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University of Calgary Press

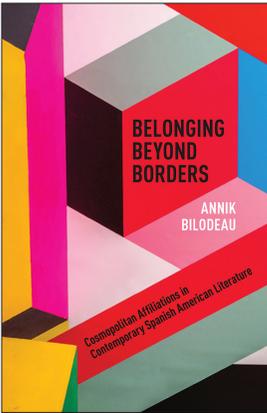
Bilodeau, A. (2021). *Belonging Beyond Borders: Cosmopolitan Affiliations in Contemporary Spanish American Literature*. University of Calgary Press, Calgary, AB. pp. 1-267.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/113029>

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**BELONGING BEYOND BORDERS:
Cosmopolitan Affiliations in Contemporary
Spanish American Literature**

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ISBN 978-1-77385-159-4

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Cosmopolitanism at the End of History in the Fictions of Jorge Volpi

Yo soy mexicano y seguramente escribo como mexicano, por más que lo que escriba no ocurra en México.

(I am Mexican and surely I write as a Mexican, even if what I write does not unfold in Mexico.)

—JORGE VOLPI

Mexican author Jorge Volpi is known for his complex, deterritorialized narrative worlds. He is, in his own words, “un latinoamericano que—rara cosa—no escribe sobre América Latina” (“a Latin American, who—rare as it may seem—does not write about Latin America; *Insomnio* 24), who even doubts that such a thing as Latin America actually exists. This perspective has led him to conceptualize literature in cosmopolitan and global terms, but he also has an acute understanding of his place in the ever-changing Latin American and Mexican canons.¹

Born on 10 July 1968, in Mexico City, Volpi is a lawyer-turned-novelist known for his involvement in the Crack movement as well as his thought-provoking essays. In 1996, after practising law for a few years, he travelled to Salamanca, Spain, to complete his doctorate in Hispanic philology. In the prologue to *El insomnio de Bolívar* (*Bolívar's Insomnia*; 2009) he reminisces about this period in his life.² Much like some of his forefathers, Volpi asserts that he discovered his Latin American affiliations abroad; in his case, while studying in Spain, of all places. He recalls that he “acababa de cumplir 28 años y hasta entonces había vivido en México,

donde jamás fui consciente de esta condición y donde nunca tuve la fortuna o la desgracia de toparme con alguien que se proclamase miembro de esta especie” (“I had just turned twenty-eight and until then I had lived in Mexico, where I had never been aware of this condition and where I never had the fortune or the misfortune of running into anyone who claimed to be a member of this species”; 17). Volpi claims that for him, like many Mexicans of his generation, “América Latina—término rimbombante, resbaladizo—era un hermoso fantasma, una herencia incómoda, una carga o una deuda imposible de calcular” (“Latin America—a grandiose, slippery term—was a beautiful ghost, an uncomfortable inheritance, a burden or a debt that was impossible to measure”; 18). This is perhaps one of the reasons why Latin America is given no more privilege of place than the other parts of the world Volpi writes about in the novels I analyze in this chapter. It is, after all, a *fantasma*, a ghost, something that escapes its very seeker.

These narratives are a case in point: both *El fin de la locura* and *No será la Tierra* articulate Mexico and Latin America in a global context by erasing major indicators of identity as they relate to the Spanish American novel, whether through their narrators, the events depicted, or their very settings. They also concentrate on events that marked and shaped the twentieth century around the globe. *El fin de la locura* (2003) starts on 10 November 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and chronicles the journey of Mexican psychoanalyst Aníbal Quevedo from the Paris of May 1968 to Mexico under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94). Quevedo converses with fellow intellectuals Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, and then travels to Fidel Castro’s Cuba and Salvador Allende’s Chile. The novel explores the figure of the intellectual in order to represent it as a global category of the twentieth century, one whose representation requires the articulation of a global conscience. The novel also concentrates on intellectual history, another departure from most Spanish American narratives. *No será la Tierra* (2006) starts with the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (1986) in Ukraine, and interweaves the fates of three women scattered around the world: Irina Gránina, a Russian biologist, Jennifer Moore, an American economist with a senior position at the International Monetary Fund, and Éva Halász, a Hungarian American computer genius. These three women must learn to live in a world influenced by the implosion of the Communist Bloc and the emergence of the

anti-globalization movement. *No será la Tierra* is about the emergence of the so-called New World Order and the end-of-history discourse elaborated by Francis Fukuyama in the 1990s. In my reading, the novel uses the cosmopolitan aspirations of characters of different nationalities to probe modes of universal engagement, and it advances rooted cosmopolitanism as a desirable mode of community membership in the global era. In both these texts, Latin America is but a ghost seen below the surface of the narrative. The works nevertheless embody Volpi's contentions about the future of Latin America. For the author, the way forward is to "renuncia[r] de una vez por todas a estas convicciones patrióticas, a los himnos y banderas, a los odios y las exclusiones, a las caducas ideas de soberanía, para entrar en un mundo nuevo, en una era donde la pertenencia a un solo país no sea crucial, donde sea posible articular una ciudadanía—y una identidad—más amplia" ("renounce once and for all these patriotic convictions, hymns and flags, hatreds and exclusions, outdated ideas of sovereignty, to enter into a new world, an era where belonging to a single country is not crucial, where it is possible to articulate a broader citizenship and identity"), in which "la aplicación de soluciones primero *regionales* y luego *globales* sirva para mejorar las condiciones de vida" ("the application of *regional* solutions first and then *global* solutions serves to improve living conditions"; *Insomnio* 249–50; my emphasis) in both the national and global setting. Both of these narratives propose globality as an effective way of relating to our fellow human beings.

Although a lot of attention has been given to Jorge Volpi's narratives, the scholarship on his body of work lacks a nuanced analysis that does not pit cosmopolitanism against nationalism, but rather seeks to assess the national, regional, and continental influences in his cosmopolitan and universal works. While no one really questions that his extensive body of work shows a profound understanding of the Spanish American literary tradition, no one has yet done a complete analysis of the various influences in his works, nor assessed how Volpi positions himself as a Latin American author in the strictest sense. I challenge the notion that his work rejects the Latin American literary tradition. I contend that a close reading of his novels actually shows that his narratives, although not necessarily set in Latin America, can be read as metaphors for the events occurring across the continent. Even if Latin America has no pride

of place in Volpi's literary universe, it is not erased; it is rather placed in conversation with the world.

This chapter is divided in two sections: a historical and theoretical framework, followed by the literary analysis of two novels. In the first section, I map Volpi's literary evolution over the past twenty years, from the early years of the Crack movement up to the present. This serves to highlight the fact that unlike Vargas Llosa, whose allegiance to cosmopolitanism evolved over time, Volpi's work has always showcased that philosophical position. I also discuss how his latest novels erase markers of the canonical Spanish American narrative, and as such, are global novels. The second section is dedicated to the literary analysis of *El fin de la locura* and *No será la tierra*, two historical novels that favour rooted cosmopolitanism and propose universal modes of engagement in an ever-globalized world. They challenge the readers to take a stand about the future of humanity—the first step in the development of a cosmopolitan consciousness.

“Mi biblioteca es mi patria”

Volpi is part of a group of contemporary novelists who publish widely acclaimed narrative works while also being involved in critical debates about culture, literature, and politics. Much like the Boom authors, Volpi and his peers are more than writers: they are Latin American intellectuals whose voices can be heard across many platforms. In various literary manifestos, such as the “Manifiesto Crack” (1996), and essays, Volpi has tackled the topic of literary production and its reception in the domestic and international arenas. A recurring theme in his reflection is that of a literary tradition conceptualized in cosmopolitan terms, but he also has a profound understanding of the Mexican tradition.

The Crack

The Crack emerged in 1996; its members describe it as a literary friendship, since it is both a group of novels and the very authors that aimed to renovate Mexican literature. Twenty-five years after the publication of the original manifesto, they are still active. In the 1996 “Manifiesto Crack,” Ignacio Padilla explains that at the beginning of the 1990s, he and his fellow members did not identify with the work of contemporary Mexican

and Latin American writers. The manifesto, then, was a way to articulate their literary vision, express new concerns, and open new possibilities for the Spanish American narrative, one removed from *realismo mágico* and discussions about an authentic identity.³ In short, they appeared to be rejecting the previous fifty years of Latin American literary tradition. While the movement was generally well received, *The Critical Dictionary of Mexican Literature (1955–2010)* is not laudatory toward the objectives of the Crack: “the Crack novels form a heteroclitic band of uneven . . . tales that fly the banner of false cosmopolitanism. It’s literature written by Latin Americans who decided to abandon—as if this in and of itself were novel or radical—old national themes and present themselves as contemporaries not of all men but of the superstars of world literature” (532). Much like their Boom forefathers, they were criticized for their worldwide sales and cosmopolitan outlook.

While they admired the literary experimentation of the Boom, they despised the work of the Post-Boom, for it was *easy* literature. Instead, they advocated for a return to more complex narratives. In the “Postmanifesto del Crack, 1996–2016,” Pedro Ángel Palou addressed this very issue, which he ties to universality: “El *Crack* apostó por esa globalidad de la novela desde las tradiciones locales. No buscó destruir al Boom, como se dijo, sino continuarlo. Hizo *Crack*, una fisura en la tradición” (see Volpi et al.) (“The Crack began with local traditions and bet on universality. It did not seek to destroy the Boom, as some have stated, but rather to continue it. There was a literal ‘crack,’ a fissure in the tradition”; 197–8⁴), a crack that is nevertheless part of that very tradition of global novels that discuss local themes. According to Alberto Castillo Pérez, in *El Crack y su manifiesto* (2006), “el título mismo, elegido para definirse, señala ya un afán de internacionalización, sino de anglofilia; *crack*, palabra que en inglés significa fisura o grieta y es también la onomatopeya de algo que se quiebra” (“the title itself, chosen to self-define, already indicates a desire for internationalization, if not for anglophilia; *crack*, a word that in English means fissure or rift and is also the onomatopoeia for something shattering”; 83). According to the scholar, there is a clear genealogical intent in the Crack, in that its members aimed at defining themselves as heirs of a novel they call *profound*, which signalled a break with the literature produced after the Boom. Much like the *novelas totales* of the 1960s,

the Crack novels propose complex literary worlds, non-linear structures, and narrative polyphony. There does not seem to be a specific thematic legacy in the production of the Crack authors; their only concern is that the topics broached be substantial and worth developing. In this sense, it could be argued that the Crack had a more intellectual and elitist approach than McOndo, another literary manifesto that appeared in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the movements come together in their rejection of a restrictive vision of the continent, understood through magical realism only. They both reflect Latin America's reality as more globalized and decentralized than ever.

The members of the Crack consider that they “tienen el derecho—como todos los escritores del mundo—de escribir sobre cualquier tema que se les ocurra” and “de ubicar la acción de sus novelas en el lugar que se les ocurra” (“have the right—like all the writers in the world—to write about any topic they choose” and “to locate the action in their novels wherever they so choose”; Volpi, “Código” 183). Using international settings and global events in their narratives does not make them less Latin American than authors who choose to set theirs in a familiar environment; indeed, “la ubicación es subsidiaria de la forma y no al revés” (“setting is subordinate to form and not the reverse”; 184). Using global settings is a choice that allows them to write about any topic in a credible manner. However international it may be, the Crack is above all “un grupo mexicano” (“a Mexican group”) that “se siente orgulloso de pertenecer a la rica tradición literaria latinoamericana,” but which “detesta el nacionalismo entendido como marca excluyente” (“is proud to belong to the rich Latin American literary tradition, but which detests nationalism understood as an exclusionary trait”; 186). They see nationalism as an “invento del siglo diecinueve, orgullo impuesto en el veinte, atavismo que nos enfermó de amor a lo particular para alejarnos de lo universal que . . . nos empuja a decir ‘mi cultura’ en detrimento de ‘la cultura.’ . . . La nación en singular no existe” (“invention of the nineteenth century, a sense of pride imposed in the twentieth, an atavism that made us lovesick for the specific, moving us away from the universal that . . . propels us to say ‘my culture’ to the detriment of ‘culture.’ . . . The nation in the singular does not exist”; Palou, *Pequeño diccionario* 202). It is not surprising, then, that Volpi, much like Vargas Llosa, denounces all forms of nationalism and extreme ideologies,

for “cualquier ideología es, de entrada, una forma excluyente de otras variedades de pensamiento” (“any ideology is, from the outset, a way of excluding other types of thought”; Volpi, “Yo soy una novela”), which goes against his very understanding of literature and fiction. This also sets the tone for the supranational narratives for which the members of the Crack are known.

The End of National Narrative

Like his fellow authors of the Crack, Volpi transgresses the traditional values of Mexican society, and, as we have already seen, expresses an existential ambivalence when asked to define his identity. Wilfrido H. Corral claims, in *La prosa/cultura no ficticia según Leonardo Valencia y Jorge Volpi* (*Prose and non-fiction culture according to Leonardo Valencia and Jorge Volpi*), that “si hasta cierto punto Volpi parece argüir que todos podemos ser ciudadanos en la república de las letras, lo cual es cierto, por otro parece decir que primero hay que ser ciudadano del país donde uno ha nacido. Esta impresión se desprende de su invariable elección de autores mexicanos, y su constante mención de ellos como ejemplos a seguir” (“if to a certain extent Volpi seems to argue that we can all be citizens in the republic of letters, which is true, on the other hand he seems to say that one must first be a citizen of one’s country of birth. This impression stems from his invariable choice of Mexican authors, and his constant mention of them as examples to follow”; 377). As such, Volpi is aware that his literary production is part of his national history, although he is very critical of that history. In this regard, he appears to relate to the cosmopolitan outlook of intellectuals such as Alfonso Reyes and Jorge Luis Borges, who stated that identity lies not in national stereotypes, but rather in a common sense of belonging and openness to others—in many ways, an articulation of rooted cosmopolitanism. Volpi has expressed this view of literature, literary tradition, and criticism in various short stories, essays, blog posts, and newspaper articles. In what follows, I analyze two representative texts to illustrate his vision of literature.

Volpi uses satire and parody in “El fin de la narrativa latinoamericana” (“The End of Latin American Narrative”; 2004) to examine the “purity” of the Latin American author’s identity. It arguably mirrors Borges’s “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (“The Argentine Writer and Tradition”)

and could be considered Volpi's own cosmopolitan manifesto. Volpi's examination led to some of the same contradictions, disagreements, and disputes within Mexican letters, not unlike when Borges ironically tried to resolve the essence of Argentinean identity in his time. These ties to his predecessors, in terms of both genre and form, reveal Volpi's understanding of the literary tradition in which he is evolving.

In the essay, which takes the form of a literary review, Volpi parodies the work of critic Ignatius Hieronymus Berry, a fictional professor at the University of North Dakota. The hybrid writing allows him to formulate a critical perspective, sarcastic in tone, on the pessimistic view allegedly held by scholars of the new generations of Latin American authors. The fictional Berry, with whom the Mexican disagrees, is a fierce critic of new Latin American novelists like Chilean Alberto Fuguet and Volpi himself. (Born in 1964, Fuguet is one of the founding members of the McOndo movement.) The scholar argues that the Boom was the golden age of the Latin American narrative, and that anything that came afterwards is of little critical interest: "como se sabe, a toda época de esplendor le sigue una de decadencia, y es justamente lo que ocurrió a partir de este momento" ("as we know, every age of splendour is followed by one of decadence, and that is exactly what happened from that moment on"; 33). He highlights the decadence of the new production, and how it strays from what he deems proper literature. Berry harshly criticizes the status of certain international authors, and explains that

a partir de la década de los noventa, un grupo de escritores comenzó a revelarse torpemente contra su condición hispánica. Nacidos a partir de los sesenta, no experimentaron las convulsiones ideológicas de sus predecesores y tal vez por ello no se involucraron con los problemas esenciales de sus países. Su desarraigo fue tan notorio, que al leer sus obras hoy en día, resulta imposible reconocer sus nacionalidades.

beginning in the 1990s, a group of writers started to awkwardly reveal themselves as rejecting their Hispanic condition. Born in the 1960s, they did not experience the same

ideological upheavals as their predecessors and perhaps that is why they did not get involved in the essential problems of their countries. Their lack of roots was so obvious that in reading their works today, it is impossible to ascertain their nationalities. (35)

First, Berry comments that these authors rejected their *condición hispánica* (“Hispanic condition”), which could not be further from the truth. The novels of the younger generations are written in Spanish—even if all the authors speak English, and most of them French—which makes these novels part of the de facto Hispanic tradition. Second, he criticizes their supposed lack of national allegiance, which he bases on the premise that they are not using explicit identity markers. The scholar thus disregards the production of Mexican cosmopolitan authors such as Carlos Fuentes and Jorge Cuesta, among others, who are giants of Spanish American letters, but who also produced a corpus of deterritorialized narratives that do not openly discuss national identity. The fictional Berry firmly believes that the cosmopolitan and ahistorical outlook of this *grupo de escritores* toward Latin American literary tradition is wrong. He regrets their obstinacy and stubbornness in rejecting the legacy of such great writers as Jorge Luis Borges and Juan Rulfo, who achieved worldwide success without despising their country of origin or their national identity (33). This criticism echoes the one made by many actual literary critics, like Christopher Domínguez Michael, who deemed the works of the new generations insufficiently national. Berry further suggests that novelists born after the 1960s forgot true national concerns “con el propósito de integrar su obra al mercado internacional” (“in order to integrate their work into the international marketplace”; 35). In addition to their imputed commercial interests, Berry points out a flaw in their reasoning: while the younger generations condemn the idea of a light literature—as did their forefathers, from whom the younger generations want to distance themselves at all costs—they are complacent toward the global literary market, since they do not mind adapting their novels to the needs of the marketplace. Berry argues that they do not long to join the Latin American canon, or even the global one, which would ensure their longevity, and that they would rather

succeed by selling books, a stance that the professor considers despicable. As we will see shortly, this criticism is also levelled at the global novel.

