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Edited by

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CHAPTER 4

THE TEMPORALITIES OF MODERNITY IN SPANISH AMERICAN *MODERNISMO*: DARÍO'S BOURGEOIS KING

GERARD ACHING

ONE of the purposes of this chapter is to investigate a mysterious death: namely, that of the poet at the end of Rubén Darío's famous short story, "El rey burgués" (The Bourgeois King). Published in Darío's *Azul. . . .* (Chile, 1888)—the twenty-one-year-old Nicaraguan-born poet's first book of lyrical and prose compositions and one that arguably has been regarded as the text that launched Spanish American *modernismo* (roughly 1880–1914)[1]—"El rey burgués" is usually interpreted as a tragic commentary on the waning social status of poets and romantic poetic discourse in Spanish America toward the close of the nineteenth century. From a broad perspective in Western letters, this satirical take on the antagonism between the *poète maudit* (which Darío appreciated but never claimed to be) and the modern metropolis is certainly germane; but this view does not exhaust the complex historical, socioeconomic, and epistemological elements that inform Darío's composition of the brief narrative. That the poet in the story should have frozen to death still clutching the handle of the music box that the monarch obliged him to keep turning for his livelihood readily lends itself to a Marxist reading of the declining social position and proletarianization that urban poets began to experience during the second half of the nineteenth century. But what are we to make of the enigmatic smile on the poet's face when the king and his courtesans discover his lifeless body?

Following the Marxist approach, the smile suggests that the poet's death culminated in a final but joyful deliverance from wage labor. I do not dispute this interpretation, but, by posing a fundamental question about the circumstances in which the poet died, I would like to supplement this reading with a more global context. Despite the fact that the discovery of the poet's body revealed no external signs of violence, I nonetheless want to ask who or what was responsible for his death. In this study, I examine "El rey burgués" for what the poet's death tells us about the *modernistas*' engagement with the modern.

At first glance, there appears to be little doubt that the bourgeois king should be held responsible for the poet's death: it was ultimately the monarch who confined the poet to the repetitive, mind-numbing labor of turning the handle of a music box in the royal garden regardless of the time of year. Eventually, the winter's cold penetrated the poet's body and soul and caused his brain to "petrify," all of which coincided, as the narrator puts it, with the oblivion into which the "grandes himnos" (great anthems) had fallen. (Darío 34). The poet in Darío's tale seems to succumb to what José Martí referred to in 1882 as the "decentralization of intelligence" that characterized modern life and to a concomitant nostalgia "for great deeds" among poets (("Prologue to Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde's *Poem of Niagara*" 47). Yet it appears unjustified to blame the bourgeois king for anything more incriminating than his purported ignorance about what a poet and poetry were:

> —What's this? He asked.
> —A poet, sire.
> The king had swans in the pond, canaries, sparrows, *cenzontles* in the aviary; a poet was something new and strange. (31)[2]

The monarch's ignorance and the negligence to which it gave rise clearly proved fatal for the poet. But even if we were to concede that the bourgeois king's ignorance kills, in any attempt at assigning culpability it would still be crucial to assess if this neglect had been conscious or avoidable. Because the king possesses the trappings of a historically and geographically vague European monarch—his customs and the objects that he owns correspond to a premodern royal court as well as to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe—it is improbable that he would not have known what poets and poetry were. What, then, could account for this failure to acknowledge the bard and his language?

Given the manner in which the poet had been presented to him, it is more likely that even though the bourgeois king was willing to add the poet to his collection of exquisite art objects and fauna, the monarch could not make sense of the poet's soliloquy (the only occasion when he speaks), in which the bard describes poetry, his bravura, and the exclusivity of poetic discourse. Not even after confining the poet to wage labor with a succinct "Pieza de música por pedazo de pan"

(A musical piece for a bit of bread) (33) does the king come to appreciate the sound (the constant "Tiririrín") of the music box and the labor involved in producing it. Hence, if the monarch were to be held accountable for the poet's demise in any way, this responsibility would not emerge from conscious knowledge but from a subtler contingency of forces that the conjunction of "bourgeois" and "king" generates. In his nuanced reading of "El rey burgués," Angel Rama notes the literary skill with which Darío conjures the gap between the possessor of objects (the king) and the objects that he possesses (Rama 98–99). The critic argues that the monarch's ignorance about the artistic value of his own belongings reveals a contradiction that juxtaposes the bourgeois king's nouveau riche consumerist ideology and the artistic refinement of the material environment in which he lived (99); Rama further suggests that this contradiction must have been common during the Hispano-American bourgeoisie's rapid rise to wealth in the last decades of the nineteenth century, thus making the bourgeois king representative of the emergence of a new, local literature and art consumer. The bourgeois king displays the duplicitous economic practices that his name suggests: he is an aristocrat and, like a proper capitalist, forces the poet to work for his living. Nevertheless, as a member of the leisure class who enjoys the "non-productive consumption of time" (Veblen 41), the monarch appears to be ignorant about how to exact use and exchange value from this labor source: he does not know to what use the poet should be put, requests counsel from his court, and accepts that of a street philosopher, who recommends leaving the poet outdoors.[3]

There is, as it were, a great deal to be said in this short story about the sites, articulation, and status of particular areas of knowledge. There are two such areas that I investigate in this chapter in order to describe and assess an articulation of modernity in Spanish American *modernismo*. The first of these is informational for readers unfamiliar with this field; it concerns epistemological/taxonomical debates about "excessive" imitation—the most frequently mentioned critique of the *modernistas* in Spanish American literary history—and approaches this field-defining debate by asking a deceptively simple question: how did Darío have access to what he knew about the latest in French literature, art, and culture? In the second section of the chapter, I examine the opposition between the bourgeois king and the poet around which the tale is structured as a statement about modernity. The definition of modernity to which I subscribe in this chapter derives from an analysis of this constitutive disjuncture between, on the one hand, a neocolonial economic liberalism that commodifies, rationalizes, and socializes objects in a particular way and, on the other, a discourse that laments the loss of a poetic knowledge of objects in the face of the poet's inexorable subordination to wage labor. Drawing from Étienne Balibar's reminder in *The Philosophy of Marx* (1995) that Marx's thesis of historical rationality is more complex than the relentless determinism that gets attributed to it, I interrogate the figures of the bourgeois king and poet and the antagonism between them as commentaries on the heterogeneous temporality of the region's modernity in the period when the *modernistas* wrote.

