



Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring 2008, 75-94

www.ncsu.edu/project/accontracorriente

The Politics of Literary Prestige: Promoting the Latin American “Boom” in the Pages of *Mundo Nuevo*

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The history of the Boom... is written in the pages of Mundo Nuevo.
—José Donoso

Nothing kills a man like having to represent a country.
—Jacques Vache

I.

Decades have passed since the Boom ended and yet the period remains controversial among critics. Was it a literary movement or a marketing phenomenon? Why were certain authors (Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, etc.) given pride of place over others (Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Augusto Roa Bastos)? Who was primarily responsible for making the Boom such an unprecedented success in international literary circles? This much is agreed upon: in roughly one decade, Latin American fiction emerged from obscurity in Europe and the United States to become a major critical and commercial phenomenon. International recognition had already been bestowed upon Latin American poets such as Pablo Neruda, Gabriel

Mistral, and César Vallejo earlier in the twentieth century while fiction writers remained curiously neglected in what Pascale Casanova has called the “World Republic of Letters.” With the Boom in the early 1960s, however, for the first time in history, Latin American writers were widely translated, published, and awarded the most prestigious literary prizes on the planet.

At the risk of oversimplifying matters, there are essentially two strands of thought regarding the Boom’s overwhelming critical and commercial success. There are its supporters, who believe that Boom novels flourished because of the writers’ full embrace of cosmopolitan modernism, or what Goethe called *Weltliteratur*, a concept of literature as a space existing outside national or linguistic boundaries. Critics and writers in this camp have expressed little interest in the material conditions that made the Boom possible; the genius aesthetics of the works themselves were what made critical success a reality. For its supporters, the Boom represented the first time in history that Latin American prose achieved a truly international audience and expressed an aesthetic vision on par with that of the modernists in Europe and the United States. This view of the Boom is fully articulated in José Donoso’s memoir, *Historia personal del boom* (1972), published just as the period was winding down.¹ The other strand of thought about the Boom belongs to the detractors, who believe that the Boom benefited well-placed members of a literary mafia to the exclusion of other politically revolutionary writers in Latin America. The detractors were not opposed to Boom-era fiction writing *per se*; they were opposed to what they perceived as a commercial degradation of Latin American writing.

The *bête noir* of the Boom for the detractors was the Spanish-language, Paris-based literary magazine *Mundo Nuevo*, published from 1966 to 1971. Until 1968, the magazine was almost entirely funded by the anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was, in turn, funded

¹ In this essay, I quote from the English translation, José Donoso, *The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History* (New York: Columbia University Press in association with the Center for Inter-American Relations, 1977).

by the CIA.² The magazine was edited by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a tireless promoter of writers like Borges, Fuentes, and García Márquez. Monegal had an infamous falling out with the leftist literary intelligentsia of Uruguay where, for a decade, he edited the cultural pages of the weekly newspaper *Marcha*.

The polemic between supporters and detractors has clouded much critical research into the role of *Mundo Nuevo* in the Boom. To a certain extent, every critic feels the need to side with one position or the other, thus reliving the Cold War-era cultural politics of the 1960s. That is, critics often defend Boom novels in purely stylistic terms—narrative innovation, poetic language, intertextuality, etc—and either ignore the commercial success of the novels entirely or view it as a symbol of a corrupted art form and *Mundo Nuevo* as a tool of the CIA. One of the hallmarks of modernism is its belief in artistic purity, which the marketplace serves to cheapen art. Boom writing—situated in a fuzzy terrain somewhere between modernism and postmodernism—is, then, an interesting case study for evolving views of capitalism in literary production.

María Eugenia Mudrovcic's study of the magazine—*Mundo Nuevo: Cultura y Guerra Fría en la década del 60* (1997)—often repeats the accusations leveled at the magazine during the 1960s: most importantly, that it was being used as a propaganda tool for U.S. foreign policy. Mudrovcic's book is the only monograph to closely examine *Mundo Nuevo* and it makes some compelling arguments about the role of cultural politics in promoting a seemingly non-political literary magazine. While Mudrovcic is correct to point out that much Cold War-era literary production obfuscated when it came to the complex political webs of patronage, she oversimplifies the often contradictory nature of the magazine. In this article, I argue that a closer look at the magazine's role in promoting the Boom reveals that the magazine's cosmopolitan literary projects that often

² In 1968, *Mundo Nuevo* moved to Buenos Aires and the Ford Foundation took over as the main funding source. After the Buenos Aires move, the magazine took on a more academic tone and ceased to be an important vehicle for Boom writing. For this reason, I focus almost exclusively on the period from 1966 to 1968.

subverted hard-line anticommunist elements of the CIA in particular and U.S. foreign policy in general.³

II.

The Boom has always been a term fraught with controversy. Monegal has written that he first heard the term in the pages of the Argentine magazine *Primera Plana*, during the late 1960s, when talk of the “new Latin American narrative” was still circulating in intellectual circles.⁴ At that time, the word “boom” had become a widely-used Anglicism in Spanish, usually employed in conjunction with economics. (The Argentine writer David Viñas, however, preferred to call the period the “búm,” a more phonetically correct, if somewhat disparaging, spelling.) Ironically, use of the term to describe modern Latin American writing did not become widespread until the early 1970s, when the Boom had been deflated by slower sales, political infighting, and aesthetic exhaustion; by 1971, the Boom had effectively become a “post-Boom.” It is not a coincidence that the exhaustion of the Boom parallels *Mundo Nuevo*’s move to Buenos Aires, a city that—while cosmopolitan—did not occupy the same level of prestige in international literary space as did Paris.