Berry's position is similar to that of Argentinean nationalists who criticized Borges in the 1950s, which prompted him to write "El escritor argentino y la tradición." He completely disqualifies the members of the new wave due to the absence of distinctive national traits in their work: he affirms that their abandonment of the homeland, as well as its literary tradition, is clear evidence of their disdain for their country and continent. He deplores the fact that globalization has blurred the boundaries between different national cultures in Latin America, and appears frustrated that, today, it would be completely impossible to distinguish a Mexican writer, such as Volpi (Crack), from a Chilean counterpart, such as Fuguet (McOndo). For him, 1996 marked the beginning of the "tarea de demolición, a través de dos sucesos paralelos" ("task of demolition, through two parallel events"; 36) that doomed Latin America literature—namely,

la publicación de la antología *McOndo*, prologada por los chilenos Alberto Fuguet y Sergio Gómez—su título era ya una burda sátira del territorio imaginario de Márquez—y la provocadora presentación del Manifiesto del autodenominado "grupo del *crack*" en México. Ambos fenómenos inaugurales evidenciaban ya las disfunciones de ambas cofradías: su afán teatral, su vocación de dirigirse a los *mass media* y su común rechazo del realismo mágico eran pruebas suficientes de que sus ambiciones estaban más del lado de la publicidad y del mercado que de la verdadera literatura.

the publication of the McOndo anthology, with its preface by Chileans Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez—its title already a heavy-handed satire of the imaginary territory created by Márquez—and the provocative release of the Manifesto of the self-proclaimed "crack group" in Mexico. Both of these inaugural phenomena already displayed the dysfunctions within both fraternities: their theatrical eagerness, their vocation for addressing themselves to the mass

media and their shared rejection of magical realism were sufficient proof that their ambitions leaned more toward publicity and marketing than toward real literature. (36)

He calls them *dysfunctional*, which implies that, for Berry, as for many scholars before him, there is only one literary tradition in Latin America: the national one. He also considers magical realism the true Latin American genre. Moreover, this new group of writers “se encargó de eliminar para siempre la identidad de la narrativa hispánica” (“took upon itself the task of permanently eliminating the identity of Hispanic narrative”; 35), “comportándose públicamente como cualquier escritor occidental corriente” (“behaving publicly like any other normal Western writer”; 36). Accordingly, there is such a thing as a defined *Latin American literary identity*, which should always be evident in these writers’ works. It would thus appear that the world literary tradition is available for all writers, save for Latin American ones. This satire aims to underscore the obvious contradictions in the points outlined by the professor, since he, as previously mentioned, gives much credit to Borges’s input into the Latin American canon, but conveniently forgets that the Argentinean short-story writer was once criticized for having set aside national concerns, as well as over the question of identity definition.

The creation of the Berry character positions Volpi to comment upon—and satirize—the prevailing academic opinion and myopia regarding the new generation of writers. Well aware of previous literary traditions, Volpi maintains that literary critics of Berry’s kind are mistaken, since “se olvidan de algo muy importante: desde el siglo XVI, los escritores de lo que hoy es América Latina siempre han creído pertenecer a Occidente” (“they forget something very important: since the sixteenth century, the writers of what is now Latin America have always believed that they belong to the West”; 38). There is no contradiction whatsoever in being both a Mexican and a Western author. Cosmopolitanism is not such a far-fetched stance for the new generations; it has always been part of the literature of the continent. Volpi dismisses the idea that literature should be defined “por los rasgos diferenciales del país que la produce” (“by the distinguishing features of the country that produces it”; 38), and adds that

en América Latina han coexistido estos dos bandos irreconciliables: los “nacionalistas” y los “cosmopolitas.” Sin embargo, no fue sino hasta los años treinta del siglo XX cuando el escritor mexicano Jorge Cuesta asentó el argumento definitivo en contra de los primeros: el nacionalismo—afirmó—es también, a fin de cuentas, una invención europea. Por desgracia, sus palabras no lograron terminar la discusión, la cual se ha prolongado con diversos ropajes hasta nuestra época.

in Latin America these two irreconcilable sides have coexisted: the “nationalists” and the “cosmopolitans.” However, it was not until the 1930s that Mexican writer Jorge Cuesta set out the definitive argument against the first group: nationalism, he claimed, is also, after all, a European invention. Unfortunately, his words did not succeed in putting an end to the discussion, which has continued in various disguises until our time. (38)

Cuesta made this affirmation about twenty years before Borges published his seminal essay, which highlights the evergreen nature of that discussion. Instead of lamenting the supposed demise of Latin American letters, the Mexican “prefiere preguntarse con cierto escepticismo qué significa, a fin de cuentas, ser latinoamericano al principio del siglo XXI” (“prefers to ask himself with some skepticism what it means, after all, to be Latin American at the beginning of the twenty-first century”; 39). However, it is a question that no one can answer with certainty, since identity is an ever-evolving process.

In the spirit of his forefathers, and unlike the fictional Berry, Volpi favours cosmopolitan writing that is in dialogue with a global canon:

lo cierto es que los mejores escritores latinoamericanos han sido, en la mayor parte de los casos, “cosmopolitas.” . . . En distintos momentos de la historia [Paz, Fuentes, Elizondo, Arredondo, Pitol, García Ponce] fueron acusados por los nacionalistas de copiar modelos extranjeros y de dejarse

seducir por las tendencias de moda, cuando en realidad hacían exactamente lo contrario: fundar y preservar la mejor tradición literaria del país, esa tradición que, a fuerza de ser generosamente universal . . . se volvió también ricamente nacional.

the truth is that the best Latin American writers have been, in most cases, “cosmopolitan.” . . . At different times in history [Paz, Fuentes, Elizondo, Arredondo, Pitol, García Ponce] were accused by nationalists of copying foreign models and of allowing themselves to be seduced by trends in fashion, when in fact they were doing exactly the opposite: founding and preserving the best literary tradition of the country, that tradition which, by virtue of being generously universal . . . also became richly national. (39)

Volpi, like Carlos Fuentes in *Geografía de la novela*, makes Reyes’s proclamation—“Para ser provechosamente nacional, hay que ser generosamente universal” (“In order to be richly national, we must be generously universal”; qtd. in Fuentes 25)—his own. The novelists who started writing during the 1990s are part of this universal tradition, and are resisting a diktat that forces them to be authentic followers of the Latin American style, or rather, proud heirs of the Boom. Although they reclaim some aspects of this production, such as the depth of their texts and literary experimentation, they reject the stereotype of the “Latin American writer,” and choose instead to adhere to “la mejor tradición latinoamericana, es decir, la que siempre ha promovido un cosmopolitismo abierto e incluyente” (“the best Latin American tradition, that is, the one that has always promoted an open and inclusive cosmopolitanism”; Volpi, “El fin de la narrativa” 40), making them the successors of both Borges and the Boom.

Rejecting Ideological *realismo mágico*

Along with other authors who emerged in the 1990s, Volpi rises up—in that movement of creative affirmation to which Harold Bloom refers in *The Anxiety of Influence*—against the canonical figures of the 1960s, while

also rescuing both their literary exploration and their predecessors' universal perspective.⁵ He reformulates the arguments put forth by his precursors and establishes a personal genealogy in which a cosmopolitan perspective is the outstanding criterion. In fact, both in his fiction and in his essays, Volpi rejects nationalism and claims a place in the continental canon while establishing a critical distance from the national and Latin Americanist concerns of the previous generations.

El insomnio de Bolívar is another patent example of Volpi's multi-generic prose: it combines political forecast, fantasy literature, and science fiction. The essays raise many questions, several of which remain unanswered, and they cover, among other topics, history, government systems, and the economic problems of Latin America. Each *consideración*—as he entitles each chapter—proposes a reflection on a different aspect of the continent, explores its meaning through the analysis of its past, its present, and its possible and probable future, and concludes, in an ironic manner, that the best thing Latin America could do would be to disappear and merge with North America, à la European Union. Although seemingly an imaginative work of futuristic fiction, *El insomnio de Bolívar* can also be classified as a political essay.

Volpi's reflections on Latin American literature and literary tradition are obviously the most relevant to the present analysis, which is why I concentrate on this specific aspect of the essays. While only the third essay is openly about literary tradition, Volpi's thoughts on literature are scattered throughout the book. One major criticism Volpi makes in *El insomnio de Bolívar*, as well as elsewhere, has to do with the prevalence of magical realism in Latin American literature.⁶ Not only is he dissatisfied that it has come to be synonymous with the region's literature, he also resents the fact that it has become an expectation, an "etiqueta sociopolítica" (70) ("socio-political label"). He recalls that

Como estudiantes de filología hispánica—lo que en México se llama simplemente literatura española—los latinoamericanos éramos asociados, irremediadamente, con García Márquez y el realismo mágico. Poco importaban la tradición prehispánica, los tres siglos de virreinato, el moroso siglo XIX o las infinitas modalidades literarias explo-

radas en América Latina a lo largo del siglo XX: si uno decía “estudio literatura latinoamericana,” el 98 por ciento de los oyentes asumía que uno era experto en mariposas amarillas, doncellas voladoras y niños con cola de cerdo. Y ello no gracias al denodado estudio de los entresijos de Macondo, sino a la convivencia diaria con lo maravilloso presente en nuestras tierras.

As students of Hispanic philology—what in Mexico is simply called Spanish literature—we Latin Americans were inevitably associated with García Márquez and magical realism. Little did the pre-Hispanic tradition, the three centuries of viceroyalty, the overdue nineteenth century or the infinite literary modalities explored in Latin America throughout the twentieth century matter: if one said “I am studying Latin American literature,” 98 per cent of listeners assumed that one was an expert in yellow butterflies, flying maidens, and children born with pigs’ tails. And this was not due to the bold study of the ins and outs of Macondo, but to daily coexistence with the marvelous present in our lands. (21)

This ideological understanding of Latin American literature is *excluyente* and, much like nationalism, confines writers to a very specific space and time period. However, it was the reactions to the publication of *En busca de Klingsor* (1999) that made Volpi realize the extent of the expectations toward Latin American authors: the novel was deemed not Mexican enough, and as a result, some critics argued it should not be called a “Mexican novel”; indeed, Volpi claims that a literary critic even demanded “que se [le] retirara el pasaporte por no escribir sobre México” (“that his passport be revoked for not writing about Mexico”; *El insomnio de Bolívar* 25). While in the first drafts, the protagonist was Mexican, Volpi eventually realized that, for the sake of his credibility in the literary world, he would have to change his nationality; the protagonist therefore became American.⁷ While this was a minor change in the narrative, Volpi claims that

Aquella decisión pragmática de transformar a un mexicano en gringo se convirtió en un inesperado manifiesto. Si a ello se suma que, en efecto, al lado de mis amigos mexicanos del *Crack* yo llevaba años renegando del realismo mágico que se exigía a los escritores latinoamericanos—y que nada tenía que ver con la grandeza de García Márquez—, el malentendido estaba a punto. En medio de aquel alud de elogios y ataques, igualmente enfáticos, desperté como un autor doblemente exótico. Exótico por ser latinoamericano. Y más exótico aún por no escribir sobre América Latina (¿cuándo se ha cuestionado a un escritor inglés o francés por no escribir sobre Inglaterra o Francia?). De nada servía aclarar que antes de Klingsor todas mis novelas se situaban en México o que había escrito dos ensayos sobre historia intelectual mexicana: esta novela me transformó en un apátrida literario, celebrado y denostado por las mismas razones equivocadas.

That pragmatic decision to transform a Mexican into a gringo became an unexpected manifesto. If we add to this the fact that, along with my Mexican friends from the *Crack*, I had been rejecting for years the magical realism that was demanded of Latin American writers—and that had nothing to do with the greatness of García Márquez—the misunderstanding was timely. Amid that avalanche of praise and attacks, equally emphatic, I woke up as a doubly exotic author. Exotic for being Latin American. And even more exotic for not writing about Latin America (when has an English or French writer been called out for not writing about England or France?). It was useless to point out that before Klingsor all my novels were set in Mexico or that I had written two essays on Mexican intellectual history: this novel transformed me into a stateless literary figure, celebrated and reviled for the same wrongheaded reasons. (24–5)

Volpi henceforth found himself in the same predicament as some of the Boom writers. What makes a Latin American author truly Latin American? The fact that the novels take place in the hemisphere? The fact that the author was born on the continent? From Volpi's perspective, literary critics find it quite difficult to see past nationality when it comes to establishing literary belonging:

Nada detenía la avalancha: en cada entrevista y presentación pública me veía obligado a aclarar mi nacionalidad y a señalar, en vano, que los escenarios no hacen que una obra sea más o menos latinoamericana. Aquella ruidosa querrela tuvo, por fortuna, sus ventajas: me hizo enfrentarme a las permanentes contradicciones del nacionalismo y me animó a reflexionar sobre lo que significaba ser mexicano y latinoamericano.

Nothing stopped the avalanche: in every interview and public appearance I was forced to spell out my nationality and point out, in vain, that the setting does not make a work more or less Latin American. That noisy quarrel had, fortunately, its advantages: it made me face the permanent contradictions of nationalism and motivated me to reflect on what it meant to be Mexican and Latin American. (25)

This reflection led him to reject nationalism, based on the fact that it is *excluyente*, both in political and literary terms. Indeed, according to Volpi and many writers of his generation, the so-called Latin American author no longer exists. He maintains that “ninguno se asume ligado a una literatura nacional—Fresán define: mi patria es mi biblioteca—, y ninguno cree que un escritor latinoamericano deba parecer, ay, latinoamericano” (“no one sees himself as tied to a national literature—Fresán stipulates: my homeland is my library—and no one believes that a Latin American writer must appear, alas, Latin American”; 156).⁸ He even maintains that “Si bien ninguno reniega abiertamente de su patria, se trata ahora de un mero referente autobiográfico y no de una denominación de origen. A diferencia de sus predecesores, ninguno de ellos se muestra obsesionado por

la identidad latinoamericana—y menos por la mexicana, la boliviana o la argentina—aun si continúan escribiendo sobre sus países o incluso los de sus vecinos” (“Although no one openly rejects their homeland, it has now become a mere autobiographical reference and not a designation of origin. Unlike their predecessors, none of these writers are obsessed with Latin American identity—let alone with Mexican, Bolivian, or Argentinian identity—even if they continue to write about their countries or even those of their neighbours”; 168). This is a departure from the literature of both the Boom and the Post-Boom, and a clear rejection of literature conceived in national terms. Moreover, he claims that “Ninguno tiene ni la más remota idea de cuál es el estado actual de la literatura latinoamericana, e incluso alguno duda que la literatura latinoamericana aún exista” (“No one has even the remotest idea of what the current state of Latin American literature is, and some even doubt that Latin American literature still exists”; 162). If neither national nor continental literature exists, what is left is literature understood within a global, or universal, framework. Volpi proposes that authors be radical and venture outside any artificially conceived boundaries to find new ways to tell their stories. If the “Latin American author” does not exist anymore, he does not have to abide by literary dogmas. Volpi thus argues for complete literary freedom:

Seamos radicales: la literatura latinoamericana ya no existe. Preciso: existen cientos o miles de escritores latinoamericanos o, mejor dicho, cientos o miles de escritores chilenos, hondureños, dominicanos, venezolanos, etcétera, pero un cuerpo literario único, dotado con rasgos reconocibles, no. . . . Y la verdad es que no hay nada que lamentar. La idea de una literatura nacional, dotada con particularidades típicas e irrepetibles, ajenas por completo a las demás, es un anacrónico invento del siglo XIX.

Let's be radical: Latin American literature no longer exists. To be clear: there are hundreds or thousands of Latin American writers or, rather, hundreds or thousands of Chilean, Honduran, Dominican, Venezuelan, etc., writers, but a unique literary body, bearing recognizable traits, no.