Beyond Imitation

As a field, Spanish American *modernismo* and its criticism remain isolated in modernist studies. In spite of the enormous quantity of verse, prose, and reportage that the *modernistas* wrote—every Spanish-speaking nation possesses its *modernista* literary canon—most of its figures, with the probable exception of José Martí (1853–1895) and Rubén Darío, are little known outside of Hispanic letters. The reasons for this isolation are complex and are not the principal business of this chapter, but some of them include the paucity of edited volumes of the *modernistas'* complete works until the 1960s and beyond; the long tradition of viewing literary criticism in the region as a set of institutions and practices whose primary concern was to determine and maintain national literary canons; the continuing dominance of English, French, and German literatures in modernist and comparative literary studies; and, the most challenging of all, the reductive commonplace within and outside the region that *modernista* literature merely imitated French literary and artistic currents, such as Symbolism and the Parnassian School. Yet describing the *modernistas* as compulsive imitators of metropolitan currents has done little to elucidate the complexity of their engagements with modern life.

Despite the fact that Paris, the perceived capital of the nineteenth century for most modernists, was as much a beacon of inspiration for Spanish American artists and intellectuals, the *modernistas* have rarely been considered interlocutors in the global exchange of ideas about late-nineteenth-century modernity and modernist literatures. Drawn from many parts of Spanish America, but especially concentrated in large cosmopolitan cities like Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Bogotá, Montevideo, Caracas, and Havana, they and their experiences of modernity are unfamiliar, unacknowledged, or presumed to be fundamentally distinct from their metropolitan counterparts. This last misconception derives from historical and cultural biases (both inside and outside the region) that associate economic, scientific, and social "advances" with modern "civilized" nations and concomitantly privilege the anguish, melancholy, and iconoclasm of literature by figures such as Baudelaire as autonomously and universally illustrative of the experience of modernity. Even though in the preface to the first German edition of *Capital* (1859) Marx likens metropolitan experience of the incompleteness of capitalist production to that of their Latin American counterparts, comparative work has yet to take up Marx's cue (Preface 296). Among the first generation of *modernistas*, Julián del Casal (Cuba, 1863–1893) and José Asunción Silva (Colombia, 1865–1896) stand out because of their adroit use of lyricism to articulate the deep melancholy that characterizes their respective engagements with penury and commerce, both of which were local phenomena with tangible connections to global capitalism.[4] In short, "modernity," defined by Marshall Berman in the early 1980s as "a mode of vital experience—experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils—that is shared by men and women all over the world today" (15) points to a specifically global occurrence that today

still requires elaboration as a *relational* experience beyond notions of compulsive and relentless imitation.

If *modernista* literature and criticism continue to be located at the margins of the contemporary study of modernisms, the field has not fared better vis-à-vis the category of world literature and postcolonial literary criticism. World literature emerged as a late-twentieth-century publishing phenomenon in the West that brought due attention to contemporary, mostly narrative, nonmetropolitan literatures and their authors. Even though the *modernistas* wrote from the first nations in the western hemisphere (except for Cuba and Puerto Rico) to achieve political independence after the United States and Haiti, their turn-of-the-twentieth-century bids for an autonomous literary expression, mainly in lyrical poetry, precluded them from a publishing market that later welcomed and in part facilitated the Latin American literary boom that began in the 1960s. If generalizations may be applied to so broad a literary production, the *modernistas'* penchant for the use of a refined Spanish as lingua franca, their attention to debates on art for art's sake, their defense of artistic elitism in light of an incipient democratization of cultural institutions and practices, and their ambiguous relationship with the region's oligarchies and bourgeoisies made them undesirable subjects for a publishing market that has concentrated on narratives that directly and indirectly engage with decolonization.

Even though Spanish American *modernismo* was the first literary current to extend its influence from former colonies to the Spanish peninsula, this mostly elitist, nonmetropolitan literature presents particular challenges to postcolonial critical approaches to the issue of imitation.[5] Postcolonial theories have successfully elucidated early colonial and twentieth-century Latin American literatures and cultural practices—in other words, the period before and after *modernismo*—but *modernismo* itself remains insufficiently explored. If reading for and interrogating decolonizing struggles and strategies may be considered primary aims in postcolonial criticism, then what sense can be made of the *modernistas'* predilection for refined Spanish (i.e., the cultivation of a "standard" lingua franca that had also been the official language of the Spanish empire) and their appetite for European literatures and cultural referents? Fetishization certainly provides part of the answer. But the matter of how the *modernistas* promoted an autonomous literary expression by liberally drawing from western Europe's literary and cultural production is best understood not as a complex, ambivalent relationship with Europe alone; rather, this ambivalent relationship must be viewed in light of regional concerns about a U.S. territorial, economic, and cultural presence in the hemisphere beginning as early as the second half of the nineteenth century.

The challenge for postcolonial critical approaches, then, is how to theorize the *modernistas'* modes of engagement with European literatures as, among other factors, resistance to the appeal that the United States had for some of Spanish America's political and intellectual leadership. Iris M. Zavala, one of the first and few critics to conjoin *modernismo* and postcoloniality, underscores the significance of a common language, stating that the "linguistic code of a common symbolic

geography produced modernism/modern as a social category" and that "the question of language at that point was political, cultural, and literary in its most material sense, since a defense of language by the Latin Americans, and specifically by the Caribbeans, was a choice of identity" (3). This uneasy, shifting, tripartite relation of cultural alliances and resistance (Spanish America–Europe–United States) informs the *modernistas*' defense of a Pan-Hispanism that often and paradoxically, from a postcolonial perspective, included Spain.

This tripartite relation contextualizes the urgency with which Martí, who, in response to U.S dominance and Latin American disunion at the First Pan-American Conference (1889–1890) and at the International Monetary Conference (1891) in Washington, developed his seminal essay, "Nuestra América" ("Our America," 1891), which addresses the pitfalls of "too much imitation" and the need for local knowledge to enhance self-government ("Our America" 294). The triangular relation also provides exact coordinates for José Enrique Rodó (Uruguay, 1871–1917), who, in his essay, *Ariel* (1900)—one of the earliest literary uses of Shakespeare's *Tempest* in the Americas to work through issues of political and cultural autonomy—warned against "imitación inconsulta" (ill-advised imitation) (Rodó, 79) and posited the United States as Caliban and Spanish America as Ariel, the heir to European classical and Christian civilization. Finally, the tripartite relation inspires Darío's "A Roosevelt" ("To Roosevelt," 1905), in which he describes the U.S. president as the "futuro invasor / de la América ingenua que tiene sangre indígena, / que aún reza a Jesucristo y aún habla en español" (*Cantos de vida y esperanza* 123; vv. 6–8).[6] The majority of the nations from which the *modernistas* wrote had achieved political independence by the 1830s. The challenge that these poets and writers faced, as these excerpts attest, was to contribute to the forging of discourses of national and regional culture in a period of hegemonic neocolonial incursions that originated mostly in Britain, France, and the United States.

