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History, Obstinacy, and the Historical Novel: Antonio Di Benedetto's *Zama*

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Zama, Argentine author Antonio Di Benedetto's second novel, was published in 1956, but its action is set during the final decade of the 18th century in an isolated colonial outpost of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. In an influential 1972 essay, Juan José Saer proclaims that *Zama* carries out a remarkable refutation of the historical novel, parodically deconstructing the historicist ideology underlying the genre. This paper dialectically reverses Saer's judgment, arguing that, from the standpoint of aesthetic modernism, *Zama* can be read as carrying out a re-affirmation of the historical novel by using the formal conventions of modernism to narrate the subjective, embodied experience of an essentially historical subject, the American-born colonial functionary named Diego de Zama, who is the novel's narrator and protagonist. Thus, rather than conceiving *Zama* as a refutation of the historical novel genre, this paper argues that it enacts a double exposure of aesthetic modernism to the historical novel, and vice versa. On the one hand, Di Benedetto participates in the modernist critique of the 19th century historical novel and its aspiration to objectively reconstruct history; but on the other, he exposes the 20th century modernist novel to the genre, and to history itself.

In *Zama,* this double exposure paves the way for a distinct vision of history, which is here brought to light by analyzing a series of affinities between Di Benedetto's novelistic representation of history and some of the core ideas expressed by German theorists Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt in their recently-translated book *History and Obstinacy* (1981). Kluge and Negt's pursuit of forms of "obstinate" resistance embedded in the sub-individual characteristics of the human body relates compellingly to certain methods employed in *Zama* to represent Diego de Zama's experiences, and allows for a new understanding of the theoretical implications of Di Benedetto's decision to set his modernist novel in the distant historical past.

Conventionally, it is thought that the historical novel rose to prominence at two distinct moments. It first emerged in early-19th century Europe as the result of a series of radical changes in European social existence and historical consciousness. As Georg Lukács explains in *The Historical Novel*, the experience of the French Revolution, as well as the revolutionary wars across the continent, and the rise and fall of Napoleon, created the subjective conditions for the emergence of a new historical consciousness in which world history was reconceived as progress toward emancipation. This progress-based philosophy of history is expressed not only in the philosophy of G.F.W. Hegel, but also in the novels of Walter Scott, where entire social groups are embodied in typical characters whose personal dramas stage the fall of the continental *anciens régimes* and the corresponding ascent of a triumphant bourgeoisie. The cycle opened by Scott, whose novels give the genre its classical form, is drawn to a close by Honoré de Balzac, whose novels subsume the historical novel into the realistic novel of the present, passing, as Lukács explains, "from the portrayal of *past history* to the portrayal of the *present as history*" (83; emphasis in original).

The second moment is that of postmodernism. As Perry Anderson explains, the historical novel had fallen from prominence by the mid-20th century, becoming a largely popular or lowbrow genre form. Then, surprisingly, the arrival of postmodernism was accompanied by the historical novel's spectacular rebirth as a high literary form. This new wave of novels is characterized by the systematic flouting, or reversal of, as Anderson puts it, "nearly every rule of the classical canon, as spelled out by Lukács" (27-28). In Anderson's reading, this second coming of the genre is accompanied by the collapse of the very grand narratives of progress underlying the genre's classical form. He thinks it is generally unclear whether recent novels announce a new form of historical consciousness or, as Fredric Jameson has suggested, the absence of any real sense of history at the close of the 20th century.

Anderson hypothesizes that the seeds of this "astonishing transformation" (27) of the genre can be found in Latin America, in novels such as Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949) and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). He at first proposes that this is due to the region's particular experience of history as defeat: "history as what, for all its heroics, lyricism and colour, went wrong on the continent—the discarding of democracies, the crushing of guerrillas, the spread of military tyrannies, the disappearances and tortures, of that period" (28). However, this idea presents him with a puzzle: how to explain the "wholly affirmative" drive of Carpentier's novels, which look backward to the Haitian Revolution and the impact of the French Revolution in the Caribbean. In short, it appears in Carpentier's case that an experience of defeat inspires a turn to history not in a melancholic attempt to understand when and why things went wrong, but rather in order to search for redeeming qualities, for elements or characteristics of a historical experience that can be reaffirmed in a context of overwhelming defeat. Anderson relates this understanding of history as a catastrophe that, nonetheless, may contain the seeds of redemption, to Walter Benjamin's vision of the philosophy of history, personified in the figure of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, an angel who, looking backward at the ever-expanding wreckage caused by a storm that is "what we call progress" (Benjamin 258), "would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 257). While Anderson wonders whether recent historical novels, especially those he labels as "postmodern," aren't just "desperate attempt[s] to waken us to history, in a time when any real sense of it has gone dead" (28), he nonetheless suggests through his reading of the contemporary historical novel alongside Benjamin's philosophy of history that there may yet be some real sense of history to be found in these novels where history is staged as an ever-growing collection of wreckage.

"History as catastrophe" is an apt description of the nearly ten years of Diego de Zama's life that constitute the plot of *Zama*. Alone and isolated, Zama lives apart from his family in a colonial outpost that, while it is never named in the novel's pages, is clearly identifiable as Asunción, in present day Paraguay. Zama waits for a promotion that never comes, waits for the Spanish Crown to pay him his salary as he flounders in increasing poverty, and eventually joins an expedition to find a bandit named Vicuña Porto. He is captured by Porto, who in the end chooses to chop off all ten of Zama's fingers and abandon him by the side of a campfire instead of killing him. The book ends as Zama awakens, mutilated but alive, to find that a young boy is staring at him with, as Zama puts it, "irreductible tristeza" (262). This non-death in the face of

personal catastrophe, as well as the surprisingly upbeat "sonrisa de padre" (262) with which the fingerless Zama looks back at the boy, constitute a final confirmation of the affirmative elements that generations of readers have been able to encounter in *Zama*. These range from Saer's discussion of the novel's oblique representation of "la condición profunda de América, que titila, frágil, en cada uno de nosotros" (54), to Jimena Néspolo's explanation of how, in the novel's final scene, Zama comes to the realization that "es posible que aun mutilado pueda crecer" (278). It is the aim of this article to reconsider the sentiment expressed in these affirmations by developing a more thorough understanding of the novel's treatment of history as an overwhelmingly negative experience of defeat that may, nonetheless, present the reader with a surprisingly affirmative historical consciousness.