. . . And the truth is that there is nothing here to regret. The idea of a national literature, with typical and unrepeatable particularities, completely unrelated to others, is an anachronistic invention of the nineteenth century. (165)

National literature is not the only *anacrónico invento del siglo XIX*—so is nationalism.

The Global Novel

The two works I study here belong to the category of the global novel, a genre that has yet to be properly defined. Two definitions predominate: scholars either see it as a positive type of literature, since these narratives open up possibilities for authors who would otherwise be confined to their own national markets, or else view it as extremely negative, as novels deemed to belong in this genre lack national elements—discussions that clearly mirror those heard in Latin America and that Volpi considers obsolete. Indeed, the author explained in an interview that “la novela es en el mundo contemporáneo el espacio ideal para las reflexiones globales, fuera de la hiperespecialización de la ciencia y las ciencias sociales” (“the novel is, in the contemporary world, the ideal space for global reflection, outside the hyperspecialization of science and the social sciences”; qtd. in López de Abiada 151). It is, then, but a small step from understanding the novel as the best space to discuss world issues to writing global novels. Héctor Hoyos, in *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*, also sees the emergence of Latin American novels of this type as positive, since they can discuss universal topics and memory, and thus acquire a “world literary standing” (6). Moreover, they “can contribute to consolidating both the world and Latin America as their chambers of resonance” (7), “cultivate the tension between the global and the local” (22), and show a “profound articulation of globality” (23). For Hoyos, “The global Latin American novel seeks not to flatten, but to give an almost tactile quality to the conflicting forces that define world-consciousness” (23) and as such, it shows a clear “articulation of a global conscience” (24), always of course from a Latin American perspective. I contend that, in their articulation of both Latin America and the world, Volpi’s novels depict rooted cosmopolitanism as a positive mode of engagement with the world.

Others disagree with Hoyos's view. According to Tim Parks, the existence of a "world market for literature" means that readers "become part of an international community," in his mind a community that develops around an author's popularity, rather than one based on the quality of that author's work. In this, Parks echoes the fictional Berry of "El fin de la narrativa latinoamericana." He claims that this type of fiction is tantamount to erasing national particularities and renders obsolete "the kind of work that revels in the subtle nuances of its own language and literary culture" (Parks). He fears that some authors, in a conscious attempt to make their material easier to translate and to be understood by foreign audiences, will shy away from using their own linguistic variations, such as Mexican Spanish, and from broaching national topics—which he calls "obstacles to international comprehension" (Parks). The novel, then, by erasing identity markers, would homogenize literature and make narrative a mere product that can be consumed anywhere in the world. This is a valid criticism, as critics and scholars have indeed noted the standardization of language in the production of some authors. However, I contend that this criticism does not apply to Volpi.⁹ Parks's comments echo some that members of the Crack made at the beginning of the 1990s—namely, that *literatura light* ought to be confronted at all costs, and readers challenged with dense, complex narratives. As such, an outlook like that of Parks's does not take into consideration the fact that, by having both the world and a national setting as its chamber of resonance, the genre can tackle both national and broader concerns, as well as the tensions between them. Moreover, this outlook ignores the premise of the Crack, which is to challenge readers, regardless of whether a novel uses a national or an international setting. According to Adam Kirsch, "the novel is already implicitly global as soon as it starts to speculate on or record the experience of human beings in the twenty-first century. Global novels are those that make this dimension explicit" (39). In a contemporary world, it is almost impossible for a narrative to confine itself to national concerns, as those are bound to be intertwined with international issues. Whether we like it or not, literature in the twenty-first century has acquired a supranational character. This argument links back to Pheng Cheah's positions, to which I referred in the introduction—namely, that narratives create bonds across borders because, while time and place matter, stories are ultimately about the

human experience they (re)present, more than about the settings in which they play out.

Given the political and ideological underpinnings of Volpi's oeuvre, we can now explore how these factors apply to specific novels. The two narratives studied in this chapter are, to date, two of the most explicit of Volpi's novels in terms of cosmopolitanism and globality. In both, key characters concretely tackle world concerns. It would appear that this is Volpi's preferred genre in which to address ideas and the conceptualization of identity at critical moments. Both novels deal openly with universal concerns, pivotal events of the twentieth century, and their effects on individuals. These narratives are also about travelling, be it abroad or at home, and how travel can distance an individual from loved ones, not only physically but also emotionally, and even lead to rejection. They both concentrate on times that were especially charged, from the point of view of politics and the definition—or redefinition—of identity, around the world. While these stories do not take place in a Latin American context, they can still be read as metaphors for events happening across the continent. They create international narrative universes and hybrid characters subjected to the stress of the breakdown of an existing world order. I would even argue that in these novels, events and the processes that result from them are the main characters. Volpi concentrates on defining moments of the twentieth century, portraying them from an ironic distance. Since these life-changing events are the true protagonists of the novels, Volpi's characters appear as empty shells that serve primarily as a pretext for discussing major world events.

El fin de la locura: Cosmopolitanism and the Global Intellectual

El fin de la locura (*The End of Madness*; 2003¹⁰) recounts the European and Latin American trajectory of Mexican psychoanalyst Aníbal Quevedo, from the Paris of 1968 to Carlos Salinas de Gortari's Mexico in the 1990s. He moves through various revolutionary movements to the emblematic moment of the triumph of neo-liberalism and contemporary discourses concerning the end of ideologies. The novel presents cosmopolitanism from the perspective of a Europeanized character in order to parody the

Latin American intellectual of the twentieth century, and explores global madness, understood as the widespread ideas of revolution and utopian thought. These are interpreted as a totalitarian impulse, one that ultimately leads to various failures. *El fin de la locura* addresses Latin American history obliquely, analyzing it in the broader context of both global and intellectual history. It also shows how this intersection in turn influences both the region and the world. With its oblique fictionalization, as well as its use of parody, intertextuality, and irony, the novel critically tackles issues pertaining to the recent history of Latin America, concentrating on the flaws and failings of the intellectual. I see this as Volpi's criticism of the political situation in Mexico at the turn of the twenty-first century, and the failure of the intellectual in the twentieth. For this reason, I find this novel particularly valuable when it comes to studying the evolving relationship between history and fiction in contemporary Latin American novels.

El fin de la locura showcases two major characters in a constant ideological battle: the Mexican psychoanalyst Aníbal Quevedo and his ever-disappearing French love interest, Claire. Quevedo is crazy about Claire, and is prepared to go to great lengths to make her fall in love with him. Claire, a French university student, is involved in a variety of social revolutionary movements, indeed she "está obsesionada con América Latina" ("is obsessed with Latin America"; 190) and the Cuban Revolution. She is an idealist and a true revolutionary. Quevedo, for his part, does not share her enthusiasm, but is willing to commit himself to revolution if it wins him Claire's love. But whereas Quevedo still questions revolutionary movements, Claire stays true to them until the end.

The novel is divided into two major parts: the "Primera parte" takes place in France during the revolutionary movements of May 1968, while the "Segunda Parte" takes place mostly in Mexico. The first part is itself divided into two major sections, "Amar es dar lo que no se tiene a alguien que no lo quiere" ("To love is to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it")—which recounts Quevedo's arrival in France and meeting Claire, who rejects his love time and again—and "Si Althusser permanece en cura de sueño, el movimiento de masas va bien" ("If Althusser remains in sleep therapy, the mass movement is going well")—which recounts Quevedo's first foray into revolutionary movements. The

second part is also divided into two sections, “Quevedo por Quevedo” (“Quevedo by Quevedo”)—which recounts Quevedo’s disenchantment with revolution, and “Microfísica del poder” (“Microphysics of power”)—which concentrates on the downward spiral that leads to his suicide in 1989, as a new world order is emerging.

El fin de la locura is at the intersection of two literary genres. Like most of Volpi’s multi-generic prose, the novel assumes a hybrid form: it is a collection of essays, both literary and critical, of correspondence between various characters, interviews, psychological analysis, and personal journal entries, compiled by an editor—a key figure of the historical novel (Pons 48)—who confronts the reader with complementary points of view.¹¹ The use of various sources highlights the fact that both as a writer and a psychoanalyst, Quevedo does not seem to have his own style. His incompetence, doubled with his desire to learn from the best, means that every time he encounters a seminal intellectual figure, he ends up imitating their way of thinking and writing, mimicking the colonial mindset and passively reproducing it: the intellectual from the periphery copying the metropolitan discourse and style, instead of producing his own. The texts of Quevedo’s personal file, compiled by a publisher who remains unknown until the end of the novel, emulate the theoretical production of philosophers. For example, the texts of the third part, following Barthes’s style, are fragmentary and chaotic, while the fourth and last part, consisting of various manuscripts, newspaper clippings, interviews, and letters, is reminiscent of Foucault’s archivist type. Each section of the novel is structured around the life of a French structuralist—Lacan, Althusser, Barthes, and Foucault—and besides painting the European intellectual context of the 1960s and the ’70s, the narrative portrays the life story of each thinker. In this way, the novel moves from intellectual history to the history of intellectuals, with some artistic license (Areco 307).

Aníbal Quevedo, given his initials, already alludes to *Don Quijote*, particularly Alonso Quijano and his famous *locura*.¹² He wakes up one day in Paris suffering from amnesia: “Sin saber cómo, un buen día había despertado en París, sin memoria de los días anteriores; por lo visto llevaba allí una buena temporada y, cuando al fin [se] había atrevido a pasear por la ciudad, [se] encontr[ó] en medio de una batalla campal entre policías y estudiantes” (“Without knowing how, one fine day he had awakened in

Paris, without any memory of the previous days; apparently he had been there for a good while and, when at last [he] had dared to walk around the city, [he] found himself in the middle of a pitched battle between the police and students”; Volpi, *El fin de la locura* 31). Quevedo claims not to remember anything from his past life: “Al despertar, los murmullos se habían desvanecido, pero seguía sin saber por qué estaba lejos de mi hogar, de mi familia, de mi consultorio. Mi mundo se había desvanecido para siempre. Como si hubiese renunciado a la cordura, ahora yo era incapaz de distinguir la fantasía de la realidad” (“When I woke up, the murmurs had faded, but I still didn’t know why I was far away from my home, my family, my office. My world had disappeared forever. As if I had given up on sanity, I was now unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality”; 22). One of the few things he does remember is his *consultorio*, his clinic, which justifies his pursuit of the key figures of French psychoanalysis. The lack of memories from his previous Mexican life allows him to slowly become French. Quevedo ends up meeting and conversing with his role models, and travelling to Cuba to psychoanalyze Fidel Castro and to Chile, where he provides the same treatment to Salvador Allende. These encounters have a great impact on him: “en vez de enloquecer[lo] leyendo novelas de caballerías, [lo] enloquece con tratados de marxismo y maoísmo” (“instead of driving himself mad reading novels of chivalry, he drives himself mad with treatises on Marxism and Maoism”; Volpi, “Política y literatura” 76). Quevedo embodies the subordination of the Latin American intellectual to foreign models—namely, the European one, which he not only absorbs, but later brings back with him to Latin America.

El fin de la locura is, in fact, a history of the many failures that push the protagonist toward his own end. At the global level, it is the failure of the revolutionary utopia of 1968, in both Paris and Mexico. On a personal level, it is the failure of Aníbal Quevedo, first as an intellectual and as a psychoanalyst, then as a Mexican intellectual and revolutionary. In the novel, Volpi analyzes, in addition to the debates generated by the student movements of the period, the psychoanalytic, Marxist, and structuralist theories prevalent on the left at the time, and criticizes the role of Latin American intellectuals inside and outside their countries or continent in recent decades, so as to provide various examples of failures that defined, according to the novel, the last decades of the twentieth century.

Another global aspect explored in the novel is that of the intellectual as a key figure in public life in the twentieth century, notwithstanding national categorization.

The protagonist is the archetypal anti-hero. Quevedo has big ambitions but lacks the personality to succeed. As a fallible individual, he is aware of his flaws as a human being; in retrospect, about his flight from Mexico he says: “Si salí de mi patria fue porque en ella me sentía atrapado, porque un paciente demostró de modo brutal mi incompetencia, porque tal vez ya no soportaba a mi familia” (“If I left my homeland it was because I felt trapped in it, because a patient demonstrated my incompetence in a brutal fashion, because perhaps I could no longer stand my family”; 289). His move to France, which was initially presented as accidental, becomes a way to start over. Quevedo has two major reasons to escape from Mexico. First, he feels *atrapado* (trapped) within the borders of his country, which he believes to be lacking a proper psychoanalytical culture. Second, he feels *atrapado* by his family, which he abandons and never sees again. By travelling to Paris, the quintessential cosmopolitan city, he rejects those closest to him, which makes his cosmopolitan project flawed from the start. This reveals the ambiguities of Quevedo’s discourse: first, he claims to be suffering from amnesia and not to remember much of his past life, but later on, in the section allegedly written around 1980, he refers to leaving Mexico of his own volition.

Once in France, he tries to restart his career as an intellectual. He spends time with Lacan, Althusser, Barthes, and Foucault, so as to learn everything he can from these great masters. Foucault is the thinker that he emulates and works with the most, yet he does not find his place with him either. Nor does he find it with struggling students who fight within several revolutionary movements based on the ideas of the structuralists. Although she keeps rejecting him, Quevedo wants to prove himself to Claire, his Dulcinea, and enters the Parisian student movement. After several confrontations during which members of Claire’s revolutionary cell are jailed, the group decides to start a hunger strike in “La capilla de Saint-Bernard, en plena estación de Montparnasse” (“the Saint Bernard chapel, in the centre of Montparnasse station”; 181). At first, Anibal attempts to convince Claire of the madness of her plan—“¡Una huelga de hambre!—me aterroricé—. Claire, ¿no te parece que exageras?” (“A hunger

strike! I panicked. Claire, don't you think you're going too far?"; 179)—but in an effort to seduce her, “no [le] qued[a] otra alternativa que sumar[se] a ella” (“he doesn't have any other option than to join it”; 181). Claire is an idealist who believes that she can actively take part in changing the world; according to Quevedo, “Lo único que la mantenía lúcida era la idea de que, a pesar de la inquina y los errores, aún era posible modificar las reglas del mundo” (“The only thing that kept her lucid was the idea that, despite the grievances and mistakes, it was still possible to change the rules of the world”; 179). Claire, a true revolutionary, believes in the power of the hunger strike because she is convinced it can change the world—although, conveniently, her physician does not allow her to take part in it. Quevedo, however, only wants to please her: he takes part in the strike through no will of his own, making his commitment to Claire hypocritical.

It does not take long for the young revolutionaries to become “esqueletos revolucionarios, *zombis*” and “moribundos” (“revolutionary skeletons, zombies” and “at death's door”; 181). Quevedo claims that his love for Claire has brought him too close to “degradación,” a state in which he does not wish to persevere for long. He tries to convince his fellow strikers that “[fingir] la inanición sin llegar a padecerla” (“faking starvation without getting to the point of suffering from it”; 182) would be a better option and achieve similar results without any suffering. He argues that they could fight more effectively if they ate, but the group rebukes him. He is told that they are “revolucionarios honrados” (“honourable revolutionaries”; 182), which only offends Quevedo even more. Since “la perspectiva de matar[se] de hambre [le] parec[e] muy poco atractiva” (“the prospect of dying of hunger held little appeal for him”; 182), he finds a way out of the chapel every night and dines on *éclairs* and *petits-fours* while hiding in the bathroom of the subway station. He believes that “no cometía ninguna infracción contra la causa, simplemente [se] rendía a las inquebrantables leyes de la supervivencia” (“he was not betraying the cause, he was simply surrendering to the unbreakable laws of survival”; 183). Although nobody sees through his revolutionary disguise, Quevedo has some remorse; he is aware of his moral failure and lack of ethics. While his comrades are willing to starve to death to defend their revolutionary cause, Quevedo does not understand why so much suffering is needed, and he fails as a revolutionary.