Given the extensive debates about how to forge Spanish American national/regional cultures at the time, it would be disingenuous to disavow the critical attention that had been paid to issues of imitation. However, rather than conceive of imitation as compulsive mimicry and the absence of originality, I would assert that the *modernistas*' awareness of the assimilability of literary and cultural forms and practices worthy of emulation or disdain provided them with uniquely situated approaches to culture based on the reading, translation, and assimilation of a wide spectrum of literary texts (poetry, narrative fiction, travel writing), columns, reviews, and news items from Europe, the United States, and Latin America. In other words, their cosmopolitan reading and writing habits afforded them the opportunity to appreciate how national and regional cultures could be grasped for their literariness as textual constructions. Harsha Ram, in his contribution to this volume, examines a similar eagerness on the part of the Russian futurists to identify literariness with what he calls an alternative universalism. In the *modernistas*' case, this literariness—the studied consideration of and open attitude toward the textuality of cultural representations—is precisely what allows us to broach the question of Darío's access to the latest French literature and art.

In the first of two letters that the Spanish critic, Juan Valera, wrote to Darío (October 22, 1888) reviewing *Azul*. . ., the critic admits that after initially refraining from opening Darío's book—since its title invoked for him the emptiness of Victor Hugo's "l'art c'est l'azur"[7]—he states that he was astonished to discover the poet's impressive but "originalidad muy extraña" (very strange originality) ("Carta-Prólogo" 10):

> Extraordinary was my surprise upon learning that you, according to well-informed persons who assure me of it, did not leave Nicaragua except to go to Chile, where you have been residing for no more than two years. How, without the influence of the environment, have you been able to assimilate all the elements of the French spirit, while maintaining the Spanish form that holds together and organizes these elements and transforming them into your own material? (11)[8]

Taking umbrage in Valera's biased description of Darío's immersion in French letters and culture on the other side of the Atlantic as a "galicismo mental" (mental Frenchness) (25), many commentators have missed the opportunity to interrogate the difficulty with which Valera attempted to communicate the poet's originality at the same time that he compliments him for the "perfection" (25) of his knowledge of the latest French literature, art, and fashion. For Valera, the book is so suffused with a cosmopolitan spirit and its stories so thoroughly appear to have been composed in France that the critic concludes that there is no writer in Spanish more French than Darío (12). Yet, after listing a number of French writers with whom he thought the poet to be "saturated," Valera also asserts that Darío "no imita a ninguno" (does not imitate any); rather, "You have stirred it all up: heated it in the distilling flask of your brain, and have drawn from it a peculiar quintessence" (12).[9] It should be said that this distillation was not the product of Darío's genius alone; it could be found in the works of the first generation of *modernistas* as well as in the translations of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Catulle Mendès, and others that they disseminated in Spanish American journals and magazines that began sprouting in various Spanish American cities in the 1890s.[10] In short, this assimilation of contemporary European letters, thought, and fashions took place through a network of readership, commentary, translation, and creativity whereby the *modernistas* came to recognize one another as interlocutors in a cosmopolitan exchange of ideas about modern social life in capitals on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet Valera also hints at an intriguing aspect of Darío's assimilation of French letters and artistic currents for which there is no simple explanation. The critic states that Darío is so in tune with fashions in Paris and displays such *chic* and distinction that he "se adelanta a la moda y pudiera modificarla e imponerla" (13).[11] How could the poet be said to have accomplished this feat from such a distance? Carlos Alonso, focusing on textual practices and the rhetoric of modernity in Spanish America during the nineteenth century, notes that the "obsessive readings of the latest books, the scrupulously documented travels to the metropolitan countries, the incisive, painstaking, and pained studies of local reality—they all served first to measure the distance still to be traveled to become modern, but they also helped to

identify and master the most effective strategies for never leaving home" (vi). Darío, Casal, and other *modernistas* did not travel to Paris before they began composing a literature imbued with French cosmopolitanism; nor, as Alonso asserts, had these modern artistic pilgrimages been necessary in order to keep abreast of literary fashions there. As Octavio Paz puts it, the *modernistas* were not interested in becoming French but in being modern ("El caracol y la sirena" 12–13). In Darío's case, although his living conditions were precarious after he arrived in Valparaíso, Chile, at the age of nineteen, Pedro Balmaceda Toro—a poet and the Chilean president's son—befriended the Nicaraguan and provided him with access to his private collection of the latest European literature and magazines. Recalling his influences when he composed *Azul* . . ., Darío acknowledged his ability to be in tune with the latest in Paris, stating that he had become familiar with the Parnassians at about the time that the "Symbolist struggle" was just beginning in France and was still unknown abroad and especially so in "nuestra América" (*Historia de mis libros* 36). He thus credits himself with stimulating directions in the region's literature, which brings us closer to elucidating Valera's claim that the poet anticipated fashions in France without ever having been there.

