for legitimacy” have several important implications for the study of Mexican literature: they elucidate mechanisms of selection that might not otherwise be visible in the creation of a canon; they foreground the role of Mexico’s cultural elite “in shaping cultural production”; and they offer the “possibility of another way of writing histories of the Mexican novel.”119 “Rather than following changes in narrative trends,” he observes, “one can establish histories of numerous publishing houses that promoted certain kinds of literature and at various moments achieved qualified and temporary degrees of cultural hegemony.”120 As these publishing houses were largely dominated by intellectuals who formed part of a larger group with a shared vision of Mexico, and of what Mexican culture should come to be, I would suggest that the history of the intellectuals themselves and of their own cultural hegemony is at many levels a key to the history of Mexican literature during this period.

120. Ibid.