On top of the madness caused by these student movements, Quevedo is faced with his own folly in the form of the role of the Latin American intellectual who ends up far away from his country and continent. He is the embodiment of the Latin America intellectual of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who travels to France—in certain cases, to England—and all of a sudden forgets his origins and appropriates a different world view. Quevedo, then, is not a special case in Latin American history. Indeed, he reproduces the model forged by many artists who were trying to emancipate themselves from their national context and ended up merging—in a metaphorical manner—with the metropole. In *Littératures et cultures en dialogue (Literatures and Cultures in Dialogue)*, French sociologist Daniel-Henri Pageaux defined this behaviour as *manic*—that is an attitude according to which

la réalité culturelle étrangère est tenue par l'écrivain . . . comme absolument supérieure à la culture 'nationale,' d'origine. Cette supériorité affecte tout ou partie de la culture étrangère. La conséquence pour la culture d'origine, regardante, est qu'elle est tenue comme inférieure par l'écrivain. . . . À la valorisation positive de l'étranger, correspond la vision dépréciative de la culture d'origine.

foreign cultural reality is held by the writer . . . as absolutely superior to the “national” culture of origin. This superiority involves either all or a part of the foreign culture. The consequence for the original, observing culture is that it is held as inferior by the writer. . . . With the valorization of the foreign comes a corresponding disparaging image of the culture of origin. (47)

This explanation of manic behaviour summarizes well Quevedo's attitude, since during his first years in Europe he values, to the detriment of his Mexican culture, French culture and philosophy. He is, then, an allegory for intellectuals of his era, one which Volpi harshly criticizes. As Pageaux explains,

on peut dire que cette attitude maniaque a prévalu dans les rapports culturels entre Europe et Amérique Latine jusqu'au début du XX^e siècle: tous les artistes et hommes de lettres latino-américains avaient les yeux rivés sur les modes et révolutions culturelles parisiennes si bien que les productions nationales latino-américaines ont très longtemps été subordonnées aux schémas et techniques élaborés dans la capitale française.

this manic attitude prevailed in cultural relations between Europe and Latin America until the beginning of the twentieth century: all Latin American artists and writers were fixated on Parisian cultural fashions and revolutions, and Latin American national productions were, for a very long time, subordinated to the patterns and techniques developed in the French capital. (*Littératures et cultures en dialogue* 294)

This subordination leads to blind acceptance and the imitation of foreign models, which ultimately turn into the denial of one's cultural roots.

Quevedo's only link to Mexico is through his friend Josefa, whom he likes but judges through the eyes of a French local, even though they share the same origin. When Josefa succeeds in developing an intimate relationship with Althusser—no small accomplishment, since the philosopher does not often like to see people—Quevedo becomes jealous: he does not understand why his spiritual master has no interest in discussing philosophical matters with him. Angered by the fact that his Mexican friend—whom he deems lacking in the intellectual capacities Quevedo finds necessary—has a privileged access to the philosopher, he violates her sanctuary—her bedroom—and, analyzing its contents, claims that “Su habitación reflej[a] los gustos y las manías de la clase media mexicana: pequeñas reproducciones de cuadros impresionistas, un par de vasijas con enormes flores secas, una imagen de la Virgen de Guadalupe junto a un recorte de Elvis Presley” (“Her room reflected the tastes and predilections of the Mexican middle class: small reproductions of Impressionist paintings, a pair of vases filled with huge dried flowers, an image of the Virgin

of Guadalupe next to a clipping of Elvis Presley”; Volpi, *El fin de la locura* 171). He criticizes the Mexicanness of some of Josefa’s belongings and behaves in a condescending manner toward her, for in his view she does not have the necessary clout to have a romantic relationship, as well as an intellectual one, with Althusser. What Quevedo fails to see is that Althusser loves Josefa *because* she is authentic and does not reject her roots. He calls her “mi añorada estrella mexicana” (“my long-awaited Mexican star”; 176) and “jirafa mexicana” (“Mexican giraffe”; 185)—terms of endearment that emphasize, rather than erase, her origins.

While Josefa keeps alive her ties with her homeland, Quevedo seems to have a complicated relationship with his Latin American identity. The massacre of the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in October 1968 in Mexico City, also known as the Tlatelolco massacre, saddens him, but he admits, albeit unwillingly, that these dead are not his:

La tarea era espantosa y aburrida: ninguna información paliaba mi dolor. Una aciaga casualidad me había conducido a París y ahora me resultaba imposible sentir verdadera indignación ante aquellos muertos lejanos, mis muertos. Las imágenes de la manifestación del 2 de octubre, las luces de bengala en el cielo, del tiroteo, los heridos y los cadáveres lucían como simples manchas en el papel: no me concernían. Sentí ganas de vomitar. Lo peor no era mi incapacidad para odiar a Díaz Ordaz y a sus secuaces, sino la falta de un odio verdadero. Yo también estaba muerto, tan muerto como los jóvenes atravesados por las balas de los militares en Tlatelolco.

The task was frightening and boring: no information could alleviate my pain. A fateful coincidence had led me to Paris and now it was impossible for me to feel real indignation for these distant dead, my dead ones. The images of the demonstration on October 2, the flares in the sky, the shooting, the wounded and the corpses looked like simple stains on paper: they did not concern me. I felt like vomiting. The worst was not my inability to hate Díaz Ordaz and his henchmen,

but the lack of true hatred. I was also dead, as dead as the youth shot down by the soldiers' bullets in Tlatelolco. (141)

Quevedo rejects anything that has to do with national identity, but feels sympathy for the students who fight in France. He universalizes the fight of the Mexican students without empathizing with them. This national death is symbolic, and does not mean that Quevedo has rid himself of all aspects of his Mexican identity. According to Steinberg, even if Tlatelolco is mostly absent from the narrative, it remains central to the book's development. The critic posits that

An image travels from Mexico to become the sign that drives Quevedo's future. If, on one level, Tlatelolco initiates and organizes the protagonist's stated emancipatory desire, then on the other, more formal, level, Tlatelolco initiates and organizes the narrative's disenchantment of this desire, that is, transition, turning on the decline of the Mexican state's national-popular form and its reconfiguration in the neo-liberal era. (267)

Although Quevedo declares he is as dead as the students at the heart of Mexico City, the massacre serves as a first step in his conversion to leftist ideologies, the first step into his *locura*, although it must be noted that it is also a first step into the reaffirmation of some aspects of his identity. After Tlatelolco, he makes a point of correcting his interlocutors when they overlook his Mexican identity.

When Lacan sends him to meet Althusser, he explains to Quevedo that getting close to the philosopher should be easy:

—Yo le enviaré una nota diciéndole que usted está muy interesado en conocerlo. . . . ¿Qué le parece si le decimos que usted prepara una memoria sobre marxismo y psicoanálisis? Además, como usted es sudamericano . . .

—Mexicano . . . lo interrumpí.

—Además, como usted es *mexicano*—corrigió con enfado—, y él mantiene unos lazos especialmente afectuosos con colegas de esa parte del mundo, estoy seguro de que no dudará en recibirlo.

“I will send him a note telling him that you are very interested in meeting him. . . . How about we tell him that you are preparing a memoir on Marxism and psychoanalysis? Furthermore, as you are a South American. . .”

“—Mexican” . . . I cut him off.

“Also, since you are a Mexican,” he corrected himself angrily, “and he maintains especially friendly ties with colleagues from that part of the world, I am sure he will not hesitate to meet with you.” (Volpi, *El fin de la locura* 151)

In this very moment, Quevedo—although *afrancesado* (“Gallicized”)—reclaims his Mexican identity. He wants to be known for his country, not for a continent. He also laughs at Claire’s lack of understanding of Latin America, as she, much like Lacan, lumps together the whole region:

Estuve a punto de contarle mi experiencia posterior al dos de octubre, pero preferí seguirla escuchando; Claire me reveló entonces que ella no había estado muy lejos del lugar de la masacre y que no había dejado de pensar en mí . . .

—¿Estuviste en México?—salté.

—No, en Venezuela.

—¡En Venezuela!

Poco importaba que entre Caracas y Tlatelolco hubiese miles de kilómetros de distancia: para ella América Latina carecía de fronteras.

I was about to tell her about my experience after October 2, but I preferred to continue listening; Claire then revealed to me that she had not been very far from the scene of the massacre and that she had not stopped thinking about me . . .

“You were in Mexico?”

“No, in Venezuela.”

“In Venezuela!”

It mattered little that between Caracas and Tlatelolco there were thousands of kilometres: for her, Latin America had no borders. (164)

Like most Europeans, Claire does not perceive the regional differences among various Latin American cultures and nations; rather, she understands the continent as one unified element, which forces Quevedo to re-evaluate his own sense of identity.

Moreover, while a major part of the narrative takes place in Paris, the ideal city for any revolutionary endeavour in 1968, several characters ironize this fact and comment on the literary process:

—El gran problema de este libro es que la mayor parte de las acciones se desarrollan en París—me sanciona Josefa—. ¿Sabes cuántas novelas latinoamericanas se sitúan en esta ciudad? Centenares, Aníbal, centenares . . .

—¿Y qué quieres que haga, Josefa? ¿Que me vaya a vivir a Varsovia o a Bogotá para no incomodar a los críticos? ¿No te parece una concesión suficiente el que yo sea mexicano?

“The big problem with this book is that most of the action takes place in Paris,” Josefa sanctions me. “Do you know how many Latin American novels are set in this city? Hundreds, Aníbal, hundreds . . .”

“And what do you want me to do, Josefa? Should I go live in Warsaw or Bogota so as not to inconvenience the critics? Don’t you think that the fact that I’m Mexican is concession enough?” (305)

Once again, a Gallicized Quevedo reclaims his Mexican identity. He is aware that he fits into the stereotype of the Latin American writer in Paris.

While Quevedo realizes that he embodies a stereotype, Claire is unaware that she behaves similarly by perceiving Latin America as lacking borders. She also sees the region as the perfect playground for her revolutionary ideals; she claims that “Al fin cumplí mi sueño de hacer la revolución en América del Sur” (“Finally I achieved my dream to be a revolutionary in South America”; 164), as if she was checking off something on a bucket list. During her stay abroad, she becomes “una campesina” (“a peasant”; 164) who is accepted by the “guerrilleros locales” (“local guerrillas”; 164), who treat her as one of their own. Claire is blinded by her revolutionary fervour the same way Quevedo is blinded by his love for her. In search of Claire, Quevedo travels to Cuba, where he is first greeted by the director of the Casa de las Américas, the national publishing house, with whom he discusses the role of the revolutionary. He listens attentively to the claims that “No basta con adherirse verbalmente a la revolución para ser un intelectual revolucionario; ni siquiera basta con las acciones propias de un revolucionario. . . . Ese intelectual está también obligado a asumir una posición intelectual revolucionaria” (“It is not enough to verbally adhere to the revolution to be a revolutionary intellectual; even the actions themselves of a revolutionary are not enough. . . . This intellectual is also obliged to adopt a revolutionary intellectual position”; 195), but Quevedo is not convinced by the speech, although he feigns interest for personal gain. Indeed, by agreeing with the director, he is offered a place on the jury of the Premio Casa de las Américas, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in Latin America. He takes his task very seriously: “Más que discernir un premio, nos aprestábamos a definir el futuro de la humanidad” (“More than awarding a prize, we were getting ready to define the future of humanity”; 198), for whatever book is awarded the prize will receive a lot of attention and have a great impact on the way the Cuban Revolution is perceived throughout the world. His trip to Cuba also serves as a pretext

to attempt to cure Fidel Castro of insomnia, to no avail. His meetings with Castro also highlight the role of literature in Cuba, or in any authoritarian regime: writers are “arribistas sin compromiso . . . ratas” (“careerists without commitment . . . rats”; 212), and words, useless, except when they promote the revolution. Again, Quevedo, although at ease in these intellectual circles, is not convinced. “La autocritica de Padilla [le hace] repensar por completo [sus] convicciones revolucionarias” (“Padilla’s self-criticism [makes him] completely rethink [his] revolutionary convictions”; 223), and he realizes that “siempre que alcanzaba el poder, la revolución se pervertía. . . . Cuba no era un lugar para nosotros” (“any time it came to power, the revolution was perverted. . . . Cuba was not a place for us”; 224)—thoughts that spur his expulsion from the island for being anti-revolutionary and rejecting the influence of authority figures such as Castro.

Although Quevedo openly judges Josefa for her Mexicanness, she remains indispensable in his life. In fact, it is with Josefa that he wants to return to Mexico after seventeen years in France. Eventually, Quevedo, now certain of his potential as an intellectual leader, travels back to Mexico: in a letter, Claire comments that “después de estos años de aprendizaje en Francia, llegó el momento de completar tu camino. Como cualquier héroe, debías regresar a Ítaca para poner en práctica tus conocimientos, tu saber” (“after these years of training in France, it was time to complete your journey. Like any hero, you had to return to Ithaca to put into practice your knowledge, your wisdom”; 320). Having acquired all the knowledge in the metropole, he can now go back to the periphery and mimic behaviours acquired abroad. He seems so accustomed to his life in France that Claire is very surprised by his return to Mexico. Indeed, she is shocked that he left Europe, and even more shocked that he continues to remain in his native land. Staying put appears unrealistic for someone like Quevedo, who had thus far been ambivalent in most aspects of his life:

Me cuesta trabajo imaginarte allá, tan cerca de tu infancia y tan lejos de ti mismo (del hombre que eres hoy), extraviado en una ciudad que, como dices, ya no puede ser tuya. México: qué significativo más extraño, tan árido y al mismo tiempo tan solemne. Un lugar de cuyo nombre no querías

acordarte. . . . Cuando te marchaste pensé que no resistirías y que terminarías por regresar a Europa.

I find it hard to imagine you there, so close to your infancy and so far from yourself (from the man you are today), lost in a city that, as you say, can no longer be yours. Mexico: what a strange signifier, so arid and, at the same time, so solemn. A place whose name you didn't wish to recall. . . . When you left I thought that you would not be able to resist and that you would end up returning to Europe. (320)

However, Quevedo does not have to be in Europe, for he brings his European experience and intellectual history to Mexico. While much of the ensuing story takes place in Latin America, the physical setting is not equivalent to the intellectual space. The intellectual mindset in which Quevedo evolves is still European. Once established in Mexico, he continues to reproduce the cultural and intellectual models that he has integrated. When his daughter, whom he has not seen in years, goes to a book signing to meet him, she gets to see the extent to which he has become a stranger and is disconnected from Mexico: indeed, she says “sentí como si mi padre estuviese dormido. . . . Y no tuve el valor de despertarlo” (“I felt like my father was asleep. . . . And I didn't have the courage to wake him”; 336).

Despite the fact that he creates successful magazines such as *Tal Cual*, an imitation of *Tel Quel*, the French magazine of literary theory and criticism, and has a certain prestige in Mexican intellectual circles, he is met with only modest results. He is awarded a prize for the “peor libro del año” (“worst book of the year”) by some literary critic, who rejects him both as a writer and an intellectual; his research on murder in Chiapas—copied on Foucault's *Surveiller et punir*—does not reach any concrete conclusions; and rumours of government corruption after his psychoanalysis sessions with President Salinas de Gortari abound. All these setbacks bring Quevedo to conclude that it is impossible to be an *intellectuel engagé* in Mexico:

¿Es posible ser un intelectual comprometido en México? Esta cuestión me atormenta desde mi regreso. . . . Hasta los pensadores más críticos necesitan del poder para subsistir. Basta repasar la triste historia de la mayor parte de los escritores mexicanos de este siglo para desanimarse por completo. Al parecer, sólo existen dos opciones: mantener una posición independiente hasta las últimas consecuencias, y entonces sufrir la persecución o el silencio—acaso la peor de las condenas—, o bien plegarse a los caprichos de la clase política y guardar una obligada discreción ante los excesos del PRI y del gobierno.

Is it possible to be a committed intellectual in Mexico? This question haunts me since my return. . . . Even the most critical thinkers need power to survive. Just reviewing the sad history of most of the Mexican writers of this century is enough to be completely discouraged. Apparently there are only two options: maintain an independent position to the bitter end, and then suffer persecution or silence—perhaps the worst sentence—or bow to the whims of the political class and maintain a compulsory discretion before the excesses of the PRI and the government. (322)

“Demolido” (“destroyed”; 13) by the corruption rumours emanating from the *Salinista* administration, and since Claire cannot be convinced of his intellectual integrity, Quevedo commits suicide while the Berlin Wall falls, thus embodying “el fracaso de [las] ilusiones” (“the failure of the illusions”; 12) of the revolutionary left and the end of utopias. The ending of the novel does not make clear if Quevedo was actually corrupted by power—embodied by President Salinas de Gortari—or if he fell victim to a conspiracy led by those in power. The government of Salinas de Gortari wins over the intellectual figure Quevedo, eliminates dissent, and reiterates the victory of neo-liberalism as a system. His death on 9 November 1989, at the very moment when “Tras más de setenta años de locura, el mundo se apresta a volver a la razón” (“after seventy years of madness, the

world is preparing to return to reason"; 472), confirms that he represents the end of that long trajectory.

The last part of the novel, "El diario inédito de Christopher Domínguez" ("The Unpublished Diary of Christopher Domínguez"), echoes this finality:

La historia de este siglo es la historia de una gigantesca decepción. Su ruina representa el ansiado fin de la locura. Después de incontables esfuerzos, se ha podido comprobar que, como muchos de nosotros habíamos advertido, la revolución fue un fiasco. Detrás de sus buenos deseos, su ansia de mejorar el mundo y su pasión por la utopía, siempre se ocultó una tentación totalitaria.