Darío cultivated this sensibility for emerging literary and artistic currents and defined his role, as he stated in the prologue to *Prosas profanas*—his second book of poems—as that of informant and leader of the new literary currents in Spanish America. The year after his brief, first visit to Paris in 1893, he began to publish in Buenos Aires' *La Nación* a series of portraits (*semblanzas*) of nineteen unconventional, mostly French poets and writers that he admired or found fascinating. The series, which he collected and eventually published as *Los raros* (*The Odd Ones*) in 1896 includes figures such as Poe, Martí, Leconte de Lisle, Moréas, Ibsen, Nordau, Lautréamont, and Verlaine. The portraits conjure these figures through a journalistic combination of observations and critiques by their contemporaries, physical descriptions, attention to transgressive or quirky comportment, direct quotes from their works, foreign colloquial and erudite terms, and a plethora of references to past and modern literature and art that offers the knowledgeable reader an illusion of tangible immediacy and cliquish social prestige. According to Paz, Darío's "instinct" for anticipating the future relevance of some of these figures was astonishing; he was, for instance, the first to call attention to Lautréamont outside of France and, arguably, the first Spanish-language writer to allude to Sade (11–12). More recently, Julio Ortega has examined Darío's prescience, asserting that *Los raros* can be simultaneously considered an "archivo transitorio" (transitory archive) and a "genealogía del futuro" (genealogy of the future) that centers its creativity in a system of reading through which Darío identified novelty in past and coetaneous literary currents and constructed a future lineage on the force of a signifying present (2). *Los raros*, Ortega states, is a book whose plot is fundamentally about reading the new Atlantic literature (3), and it facilitates this reading by glossing, quoting, and translating (4) in ways, I would add, that Borges would take to an internationally recognized level of sophisticated reflection in the twentieth century.

As Valera initially observed and Paz later attested, Darío's originality lay in the innovations in meter that he introduced into Spanish-language poetry, the related freedom from academicism that he brought to verse, the bold cosmopolitan spirit that suffuses his texts, and the daring eroticism (for the times) of some of his works. These innovations transcend the notion of spontaneous or mindless imitation of metropolitan Europe. In fact, Fredric Jameson refers to Darío's introduction of the term "*modernismo*" into Spanish-language usage in 1888 as a "scandal" since it marked a more evident "break" with literary traditions than in other languages (100). Darío's and the *modernistas*' familiarity with the latest trends in literature, art, culture, and modern life in the Atlantic world's most influential capitals was the result of critical processes that included the regular reading, translation, modeling of texts on, as well as against, European influences—Casal, for example, praised literary decadentism while Gutiérrez Nájera deplored it—and the creation of original works, especially in poetry, literary journalism, and reportage. The elite transatlantic circuit of readers and writers that gave rise to *modernista* cultural claims of belonging to a modern world established the basis for a social imaginary of Spanish America's relation to the foremost capitalist nations of the Western world as a regional, class, and language-based identity that interpellated members according to the economic and/or intellectual means that they had at their disposal to travel and/or "transport" themselves, for instance, to an illusory Paris.

A Transatlantic Modernity

Countering relativist arguments for the cultural exceptionalism that the "ideologues of 'modernity'" proffer, Jameson reminds the reader in *A Singular Modernity* (2002) that the fundamental meaning of modernity is global capitalism. In his assessment of how such stances avoid this basic meaning, he asserts wryly:

> Everyone knows the formula by now: this means that there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model. Whatever you dislike about the latter, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and 'cultural' notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently, so that there can be a Latin-American kind, or an Indian kind or an African kind, and so forth. (12)

Jameson's point about the limits of exceptionalism is well taken, for any attempt at cultural chauvinism is worthy of analysis and critique. In this section, I describe and examine an example of nineteenth-century transatlantic modernity that not only emerges through global capitalism but also acknowledges that experiences of modernity are indeed global. Following Jameson's lead and in concert with Neil Lazarus' assessment of his model in this volume, what I propose is not an "alternative"

modernity but the opportunity to recognize that if it is at all possible to speak of global capitalism and its history, then it is crucial to bring to light the infrastructural, extra-European *circuits* of social and economic activities, transactions, and influences that helped to stimulate global capitalism in the first place. To imagine modernity in this way avoids problems of the one-sidedness in Eurocentric accounts of modernity because it assumes, as E. San Juan Jr. asserts, that global experiences of modernity occur "within a differentiated, not centralized, ontology of determinate and concrete social formations" (223–24). The evidence of transatlantic modernity that I describe below is graspable, then, not as stark oppositions between center and periphery, modern and premodern, Paris and Spanish America, but as circuits of texts, reading, translation, and literary composition that I refer to as an evaluative readership. The intelligibility of Darío's short story relies on the difference that knowledge or ignorance of the value of the art objects and cultural referents in the narrative makes for the subjectivities of the bourgeois king, the poet, and the worldly reader.

If the evaluative readership that I describe provides evidence of a transatlantic modernity, then the Spanish American bourgeoisie's desire to belong to Western civilization and participate in global capitalism as well as its sponsorship of the movement of texts and ideas across the Atlantic need to be accounted for not only as an infrastructural issue but also in relation to the nineteenth-century evolutionist idea of historical progress.[12] Martí's observation in "Our America" that Spanish Americans "were a whole fancy dress ball, in English trousers, a Parisian waistcoat, a North American overcoat, and a Spanish bullfighter's hat" (293) alludes to presumably overactive circuits of trade and consumption that present obstacles for autochthonous creativity. Yet he also underscores the historical uniqueness of nation-building in the Americas in temporal terms, claiming that "[n]ever before have such advanced and consolidated nations been created from such disparate factors in less historical time" (289–90).[13] Although Martí is aware that the speed of these advances has also been problematic, his statement nonetheless invites us to interrogate the temporal heterogeneity of late-nineteenth-century "historical progress" in the region. As I will show, the bourgeois king's hybridity invokes this heterogeneity.

The conflict between the bourgeois king and the poet and the latter's unavoidable subjection to wage labor are also indicative of "historical progress" in another crucial way. Asserting that even though it was practically impossible for the theorist "not to be an evolutionist in the nineteenth century" (91), Étienne Balibar argues that "the idea of progressive evolution in Marx is inseparable from a thesis on the rationality of history or, if one prefers, the intelligibility of its forms, tendencies and conjunctures" (92). In order to move beyond the vulgar determinism that has been ascribed to Marx's investigatory "schema of historical causality" (92), Balibar advocates analyzing the *development* of the contradiction in the social relations between capitalists and workers, which would in effect serve to describe the history of a society's social formations: the deepening opposition between "the relations of production and the development of productive forces" (94) in capitalism that leads to a

growing conflict between an increasingly rationalized production and the super-exploitation of labor (the second level of development) and that ends with a class struggle that is not simply about the telos of transforming capitalism's mode of production; it is also about pressuring workers in order to exact surplus value and forcing capitalists to find other methods when proletarian resistance proves too strong (96). The analysis that follows examines the figures of the bourgeois king and the poet and their mutual antagonism for the "intelligibility of [their] forms, tendencies and conjunctures." In essence, the modernity to which I refer in this section of the chapter is spatial (transatlantic), temporally heterogeneous, and measurable according to the nature and outcome of the conflict between the bourgeois king and the poet.