Part I: Zama, Modernism, and the Historical Novel

In *Zama*, Di Benedetto establishes a climate of historical verisimilitude through the use of a stylized language that is meant to approximate the way in which a lettered creole like Diego de Zama might have expressed himself. From beginning to end, the narration is subsumed to Zama's subjective point of view, and Di Benedetto utilizes a number of strategies in order to, as Néspolo puts it, "crear [su] lengua, que es a la vez esa atmósfera tan característica de *Zama*" (240). On the lexical level, the incorporation of a limited quantity of vocabulary in Guaraní in order to establish a measure of geographical specificity is combined with a generalized suppression of colloquialisms in favor of an austere vocabulary that avoids temptations to add "local color." Hummingbirds named *mainumbig* flutter outside of Zama's lodging, and his rudimentary diet in the book's later pages includes a starchy cake named *mbeyú,* but in general, the novel's vocabulary is not expansive. Syntactically, there is a tendency toward short, succinct statements, often with a vaguely archaic suppression of articles and prepositions. Zama says simply "Vino barco." (78) when a ship arrives to the town's small port, and, when he needs permission to speak with the governor, he explains: "Solicité audiencia. No la obtuve" (140). This tendency is augmented as time passes: the book is divided into three sections, each one bearing the heading of a specific year: "1790," "1794," and "1799." The final section is the shortest in length (51 pages), and Zama's statements become correspondingly shorter as well. A page near the book's end, for example, contains the following paragraphs, often composed of a single word: "Dormía." ... "Abrí los ojos. Imposible mirar." ... "Sigilo." ... "Quise alzarme. No pude" (253). This economy of expression is meant to reflect Zama's deteriorating situation. If

in 1790 he can proudly refer back to a relatively glorious career as "el doctor Diego de Zama," "[e]l enérgico, el ejecutivo, el pacificador de indios, el que hizo justicia sin emplear la espada" (20), by 1799 he is a shell of his former self. His career is at a standstill, he has no money and has not seen his family for nearly a decade, and he ultimately sets off on what turns out to be an ill-fated military expedition in a last-gasp effort to attain a glorious victory, word of which will reach the ears of the Spanish crown and, in turn, allow him to leave town.

It appears that Di Benedetto aspires to reconstruct a historically accurate language for his hero: "está bien resuelto el problema del habla de la época" (78), as Jorge Alberto Paeta notes in a 1957 review of the novel. Saer, however, argues this is not exactly the case: although the language awakens historical echoes, it is in fact irreducible to the moment in which the novel takes place: "esa lengua no es de ningún modo contemporáneo a los años en que supuestamente transcurre la acción—1790-1799—, sino anterior en casi dos siglos: es la lengua clásica del Siglo de Oro" (49). By this he means that many of the rhetorical strategies employed by Zama, such as the occasional use of hyperbaton in sentences that the reader must slowly unravel, have more to do with the literary language of past centuries than with the everyday speech of colonial America. Although Saer does not mention this, the inverse is true as well. Words pop up in *Zama* that appear to relate not to the Spanish of that time, but to the theoretical vocabulary of the 20th century: when Zama complains about how Luciana, his love interest in 1790, is condemning him to "visitas que para mí serían ya formalistas e improductivas" (66), or when he daydreams about mythical gods who "impusieron [sus propias] hegemonías" (134), the reader wonders if words like "formalista" and "hegemonía" were in use in those days (neither word appears in dictionaries until well into the 19th century). In short, what at first appears to be an imitation of a historically specific language in fact proves to be irreducible to that historical moment, as Zama's words and speech patterns constantly point both forward and backward to the Spanish of other centuries, including Saer's own.

This linguistic slippage forms the basis for Saer's surprising thesis about *Zama*'*s* relation to the historical novel genre. In contrast to the classical historical novel's aspiration to archaeologically reconstruct a past moment, Saer asserts that Di Benedetto's novel should be read as a parody of the genre, due to the way it self-consciously constructs a vision of that past from the perspective of the present. He defines parody as a dialectical relation between texts, where the parodic one partially occupies the structures of the text that serves as its model without fully imitating them.

If an imitation wants nothing more than to fully replicate the structures of its model, a parody intentionally seeks to expose the gap or interstices separating the model from any possible imitation, laying bare the conventional nature of the model itself and thus producing a new meaning. The language of *Zama* accomplishes this, exposing the reconstructivist fallacy at the center of the classical historical novel. Far from being a historical novel, Saer insists, *Zama* is instead "la refutación deliberada de ese género" (48). It shows that any project to reconstruct the past in writing is doomed to failure, since, in fact, "[n]o se reconstruye ningún pasado sino que simplemente se *construye* una visión del pasado" (48).

Saer's discussion of *Zama*'s parody of the historical novel is limited to the level of language. It can, however, be generalized to encompass some of the novel's other salient features. As Malva Filer explains in her 1982 study of *Zama*, Di Benedetto made extensive use of historical documentation when composing his novel. To cite just two examples, he drew on Spanish naturalist and military officer Félix de Azara's 1784 book *Geografía física y esférica del Paraguay* to establish the general coordinates for Zama's journey into the American wilderness, and on Ricardo de Lafuente Machain's *La Asunción de antaño* for information on the urban environment of Asunción. Filer's close study of these textual antecedents, however, brings to light a series of anachronisms, such as Di Benedetto's use of street names in his descriptions of the city that were only implemented in the late 1840s. While, as she explains, "[l]a novela es fundamentalmente fiel a las fuentes documentales" (42), Saer's reading demonstrates that its historiographic inaccuracies, which elaborate a micrological network of gaps separating fiction from historical reality, might also be interpreted in terms of an overarching parodic intent.

While the novel's characters also appear to be representative of historical individuals, they evidence a number of anachronistic qualities. In general, Zama, as well as the town's Spanish-born governor, its land-owning aristocracy and limited number of creole inhabitants, and the many black, mulatto, and mestizo servants and slaves with whom Zama interacts, display a high degree of historical veracity. Diego de Zama himself demonstrates a particularly compelling similarity to Miguel Gregorio de Zamalloa, a creole functionary who lived and worked in Asunción from 1785 to 1799, and whose life is documented in a 1952 biography by Efraín Bischoff. Zama, like Zamalloa, is a university-educated member of the colonial administration who rose to the rank of *corregidor* but was later named to a lower position in Paraguay after the abolition of the system of *corregimientos* in 1781, a posting that required him to spend an

extended period away from his wife. However, as Filer demonstrates, while Zama's career mirrors that of Zamalloa, his psychological makeup and his general conduct bear little relation to this historical model: he often thinks and acts, not like an 18th-century creole, but rather in ways that correspond to "la alienación y parálisis moral del anti-héroe, según los modelos literarios que eran prevalentes durante la época de la escritura de la novela" (54). While his social status and life story correspond quite closely to the novel's historical setting, Zama at times seems to behave more like an existentialist anti-hero than a colonial functionary.