The history of this century is the history of a gigantic disappointment. Its ruin represents the long-awaited end of madness. After countless efforts, it is clear that, as many of us had warned, the revolution was a fiasco. Behind its good intentions, its desire to improve the world and its passion for utopia, there always lay a hidden totalitarian temptation. (448–9)

In the end, Quevedo's fight was pointless. The end of madness spells the end of Quevedo's understanding of the world as he knew it, and his own demise, for he cannot go on living now that he sees the futility of revolution.¹³ The fall of the Berlin Wall is but a symbol of Quevedo's own fall from grace. As the Wall and the ideological struggles it represents come to an end, Quevedo suddenly *recobra la cordura* ("recovers his sanity") and in a last attempt at justifying himself, turns toward Claire. He questions everything he had taken for granted until then: their shared interests, protests, even their complicated love affair. His own demise is a metaphor for that of the revolutionary movements, something with which he has come to terms. In his suicide letter, addressed to Claire, he asks: "¿De qué te sirvió contemplar el fin de la revolución, el penoso trayecto de este siglo, el sanguinario envejecimiento de nuestra causa? Si algo aprendimos en esta era de dictadores y profetas, de carniceros y mesías, es que la verdad no

existe: fue aniquilada en medio de promesas y palabras” (“What was the point of you contemplating the end of the revolution, the painful journey of this century, the bloody aging of our cause? If we have learned anything in this era of dictators and prophets, of butchers and messiahs, it is that truth does not exist: it was annihilated amid promises and words”; 12). Revolutions, after all, were based on words and very few actions, fuelled by utopian visions but not grounded in reality. Whereas Claire thrives on utopias—“Yo soy la desquiciada, la violenta, la rebelde, ¿lo recuerdas? Oigo voces. Siempre me mantengo en pie de guerra. Y nunca transijo. Lo siento, Aníbal: a diferencia de ti, yo no pienso renunciar a la locura” (“I am the deranged, the violent, the rebellious one, remember? I hear voices. I always stay on a war footing. And I never compromise. I’m sorry, Aníbal: unlike you, I don’t plan to give up on madness”; 462)—Quevedo realizes that the revolutionary calls for action were but a farce. He criticizes Claire harshly:

Me equivoqué doblemente: primero, al creer que era posible armonizar la independencia y el compromiso y, luego, al asumir que antepondrías nuestro pasado común a tus ideales. O quizás sería mejor decir que ambos erramos o nos confundimos en esta época dominada por la falta de certezas. . . . Nuestro caso resulta tan trágico e ilusorio, banal y esperpéntico como el propio siglo XX. . . . ¿Entonces por qué asumes que eres mejor que yo? Tú me convenciste de sumarme a ese gigantesco espejismo que fue la izquierda revolucionaria y ahora te arrogas una integridad que, siento decirlo, no posees. ¿Qué buscas? ¿Comprobar que soy un traidor o un embustero? ¿Denunciar mis tratos con el poder? ¿Revelar mi debilidad, mi incongruencia, mi avaricia? Tal vez ha llegado el momento de volver a la cordura. ¿Y si en nuestros días fuese imposible luchar sin transigir? ¿No esconderá tu ansia de pureza una ambición aún mayor que la mía? Dime: ¿quién es el mentiroso: yo, eternamente afligido por mis dudas, o tú, que nunca dudaste de tu fe?

I was doubly wrong: first, by believing that it was possible to combine independence and commitment, and then, by

assuming that you would put our shared past ahead of your ideals. Or perhaps it would be better to say that we both erred or were confused in this age dominated by the lack of certainty. . . . Our case is as tragic and illusory, banal and gruesome as the twentieth century itself. . . . So why do you assume you are better than I am? You convinced me to join that gigantic mirage that was the revolutionary left and now you assume an integrity that, I am sorry to say, you do not possess. What are you looking for? To prove that I am a traitor or a liar? To denounce my dealings with power? To reveal my weakness, my inconsistency, my greed? Maybe the time has come to return to sanity. What if in our time it was impossible to fight without compromising? Does your craving for purity not hide an ambition even greater than mine? Tell me, who is the liar: me, eternally assailed by doubts, or you, who never doubted your faith? (12–13)

He paints Claire as a fanatic who never doubted her revolutionary commitment, someone blinded by faith who believes that staying true to her ideals makes her better than Quevedo, who was never able to commit fully to revolution. Claire's *locura*, then, makes her superior to Quevedo, whose newfound *cordura* turns him into a traitor to their cause. Quevedo also admits his own shortcomings—namely, the fact that he believed he could find a middle ground between logic and pragmatism, and revolution. He realizes, albeit a little late, that a compromise is impossible to find in such extreme circumstances, with such extreme interlocutors.

This discourse about *locura* and *cordura* echoes the fictional Michel Foucault's words about the role of madness in human life. The character describes it as a role to play: "Por el juego del espejo y por el silencio, la locura está llamada sin descanso a juzgarse a sí misma. Además, es juzgada a cada instante desde el exterior; juzgada no por una conciencia moral o científica, sino por una especie de tribunal que constantemente está en audiencia" ("Through mirror images and through silence, madness is tirelessly called to judge itself. Furthermore, it is judged at every moment from the outside; judged not by a moral or scientific conscience, but by a kind of tribunal that is constantly in session"; 143). Claire embodies both

locura and *tribunal*, a character who can judge others according to her fervour.

The topic of the relationship between intellectual figures and power—or, to be more precise, the criticism of the relationship between intellectuals and power—stands out in Volpi's works, whether in his essays or his novels. In his article "El fin de la conjura" ("The End of the Conspiracy"), he argues that although the tight-knit relationship between intellectuals and the state goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, "el poderoso y el intelectual en México siguen unidos por la costumbre y un preocupante desconocimiento mutuo" ("the powerful and the intellectual in Mexico are still united by habit and by a worrisome mutual lack of understanding"). In Volpi's view, this is a relationship based on a dichotomy:

Dominado por un impulso irracional, el poderoso escucha las opiniones de los intelectuales con la convicción de que poseen una influencia—una sabiduría—peligrosa. A partir de ahí, no se le ocurre más que clasificarlos en dos categorías: si las ideas que expresa el intelectual en turno son favorables a sus políticas, se trata sin excepción de un *lamesuelas*, una especie de empleado oficioso al cual debe pagar sus servicios por medio de prebendas, honores o dinero (o las tres cosas); si, en cambio, cuestionan, invalidan o de plano se oponen a sus actos, el poderoso no tarda en reconocer en él a un *conjurado*, un delincuente en potencia que sirve a "oscuros intereses," al cual debe intimidar, cortejar, perseguir, o, en un caso extremo, eliminar (lo que resulte más barato).

Dominated by an irrational impulse, the powerful listen to the opinions of intellectuals with the conviction that they possess a dangerous influence and wisdom. From that, they can think of nothing more than to classify them into two categories: if the ideas expressed by a favoured intellectual agree with their policies, he is without exception a bootlicker, an officious employee who must be paid for his services with privileges, honours, or money (or all three); if, on the other hand, they question, invalidate or outright oppose

their acts, the powerful soon recognize in them a conspirator, a potential delinquent who has “dark interests,” someone whom they must intimidate, court, pursue, or, in the extreme case, eliminate (whichever is cheaper). (“El fin de la conjura”)

In the article, Volpi explains that there are four generations of intellectuals in Mexico: the so-called generation of 1915, whose members created the first parties opposed to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional; the generation of 1929, which includes figures such as Octavio Paz; the generación de Medio Siglo, defined by the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War, which includes figures such as Gabriel Zaid and authors such as Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Fuentes; and finally, the generation of 1968, whose most famous members are Enrique Krauze and Héctor Aguilar Camín. Volpi’s objective in re-examining the various generations is to propose new possibilities for twenty-first-century intellectuals:

En primer lugar, habría que reconocer su verdadera dimensión en una sociedad democrática. A partir de ahora los intelectuales ya no debieran ser vistos por el poder como esos admirados enemigos de antes. . . . El intelectual, así, debe ser visto como lo que es: un profesional independiente, como cualquier otro, cuya misión es opinar sobre los asuntos de interés público para ayudar a modelar la opinión general sobre temas de importancia.

First, their true dimension in a democratic society should be recognized. From now on, intellectuals should no longer be seen by those in power as the admired enemies of old. . . . Intellectuals, therefore, must be seen for what they are: independent professionals, like any other, whose mission it is to express an opinion on matters of public interest to help shape general opinion on important issues. (“El fin de la conjura”)

He also maintains that the role of intellectuals must evolve over time, and that they cannot expect to be acknowledged by authority figures, which is the mistake Quevedo makes, for he wants to be acknowledged at all costs. Volpi concludes with the idea that “la transparencia debe ser la nota dominante en las relaciones entre el poder y los intelectuales” (“transparency must be the key element in relations between those in power and intellectuals”); such *transparencia* is absent from Quevedo’s relationships. He is aware that associating with power is dangerous for one’s reputation, so he does it in secret. Similar to Vargas Llosa, Volpi plots in fiction concerns he expresses in his essays and columns. The writer Ignacio Padilla has stated that Volpi’s views were but a roadmap for the Crack members’ own role as Mexican intellectuals in the twentieth century (218–19). Reading *El fin de la locura* as a roadmap makes obvious the role intellectuals ought to play in the development of a global consciousness.

El fin de la locura is also a political novel, a sub-genre of the historical novel, by virtue of the fact that the issues at hand are eminently political. It raises the idea of the end of the leading role of intellectuals in general, of the end of the Latin American intellectual forged by his European stay, and of the end of revolutionary ideas. This idea of *the end*, ironically qualified as dementia in the title itself, evokes other discourses about the end of history. The American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, in “The End of History” (1989), hypothesized that the world had reached the end of history. In this article, and then in the book of the same title, Fukuyama argued that humanity had reached the end of history as understood as a clash between competing ideologies about the economic and political organization of the world. Fukuyama argued that the failure of communism had allowed liberalism to become the universal and uncontested form of human organization. Therefore, the end of history had happened with the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that symbolized the end of ideology. In *El fin de la locura*, Quevedo also represents the end of the intellectual and the guiding ideas of past decades.

As with other discourses on temporal change, the novel has a personal dimension. This echoes comments made by Noé Jitrik in *Historia e imaginación literaria* (*History and Literary Imagination*), where he argues that the historical novel he calls *cathartic* allows authors to address recent problems in their relationship with a past they experienced themselves.

These works tend to seek “una definición de la identidad que, a causa de ciertos acontecimientos políticos, est[á] fuertemente cuestionada” (“a definition of identity that is highly questioned due to certain political events”; 17). Volpi offers a critical view of intellectuals and of Mexican and Latin American intellectual history more broadly, and he ironically advocates in favour of emancipation from the European codes of his own precursors. His view aligns with that of Edward Said, who, in *Representations of the Intellectual*, claimed that “one task of the intellectual is the effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought” (xi). Quevedo is a caricature of Latin American intellectuals of the past. His depiction serves as a counter-example to what an intellectual in Mexico should be—namely, someone who rejects the old binary between the core and the periphery and can thereby have a true worldly standing. This is how Volpi himself conceptualizes his own role as an intellectual.

According to Roberto González Echevarría, “La ‘locura’ que Volpi exorciza y ayuda a los intelectuales latinoamericanos a exorcizar es la imitación servil del pensamiento y estética europeos” (“The ‘madness’ that Volpi exorcises and helps Latin American intellectuals to exorcise is the servile imitation of European thought and aesthetics”; 147). In Volpi’s understanding of literature, national traditions are not limits to creation—not his own, not foreign traditions. A well-rounded intellectual should be open to the whole of the world’s intellectual tradition, for it can help in shaping one’s critical thinking. Here lie Quevedo’s mistakes: not only does he absorb another intellectual model, but he abides by that model alone. He dismisses other traditions that could complement his philosophical positions. Consequently, Quevedo’s goals cannot be construed in cosmopolitan terms. From the beginning of his journey to France, he betrays not only the cosmopolitan impulse, in that he solely focuses on the world, but also the commitment necessary for the articulation of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, he only concentrates on what the world can bring him, and not on what he can bring to the world. Quevedo is not committed to changing the world or tackling universal issues; he merely wants to acquire the philosophical standing necessary to be recognized as a great intellectual figure. This is contradictory to what Said argues; indeed, “the purpose of intellectual activity is to advance human freedom and knowledge”

(*Representations of the Intellectual* 17). By replicating the works of various French philosophers, Quevedo does not advance either human freedom or knowledge: he is not free to think by himself, does not come up with new ideas, and his bringing back French philosophical articulations to Mexico does not free the Mexican people, for they remain subordinated to the metropole. Moreover, Quevedo's rejection of those closest to him is two-fold. First, he rejects the life he had built in Mexico, abandoning his wife and daughter. Indeed, even when he returns, he does not seek to rekindle his relationship with them. Second, he dismisses the whole of Mexican culture: intellectually, he does not identify with it, rejecting it as a defining characteristic of identity when in France, and never reclaiming it once back on Mexican soil.

In every aspect of his life, then, he betrays the precepts of both cosmopolitanism and intellectualism. He cannot articulate a true global consciousness, for he denies one aspect of globality—home. This failure to incarnate cosmopolitan tenets also highlights his failure as an intellectual. Indeed, in Said's interpretation, the intellectual must be truly universal and embody "the interaction between universality and the local" (xiii), as well as question all aspects of society. Quevedo does not embody the interaction between the universal and the local, but rather the relationship between the periphery and the core, a situation he does not question. He lacks the critical distance and ethical commitment necessary to put his own situation into perspective: Quevedo is blinded by his desire to learn from his masters. Said also states that "the role of intellectuals is supposed to be that of helping a national community feel more a sense of common identity, and a very elevated one at that" (29), another task at which Quevedo fails. Indeed, he only succeeds in uniting people against him, in their common repudiation of him as a Mexican intellectual.

Often, historical novels fictionalize the past that its authors believe their nation to have overcome, only to criticize it and make it theirs (Pons 62). By placing Latin American history in a global context, *El fin de la locura*, a hybrid novel, shares aspects of the historical novel and the global novel, and as such, it is a striking example of a metafictional work that uses literature as a weapon to reflect on and criticize the Latin American intellectual past in a global setting. On numerous occasions, Quevedo filters his understanding of global events through a national lens, which is

also problematic. He is unable to universalize a Mexican's situation, and to truly commit to global changes. For instance, he fails both as a revolutionary and as an intellectual during the May 1968 protests in France, and cannot conceive of the October 1968 massacre in Mexico City as part of a global event. He does not "tak[e] a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided by [his] background, language, nationality," which shield him "from the reality of others" (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* xiv). Not only does Volpi criticize the *Latin American intellectual* as a global category, he also criticizes the *Mexican intellectual* in relation to both Tlatelolco and the Salinas de Gortari government. Indeed, "in dark times an intellectual is often looked to by members of his . . . nationality to represent, speak out for, and testify to the sufferings of that nationality" (43). Quevedo, by not taking a stand—worse, by feeling nothing after the massacre of October 1968—tacitly sides with the Díaz Ordaz government (1964–70).¹⁴ Later, in 1988–89, by helping the Salinas de Gortari administration, he does not voice the public's concerns about the neo-liberal policies implemented by the government. By not acting, Quevedo becomes an accomplice who fails in his commitment to his fellow Mexicans, both as an intellectual and a cosmopolitan.

Even by portraying a failed Mexican intellectual and by engaging the Latin American setting obliquely, Volpi still proposes a reflection that is relevant to his continent of birth. As he has said in an interview, "se necesita ser muy poco avezado en prácticas literarias como para no darse cuenta que en cualquier caso, un mexicano escribiendo sobre Alemania o sobre Rusia o lo que sea, incluso no metafóricamente, hay una correspondencia con lo que estás viviendo" ("you need very little experience of literary practice not to realize that in any case, with a Mexican writing about Germany or Russia or whatever, even unmetaphorically, there is a connection with your life"; qtd. in Areco 300). This *correspondencia* to which Volpi refers has to do with the events on which his novels concentrate—that is, global events that had an impact on a national as much as an international scale. The narrative is written from the perspective of rooted cosmopolitanism and presents models that are problematic and need correcting, precisely for their lack of articulation of an ethical local and global consciousness. Quevedo is anything but an exemplary personification of a rooted cosmopolitan: he does not commit to those close to him, nor to the larger world.