The figure of the bourgeois king accurately captures some of the unevenness of global capitalism from the purview of late-nineteenth-century teleological discourses on socioeconomic development and progress. When Marx called attention to the incompleteness of capitalist development in Europe in his preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, he also critiqued the "inherited evils" that derived from "the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms." (296). The presence of these "anachronisms" in mid-nineteenth-century Europe provides a partial explanation for "the 'crises of Marxism' before Marxism as such existed" (Balibar 8): the unexpected failure of the revolutions of 1848, when Marx and others were convinced that a major crisis of capitalism was about to happen and did not; and the combined Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the suppression of the Paris Commune the following year, when, to Marx's chagrin, it became evident that other crucial factors competed with class struggle as explanations for the idea of progress (9). A bourgeois king at the time when Marx and Engels penned *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) might have represented part of that enigmatic mix of classes in the "holy alliance" against the "spectre of Communism" to which Marx and Engels refer in the document's opening line (Marx and Engels 29); later in the century, however, the hybrid figure would more readily capture the "passive survival of antiquated modes of production" in modern times and their accompanying temporal disjunctures, which, it should be noted, Marx reads as being "social and political." European modernism itself emerged through such disjunctures or, as Perry Anderson puts it, "at the intersection between a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or semi-insurgent, labor movement" (326).

The bourgeois king's configuration is also intelligible on the other side of the Atlantic. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the figure might have been illustrative of an inner turmoil in national politics and imperial economic policies: the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie throughout the Atlantic world were perennially at odds over whether chattel slavery—one of colonialism's "inherited evils" and the forced labor regime that facilitated the modernization of global capitalism—was an obstacle to economic and moral progress. Nevertheless, whenever the bourgeoisie gains the upper hand, Marx and Engels wrote in their manifesto, it "has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations" (32). Rama argues that by the final quarter

of the nineteenth century, a period to which he refers as the "imperial" expansion of capitalism, one of the "secret" reasons why Marx's hopes for proletarian victory in the Paris Commune came to naught was the wealth and resilience that intensified incorporation of Latin America and its primary raw materials brought to Europe's bourgeoisies during the Belle Époque (23). Tulio Halperin Donghi documents how the whole political spectrum (oligarchies, the new bourgeoisie, the urban middle classes) embraced the establishment of a Latin American branch of the European bourgeoisie (228) and that a neocolonial order was firmly in place in Latin America by 1880 (280). By way of illustration, this historian reports that during the first Pan-American Conference (Washington, DC, 1889–1890), Roque Sáenz Peña, a member of the Argentine delegation, opposed the U.S. agenda of America for Americans with the idea of America for humanity, which, Halperin Donghi states, reflected the position of some Latin American countries to maintain its unbalanced trade with Europe and that of others to oppose U.S. hegemony (287). It is worth noting that several stories from Darío's *Azul* . . . would first be published in newspapers during this decade in Valparaíso, Chile, a city that had already begun to display the wealth that its copper exports to Europe generated by the time the poet arrived. In late-nineteenth-century Spanish America, the bourgeois king would thus reflect the diverse but conciliatory political spectrum to which Halperin Donghi refers, so that the figure's specificity would consist in this *active* survival and simultaneity of different modes of production within a hegemonic neocolonial order.

In Darío's tale, the bourgeois king is undoubtedly a member of a wealthy, urban, leisure class whose accumulated riches proceed from diverse areas of the globe. He dons fine, whimsical clothes and possesses a splendid palace with a large contingent of slaves, servants, and courtiers. He enjoys and supports painting, sculpture, and music; he fences, hunts for sport, takes lessons in rhetoric, ponders grammatical problems, and reads novels by the late-nineteenth-century French novelist Georges Ohnet for pleasure.[14] The narrative's fictive depiction of the bourgeois king's life of leisure is sociologically accurate. Writing in the 1890s, the American economist and social critic Thorstein Veblen asserted that leisure produces "'immaterial' goods," some of which included "quasi-scholarly or quasi-artistic accomplishments," such as the knowledge of dead languages, correct spelling, syntax, prosody, and the "latest proprieties" of dress, furniture, games, sports, fancy-bred animals, and other "branches of learning" (45). What is most illustrative of the bourgeois king's involvement in global capitalism, however, is his collection of a large number of rare and beautiful objects of art from Europe and the Orient—"por lujo y nada más" (for the sake of luxury and nothing more) ("El rey burgués" 30). The collection includes Chinese and Japanese porcelains, fans, and masks, marble sculptures in the Greek salon, and, in the "salon de los tiempos galantes" (merry times salon), paintings by the French, Rococo artists Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin. According to the narrator, the bourgeois king could have enjoyed a salon "worthy of the taste of a Goncourt and of the millions of a Croesus" (30).[15]

The collection of luxury goods and international art, a frequent *modernista* trope that Silva, for example, skillfully develops in the opening pages of his novel *De sobremesa* (posthumously published in 1925), indicates that the bourgeois king is immersed in a realm of commodity fetishism whereby the objects he owns reveal, as the narrator states, his "Buen gusto" (Good taste) and "Refinamiento" (Refinement) (30)—qualities that emanate from his possessions and associate him with the likes of a Goncourt. Yet, as a collector, the monarch is also faced with "the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them" (Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" 39).[16] The irony of indulging in and, at the same time, attempting to undo commodity fetishism not only captures an experience of modernity in which men struggle against the proverbial melting of all that is solid into air; it is also a specific reminder that leisure "does not leave a material product" (Veblen 45). In other words, at the summit of his acquisitive power to collect objects from across the globe at whim, the collector produces immaterial values that he then wishes to reify through the acquisition and display of his collection. According to Walter Benjamin,

> Since the days of Louis Philippe, the bourgeoisie has endeavored to compensate itself for the fact that private life leaves no traces in the big city. It seeks such compensation within its four walls—as if it were striving, as a matter of honor, to prevent the traces, if not of its days on earth then at least of its possessions and requisites of daily life, from disappearing forever. ("The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" 77).[17]

The affective intensity that accompanies this knowledge of disappearing immaterial values is a nineteenth-century literary commonplace that the *modernistas* widely employed and which places them in the duplicitous position of being both inculcators of the modern and experts on melancholic, aristocratic and bourgeois decadentism in Spanish America. According to Halperin Donghi, the neocolonial order in the region was born old because it demonstrated clearly visible signs of a rapid exhaustion (280); similarly, Anderson claims that capitalist development in regions like Latin America (before the 1980s) is usually "far more rapid and dynamic, where it does occur, than in metropolitan zones, yet it is infinitely less stabilized or consolidated" (329). Even though it is certain that a related and developed transatlantic readership facilitated the *modernistas*' extensive cultivation of the trope of the art and luxury object collection, Halperin Donghi and Anderson also provide infrastructural reasons for appreciating the intensity with which the Spanish American bourgeoisie experienced (and the *modernistas* represented) the disappearance of immaterial values within the walled interiors of its urban communities.