The author's own comments on his creative process provide a compelling explanation for the novel's historiographical inaccuracies. He explains that prior to writing the novel he undertook an extensive research project:

> [estudié] la orografía, la hidrografía, la fauna, los vientos, los árboles y los pastos, las familias indígenas y la sociedad colonial, las medicinas, las creencias y los minerales, la arquitectura, las armas, el guaraní, la lengua de los indios, costumbres domésticas, fiestas, el plano de la ciudad principal, los pueblos, el trabajo rural y la delincuencia del país. (Di Benedetto, quoted in Néspolo 252)

Then, as Néspolo puts it, he "tiró la información por la borda y se puso a escribir" (252):

> Prescindí del Paraguay histórico, prescindí de la historia, mi novela no es una novela histórica, nunca quiso serlo. Me despreocupé de cualquier tacha de anacronismo, imprecisión o malversación de datos reales. Me puse a reconstruir una América medio mágica desde adentro del héroe. (Di Benedetto, quoted in Néspolo 252)

This moment of refusal, of wiping the slate clean and then starting anew, marks the point of separation from the historicist objective of rigorously reconstructing the past that forms the basis for Saer's discussion of *Zama* as a parody of the historical novel. The fruits of Di Benedetto's research are undeniably present in the novel's pages, but his own freewheeling approach establishes a degree of parodic separation from the mandate for historical accuracy that characterizes the historical novel genre, which in its classical form is governed by a more or less constant obsession with avoiding anachronisms.

While Filer's study of *Zama* largely corroborates Saer's observations, her work also aims to correct a somewhat overzealous tendency to celebrate Di Benedetto's "refutation" of the historical novel. She explains that readers who have emphasized the negative relation between *Zama* and its genre model have tended to rely on an impoverishing definition of the genre, in which the historical novel is reduced to its aspiration to archaeological fidelity. She points out that theorists as far back as Goethe

and Hegel have consistently emphasized that the anachronistic projection of the present back into the past is a constitutive and ineludible aspect of the genre. To make the past speak to the sensibility and intelligence of readers in the present, it is necessary to (re-) construct bridges back and forth between two radically disparate cultural moments. For Filer, this necessity receives its canonical formulation in Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, where the defining trait of the genre comes to be that "el pasado plasmado por el escritor sea 'reconocido y vivido claramente como *prehistoria necesaria* del presente'" (56, emphasis in original).

By highlighting this reductive vision of the genre, Filer evidences the need for moving beyond the narrow terms within which Saer and Di Benedetto conceive *Zama*'s negative relation to the historical novel. In recent decades, existing scholarship has generally followed two paths. The first, which is largely compatible with Anderson's study of the genre's spectacular postmodern rebirth, positions *Zama* as a precursor to this later boom in historical novels. In a survey of the Argentine historical novel, from Romanticism to the early years of the 21st century, María Rosa Lojo situates *Zama* "en la vanguardia de la narración histórica latinoamericana [de la segunda mitad del siglo XX]" (52), explaining that Di Benedetto's novel is an early manifestation of a comprehensive re-thinking of the genre in which typically "postmodern" elements such as parody, pastiche, polyphony, and the de-centering of established genre models are used to problematize the epistemological bases of the historical novel. This historicization of *Zama* parallels Anderson's understanding of the genre. *Zama*, like the novels by Carpentier and García Márquez that Anderson references, stands as a bellwether for later developments. Rather than conceiving it in terms of its negative relation to the genre's classical form, Lojo, like Anderson, suggests that this mid-century text can be viewed in terms of its positive relation to the genre's later postmodern reformulation.

The second path builds on the intertextual connections between *Zama* and the existentialist writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and others, and conceives Di Benedetto's novel as, so to speak, an *existentialist* historical novel. Filer highlights the influence of existentialist ideas and literary techniques, most notably the use of first-person narration to collapse distinctions between novelistic protagonist and authorial observer. Rafael Arce, for his part, identifies a dual negativity in Di Benedetto's novel, in which *Zama*'s critique of the historical novel is driven by his deployment of existentialism's constitutive "negación del sentido, de la trascendencia, del orden, de Dios, de la comunicación" (Arce). Arce, whose discussion of an affirmative impulse in

Zama lying beyond the limits of this critical negativity will be discussed in greater detail below, extends Di Benedetto's dialogue with European existentialism to a broader tendency in the 20th century novel. This tendency is perhaps best illustrated by Theodor Adorno, whose *Aesthetic Theory* stresses how an avant-garde drive to construct new forms can only occur through the incessant negation of the conventions that crystallized around the realist novel over the course of the 19th century. Arce thus proposes that *Zama*'s transgression of the historical novel is driven by a negative impulse that is characteristic not only of existentialism, but also of a more general avant-garde turn in the 20th century novel.

This understanding of avant-garde or modernist negativity is largely reflected in Saer's canonical reading of *Zama*: his essay can be read to illustrate how the novel follows the path taken by modernism, defined as a broad-based critique of the transparency of the linguistic sign, as well as a corresponding attempt to develop linguistically creative private styles to resist the processes of rationalization. This rationalization, for many 19th and 20th century authors, had progressively coopted public speech and rendered the textual strategies of previous generations suspicious. If, as Fredric Jameson has argued, "[t]he most influential formal impulses of canonical modernism have been strategies of inwardness, which set out to re-appropriate an alienated universe by transforming it into personal styles and private languages" (*Fables of Aggression* 2), then Diego de Zama can be taken to partake in a more general modernist movement of re-appropriation through private style.

Arce emphasizes that the 20th century novel "es sobre todo crítica de sí misma" (Arce). In this light, *Zama* might also be read the other way around, as a *reaffirmation* of the historical novel in a self-critique of the 20th century modernist novel itself. By the 1950s, avant-garde and modernist literary tendencies had achieved a relatively hegemonic status in Argentina, characterized not only by the reception of existentialism in the postwar years, but also by the role of the literary journal *Sur* in establishing the dominance of modernist literary models during the 1930s and 40s. In this context, what is most notable about *Zama* is the fact that, while it is in many ways a prototypical modernist novel, its subject is an undeniably historical one whose thoughts and language bear the many, many traces of the historical documents studied by Di Benedetto. In his comments on the novel, the author identifies the historical *héroe* who reconstructs a fantastic America from his privately-situated point of view as his starting point. Di Benedetto also, however, provides a detailed description of how his novel

emerged out of an extended period of research into the historical reality within which he situates his hero, Diego de Zama.