His various travels serve to enrich him only. Lessons drawn from his behaviour can be applied to Mexico, Latin America, or the world—it has global implications about universal commitment. As a global novel, *El fin de la locura* not only articulates both the world and Latin America as its chambers of resonance, but also proposes a cosmopolitan consciousness through the depiction of intellectual counter-examples of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

No será la Tierra: The Fate of Cosmopolitanism in the Neo-liberal World Order

Jorge Volpi has said that *No será la Tierra* (*Season of Ash*¹⁵) is “the most pessimistic novel I have written” (qtd. in Corral et al. 103). It is also, incidentally, his most global novel, in terms of territory covered, to date. *No será la Tierra* is a prime example of a novel in which events are given more importance than characters. I contend that the narrative is about the fanaticism of characters who emerge from a world of extremes, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s description of the century in *The Age of Extremes* (1994), and who, filled with doubts in a world that they identify correctly as totalitarian, have oscillated to embrace opposite ideologies. My analysis shows that *No será la Tierra* represents a criticism of nationalism and of the excesses that arise from this political position, as well as a pessimistic view of cosmopolitanism in contemporary times, in which one relates to people from another continent but forgets one’s family. The novel also showcases how globality can be synonymous with uprootedness and disengagement. I concentrate on two characters, the Russian Arkadi Granin and the American Allison Moore, as well as on their families, to explore Volpi’s representation of the failures of both the nationalist and the cosmopolitan position. Moreover, I show that political polarities destroy as much as the nuclear weapons against which these characters fight. While both characters try to reconcile their family life with their universal concerns, both fail in their attempts to achieve a balanced approach to their projects. They feel propelled by their ideals to engage primarily with the universal, which leads them to disengagement from the local; in this way, each betrays the precepts of rooted cosmopolitanism, which reconciles love and responsibilities for one’s nation with a universal commitment toward

others. In fact, inasmuch as they deny to varying degrees their cultural roots, their cosmopolitan engagements do not promote dialogue among cultures, which, in my proposed conceptualization, is a basic tenet for the articulation of a universal community. Rooted cosmopolitanism, after all, is universalism plus difference (Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Reading” 202). Their disengagement from their own cultural milieu makes their projects flawed from the outset.

According to Volpi, the narrative is structured like an opera:¹⁶ a prelude recounts the events of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986—and sets the tone for a novel about human hubris and the end of ideologies—and is then divided into three *actos*: the first act, “Tiempo de Guerra [“War Time”] (1929–1985),” starts with the 1929 Black Thursday and concludes with Ronald Reagan’s 1985 Star Wars military project; the second, “Mutaciones [“Mutations”] (1985–1991),” spans the years leading to the fall of the Soviet Union; and the third, “La esencia de lo humano [“The Essence of the Human”] (1991–2000),” concentrates on the aftermath of market liberalization in post-Soviet Russia. In other words, the novel covers, in great detail, the global events that shaped the 1929–2000 period on every continent.

The narrative intertwines the lives of eight major characters, as well as those of their respective relatives, reinforcing my reading that the novel is more about global events than it is about individual characters.¹⁷ Journalist Yuri Mijáilovich Chernishevski recounts the events from his prison cell, where he sits after being convicted of murder. Chernishevski is the narrator of what appear to be, at first sight, three disparate subplots, which converge toward the end of the novel. The three main protagonists are “tres mujeres” (“three women”), as is reflected in the title of a subsection of the novel: Jennifer Moore, Irina Gránina, and Éva Halász. Their relatives and acquaintances, though less fleshed out, are as important—if not more—to the plot’s development. Indeed, it is through the interaction of members of their respective families that the three women eventually meet.

Jennifer Moore is the eldest daughter of a member of the US Senate. She is a very sensible and determined person. After graduating college with honours, she sets her mind on becoming one of the students of Canadian-born American economist and diplomat John Kenneth Galbraith. Henceforth, her unwavering ambition and dedication leads her to

success. She eventually secures an important position at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where she is put in charge of key projects. Jennifer is married to Jack Wells, a failed entrepreneur who cheats on her regularly. Blinded by capitalism, Wells pursues risky trading ventures. Jennifer is unable to have children; she gets to experience motherhood thanks to her younger sister, Allison, the black sheep of the family, who abandons her son to her sister. Allison resents the fact that their father has always shown a clear preference for Jennifer, and during her teenage years, Allison does everything in her power to cause trouble. As a young adult, she distances herself from her family, and becomes involved in various anti-globalization movements. Her son, Jacob, becomes the object of Jennifer's motherly love. Allison meets the narrator, Chernishevski, during the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests.

Irina Gránina is a Soviet scientist who has little interest in human relationships; she has, however, taken a keen interest in the bacteria she studies in her laboratory. She believes that the whole world can be understood through science, as it is more stable than human interactions. She does not question the Soviet regime nor does she take an active part in it. Her only desire is to dedicate herself to science. Her life changes when she meets fellow scientist Arkadi Granin; they soon marry and have a daughter, Oksana. Arkadi is the incarnation of the perfect Soviet citizen, until a bacteriological incident, for which he feels responsible, results in him being sent to the Gulag. His imprisonment, unsurprisingly, embitters him and leaves him disenchanted with communism. When he is freed years later, Oksana does not recognize her father. A troubled child under Irina's care, she becomes an ever more disturbed teenager. She resents her father and the work he does, turning to poetry to exorcise the pain she feels for not having a defined national identity. She expresses her condition eloquently: "Desde hoy me considero apátrida. Nací en una nación muerta, en un territorio que perderá su nombre, en un tiempo vacío que el mundo se obstina en olvidar. Me considero ciudadana de la Nada, ostento un pasaporte de Ninguna parte, tal vez yo ya tampoco existo, soy una ilusión o un error de cálculo, un daño colateral—así los llaman—una ruina" (Volpi, *No será la Tierra* 362) ("Beginning today, I consider myself a stateless person. I was born in a dead nation, in a territory that will lose its name, in an empty time the world insists on forgetting. I consider myself

a citizen of Nothingness, I can flash a passport for Nowhere, perhaps I too no longer exist. I'm an illusion, a mistake, collateral damage—that's what they call it—a ruin"; *Season of Ash* 277–8). She even claims to be “un *anacronismo*” (362) (“an anachronism”; 278). She eventually escapes her parents' care and resurfaces in Vladivostok, where she turns to prostitution and is killed by a man known as “el coreano” (“the Korean”). Whereas Irina is crushed by the death of her daughter, Arkadi does not feel anything. Out of spite and grief, Irina shares Oksana's diaries and poems, and her life story, with Chernishevski.

The last female protagonist is Éva Halász, a gifted scientist. Born in Hungary, she is raised in the United States, where she attends prestigious universities. A depressed figure, she only cares about artificial intelligence; she insists that the reproduction of human intelligence is science's final frontier. Throughout the novel, she repeats her claim that humans are not as evolved as machines, and that feelings are a waste of time. Her dismissal of the importance of feelings is exemplified by the fact that Éva has many lovers—Jack Wells, husband of Jennifer Moore, and the narrator Chernishevski, among others—none of whom stay in her life for very long. Like Irina, her sole interest is science. However, whereas Irina works on concrete projects within the borders of her nation, Eva has but one goal in mind, to map the human genome, and her research takes her around the globe. For instance, she spends some years in Berlin, where she witnesses the fall of the Wall. Much like Oksana, Éva does not feel she has a stable national identity—“Éva no poseía un hogar, era húngara y estadounidense y alemana (o más bien berlinesa), y no era nada de eso” (360) (“Eva had no home; she was Hungarian, American, and German [well, actually a Berliner] and none of those things”; 276)—her identity is tied solely to her profession as a scientist. Éva represents the most extreme incarnation of globality—neither territory nor human beings are important to her, she only thrives through science. She eventually dies at the hands of the narrator, Chernishevski, which spurs the writing of the novel within the novel.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), describes nationalism as “the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as neurosis in the individual . . . and largely incurable” (5).¹⁸ This definition is consistent with the vision of the Communist Bloc put forward by the narrator Chernishevski. He explains that after the October Revolution

of 1917, the Soviet Union developed a political program focused on the creation of the *homo sovieticus*, “un nuevo tipo de ser humano, alejado de los yerros, la torpeza, la avaricia, y la mezquindad propia de nuestra especie” (Volpi, *No será la Tierra* 54) (“a new type of human being, free of the errors, awkwardness, avarice, and meanness of our species”; *Season of Ash* 35), and, finally, on the spread of nationalism at all costs. Although Soviet officials were aware of their shortcomings and mistakes—as in the Chernobyl tragedy, a symbol of communist decadence—it was unpatriotic to admit it. Chernishevski goes even further than comparing the USSR to a lie: “Chernóbil desveló el secreto: la Unión Soviética era una ficción” (221) (“Chernobyl revealed the secret: The Soviet Union was a fiction”; 166), an imagined country.

The character of Arkadi Granin fits neatly into this narrative plot created by the state. Granin, a Russian scientist specializing in bacteriological warfare, begins his life as a perfect student aware of the role he has to play to satisfy both his family’s and the state’s expectations. The two are conflated in the mind of the character, for the state makes clear that everything must be done for the greater good of the motherland. From an early age, Arkadi is also aware that his life is relatively easy when compared to that of the average Soviet, for “a diferencia de la mayor parte de los internos, él se había beneficiado de los privilegios de la élite, había disfrutado de una vida llena de comodidades y ni siquiera había sufrido las penurias del estalinismo” (149) (“unlike most of the prisoners, he had benefited from the privileges of the elite, had enjoyed a life full of comforts, and hadn’t even suffered the shortages of the Stalin era”; 109). The easy life that he has led, a result of his ignorance of the shortcomings of the USSR, ultimately conditions him to believe in the utopian project that is communism/socialism, since he has never seen how terribly it affected large groups of people. Consequently, at nineteen years of age, he is quite different from his classmates, who for the most part have more reasonable dreams and expectations. When his best friend asks him why he chose medicine, Arkadi confesses to dreams bigger than himself:

¿y por qué no? Ésa no es una respuesta, Arkadi Ivánovitch. Entonces porque sí. *Reductio ad absurdum*. A los 19 años cualquier discusión se volvía trascendental: para salvar a la

humanidad, concluyó Arkadi. . . . Una frase típica de Arkadi que reflejaba la diferencia entre ambos: él quería estudiar medicina para ayudar a unos pocos individuos de carne y hueso, mientras que Arkadi sólo podía soñar con el género humano. (57)

Why not? That's not an answer, Arkady Ivanovitch. Well, just because. *Reductio ad absurdum*. When you're nineteen, any discussion becomes transcendent: to save humanity, concluded Arkady. . . . A typical Arkady statement, which reflected the difference between the two of them: He wanted to study medicine to save a few real people, Arkady could only dream about the human race. (37–8)

Arkadi expresses strong cosmopolitan concerns. He wants to *salvar a la humanidad* (“save humanity”), a dream that does not appear beyond reach when construed in Soviet terms. Indeed, Arkadi is blinded by the discourse that posits communism as the best ideological stance. *Salvar a la humanidad* is, then, a twofold process: first, it can be accomplished through medicine and the development of strong medical practices and scientific discoveries, which are possible thanks to the superiority of the USSR, and second, through the spread of communism, once other nations recognize the superiority of that system. Arkadi's interest in a humanity that is not confined to the borders of the Soviet Union seems suspicious to the administration of the Central University of Moscow and to some sections of the Communist Party. It is said that Arkadi “No tiene raíces. Flirtea con el Occidente. Es un traidor” (63) (“They have no roots. They flirt with the West. They're traitors”; 43) and that “tiene que reparar en sus inclinaciones cosmopolitas” (63) (“he had no choice but to renounce his friendship”; 43) if he wants to thrive in the USSR. For a time, his dream of becoming a doctor is stronger than his humanist ambitions. Although at first the thought of having to distance himself from his best friend, Vsevolod Birsten, when he is accused of being a “perro judío” (62) (“Jew bastard”; 42), is unbearable, he eventually does so when he is himself accused of being a “cosmopolita como Vsevolod: sólo los traidores eran amigos de los traidores” (63) (“a *cosmopolite* like Vsevolod: Only traitors

were friends of traitors”; 43). Being cosmopolitan can mean being sent to the Gulag, something everyone dreads. Arkadi rationalizes his decision in the following way: “Si pretendía continuar su ascenso, no le quedaba más que renegar de su amistad” (63) (“If he wanted his rise to continue, he had no choice but to renounce his friendship”; 43)—what does it matter if you sacrifice one person if you can save millions? He refuses to ground his cosmopolitan pretensions in reality—standing by a friend. He prefers the abstraction of utopia—the possibility to save millions. He denies the importance of kith and kind in the name of his cosmopolitan project, which makes it flawed from the outset.

Arkadi lets himself be convinced by the state, “seguro de ser un elegido de los dioses” (68) (“certain he was one of the chosen of the gods”; 46), and, as a young adult, is the perfect embodiment of the *homo sovieticus* who thrives within the system. Supported by his wife Irina, he rises to an important position in a state company and is very successful until a serious accident occurs with anthrax bacillus, causing the death of a hundred innocent people. This event is the turning point in the evolution of his character. His faith in the party starts to falter, never to return. Indeed, instead of acknowledging the tragic accident, the party finds scapegoats who are later sent to the Gulag or before a firing squad. At all times, the narrative set up by the USSR must hold, and the death of a handful of citizens is no reason to challenge the established order. Arkadi is disgusted by this attitude: he became a scientist to save lives, not to see them destroyed by a state he believes in. He needs for his “trabajo sea útil, salvar vidas, no acabar con ellas” (141) (“work to be useful, to save lives, not end them”; 102). While his wife Irina cannot conceive that the world is different outside the borders of the country, does not believe “en la propaganda oficial que insist[e] en la amistad entre los pueblos” (48) (“the propaganda that insisted on the friendship between the two nations”; 30), and gladly admits that “el mundo exterior sólo le provo[ca] indiferencia” (48) (“the exterior world only aroused her indifference”; 30), Arkadi returns to the humanist ambitions of his nineteen-year-old self and wants to get away from the *nomenklatura*, or party apparatus, creating frictions in his marriage. Irina, without being a fervent communist, does not share the universalist ideals of her husband and only believes in the importance of applied science, not human beings. She also fears, rightfully, that Arkadi’s newfound

rebellion will affect those closest to him—his wife and daughter. And sure enough, the party disapproves of the change in Arkadi's political position, and exiles him while also tormenting Irina and Oksana. In jail, Arkadi has all the time that he needs to reflect on communism, and to develop a pure hatred toward the system he once admired.

When Arkadi is released five years later, he is a changed man. He has become anti-national to the extreme, and has assimilated the universalist doctrine and the cosmopolitan view of the globalization/capitalist discourse. He only thinks “en el modo de salvar a su patria” (239) (“and thought about how to go about saving the nation”; 182) from communism. *Salvar* is, then, a leitmotiv in his life, notwithstanding the ideology by which he is blinded. He cannot stand the idea that communism and its misleading ideals are still thriving in the Soviet Union, and is adamant that “él, y sólo él, tenía una misión que cumplir” (239) (“he, and only he, had a mission to carry out”; 182). He feels invested with a mission, and becomes driven by a messianic spirit, the same spirit that made him choose medicine as a young adult. He calls for open markets during the period of *Perestroika* (“restructuring”) led by Russian leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and later Boris Yeltsin. Irina disapproves of this position, and agrees with many members of their group who “deploraban de su radicalismo” (255) (“deplored his radicalism”; 192). He has gone from the extreme of communism to that of capitalism, each time blindly believing its gospel. Although Irina is glad of the fall of communism, she notes that new dogmas—Western capitalism and the Orthodox Church—appeared in its wake, each as extreme as its predecessor:

La Unión soviética había sido una pesadilla, una fuente de opresión y de tortura, pero a Irina le resultaba imposible imaginarse en el desierto, no toleraba la ciega voluntad de borrar el pasado que animaba a los reformistas. . . . Otorgarle poder a esos ancianos incultos y anacrónicos le parecía un síntoma inequívoco de la demagogia imperante; se llenaba el vacío ideológico dejado por el comunismo con otra fe absurda: antes Lenin, ahora Cristo. (332)

The Soviet Union had been a nightmare, a source of oppression and torture, but Irina could not imagine herself in the desert: She couldn't stand the blind will to erase the past that animated the reformers. . . . To grant power to those ignorant, anachronistic old men seemed to her an unequivocal sign of the current demagoguery. The ideological void left by Communism was being filled by another absurd faith: First it was Lenin, now Christ. (252–3)

History repeats itself, as one ideology has been replaced by another.