When Benjamin avers that the best that the collector could do in his vain attempt to annul commodity fetishism was to bestow "connoisseur" rather than "use value" ("Paris" 39) on the objects in his possession, he points to the nineteenth-century critique of another deleterious effect of modern capitalism with which the *modernistas* were familiar: the division of labor and the forced specialization of knowledge it induces. (In *Ariel*, for example, Rodó assails utilitarianism and its purportedly nefarious consequences for the spiritual and intellectual integrity that privacy and leisure should provide Spanish Americans.) The bourgeois king illustrates that he is embedded in a world that he fosters yet from which he cannot extricate

himself. Evocative of Martí's allusion to the "decentralization of intelligence," the monarch surrounds himself with courtesans, rhetoricians, riding and dance teachers, and a petty philosopher, all of whom provide him with discrete areas of knowledge that he calls upon at leisure; even though they make their appearance in the privacy of the bourgeois king's court, these characters only come to into being in the text through the division of intellectual and quasi-intellectual labor and reveal the increasing specialization of knowledge that leads to the monarch's reliance on chosen "specialists" to provide him with a connoisseur's knowledge of his world.

Even though the poet in Darío's story must also submit to the division of labor and the specialization of knowledge, he still claims to possess a comprehensive view of the world that the bourgeois king and his court fail or refuse to appreciate. When the king commands the poet to speak, the poet's attitude and complaints are reminiscent of Baudelaire's pointed remarks "To the Bourgeois" in "The Salon of 1846": "Some of you are 'learned'; others are the 'haves.' A glorious day will dawn when the learned will be 'haves,' and the 'haves' will be learned. . . . Until such time as this supreme harmony is ours, it is just that the mere 'haves' should aspire to be learned; for knowledge is a form of enjoyment no less than ownership" (47). As if he were imparting the knowledge that Baudelaire deemed "just," the poet instructs the bourgeois king: "Sire, art is not to be found in frigid marble folds, nor in overworked paintings, nor in the excellent Mr. Ohnet! Sire! Art does not don trousers, nor speaks bourgeois, nor dots all the 'i's'" ("El rey burgués" 32).[18] The poet's declaration that the king's collection of precious and exotic art objects is not true art questions the king's social status and undermines his belief that by collecting these objects in the privacy of his salons he has the power to exempt them from circulation in the marketplace. As a further reminder of the contradiction that characterizes the bourgeois king's actions, the poet complains that if the shoemaker criticizes his verses and the pharmacology professor punctures his inspiration it is because the king authorizes these affronts (33). In response to these authorized challenges to the exclusivity of poetic discourse, the poet publicly discloses the monarch's attempts to disavow his role in bourgeois capitalism. The king reacts to the poet's revelation that the monarch may be counted among the "haves" but not the "learned" by confining the poet to winding a music box in his garden, thereby transforming him into another collected item.

In contrast to the bourgeois king's socioeconomic rationalization of his possessions, the poet's grandiloquent soliloquy lists a number of subject-object relations that the bard promotes as poetic knowledge of the world. The poet announces that he has abandoned the city's Bohemian decadence as a source of inspiration and renewed himself through Nature: "I have caressed Nature, and I have sought ideal warmth, the verse that resides in the star, at the far end of the sky, in the pearl, at the bottom of the ocean" (32).[19] In addition to this Symbolist insight and idealism, the poet claims to perceive vast panoramas that he appropriates for the future: "Sire, I have for some time sung the verb of the future. I have spread my wings before the hurricane, I was born at the moment of the aurora; I seek the chosen race that must await, with a hymn on its lips and a lyre in hand, the emergence of the great sun"

(32).[20] Ironically, this claim to envision the future—with its looming revolutions and the need for a poem that would greet a Messiah with a "triumphal arch, of stanzas made of steel, stanzas made of gold, stanzas of love" (32)[21]—constitutes a defense of the prophetic power of poetic discourse at a time when, faced with the division of intellectual and artistic labor and the rules of the market, the Hispano-American poet saw himself, as Rama puts it, "condemned to disappear" (50). Analogous to the bourgeois king's self-generated fiction that he could evade capitalist relations of production, the poet claims to possess a unified conception of the world on the basis of a poetic subjectivity that he locates outside of capitalism but which nonetheless emerges with the subjectivation that characterized the rise of bourgeois liberalism in Spanish America at the time (13). The multiple subject positions that punctuate the poet's soliloquy belie his claim to possess an unfragmented subjectivity.

Although Rama's analysis of Darío's tale accurately describes how the poet is embedded in capitalism, it does not recognize the antagonism between the monarch and the poet as an evolving contradiction that the bard's death brings to a close. For the critic, the poet's subjection to wage labor and the repetitive production of specialized poetry (the music box's relentless "Tiririrín") represent the outcome of a process by which the Spanish American poet had been gradually losing the social status that the figure enjoyed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. No longer the civil poet, as Rama asserts, who simultaneously performed the roles of "politician, ideologue, moralist, educator" (7), the poet, now stripped of the pedagogical and ideological functions that might have allowed him to transform the "haves" into the "learned" in the bourgeois king's court, is forced to abandon his poetic "totalizing vision" (44). Yet the poet's death represents a tragic local resolution to a contradiction in which he succumbs to the "super-exploitation" that Balibar identifies with the capitalists' rationalization and socialization of production. Other stories from *Azul* . . . also denounce the pervasive exploitation that characterizes what Balibar calls the second level in the development of the contradiction between capitalists and workers: A poet in "El velo de la reina Mab" (Queen Mab's Veil) declares that he would compose something immortal were it not for his being overwhelmed by misery and hunger; and in "La canción del oro" (Gold's Song), the bard appears as a ragged, wandering beggar. In "El rey burgués," as in these other examples from *Azul* . . ., there are no possibilities for "historical progress" toward the transformation of capitalism's relations of production beyond this second stage of the conflict between knowledge capitalists and workers.