Along these lines, *Zama* might be read as enacting a dialectical recuperation of the historical novel as a way of responding to what Devin Fore calls "modernism's relentless semantic demotivation of the realist sign" (*Realism after Modernism* 13). The primary sign that is recovered in *Zama* is that of the historical subject: the figure of the creole functionary at the center of the novel. *Zama* might thus be read as turning to the historical novel as an attempt to "remotivate and resocialize strategies of representation" (*Realism after Modernism* 13) in the wake of modernism's relentless de-motivation. Fore's *Realism after Modernism* studies what he calls a "rehumanization" of art and literature in interwar Europe, considering how Lásló Moholy-Nagy, Bertolt Brecht, Carl Einstein, and others sought to reassert the human figure in response to what he refers to as "modernism's commitment to the non-human in all of its guises" (*Realism after Modernism* 3). Di Benedetto's novel might thus be read as another such attempt to pick up the pieces in the wake of modernism's destruction of realism's narrative frameworks. Rather than simply extending modernism's anti-realist endeavor to the genre form of the historical novel, *Zama* can also be read as recuperating a historically-grounded human figure in response to the relentless negativity of modernist art and literature.

In this context, Di Benedetto's placement of a modernist textual subject in the "pre-modern" context of a colonial American backwater in the waning years of the 18th century presents a rather different set of problems, relating to the articulation of the inward turn enacted by modernism into the genre confines of the historical novel. Importantly, it must investigate how historical experience might be represented via modernist means. In the pages of the novel, Diego de Zama elaborates a fragmentary, collage-like vision of his own subjectivity from the raw material of his own thoughts, sensations, perceptions, and actions. *Zama* can thus be read as an attempt to demonstrate that the modernist approach to subjectivity, where the character is not a solidly constructed entity, but rather a mental battlefield and the site of a perpetual conflict between a constantly-shifting interplay of sensory and psychic inputs, might in fact be used to reconstruct subjective experiences from more distant historical periods as well.

Notably, this extension of modernist strategies of representation can also be interpreted to mark the dawning recognition, in the middle decades of the 20th century, that the modernist novel is *itself* historical in nature, and can be exposed to history in

radically new ways. If, for Lukács, the classical historical novel was subsumed into the realistic novel of the present, allowing for the historical consciousness that arose out of the French Revolution and the corresponding large-scale changes that took place in European societies to be extended to novelistic projects that understood the present itself as historical, *Zama* might be read as enacting an analogous but opposite process. In Zama's pages, the modernist novel is subjected to history in such a way that modernism is itself historicized. It is in this light that the novel's relation to the later postmodern boom in the historical novel is perhaps best understood: by filtering the genre back through the codes and conventions of modernism, Di Benedetto's novel enacts a dialectical recuperation of the historical novel, renewing it through contact with the representational strategies of the 20th century modernist novel.

To be clear, Di Benedetto was probably not aware of this possibility. His comments reproduced above about the novel's non-relation to the historical novel genre, however, can be re-read in the following fashion: when he says that his novel never wanted to be a historical novel, he has the classical form of the genre in mind and is using it as a straw man. When he speaks of his aim to reconstruct a half-magic America from within his hero, in turn, he seems to understand that he does not want to avoid or escape history by banishing all the materials he studied to the dustbin. After all, he did not dispense with all the flora and fauna, colonial sociology, city plans, and studies of rural labor patterns that he studied before writing *Zama*. They are unmistakably there, in each one of the novel's pages. As Julio Schvartzman explains, the author's assertion about how he "[prescindió] de la historia" (Di Benedetto, quoted in Néspolo 252) should not be taken too literally: "[p]rescindir, aquí, no equivale a perder; implica recuperar en otro nivel" (189). Di Benedetto's use of the exact word, "reconstruir," which Saer claims is exactly what the novel does *not* set out to do, suggests that there is in fact a strong impulse to access the history of the American continent where Diego de Zama lives, suffers, and waits for the news of a promotion that never comes. Finally, the novel's dedication—"A las víctimas de la espera" (5)—suggests that Di Benedetto also has a redemptive aspiration that echoes Walter Benjamin's famous statements in his "Theses." The second part of this article concerns the possible object, or objects, of that aspiration to redeem the past.

Part II: Zama, History, and Obstinacy

As Néspolo points out in *Ejercicios de pudor*, a large portion of *Zama* criticism centers on questions of regional Latin American identity. She explains that Di

Benedetto was influenced by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's and H.A. Murena's essays that disputed the idea of a "youthful" America encoded in the denomination of the continent as a "New World," and that he participated in a broader generational endeavor to transcend what came to be seen as a problematic conflict between nationalist and universalist tendencies in the Latin American literary tradition. Along these lines, the novel's unnamed urban setting could compellingly be read alongside the novels by Carpentier, García Márquez, and other Latin American authors that Anderson cites in the context of the postmodern reemergence of the historical novel. As Néspolo explains, the fictional spaces represented in these Latin American novels enact the mythical foundation of new visions of history associated with the historical specificities of the American continent as a regional, rather than national, geographical unit.

In this light, the final scene of *Zama,* where Diego de Zama has all of his fingers chopped off and is abandoned deep in the wilderness, can be read as the culmination of a process through which the novel's hero comes to recognize that his understanding of America as an "infantile," unhistorical place is the result of an error. As Néspolo puts it, "[s]ólo cuando Zama adentra en el corazón de ese continente...es que América se hace arrasadoramente visible. Y esta visión supone por lo pronto la aprehensión de una certeza cabal: la supuesta infantilidad de América es sólo el atributo de una percepción dislocada" (278). In this reading, Zama's survival, as well as the optimism expressed in the final, fatherly smile he directs at the blond boy who stands by his side, affirm the ultimately successful nature of Zama's journey into the American wilderness. The book concludes in a foundational moment in which its hero finds his true identity and assumes his place as a properly American subject of history. The blond boy looks back, however, with irreducible sadness, and the hero has been stripped of the use of his hands, which were central to his ability to exercise his profession as a lettered member of the colonial administration. In the final interaction between Zama and the young boy, a decidedly melancholic vision of Zama's life as a story of catastrophic defeat stands in dialectical opposition to the other, more optimistic vision outlined by Néspolo. While, as Filer points out, the blond boy can indeed be interpreted as a possible redeeming presence in the midst of Zama's personal catastrophe, the novel's conclusion does not indicate whether or not Diego de Zama himself participates in this redemption. The author instead "nos deja en la duda de que, en verdad, haya ocurrido una transformación radical del personaje" (104). The ending of the novel is thus

irreducible to the "sonrisa de padre" (262) of Zama, nor to the "irreductible tristeza" (262) of the boy. The two perspectives stand in dialectical tension.