Arkadi, meanwhile, calls for the democratization of the country and internalizes Western influence without realizing that he shifts from one extreme to another, from communist nationalism to American capitalism; “se había convertido en un liberal tan autoritario como sus enemigos” (334) (“had become a liberal and was as authoritarian as his enemies”; 254) and “Su odio al comunismo lo había convertido en un fanático del mercado” (429) (“his hatred of Communism had turned him into a free market fanatic”; 333–4). He has converted to a new faith, and is aware of major changes in his personality, but does not resent them: “Arkadi Ivánovich no podía ni quería contenerse, ya no podía volver atrás, la revolución de su mente y de su cuerpo era irrefrenable. Sí, ahora era violento; sí, ahora era intransigente; sí, ahora era brutal. Era el precio que había pagado, y no se conformaba con las mijagas de libertad que le concedía Gorbachov, pastor de hombres” (276) (“Arkady Ivanovich could not hold back, didn't want to, couldn't go back. The revolution of his mind and body was now unfettered. Yes, now he was violent; yes, now he was intransigent; yes, now he was brutal. That was the price he'd paid, and he wasn't going to settle for the crumbs of freedom conceded to him by Gorbachev, shepherd of men”; 210). The flow of consciousness makes the reader privy to Arkadi's most intimate thoughts. He longs for complete individual liberty, and his disgust for communism makes him profess his faith to a new god, America, which he associates with freedom and democracy. However, he has an idealistic view of America. Once there, he cannot believe the type of capitalism displayed in New York is the right one. He is disappointed with the concrete incarnation of his dream: “El capitalismo no era aquella obscena proliferación de productos, marcas, colores y sabores, sino algo superior,

casi metafísico: una forma de vida abstracta, una metáfora de la libertad que apenas se correspondía con su encarnación real” (410) (“Capitalism was not that obscene proliferation of products, brands, colors, and tastes but something superior, something almost metaphysical: an abstract kind of life, a metaphor for freedom that barely corresponded to its real incarnation”; 318). Once again, reality disappoints him, much like the concrete praxis of communism that led him to rebel against it. The abstraction about which he dreams is not what he finds in the United States, nor what his business associate Jack Wells is promoting. He associates with Wells, Jennifer’s husband, who is eventually accused of fraud. Arkadi cannot find the middle ground between these two irreconcilable positions. However, he does not see that this new position is as destructive as the former, for anything seems to be better than communism.

Irina is not surprised by her husband’s demise. In fact, the reader is privy to her thoughts, which she shares with the narrator in an interview included in the third part of the novel. Although at first, when Arkadi refuses to keep working for a system that scapegoats its citizens, Irina “no ponía en duda la repentina toma de conciencia de su marido” (146) (“never doubted her husband’s sudden attack of conscience”; 106), she doubts the purity of his intentions: “creía que su frustración profesional también había resultado determinante. Para Arkadi el anonimato era la peor de las condenas” (146) (“she believed that his frustration also played a role. For Arkady, anonymity was the worst sentence he could receive”; 106). Communism tried to annihilate individual identity, much like the extreme articulation of globality does with local cultures. Irina even believes that somehow being jailed and exiled was his endgame, for his only desire was to be “el centro del mundo” (147) (“the center of the world”; 107), which he effectively becomes once the government tries to rid itself of its once best example of *homo sovieticus*.

Like Arkadi, Allison Moore is another major character. She, too, goes to the extremes of her ideologies, and she also does it for what she deems to be the greater good. She is the black sheep of a prominent American family who grew up in an environment protected by her father’s money, knowing only the best society has to offer. Expected to act as a daughter of a good family would (103–4), she rebels during her adolescence, during which “no busc[a] divertirse sino cambiar el mundo” (91) (“instead of

trying to amuse herself, [she] attempted to change the world”; 66), only to become what her family, conservative Republicans, hates. After she is expelled from her private high school, she attends university only sporadically, preferring instead to become involved in the protests against the Vietnam War and in the Flower Power movement. Allison has a chaotic relationship with her older sister, Jennifer, who is her polar opposite. While Jennifer “odi[a] o más bien despreci[a] a los liberales como su hermana por su doble moral” (173) (“hated liberals like her sister because of their double standard”; 130), Allison cannot stand her sister talking about her “irritante[s] experiencia[s] [por el mundo] trufada[s] con estereotipos y quejas” (232) (“irritating experiences, complete with stereotypes and complaints”; 175), seeing the IMF, for which Jennifer works, as the only way to save the Third World. Allison believes that Western organizations are but meddlers trying to impose a way of life instead of trying to understand the cultural framework of the countries they arguably fail to help. She is angered when Jennifer claims that “el único modo de ayudar a ‘esa gente’ (la del Tercer Mundo, por supuesto) era obligándola a acatar las disposiciones del Fondo” (232) (“the only way to help ‘those people’ [of the Third World, of course] was by forcing them to respect the policies of the IMF”; 175), and swears that her sister is wrong, for she embodies, through her position at the IMF, the very neo-liberal policies against which she fights. Jennifer has the very same opinion of her sister as Allison has of her. Jennifer sees Allison as an idealist with little to no understanding of the socio-political struggles of the countries she wants to help. Jennifer is irritated by the fact that the groups to which Allison belongs present themselves as “defensores de los débiles y los desheredados,” but who are “incapaces de buscar soluciones reales a sus problemas. Ella, republicana orgullosa—*conservadora compasiva*, se definía—no se creía mejor que nadie, no pensaba en guiar a los pobres, los enfermos o los lisiados, pero hacía más por ellos que todos esos progresistas de salón” (173) (“defenders of the weak and abandoned, but they were unable to find real solutions for their problems. She, a proud Republican, did not think she was better than anyone, did not think about guiding the poor, the sick, or the disabled, but she did more for them than these armchair progressives”; 130). Ironically, the two sisters have the same objective: to improve the living conditions of the less fortunate, albeit through different means.

Allison's humanitarian concerns begin early on, and never waver: she is "decidida a consagrarse a lo único que le importaba: los otros" (200) ("intent on dedicating herself to the only thing that mattered to her: other people"; 151). She even puts her own needs—for love, stability, and security—behind those of the rest of the world. However, like Arkadi Granin, she cannot reconcile her universalist concerns with her own family, which eventually disintegrates. While her sister Jennifer travels a lot for work, Allison gets involved with different organizations and lives all over the planet: San Francisco, Auckland, Palestine. Although both are committed to helping their fellow human beings, their ways of doing so could not be more different. Jennifer wants to help the developing countries—Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Mexico, Russia—to improve their economies, but she comes with an American imperialistic mentality. Instead of trying to understand the rules governing the systems of these other countries, she just imposes her own. For instance, when she travels to Mexico City with the IMF in 1986, she claims that while it is not Zaire, "se le parecía" (221) ("it seemed like it"; 166), and that it was "un país tan hospitalario como opaco" (212) ("a country as hospitable as it was opaque"; 159). The Mexican public servants she meets are not helpful, nor are they dedicated to redressing the economic situation of the country. She also travels to Africa, the "corazón de las tinieblas" (157) ("the heart of darkness"; 116), a continent where "se concentran todas las taras de la colonización y barbarie" (162) ("we have concentrated here all the defects of colonization and barbarism"; 120) to "civilizar a esos salvajes" (156) ("to civilize those savages"; 116). She is so extreme in her approach that she drives her team of analysts, and herself, to the verge of exhaustion. She considers it her duty to help them surmount the economic misery in which they live, and she experiences the IMF's failures to redress these economic woes as personal failures. Like her sister, she is a utopian, in that she really believes she can have an impact wherever she goes. She sees herself as "la punta de lanza de ese cambio" (161) ("the advanced guard for that change"; 119), and sincerely embodies the ideals of the IMF and the powers the institution grants her. Like Arkadi, she is also extremely self-centred and wants to be acknowledged for the work she does:

Ella podría bien estar en América, paseando por Central Park o comprando vestidos de piel en Saks, alimentando su colección de joyas y abrigos de piel, despreocupada de la misera, y en cambio prefería el calor, la inseguridad y los mosquitos de Kinshasa, con el único objetivo de ayudar a sus roñosos habitantes. Lo menos que esperaba de ellos era que se mostrasen comprensivos con sus cambios de humor. (164)

She could easily have been in the United States, augmenting her collection of jewels and fur coats, unconcerned about poverty, but instead she preferred the heat, insecurity, and mosquitoes of Kinshasa. Her only objective was to help its mangy inhabitants. All she expected from them is that they show some understanding for her mood shifts. (122)

She feels “the white man’s burden,” and has a dire need to be acknowledged for her efforts, be they in helping foreign countries or trying to have a functional life back in the United States.

Allison, however, cannot divide her attention as well as her sister does. Idealistic, she gives herself body and soul to a cause, whether it is with Greenpeace or Earth First, and she struggles to reconcile her universal concerns with her family life. During her period with Earth First, with whom she feels she has finally “encontrado su lugar” (242) (“found her place”; 184) after years of soul-searching, she falls in love with a fellow protester, Zak, whom she calls her “pequeño paraíso” (273) (“little paradise”; 207). Zak turns out to be an undercover FBI agent, sent to thwart the organization’s plans. On 31 May 1989, members of Allison’s cell are arrested and jailed. She later realizes that she is pregnant with Zak’s child (294), something that Jennifer takes as a personal affront (296). Much like Irina, who sees Arkadi’s need to be the centre of the world as egotism, Jennifer hurls abuse at her sister and calls her decision to keep the child “un puro gesto de egoísmo” (297) (“a pure act of egoism”; 225), for she doubts Allison will set aside her various projects to raise a child. Unsurprisingly, Allison eventually has Jennifer take care of her son, Jacob, while trying to save the lives of other children in Palestine, something Jennifer resents

deeply. During one of their numerous fights, Jennifer tells Allison that she should “Deja[r] de salvar al mundo y ocupa[rs]e de la única persona que de verdad te necesita” (341) (“forget saving the world and look after the only person who really needs you”; 261), her son. She never does, because Allison knows that Jennifer is better at raising Jacob than she would be.

Allison dies defending others, without worrying much about her own life (508). Ironically, while Allison has a truly universalist desire to help others, as opposed to the US-centred perspective of her sister, Jennifer enjoys a relative degree of success balancing her commitment to all aspects of her life. However, as her death nears, Allison partially comes to terms with her role in the world, and is aware that she can only do so much:

Allison tomó al pequeño en sus brazos y lo cubrió de besos. ¿Qué importaba lo que sucediese con el resto de la humanidad? Ella sola jamás lograría eliminar la brecha entre ricos y pobres, entre poderosos y desheredados, pero al menos podía ocuparse de que cinco o diez personas, acaso veinte o treinta, tomasen conciencia de su situación y aprendiesen a sobrevivir por sí mismas. (447)

Allison took the boy in her arms and covered him with kisses. What did it matter what happened to the rest of humanity? Alone, she would never manage to eliminate the gap between rich and poor, between the powerful and the disinherited, but she at least could see that five or ten people, maybe twenty or thirty, could become aware of their situation and learn to survive on their own. (349)

She reframes her commitment to others, and her universalist pretensions. It is still global, in the sense that she is far from home, but she narrows down her field of action. She has, in Said’s words, “creat[ed] an environment in which [she] feel[s] that [she] belong[s]” (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 14), having replaced filiation, the natural bonds of family, with affiliation, the bonds of “culture and society” (20). She has made the “transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation”—her strained relationship with her father and her confrontational rapport with Jennifer—to

what Said calls a “compensatory order . . . that provides men and women with a new form of relationship”—namely, affiliation (19). Although she dies and cannot expand on that understanding of her place in the world, she has acknowledged that she could only act on a smaller scale. Ironically, even in death, she is the character who finds the greatest closure.

No será la Tierra is fundamentally a novel about death, strictly and metaphorically speaking. First, the narrator is writing his story as he sits in jail after his conviction for the murder of Éva Halász. Second, the death of a loved one is both the start and end of every subplot. At the beginning of the novel, Jennifer learns of Allison’s death, Irina of Oksana’s, and the narrator’s killing of Eva prompts the very writing of the narrative. At the end of the novel, Jennifer must tell Jacob that his mother passed away—Jennifer comments that Jacob “está a punto de perder la inocencia” (508) (is “about to lose his innocence”; 398)—and Irina and Arkadi struggle to come to terms with their daughter’s death, which marks the metaphorical death of their marriage. Third, the novel is about human hubris, and if not its death, at least its consequences. The novel begins with the Chernobyl tragedy, the beginning of the end for the USSR, and concludes on the eve of the new millennium, when it is apparent that Russia has failed in its attempts at liberalization. The novel also emphasizes quite eloquently how the capitalist system is broken; this is conveyed through the character of Wells, his association with Granin, and Oksana’s sexual exploitation and murder in Vladivostok.

Like *El fin de la locura*, the novel is a work of metafiction, although it must be noted, less ironic and parodic in tone. First, the narrator, Chernishevski, acts as the editor of the novel, a key figure for this type of fiction. Second, this narrator is reminiscent of Volpi himself. Indeed, the journalist has become famous for his novel *En busca de Kaminski* (*In Search of Kaminski*), a political thriller set in the USSR. Chernishevski explained that he enjoyed the writing of this novel very much: “Al principio se trató de un entretenimiento o un juego para olvidar las horas; luego la tarea se volvió tan absorbente que los días se desvanecían mientras trazaba la historia de Jodorkovski que era también la historia del final de la Unión Soviética y la historia del triunfo del capitalismo en Rusia” (434) (“At first, it was an amusement, a pastime. Then the work became so absorbing that tracing Khodorkovsky’s history, which was also the history of the end of

the Soviet Union and the history of the triumph of capitalism in Russia"; 338), much like Volpi's *En busca de Klingsor* recounts the end of Nazi Germany, and *No será la Tierra* the end of communism and the—mostly failed—implementation of capitalism in Russia. *En busca de Kaminski* is, then, a fictional work reminiscent of two of Volpi's works. Chernishevski also recalls how his "vida se paralizó" (436) ("life stopped"; 339) after the publication of the novel: "Durante meses mi existencia se redujo a hablar una y mil veces, en distintas ciudades y lenguas—a veces era incapaz de reconocerlas—, del infame Vladímir Kaminski, quien no sólo terminó por carcomer o suplantar a Jodorkovski, sino a mí mismo" (436) ("For months, my existence was reduced to speaking a thousand and one times in different cities and languages—at times I couldn't even recognize what they were—about the infamous Vladimir Kaminski, who not only consumed Khodorkovsky but did the same to me"; 339), much like that of Volpi after the publication of *En busca de Klingsor*, and the polemics that followed. Third, the very title, *No será la Tierra*, is the title of a collection of poems by Oksana. Irina, Oksana's mother, discovers the poems after burying her daughter. She reads and shares them with Chernishevski, who then uses the same title for the novel he writes about the events. Finally, the narrator uses a variety of apocryphal texts, such as newspaper articles, briefing notes, conversations he had with various characters, and the previously mentioned collection of poems. The novel also has some characteristics of the new historical novel: real-life figures, such as American president Bill Clinton and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, are turned into characters, though never given a central role. History is circular and repeats itself through various cycles.

No será la Tierra is also universal in scope, although it must be said that some countries and continents only play a minor role in the narrative, which I contend is essentially a comment on globality itself; by covering too much ground, one eventually loses oneself. Jennifer Moore, for instance, travels to Zaire, Mexico, and Russia for the IMF, but never develops a sense of belonging to these countries. In contrast, her sister Allison travels to New Zealand and Palestine, and develops a sense of belonging abroad that she never feels at home in the United States. Even if these countries play what appears to be, at first sight, a lesser role—in terms of the narrative space dedicated to the events that take place there,

or the time the character spends in these countries—they are the most important in the development of her global awareness. For instance, the explosion of the *Rainbow Warrior* in the port of Auckland, and the subsequent death of a colleague, cement her revolutionary beliefs, and her time spent in Palestine helping children makes her come to terms with the failure of her universalist dream.

My analysis has shown that the novel is about the embrace of opposite, yet equally extreme, ideologies. Through its plotting of characters who fail to reconcile their commitment to their family and the world, *No será la Tierra* is about ideological extremes; neither nationalism nor cosmopolitanism, the characters learn, fulfils universal human needs, for they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Whereas Allison is eventually able to reframe her commitment to others, albeit in global terms that still alienate those closest to her, Arkadi ultimately alienates everyone in his life. Although he tries to reconcile the plight of those closest to him—family, friends, and colleagues—he ends up dedicating all his efforts to humanity. These characters, who embody ideas and intellectual positions, are not rooted cosmopolitans: their universal concerns and attempts to tackle the world's problems are thwarted by their betrayal of the local aspects of their lives. Only Jennifer, by maintaining a critical perspective close to rooted cosmopolitanism, partially succeeds.

Conclusion

In my investigation of *El fin de la locura* and *No será la Tierra* I have interpreted these two texts as global novels that plot cosmopolitanism proper, and advocate for rooted cosmopolitanism. Yet it is worth noting that neither book shies away from arguing in favour of this position through the use of counter-examples that highlight the difficulties of espousing such a position. Indeed, neither Quevedo nor Claire, neither Allison nor Arkadi, are rooted cosmopolitans, and not one of them finds full redemption.

Quevedo turns his back on his Mexican roots to adopt a European intellectual identity that he later brings back to Mexico; he becomes rooted in his milieu—claiming a Mexicanness he rejected some years before—while also remaining foreign to it. Claire's only interest is in revolutionary movements, be they in France or abroad; their physical location matters

little, only the praxis of revolution. She is blinded by her belief in the revolutionary gospel and refuses to admit that as the Berlin Wall is falling, so are the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and '70s. Neither Quevedo nor Claire is a rooted cosmopolitan; their ideology, be it psychoanalysis or revolution, makes them impervious to a balanced commitment to their immediate surroundings and the world.