The winter in Darío's story, which chills the poet's body and petrifies his mind, and the glacial air, which bites his flesh, lashes his face, and eventually leaves him dead like a frozen sparrow ("El rey burgués" 34), resonates with Benjamin's characterization of commodity culture in his study of Baudelaire's Paris. Referring to the Second Empire as a period of growing exploitation, Benjamin argues that the more conscious the person qua "labor power" is of his existence as a commodity and the more he proletarianizes himself, "the more he will be gripped by the *chilly breath of the commodity economy*, and the less he will feel like empathizing with commodities"

("Second Empire" 88–89; my emphasis). Even though, Benjamin asserts, the situation had not yet reached this point for the petty bourgeoisie to which Baudelaire belonged (89), Darío's poet, who must endure the court's response to the bourgeois king's query about what should be done with him, is openly subject to evaluation, objectification, and commodification. The poet's demise, in other words, illustrates the temporal heterogeneity of Spanish American "historical progress" and modernity: on the one hand, the threat of being "gripped by the chilly breath" of commodification is immanent in Benjamin's perception of the French petty bourgeoisie in the 1840s yet fully representable some forty years later in *Azul*...; on the other, it is also the case that a phenomenon such as Darío's radical transformation of the poet into a collectible thing could not have been theorized by Marx, as Balibar points out, but had to await Georg Lukács at the beginning of the twentieth century (69).

In "El rey burgués," the poet's death forecloses the continuing evolution of the contradiction between bourgeois capitalism and working-class proletarianization that informs nineteenth-century "historical progress" according to Marx. That the poet's demise alludes to the political weakness of urban, working-class struggles in the face of the wide political spectrum intent on creating local branches of the European bourgeoisie in late-nineteenth-century Spanish America is a thesis worth documenting. As such, the poet's death would signify the gradual disappearance of opportunities for working-class resistance, the absolute victory of the "haves," and the dissolution of a social antagonism upon which "historical progress" was based. But it should not be assumed that the poet is necessarily driven into oblivion as a powerless victim. As I indicated earlier, the poet's frozen corpse showed no external signs of violence, which brings to mind another hypothesis. According to Benjamin, it was understandable that under the strain of modernity individuals might become "exhausted and take refuge in death" ("Second Empire" 104). In "El pájaro azul" ("The Blue Bird"), another of Darío's stories from *Azul*..., the poet commits suicide rather than abandon poetry in order to enter his father's business. Arguing that Baudelaire penned his first notes on the theory of the modern in 1845 when "the idea of suicide became familiar to the working masses" (105), Benjamin asserts that "[m]odernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seats a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernity in the realm of passions" (104). Whether the poet succumbs to relentless capitalist exploitation or heroically takes his life because of it, how do we account for the smile that exceeds the tragic end that is common to both hypotheses? Bitterness may be considered a reasonable response to the super-exploitation that assailed the poet, but the pleasure that his rigor mortis simultaneously captures defies this expectation.

More dynamic an oxymoron than the "frozen unrest" in Baudelaire's features that Benjamin attributes to the poet's lack of "great knowledge and a comprehensive view of history" (100), the bitter smile of Darío's poet not only connotes a joyful delivery from a modern society that no longer requires his unspecialized knowledge of the world. The gesture also provides evidence of an agency unavoidably

embedded in global capitalism even as its very ambiguity reminds us that the intelligibility of the poet's bitter smile emerges through a more decentered and temporally heterogeneous historical rationality than that posited in the deterministic teleological accounts so often employed to describe it. In short, the transcendent ambiguity of the poet's smile invokes the unevenness of "progress" and "development" as an experience of modernity that we might today consider universal.

NOTES

1. As in all such conventions to historicize literary movements, these years provide a rough estimate. A traditional strain within Spanish American literary history closely linked the movement's duration with Darío's biography: such was his influence in the Spanish-speaking world that his first book was said to mark the beginnings of *modernismo* and his death, in 1916, signaled its end. In choosing the years 1880 to 1914 to refer to *modernismo*, I follow Angel Rama's lead when he points out that the period 1870–1914 coincided with the Belle Époque, when western European nations intensified their incorporation of Latin America into global capitalism and the Spanish American bourgeoisies correspondingly rose to prominence in their respective nations (Rama 24). It should be noted that in Spanish American letters, *posmodernismo* or *vanguardia* are the names that are normally applied to the avant-garde artistic and literary activities and movements that followed. Also, Brazilian *modernismo* is distinguishable from Spanish American *modernismo* since the former was contemporaneous with the European avant-garde movements beginning in the interwar period. For more about the Brazilian movement, see Martins, Schwartz, and Unruh.

2. Darío, "El rey burgués"; all translations of the short story are mine.

3. I have not come across evidence that Darío specifically had the French king, Louis Philippe, the Duc d'Orléans (1773–1850), in mind. This monarch had been nicknamed the Citizen King because he ostensibly courted popular sovereignty—his exile in Massachusetts had also familiarized him with U.S. democracy—but in fact, he drew his support from and privileged the wealthy bourgeoisie during a reign (the July Monarchy, 1830–1848) in which working-class conditions deteriorated considerably. Baudelaire, who wrote about Louis Philippe, states in "The Salon of 1846": "Bourgeois—be you king, lawgiver or merchant—you have established collections, museums, galleries. Some of these, which sixteen years ago were accessible only to the monopolizers, have opened the door to the masses" (48).

4. In addition to Martí, Darío, Casal, and Silva, the first generation of Spanish American *modernistas* included Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (Mexico, 1859–1895), Salvador Díaz Mirón (Mexico, 1853–1928), and Ricardo Jaimes Freyre (Bolivia, 1868–1933). The second generation, many of whom straddled *modernismo* and *posmodernismo*, included Leopoldo Lugones (Argentina, 1874–1938), Amado Nervo (Mexico, 1870–1919), José Juan Tablada (Mexico, 1871–1945), Enrique González Martínez (Mexico, 1871–1952), Julio Herrera y Reissig (Uruguay, 1875–1910), Delmira Agustini (Uruguay, 1886–1914), and José Santos Chocano (Peru, 1875–1934).