The ambivalence of *Zama*'s final scene is not unusual. It can be situated alongside a series of similar gestures enacted in the very Latin American historical novels that Anderson positions at the beginning of the genre's postmodern renaissance. As Roberto González Echeverría explains in his readings of Carpentier, García Márquez, and other authors of what he calls "archival fictions," Latin American literary pursuits of an escape from the dominant discourses of national identity tend to conclude not in the arrival to a proverbial clearing in the discursive jungle, but in the recognition of the abyssal nature of any possible discursive ground from which an "authentic," counter-hegemonic identity might be affirmed. And, as Alberto Moreiras has compellingly shown in *Tercer espacio*, the ultimate crisis of these and other literary endeavors to arrive at an authentic Latin American identity is inseparable from a more general failure in attempts theorize a properly Latin American subject of history, attempts that invariably tend to cipher that subject within what has always already been a Eurocentric and onto-logocentric history of modernity. The irreducible sadness with which the blond boy returns Zama's gaze, then, might be read alongside Zama's own optimistic smile as a recognition of the failure of the notion of the subject of history that underlies not only the historical novel genre, but also the sense of history as progress toward emancipation that has characterized the modern period in Latin America and elsewhere. Thus, while it was argued above that *Zama* enacts a dialectical recuperation of the historical subject in response to modernism's strategies of de-motivation, it must equally be stressed that this recuperation is ambivalent in nature. Rather than simply enacting a successful re-grounding of the Latin American subject of history, the ambivalence of the novel's final scene questions the very possibility of ever truly encountering an adequate ground for an authentically American subject.

If one wishes to continue pursuing affirmative visions of history in *Zama*'s pages, it may thus be productive to decouple that pursuit from the problematic of regional identity that has traditionally structured readings of *Zama*, and also to seek dynamics in the novel that transcend the tension between optimism and melancholy expressed in the its closing scene. In this light, Arce's 2015 article constitutes an important intervention, due to its stated aim of looking beyond the "interpretacion[es] en clave negativa con el fin de restituir a *Zama* lo que nos gustaría llamar su *potencia de afirmación*" (Arce). Arce grasps this affirmative force as a manifestation of the grotesque in the sense that the term is defined by Wolfgang Keyser, as the "contraste pronunciado

entre forma y argumento, la mezcla centrífuga de lo heterogéneo, la fuerza explosiva de lo paradójico, que son ridículas y al mismo tiempo producen horror" (Kayser, quoted in Arce). In *Zama*, this explosive force is generated on a number of distinct levels: it arises due to the inadequacy of Diego de Zama's mental representations and his lived experience; it is evidenced in the author's re-purposing of existentialist materials that stand in heterogeneous relation to both the historical reality portrayed in the novel, as well as the author's own situation as a novelist in mid-century Argentina; and, finally, it characterizes Zama's vision of a sinister natural world whose spectral presence in his life "[encarna] lo no dominado de la realidad, lo que Adorno llama *lo no idéntico o lo mutilado a la naturaleza*" (Arce), and which perpetually slips through the categorial distinctions imposed on it by consciousness in a transformative movement in which the human subject is perpetually pushed backward toward an inhuman nature.

The remaining pages of this essay situate what Arce conceives as the affirmative force generated by the grotesque inadequation of heterogeneous materials within the vision of history elaborated by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt in *History and Obstinacy*. Kluge and Negt attempt to think beyond the limits of the negative interpretations of social existence produced by the Western Marxist tradition. They introduce the term "obstinacy" to describe an affirmative impulse that courses throughout human (and natural) history, endeavoring to elaborate a critical consciousness of this driving force by tracing its presence across history. This section proposes that "obstinacy" can be taken as another name for the force of the grotesque, and constructs a reading of *Zama* structured by the dynamic relation between history and obstinacy that is the subject of Kluge and Negt's book.

As Devin Fore points out, *History and Obstinacy* exhibits similarities with a number of projects undertaken by their contemporaries, from Michel Foucault's biopolitical investigation of how the expansionist impulses of capitalism "were now being applied to investments made 'at the level of man himself'" (20), to Deleuze and Guattari's turn in *A Thousand Plateaus* toward "the subversive energies and potentials located in the multidimensional processes of geology, chemistry, and biology" (23). Kluge and Negt, like their peers, attempt to develop what might be called a micropolitics of resistance in a context where attempts to identify a specific social group as *the* emancipatory subject of history no longer seemed feasible or desirable. To do so, they turn to what they call the "raw material" of the emancipatory potentials that previous generations had located within entire social groups: "the ruptured, yet still

lively INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS located beneath the level of the whole person" (220; capitalization in original).

As Fore explains, these characteristics, the building blocks of the individual subject such as its skin, brain, and hands, its individual cells, and its mental and physical aptitudes for different sorts of labor, can be thought of as the actual subjects of history in *History and Obstinacy*. The human hand and its ability to grasp objects in a wide variety of manners stands as a particularly compelling example: as Kluge and Negt note, our hands possess a series of capacities for different sorts of labor that have developed historically through a process that they refer to as "the most significant evolutionary achievement: the ability to distinguish between when to use power grips and precision grips" (89). To illustrate the existential consequences of this development, they connect these capacities of the hand to the practices of midwives, pointing out that the ability to exercise a necessarily precise grip is central to the labor of maieutics. Our hands' capacities speak to the authors' broader concern for the historical complexity of how the distinct parts of our bodies, conceived in terms of their relative autonomy and their tendencies toward self-regulation, might be conceived as historical subjects.

In his narration of his life story, Diego de Zama appears to share Kluge and Negt's concern with the capacities and dispositions of the components of the human body. His extensive consideration of his hands, the body part that receives Vicuña Porto's violent punishment at the novel's end, is exemplary of this tendency: his narration contains many references to his hands and their seemingly autonomous capacities to protagonize a diverse array of actions. In the pages of *Zama*, the protagonist's hands automatically reach out to touch and grasp the bodies of the women with whom he comes into contact, expressing the sexual frustration that stems from his forced separation from his wife. They also move to grasp his sword in moments of danger, such as when he encounters another man in the street outside the home of Luciana, his love interest in 1790, and both men automatically, "como de acuerdo, echamos mano al pomo, que ahí se quedó, prevenido, mientras nos considerábamos" (95). In other contexts, an offended Zama's open palms express his anger and frustration, such as when his hand slaps a man whom he believes to have insulted him, "sin averiguar más, sin darle aviso ni respiro" (59). Zama's right hand is also intimately connected to both his personal and professional lives, in that it holds the pen he uses to write letters to his wife, Marta, and also to write opinions concerning the cases that come to his desk in the colonial administration.