Allison is eventually able to come to terms with the fact that her universalist pretensions are setting her up for failure, and she reconceptualizes her role in the world; she nevertheless abandons those closest to her, who were never part of her cosmopolitan ideals from the start. Like Claire, the only thing that matters is that some sort of greater good be achieved outside of her national territory. Allison is similar in this regard to Quevedo, for both, toward the end of their lives, grasp and acknowledge some of their shortcomings. However, Allison is allowed a partial atonement by the narrative voice, for she realizes, to a certain extent, the error of her ways. She is judged harshly for abandoning her son, but given credit for being able to reconceptualize her universal concerns on a smaller scale. Unlike Quevedo, she is not the object of ridicule.

Arkadi dreams of the world, but constantly abandons his friends, family, and colleagues. He, too, is blinded by his faith in ideology. Arkadi resembles Claire in terms of ideological extremes, but unlike Claire, whose faith never wavers, Arkadi moves from communism to capitalism. Claire and Arkadi remain on the extremes of the ideological spectrum, but Arkadi moves from one extreme to another when he loses faith in the USSR. Arkadi is also similar to Quevedo—they both feel they have a mission to save their country—and to Allison, for they each had a sheltered childhood that allows them to develop universalist ideals.

Only Jennifer Moore can be seen to embody rooted cosmopolitanism, with some difficulty. Contrary to Allison, who has no roots, Jennifer always returns to her husband in the United States and tries to make her marriage function. Appearances must be maintained, at all costs. Although she does not succeed in every project—her attempts to fix Third World economies are failures, and she has a hard time maintaining close-knit work relationships and friendships—Jennifer is the closest example to a rooted cosmopolitan in the novel. She tries her best in everything she attempts, be it helping the less fortunate or taking care of Allison's son. Her

self-centredness and her striking US-centred perspective are two aspects that keep her from fully embodying the ethos of rooted cosmopolitanism.

The global novels studied in this chapter are two of the most explicit articulations of both cosmopolitanism and globality in Volpi's oeuvre, since they represent characters compelled to address the world's concerns. Indeed, all characters studied above actively take part in trying to change the world. Quevedo and Claire participate in various revolutionary movements that aim to undo real or perceived authoritarianism, both at home and abroad, and try to give a voice to subalterns, be they workers and students during the May 1968 protests, or Indigenous populations through Subcomandante Marcos in the Lacandon Jungle. Allison Moore tries to undo the legacy of colonialism and neo-liberalism, both at home and abroad; her travels to Palestine and her participation in the so-called Battle of Seattle of 1999 are but two examples of her dedication to improving the world. Arkadi Granin fights against communism by turning to capitalism, which he sees as the solution to the irreparable issues of the USSR's political and social structure. Jennifer Moore tries her best to tackle the world's problems—the fact that she does so in a problematic manner, trying to impose a Western economic vision on Third World countries, does not take away from the fact that she acts. Even Irina Gránina, through her interviews with the narrator and her handing in of the various writings that are the basis for the novel, can be seen to tackle the world's problems: she wants the story of her family, and Arkadi's ideological conversion, to be exposed so that the world can learn about not only their shortcomings, but also the state's. She wants to ensure that the same mistakes will not be made again, and that history does not repeat itself. Even if all characters fail in their Sisyphean task of changing the world order, they do attempt to confront its ills, thus embodying a universal impulse that the novels critically dissect and condemn for its shortcomings.

As I have demonstrated, Volpi's novels are framed in historicity and are pedagogical in nature. The extensive investigation the author undertakes before writing each of his novels indicates a detail-oriented writer who seeks to reproduce the historical context of the characters in the most accurate way possible (Lukács), and his protagonists are historical characters who discuss philosophical ideas (Menton). Volpi's novels are global novels, but they could also be read as novelized essays, which is a

departure both from Lukács and Menton. Rafael Lemus commented as follows about *No será la Tierra*: “el reseñista intenta comprender: ¿por qué esta novela? Porque Volpi cree, acaso válidamente, que la novela es, ante todo, un instrumento al servicio de la inteligencia” (“the reviewer tries to understand: Why this novel? Because Volpi believes, perhaps with good reason, that the novel is, above all, an instrument at the service of intelligence”). Chávez Castañeda and Santajuliana further comment in their “Diccionario Volpi” (“Volpi Dictionary”), for the Mexican author “la literatura no se cierra en un fin en sí mismo. Narrar le supone un medio de conocimiento . . . y esta exploración del mundo siempre queda ‘grabada’ con mayor o menor sutileza en sus libros, convirtiéndoles en un híbrido entre la novela y el ensayo” (“literature is not an end in itself. Narrating is seen as a means of acquiring knowledge . . . and this exploration of the world is always ‘recorded’ with more or less subtlety in his books, making them a hybrid between the novel and the essay”; 93). These novels “con una pesada carga documental . . . viene[n] a ser una enciclopedia de sus pasiones intelectuales” (“with their heavy documentary content . . . become an encyclopedia of his intellectual passions”; 93). These intellectual passions are, in *El fin de la locura*, French philosophical and political thought, and, in *No será la Tierra*, economics, politics, and science. This hybridity of genre is a departure from the Latin American historical novel. Still, some characteristics, such “the cyclical nature of history,” “the conscious distortion of history,” and “the utilization of famous historical characters as protagonists” (Menton 22–3), are also an integral part of the narratives. However, these characteristics are but a starting point that Volpi rearticulates in an ironic manner. History is not only cyclical: the circularity of history allows for the realization that failure is the only logical ending. *El fin de la locura*’s Quevedo participates in various revolutionary movements, only to die when he becomes aware that revolutions are doomed. Moreover, a disillusioned Quevedo comments on the absurd nature of both his life and the twentieth century. History repeats itself: Quevedo courts Claire and is rejected time and again, until he commits suicide—which could arguably be seen as his biggest failure—and revolutionary movements arise one after the other, in various regions of the world, but consistently fail in living up to their “promesas y palabras” (“promises and words”; Volpi, *El fin de la locura* 9). *No será la Tierra*’s Allison Moore

is part of various failed social movements, but she keeps trying to bring social change to the less fortunate parts of the world; she dies doing so. Arkadi Granin fights communism, seeing it as the terrible ideology that destroyed his career as a scientist, but fails to see that his blind faith in capitalism destroys his marriage and causes his daughter's death. Through the character of Irina, it is also suggested that capitalism in Russia is a failure, and although it is not explicit, one can see beneath Irina's concerns that she fears that a different type of authoritarianism is looming.

In both novels, history is distorted so as to give more importance to events than to characters. Moreover, the historical characters that are fictionalized in both novels are but empty shells, and eventually they become the object of ridicule. They do not take an active role in the narrative; they are, rather, but a pretext for the protagonists to face the embodiment of their (bygone) ideals. Quevedo meets with Castro and Allende; both these figures and their devotion to their respective ideologies are ridiculed. The same happens in *No será la Tierra*, where Soviet leaders are portrayed at their weakest: Stalin, a shadow of his former self, is about to die and cannot be associated with the idea of power anymore; and Gorbachev is mocked for his idealism and incapacity to deliver on his promises to make Russia a better place through *Perestroika* (restructuring) and *Glasnost* (openness).

The two works, although close to the new historical novel, are a rearticulation of the canonical genre. Both the traditional historical novel, as theorized by Lukács, and the new historical novel, as theorized by Menton, focus on the history of great events. However, as María Cristina Pons notes, “la reciente producción de novelas históricas se caracteriza por la relectura crítica y desmitificadora del pasado” (“the recent production of historical novels is characterized by a critical and demystifying rereading of the past”; 16), which “marca un cambio radical en el género” (“marks a radical shift in the genre”; 15) since “la novela histórica contemporánea tiende a presentar el lado antiheroico o antiépico de la Historia; muchas veces el pasado histórico que recuperan no es el pasado de los tiempos gloriosos ni de los ganadores de puja histórica, sino el pasado de las derrotas y fracasos” (“the contemporary historical novel tends to present the antiheroic or anti-epic side of History; often the historical past that they recover is not the past of glorious times nor of the winners of the historical struggle, but the past of defeats and failures”; 17). Both *El fin de la locura* and *No*

será la Tierra are about failures: the failure of revolutionary movements, and the failure of both communism and various social movements in the face of neo-liberalism. Quevedo fails in his pragmatic approach to his role as an intellectual who aims to give advice to heads of state; Claire—although she never admits it—fails to reap the fruits of her revolutionary labour; Allison fails to be balanced in her approach to cosmopolitan concerns; Jennifer fails to save her sister from herself; Arkadi fails to save his country, replacing one dogma with another; and both Irina and Arkadi fail as parents.

Furthermore, the literary form of the novel reflects Volpi's political vision in the choice of narrators and implicit authors. Failure is also suggested by the personality of the very narrators, who are problematic narrative voices. *El fin de la locura*'s Anibal Quevedo is an amnesic liar, and *No será la Tierra*'s Yuri Mijáilovich Chernishevski is writing from his prison cell, having previously been convicted of murder. Also, the erasure of the identity of the editors, which is only revealed late in the narratives, is symptomatic of the erasure of identity in an ever more globalized world. In *El fin de la locura*, ideas are more important than people—a metaphor for the pervasiveness of ideologies. In *No será la Tierra*, events are more important than people as well—the characters are puppets to global events. Both novels are about ideological extremes; neither nationalism nor cosmopolitanism fulfills universal human needs, only rooted cosmopolitanism, as partially embodied by Jennifer, can. In the end, all the characters fail in their endeavours because they believe in utopias without grounding them in reality, or put differently, their universal impulse divorces them from engagement with kith and kind.

Both *El fin de la locura* and *No será la Tierra*, albeit indirectly and in a global manner, engage the Latin American context. To this end, Ignacio Padilla claimed that

La mayor parte de las novelas escritas por los firmantes de aquel manifiesto transcurren en México, si bien en todas ellas y para todas ellas hemos reivindicado nuestro derecho a situar nuestras historias en el lugar del mundo o del inframundo donde mejor podamos expresar ese relato concreto, siempre, eso sí, en esa patria nuestra que desde siempre ha

sido la lengua española. (Volpi et al., “Postmanifiesto del Crack” 17)

For the most part, the novels authored by the signatories of this manifesto involve Mexico, but in all of them and on behalf of all of them, we have maintained our right to set our stories on the world’s (or underworld’s) stage, where we can best express these particular stories which, yes, have always been at home in the nation we know as the Spanish language. (200)

This is a comment about the place Latin America now occupies on the world stage, and it reflects Volpi’s conceptualization of his role as a cosmopolitan Mexican writer and public intellectual, as well as his understanding of Latin America’s reality as globalized and decentralized. In *El fin de la locura*, the Mexican intellectual is ridiculed, and in *No será la Tierra*, Mexico is almost completely absent. Mexico, part of the global community, does not escape this state of affairs. Both novels are also a comment on Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, and the role of globalization, understood as a deterritorialized tackling of both national and worldly concerns, which has to this point been a failure.

In the short essay “Yo soy una novela” (“I Am a Novel”) Volpi expounds on his vision of literature, which is articulated in cosmopolitan terms—even if the word itself is never mentioned. First, “Los humanos somos rehenes de la ficción” (“We human beings are hostages to fiction”) for it is a human characteristic to produce it, a part of being human, which gives fiction a universal character. Second, even if narratives, by definition, lie, “las vivimos con la misma pasión con la cual nos enfrentamos a lo real. Porque esas mentiras también pertenecen al dominio de lo real” (“we live them with the same passion with which we face the real world. Because those lies also belong to the realm of reality”). It is, then, logical that

la ficción cumple una tarea indispensable para nuestra supervivencia: no sólo nos ayuda a predecir nuestras reacciones en situaciones hipotéticas, sino que nos obliga a representarlas en nuestra mente—a repetir las y

reconstruirlas—y, a partir de allí, a entrever qué sentiríamos si las experimentáramos de verdad. Una vez hecho esto, no tardamos en reconocernos en los demás, porque en alguna medida en ese momento ya somos los demás.

fiction fulfills an indispensable task for our survival: it not only helps us to predict our reactions in hypothetical situations, but it forces us to represent them in our minds—to repeat and reconstruct them—and, from there, to glimpse what we would feel if we actually experienced them. Once this is done, it does not take us long to recognize ourselves in others, because to some extent we are already the others. (*Nexos.com*)

He emphasizes that fiction makes human beings *reconocerse en los demás*, which is the very basis of the cosmopolitan reading that I have grounded in Appiah's philosophy. Not only do we, as readers, see ourselves *en los demás*, we become *los demás*—acquiring a sense of universality that only narrative allows. Through synecdoche, human beings are able to universalize their fellow human beings' experience. Fiction helps us to “ensanchar nuestra idea de lo humano. Con ella no sólo conocemos otras voces y otras experiencias, sino que las sentimos tan vivas como si nos pertenecieran” (“broaden our idea of the human. With it we not only come to know other voices and other experiences, but we feel them as being as alive as if they belonged to us”). Fictions helps one experience the lives of others, but more importantly, develop new values: “Vivir otras vidas no es sólo un juego . . . sino una conducta provista con sólidas ganancias evolutivas, capaz de transportar, de una mente a otra, ideas que acentúan la interacción social. La empatía. La solidaridad” (“Living other lives is not just a game . . . but a behaviour equipped with solid evolutionary gains, capable of transporting, from one mind to another, ideas that accentuate social interaction. Empathy. Solidarity”). Narratives allow us the possibility of becoming better human beings, for they force readers to feel and develop emotions that, I posit in this case, are the very basis of cosmopolitan engagement: empathy and solidarity.

As the works studied in this chapter show, novels, by providing readers with the opportunity both to develop new values and recognize the dangers of ideologies, also serve a social function: “Una novela . . . me transmite información social relevante—la literatura es una porción esencial de nuestra memoria compartida. Y se convierte, por tanto, en uno de los medios más contundentes para asentar nuestra idea de humanidad” (“A novel . . . conveys relevant social information to me—literature is an essential portion of our shared memory. And it becomes, therefore, one of the most powerful means of establishing our idea of humanity”). Narratives, through their universality, also erase identity markers: “Frente a las diferencias que nos separan—del color de la piel al lugar de nacimiento, obsesiones equivalentemente perniciosas—, la literatura siempre anunció una verdad que hace apenas unos años corroboró la secuenciación del genoma humano: todos somos básicamente idénticos. Al menos en teoría, cualquiera podría ponerse en el sitio de cualquiera” (“Faced with the differences that separate us—from skin colour to birthplace, two equally pernicious obsessions—literature has always anticipated a truth that, just a few years ago, the sequencing of the human genome confirmed: we are all basically identical. In theory at least, anyone could trade places with anyone else”). Literature should not be bound either by nationality or nationalism, which are *obsesiones perniciosas*, for they distort the very idea of literature as universal. If literature is about seeing ourselves in other peoples’ lives and experiences so as to universalize their situation, it appears logical that Volpi shies away from dwelling exclusively on national settings and problems, and prefers instead to engage issues and settings in universal terms. In the “Postmanifiesto del Crack,” the authors argue that there is “Nada más pernicioso que el nacionalismo—un adjetivo europeo, por cierto—para la novela. El nacionalismo es una mentira y la novela odia, aborrece la mentira. La novela entraña una búsqueda de la verdad literaria. Dentro de sus páginas, todo lo que ocurre es absolutamente verdadero. El *Crack* es una novela sin adjetivos y sin nación” (Volpi et al. 18) (“When it comes to the novel, nothing is more pernicious than nationalism, which is a European modifier, of course. Nationalism is a lie, and the novel hates lies. In fact, it abhors them. The novel is about the search for literary honesty. Everything that happens within its pages is absolute truth. And the *Crack* is a novel without modifiers, without a nation”; 199).

This affirmation reinforces my contention that *El fin de la locura* and *No será la Tierra* are about a universalizing position.

In conclusion, I have shown that Volpi's novels posit rooted cosmopolitanism as the best way through which to engage humanity and tackle the world's issues, and that this is reflected precisely in the fact that his narrative worlds dissect the difficulties of this position. His rearticulation of the historical novel allows him to discuss cosmopolitanism, ideologies, intellectual and political engagement, and globalization and its shortcomings. Under the guise of historical metafiction, the reader can learn from the characters' behaviours, for they are harshly criticized and presented as counter-examples in opposition to an ethos of rooted cosmopolitan for the global era. Ultimately, both *El fin de la locura* and *No será la Tierra*, through their complex articulation of globality, are global novels that, in line with the prerogatives of this literary genre, articulate a global consciousness.