5. A traditional commonplace in Hispanic literary history posits a clearly delineated distinction between Spanish American and Spanish *modernistas* and the members of

Spain's Generation of 1898; what purportedly distinguished both groups was the idea that the former were cosmopolitan practitioners of art for art's sake while the latter were introspective and immersed in reflections on the meaning of Spanishness. Needless to say, the end of the Spanish American War in 1898, in which Spain lost its last overseas colonies to the United States, concretized a significant geopolitical and cultural transformation that had been taking place for Latin America through which Spanish political influence receded and the United States began extending its own via the territorial expansion that its "Manifest Destiny" justified. Even though there is consensus that Spanish American *modernistas* and Darío in particular influenced Spanish poetry (including before 1898), the differences in the aesthetic practices of *modernistas* and members of the Generation of 1898 are neither absolute nor reducible to cultural nationalisms.

6. Future invader / of the innocent America that possesses indigenous blood, / that still prays to Jesus Christ and still speaks in Spanish. (my translation).

7. Valera did not share Hugo's romantic enthusiasm for the limitless azure of the sky as a trope for the goal and limits of poetic creativity. Darío's engagement with this trope has been frequently attributed, first, to his reading of Hugo before the publication of *Azul* and, subsequently, to his interest in Mallarmé's use of the same trope.

8. All translations from this text are mine.

9. "Usted lo ha revuelto todo: lo ha puesto a cocer en el alambique de su cerebro, y ha sacado de ello una rara quintaesencia."

10. These publications included the *Revista Azul* (1894–1896) and the *Revista Moderna* (1896–1911) in Mexico City; *La Habana Elegante* (1883–1896) and *El Fígaro* (1885–1899) in Havana; *Cosmópolis* (1894–1895) and *El Cojo Ilustrado* (1895–1907) in Caracas; and *La Revista de América* (1894), *La Biblioteca* (1896–1898), and *El Mercurio de América* (1898–1900) in Buenos Aires. It must also be remembered that French publications, such as *Le Mercure de France, Revue des Deux Mondes, Revue de Revues, La Plume*, and others, were aware of their Latin American reading republic and contributed actively to this transatlantic literary network in columns that were often penned by leading *modernistas* such as Darío, Lugones, and Pedro Emilio Coll. For more on the role of translation in the Spanish American journals, consult José Ismael Gutiérrez, "Traducción y renovación literaria en el modernismo hispanoamericano" *HISTAL* January 2004 at http://www.histal.umontreal.ca/espanol/documentos/traduccion_y_renovacion_literatura.htm (accessed July 23, 2008).

11. "He is ahead of the fashion and could modify and impose it." It was compliments like this one that probably encouraged Darío to publish Valera's letters as the prologue to the second and subsequent editions of *Azul*.

12. For most of the nineteenth century, the term that theorists employed to speak of social, economic, and moral progress was not "modernity" but "civilization." For a succinct analysis of the meaning of the latter since the eighteenth century, when its modern usage emerged, see Bruce Mazlish's *Civilization and Its Contents*.

13. Roberto Schwartz also offers an illustration of this heterogeneity when he states, regarding Brazil, that "[t]he latifundia, little changed, saw the baroque, neoclassic, romantic, naturalist and modernist cultures pass by, cultures which in Europe reflected immense transformations in its social order" (27).

14. The choice of Georges Ohnet (1848–1918)—a popular Parisian novelist and playwright especially in the 1880s—is not arbitrary. In *Le Maitre des forges* (1882), Ohnet focuses on social tensions between an aristocracy in decline and a rising bourgeoisie. That the bourgeois king should read such novels is a metaliterary marker that alludes to the literature that Darío read in Chile.

15. Again, the selection of Watteau would not have been arbitrary on Darío's part since Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896) and his brother Jules (1830–1870), members of a French aristocratic family who debated art and politics with Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and others and whose writings were widely read in the second half of the nineteenth century, published "Philosophie de Watteau" (1856) in which they compared the artist to Rubens.

16. Hereafter abbreviated as "Paris."

17. Hereafter abbreviated as "Second Empire."

18. "¡Señor, el arte no está en los fríos envoltorios de mármol, ni en los cuadros lamidos, ni en el excelente señor Ohnet! El arte no viste pantalones, ni habla en burgués, ni pone los puntos en todas las íes."

19. "He acariciado a la gran Naturaleza, y he buscado el calor ideal, el verso que está en el astro, en el fondo del cielo, y el que está en la perla, en lo profundo del océano."

20. "Señor, ha tiempo que yo canto el verbo del porvenir. He tendido mis alas al huracán, he nacido en el tiempo de la aurora; busco la raza escogida que debe esperar, con el himno en la boca y la lira en el mano, la salida del gran sol." Darío elaborates this language in "Salutación del optimista" ("Optimist's Salute"), a poem that he read in Spain shortly after the debacle of 1898 and in which he evoked a Pan-Hispanic race. It was published in his *Cantos de vida y esperanza* in 1905.

21. "Arco triunfal, de estrofas de acero, de estrofas de oro, de estrofas de amor."

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CHAPTER 5

NATION TIME: RICHARD WRIGHT, *BLACK POWER*, AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MODERNISM

SARA BLAIR

WHAT does it mean for an African American writer revisiting his own relations to the legacies of modernism to address the fraught subject of modernizing Africa? How might the resources of modernism underwrite a narrative of the African nation at the moment of its coming-into-being as such, an exploration of the "nature" of the colony on the verge of transformation into the postcolonial state? And what kind of narrative—fractured, self-interrupting, self-reflexive—can do justice to what is, in the mid-twentieth century, a world-historically new entity: the African colony form, imposed by imperial fiat and the violence of the Western state, in the process of reinventing itself as the proto-postcolonial, emergently independent nation?[1] At the epochal moment of political independence, the African colony is forcibly placed in a vexed relation to history and to narrative. Asserting its claims on modernity and the present, the colony on the verge of no longer being one bears the burdensome weight of the past, the power of its own currency as a token of the prehistory of the West. The space of decolonization exemplifies the crisis—perhaps the possibility—of a split temporality, a bifurcated being in time that evades, as it is beggared by, linear narrative. If modernism can be defined as a set of techniques for exploring felt dislocations in spatial experience and in temporality, it might well serve as a resource for a writer confronting the social form that seems to mark its ending as a cultural project.