Over the course of the novel, Zama experiences a progressive diminution of his capacity to use his hands for these major tasks. In 1794, he admits "[haber] vendido espada y estoque meses atrás" (150), and at a later moment, when he finds himself alone in his room and feels the urge to "hacer lo que nunca hacía: leer, escribir alguna carta" (179), he is interrupted before he is able to do so. This progressive reduction of his capacity to put his previously productive hands to use reaches its climax in the book's final pages. First, Zama is captured and his hands are tied behind his back. As he is transported on horseback, he notes how he can't stop insects from biting him nor wipe the snot from his nose: "Las manos no me servían ni para defensa contra el mísero insecto" (247), as he puts it, and later, "Detrás, mis manos, ineptas" (248). He thinks that Vicuña Porto might put him to death with his hands tied, but in the end the opposite occurs: the bandit leaves him with life, but unties his hands and cuts off his fingers, culminating a process through which Zama's hands have progressively been stripped of their capacities to write, hold swords, and carry out a number of increasingly basic activities.

This focus on the hands and their capacities forms part of a broader strategy employed throughout the novel: as Zama narrates his experiences, he repeatedly intersperses commentaries in which different parts of his bodies occupy the subject position. His stomach, for example, is presented as a protagonist of sorts when a hungry Zama explains that "también mi estómago reclamó por sus derechos" (73). As time passes, the needs of his stomach and their particular temporality occupy a more and more central place in his narration: his days in 1794 are often reduced to a series of increasingly desperate attempts to obtain food (or filling his stomach with water and yerba mate in its absence). This mounting existential concern comes to displace another persistent force that Zama spends much of 1790 resisting: his body's desire for sexual contact, a desire which that he finds himself increasingly unable to ignore, entering into fleeting contact with a series of women when his desires overcome his commitment to suppress them. Over the course of the nine years narrated in *Zama*, the needs of these and other components of his body are repeatedly foregrounded and granted an agency of their own. The specific temporalities associated with each body part—the daily need for nourishment, the periodic need for sexual contact, and the slow changes in Zama's capacities to write and wield a sword—play a central role in his life, often pushing back against his conscious decision-making processes.

Importantly, Zama conceives of himself and his personal history precisely in terms of an un-transcendable conflict between his rational, thinking self and the many

characteristics of his body that seem to exert an autonomous will of their own. As Gustavo Lespada explains, Zama "se reconoce prisionero de ataduras desconocidas, de causas inaccesibles. Pero lo inaccessible es aquello de lo que no podemos deshacernos, lo que nos obsesiona porque no lo podemos aferrar ni definir" (169). Zama lays out this vision early in the book when he thinks back upon his past life as a successful crown-appointed *corregidor* in another American town, contrasting it with his reduced present as a largely idle *asesor letrado*: alongside the "elementos nobles" that he finds in his past self exists a certain "algo—lo más—pringoso, desagradable y difícil de capturar como los intestinos de un animal recién abierto" (21). He quickly clarifies that he does not mean to distance himself from this "something"; he instead takes it as "una parte de mí, incluso imprescindible, aunque [yo] no hubiese intervenido en su elaboración" (21). The various characteristics of his body, which Zama conceives of as slippery and difficult to pin down and which have developed independently of his own willful elaboration, exert a persistent and relatively autonomous influence on his behavior throughout the novel. Even if he has trouble grasping just what they are, his narration repeatedly discloses their influence through his many references to a certain agency possessed by his hands, his stomach, and his other body parts.

It is precisely this sort of agency that Kluge and Negt want to bring to the surface through their use of the term "obstinacy." *Eigensinn* is the German word for this term, and the book and its paratexts provide a series of alternate translations ("self-will," "autonomy," and "willfulness" are other possibilities), as well as numerous definitions of obstinacy. In the most general terms, obstinacy is "a fundamental current observable throughout human history" (390), and is characterized by the body's stubborn resistance to the diverse disciplinary mechanisms and expropriative forces that emerge historically in the context of the rise and consolidation of the capitalist mode of production. Importantly, it is not the individual subject who resists, but the body's sub-or pre-individual characteristics and their self-regulatory resistance to change. The billions of cells that make up the human body provide a compelling example of this obstinate, resistive tendency: each cell autonomously self-regulates, reacting to external stimuli in myriad ways in order to maintain internal stability.

It is noteworthy that obstinacy is in no way meant to be limited to the human. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Kluge and Negt cite the movements of celestial bodies such as planets and stars as examples of obstinacy on a grand scale: the resistance to change seen in their orbital patterns relates metonymically to that of the human cell. In *History and Obstinacy,* obstinacy is conceived ontologically as a resistance embedded

not only in the natural world, but also in the historical development of human civilization. The authors seek to show that all things, human and non-human, from natural phenomena to historically-developed labor capacities, possess an obstinate capacity for resistance that forms the obverse of a historical process characterized, in recent centuries, by the progressive consolidation of global capitalism.

Obstinacy, understood in terms of the autonomy of both Diego de Zama's individual characteristics and also those of the world he inhabits, is conspicuous in *Zama* from the novel's opening page, where Zama walks downriver, away from the city, in the hopes of spotting an incoming boat. Arriving at the city's old dock, he looks down into the water and sees a dead monkey floating in between the dock's wooden poles. The monkey is stuck in an eddy, and Zama thinks that while the current wanted to carry the monkey away from that place, "se le enredó entre los palos del muelle decrépito y ahí estaba él, por irse y no, y ahí estábamos... Ahí estábamos, por irnos y no" (9). Julio Premat uses the specular relation this opening scene establishes between Zama and the monkey as a starting point for a reading of *Zama* built around the notion of "anteriority," which he conceives as a retrogressive impulse inherent to fiction. Fictional narratives invariably propel readers back to a previous moment in time in which the narrated events took place, and this experience of anteriority makes narrative fiction inseparable from historical time: the experience of reading involves imaginary voyages into historical pasts that in many cases pre-date the reader's lifetime. Historical novels demonstrate a particularly strong reliance on this mechanism by allowing readers to "asistir a lo imposible: a las escenas del pasado, o mejor dicho, del 'antepasado' de todo hombre, invirtiendo momentáneamente el ineluctable suceder del tiempo" (286). Premat explains that, traditionally, historical fiction has relied on realist strategies of referential illusionism to enact these voyages into the past. While *Zama* clearly turns its back on this tradition, "[abandonando] toda pretensión de verosimilitud" (286), Premat's reading of the novel demonstrates how both its hero, Diego de Zama, and his surroundings can be conceived in terms of a generalized movement in which, from the 18th century colonial setting, "en sí primitivo, pasamos a un universo de pura anterioridad fuera del tiempo" (288).

In this light, the figure of the monkey, "ascendiente absoluto y reflejo del yo 'animal'" (288), sets the stage for a series of "anterior" projections of Zama's character. The tribulations of the indigenous communities he encounters in his journey into the wilderness allegorically condense Zama's own sexual and moral conflicts. The occasional appearances of the young blond boy figuratively point to "la persistencia de

una problemática psíquica situada en la infancia" (288). And, finally, by narrating a series of anecdotes concerning animals (snakes, spiders, and fish as well as the dead monkey) in order to explain his own experiences, Zama repeatedly projects himself back beyond the limits of humanity and into the animal world.

These anterior projections of the historical subject (Diego de Zama) are accompanied by a parallel movement of retrogression with regard to the novel's setting. The urban space where the novel's first two parts takes place, which stands as a bulwark against what Premat describes as the "impetuosidad de la naturaleza americana" (289), slowly breaks down over the course of the novel, with the solid walls of the city's dwellings progressively crumbling into ruins. This degradation of the built environment is accompanied by persistent references to bodies of water and aqueous, viscous foodstuffs, which Premat relates to the unstable ground of a social existence constantly threatened by an encroaching natural environment. This retrogressive movement of the natural and built environment is ultimately subsumed within Zama's vision of his own self: the natural world repeatedly interpellates Zama, "[haciendo] que me diese conmigo en cosas exteriores" (10), and the manner in which the town's dwellings show the devastating effects of time reflects Zama's own psychic and physical deterioration. These parallel processes intersect in Zama's final trip into the heart of an American continent he describes as "infantile." His voyage is prefigured by repeated references to the intrauterine space, such that the novel's final scenes can be read as the culmination of the book-long sequence of retrogression, bringing the subject into sync with its surroundings under the sign of anteriority and setting the stage for a final scene that is explicitly associated with the idea of an imminent (re-)birth.

Premat's notion of anteriority resonates compellingly with Negt and Kluge's discussion of obstinacy as a fundamental current in human history. If *Zama* stages a passage from history (the end of the 18th century) into a universe outside of time, *History and Obstinacy*, following in the footsteps of, among others, Adorno and Horkheimer's identification of continuities connecting the mythic past of the Greeks to the history of Enlightenment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, undertakes the project of extending the Marxist critique of political economy backward, far beyond the threshold of modernity and into the realm of a pre-human or "natural" history. In this interpretation, the retrogressive impulse Premat encounters in *Zama* might be re-framed in terms of what Negt and Kluge would call obstinacy or self-will of the sub-components of Diego de Zama's body (the hand that writes and holds the sword; the stomach that demands food), as well as those of the natural world surrounding his colonial community, which

constantly encroach on the built environment. This perspective would conceive these elements not as existing outside of time, but rather as marking the interruption into the chronological flow of Zama's life history of a complex network of natural and historical elements, each possessing a specific temporality and an inherent tendency toward self-conservation (what Negt and Kluge call "obstinacy") that resists Zama's attempts to assert himself and triumph over his circumstances.

In its portrayal from the embodied perspective of Diego de Zama of what Di Benedetto refers to as "una América medio mágica" (quoted in Néspolo 252), *Zama* is structured around the overarching myth of a monstrous American natural environment capable of overcoming the individual at every turn. From the opening scene, where Zama sees an image of himself in the floating carcass of the monkey, the novel depicts Zama's effort to maintain a degree of separation from nature. For the nearly ten years depicted in the novel, he persistently attempts to hold at bay both his own nature (his sexual desires, his hunger pangs), as well as the dangers of a natural world that is persistently encroaching into his life. Looming over these intrusions of nature is the figure of Vicuña Porto, the bandit whom Zama pursues in a last-gasp effort to obtain recognition from the crown, a promotion, and his long-desired reunion with his wife. In Zama's narration, Porto is assimilated to nature: his dangerous presence is equated to rising river waters—"Vicuña Porto era como el río, pues con las lluvias crecía" (213)—, and his violent acts are compared to natural phenomena. Zama explains that if a cow disappears during the rainy season, the river would be to blame, and analogously, "si un mercader moría, en la cama, destripado, ya la culpa era de Porto" (213). In this light, Zama's final journey can be read as a desperate confrontation with the forces of a natural world embodied in the overarching figure of Vicuña Porto. In the end, this confrontation with an obstinate natural environment leaves him hanging on to life by a thread, his hands mutilated, but alive nonetheless.

Kluge and Negt assign a fundamental importance to the role of myths, fairy tales, and other cultural projections because, as Stewart Martin puts it, they "offer the projection of needs that do not conceal that they are projections. This means that their unreality must not be dismissed. It is the rare evidence of the reality of needs" (35). The foundational myth that structures *History and Obstinacy* is that of the Golden Age, which projects back into history an image of a time of abundance during which humankind lived in harmony with nature. Describing this myth as "irrepressible," Kluge and Negt explain that it doesn't matter if it is a myth or a bygone reality because "humans will never allow themselves to be dissuaded from the expectation that this *original property in*

the broader sense of the word will return (at every stage of the emancipatory process)" (82; emphasis in original). If life under capitalism constitutes an alienated, second nature, the myth of the Golden Age expresses the need to think beyond it, projecting a vision of the past into the future. It should not be denounced, in their reading, because such a denouncement would be akin to affirming that the alienated relations of capitalism are the only possible relations.

This image is important in the context of their Marxist vision of history, which is predicated on the concept of separation (*Trennung*), a term they inherit from Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation. Negt and Kluge conceive of the dynamics of separation as a permanent component of capitalism, arguing that it should not be situated historically as the moment when the peasants were separated from their land, but that it instead takes place continuously: the capitalist produces separation each time he or she purchases the laborer's labor power and puts the laborer to work. Negt and Kluge see this moment of separation as "the organizing moment of history" (85), but they emphasize that classical Marxism's focus on the negative, destructive qualities of this process conceals the obverse side of what takes place in labor under capitalism: when humans work on material objects to produce commodities, they are at the same time working on themselves, and "[a]ll external forms of labor, as well as the tools they involve, replicate themselves on the subjective side of humans" (92). It is in this work-on-oneself, which takes place behind the back of traditional Marxist considerations of value-producing labor, that Negt and Kluge encounter the form of resistance that they call obstinacy. They conceive of the labor process, in short, as a process where humankind is also working on its own primitive property, on the characteristics that *do not experience separation* during labor under capitalism. The myth of the Golden Age, by presenting an image of primitive property, is thus operative in the many historical examples they cite of labor power's resistance to capitalist expropriation. It is, moreover, operative in their persistent recourse to nature (natural characteristics, discussions of cell biology, of the hand's gripping capacities, etc.), which should *also* be conceived as projections of that need. "In so far as history as such is experienced as alienating, the need to escape it sees in nature the fulfilment of its wish" (35).

In its representation of the experience of a creole functionary stationed in a colonial backwater in the waning years of the Spanish empire, *Zama* is written from an inverse standpoint to that of Negt and Kluge's book. Like *History and Obstinacy*, the conflict between history and nature lies at the heart of the book's narrative, but the myth that structures its protagonist's experiences is diametrically opposed to the myth

of the Golden Age. Diego de Zama does articulate a series of imaginary scenarios in which he projects a utopian past into the future, but these visions are entirely assimilated to the realm of history: his reunion with his wife, his return to the favor of the Spanish crown, and the rebirth of "[e]l doctor don Diego de Zama... El enérgico, el ejecutivo, el pacificador de indios, el que hizo justicia sin emplear la espada" (20). The entire novel, rather than depicting the re-integration of the individual with nature, might be read as Zama's protracted struggle to preserve a degree of separation from an obstinate American nature and preserve the identity he had forged during his years of glory. During ten long years, he aspires to transcend not only a menacing, dangerous environment, but also that certain something, "pringoso, desagradable y difícil de capturar" (21) that he feels inside of himself. It is these forces, both interior and exterior to his body, against which Zama carries out a protracted, and ultimately catastrophic, effort to resist assimilation to his surroundings.

It is consequently tempting to position *Zama* at the antipodes of Kluge and Negt's investigation of the emancipatory potential embedded in everything from human cells to celestial bodies. The novel documents the slow, progressive defeat of a historical subject whose understanding of himself is entirely predicated on maintaining separation from the sorts of willful, obstinate characteristics that form the primary subject of *History and Obstinacy*. The melancholic gaze of the young blond boy at the novel's end would confirm Zama's ultimate defeat, as he lies bloody and mutilated in the heart of the American continent. This may be the case, but, as discussed above, the novel also closes with a final moment of rebirth in which the hero's "sonrisa de padre" (262) expresses the possibility that he has finally aligned himself with the America that had until then been an alien world of natural and historical characteristics. This more optimistic reading, which conceives of *Zama* as presenting an affirmative vision of history, may not be wholly incompatible with *History and Obstinacy*'s project. Kluge and Negt are interested in uncovering the many ways in which the historical processes they study from the context of modern capitalism has produced not only an alienated world of commodities, but also, behind our backs, the characteristics that they assign the role of agents of history. *Zama*, by staging the struggle between an individual and the many characteristics of a hostile nature that encompasses both his body and his surroundings, points toward a similar history through which, behind his back, the very elements that Zama intuitively perceives as forming part of his present and future selves—the sticky, disagreeable elements which are nonetheless essential to who he is and will become—

have also come to be understandable as subjects of a history. In the novel's final scene, this history points toward an uncertain yet not entirely bleak future.

Conclusion: Obstinacy and the Historical Novel Tradition

The comparison proposed here between Di Benedetto's mid-century historical novel and Negt and Kluge's discussion of obstinacy is not meant to stand apart from the above consideration of *Zama*'s relation to the historical novel tradition. On the one hand, it is due to the author's embrace of techniques associated with modernism, and fundamentally his election of the embodied, first person point of view of Diego de Zama, that he is able to let his titular protagonist narrate the way that the obstinate dispositions of his own his body, as well as the constant encroachment of an obstinate natural setting, repeatedly impinge upon his actions. By electing to filter the historical documentation that he compiled in his research on the colonial Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata through the focalized, subjective standpoint of his novel's hero, Di Benedetto foregrounds the way that all of that data (the flora, fauna, urban architecture, and social relations of that historical moment) might have been perceived and processed by an embodied individual whose thoughts and actions are constantly encroached upon by the obstinate characteristics of life. The shift from the objectivist, third-person perspective of the historical novel in its classical form, to the subjectivist, first-person point of view employed in *Zama,* allows the novel to disclose these sorts of conflicts taking place in the interior of its historical subject. Kluge and Negt are concerned with how an expansive understanding of what sorts of things can be conceived as historical subjects could lead to new emancipatory projects involving the potential hegemonization of the resistive potentials embedded in the individual characteristics they study in *History and Obstinacy*. Perhaps Di Benedetto's novel develops a vision of how such struggles for hegemony may have taken place throughout history, through his representation of the psychic struggles of an individual like Diego de Zama.

On the other hand, Negt and Kluge's notion of obstinacy provides a compelling standpoint from which the cycle of discussions concerning *Zama*'s (non-) status as a historical novel can be reconceived, in that the very characteristics of the genre that *Zama* has been said to refute were perhaps central to the particular effect the novel has had on readers. Like the characteristics of labor power that inform Negt and Kluge's vision of history, the characteristics of the historical novel in its classical 19th century form are obstinately present in the pages of Di Benedetto's novel. The many

elements that constitute this literary form can be conceived as the product of the historical laboratory of capitalism and the social relations and conditions of literary production that developed in its context. As most of these elements came under attack over the course of the later portion of the 19th century and into the 20th, when the many movements and theories associated with aesthetic modernism rose to prominence, they did not simply disappear or fade away. They retained a certain obstinate presence, existing in the shadow of the very anti-realist art and literature that modernist authors claimed to critique or negate. Fredric Jameson pointed toward this sort of obstinacy when he famously argued that modernist texts are "essentially simply cancelled realistic ones...[which we apprehend indirectly] by way of the relay of an imaginary realistic narrative of which the symbolic and modernistic one is then seen as a kind of stylization" ("Beyond the Cave" 16). *Zama*, through its use of a historical setting and extensive historical documentation in a novel that is largely readable through the codes and conventions of literary modernism, preserves the "cancelled" elements that Jameson speaks of in a particularly surprising way. In its dialectical recuperation of the historical novel in the wake of modernism's relentlessly negative de-motivation of realist conventions, Di Benedetto's novel strikes a remarkable balance between new and old, between modernism and the historical novel.

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