Latin American literature’s readership grew exponentially during the 1960s as publishers like the Spanish editorial house Seix Barral found new markets for novels, and translators like Gregory Rabassa and Suzanne Jill Levine made the works available to a U.S. audience. Meanwhile, writers associated with the pre-Boom era of Latin American writing started accumulating international prestige: the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges shared the International Publishers’ Prize—also known as the Prix Formentor—with Samuel Beckett in 1961, while the Guatemalan Miguel

³ There were significant divisions among U.S. officials concerning the rise of Marxist revolutions in Latin America during the 1960s. Some officials favored an overhaul of U.S. policies while others wanted to continue the anticommunist status quo. This debate spilled over into discussions of cultural policy as well. See Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), and Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000).

⁴ Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal, *El boom de la novela latinoamericana*. (Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, 1972).

Angel Asturias was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1967. In Spain, Mario Vargas Llosa became the first Spanish-American writer to win the prestigious Premio Biblioteca Breve prize in 1962 for *La ciudad y los perros*, an event that has been widely accepted as one of the catalyzing events of the Boom. Angel Rama, in his survey of the twentieth-century Latin American novel, *La novela en America Latina: panoramas 1920-1980*, demonstrates that editions of Julio Cortázar's short story collections and his novel, *Rayuela*, grew from a couple thousand copies to tens of thousands of copies from 1963 to 1966.⁵

Rama has stated that during the Boom years, magazines played a vital role in carving out a space for literary production among an increasingly urban and professionally educated populace. Magazines, Rama states, "fueron instrumento capital de la modernización y de la jerarquización de la actividad literaria: substituyendo ... publicaciones especializadas destinadas sólo al restricto público culto."⁶ Magazines like *Primera Plana* in Argentina, *Bohemia* in Cuba, and *Siempre* in Mexico published excerpts from new Latin American writing, expanding the audience for Latin American literature beyond the cultural elites who read journals like *Sur* and *Orígenes* to a burgeoning middle class. It should be noted that, while *Primera Plana* and *Siempre* did much to disseminate literary non-fiction during the period, they also were confined within national boundaries. Paradoxically, it would be smaller-scale literary magazines, like *Casa de las Américas* and *Mundo Nuevo*, that would make the Boom a Latin American—as opposed to a Mexican or Argentine—phenomenon. While *Mundo Nuevo* never attracted a wide readership—it averaged around 5,000 copies per month—it was a primary vehicle for Boom literature and was considered—along with *Casa de las Américas* in Cuba—as the most important outlet for the "new Latin American narrative," the Boom *avant la lettre*.⁷ Despite its short history

⁵ Rama, 240.

⁶ Rama, 240.

⁷ John King cites *Casa* and *Mundo Nuevo* as the two most important and influential magazines in the 1960s, when *Sur* had lost much of its relevance. See John King, *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the*

and limited readership, *Mundo Nuevo* must be considered as one of—if not the—most important factors in the rise and fall of the Boom.

Donoso, for his part, claims that the magazine was also the embodiment of a new negative image of Latin American writers as a “Mafia... a pool of uprooted writers who lived olympically in foreign countries and who used *Mundo Nuevo* to share their formulas for success.”⁸ This was an image that Marxist writers in Uruguay and Cuba would exploit until the magazine moved from its cosmopolitan perch in Paris to Buenos Aires. Antagonists like David Viñas, Rama, and Roberto Fernández Retamar used *Mundo Nuevo*’s self-styled cosmopolitanism against the magazine, claiming that it was a liberal subterfuge, disconnected with the “underdeveloped” reality of Latin America. Despite these attacks, however, Donoso claims that *Mundo Nuevo* was, in large part, responsible for the Boom:

During the years it was directed with talent and discrimination by Emir Rodríguez Monegal, this magazine exercised a decisive role in defining a generation... *Mundo Nuevo* was the voice of the Latin American literature of its time... For better or worse, and with all the risk that my statement implies, I am convinced that the history of the Boom, at the moment in which it was most united, is written in the pages of *Mundo Nuevo* up to the moment Emir Rodríguez Monegal abandoned its directorship [1968].⁹

Donoso’s statement should not be completely taken at its word. As the Chilean himself admits, he never shared his colleagues’ enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution and so never benefited from its contribution to the heady atmosphere of the Boom years.¹⁰ Much like Borges, Donoso stayed on the sidelines of many of the political debates that fueled interest in Latin American writing. Nevertheless, Donoso completely cast his lot with Monegal, even after news that CIA money was being channeled into

Development of a Culture, 1931-1970 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁸ Donoso, 103-4.

⁹ Donoso, 104.

¹⁰Worldwide fascination with the social, political, and cultural experiment that was the Cuban Revolution is widely cited as a major factor in the expanding interest among cultural elites in Latin American literature. See Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left*. (London: Verso, 1993).

cultural organizations surfaced in April 1967 in the *New York Times*. Although *Mundo Nuevo* was four times¹¹ removed from the CIA, the connection was enough to taint the magazine's image.

Before they appeared as novels, several key Boom texts appeared in serial form in *Mundo Nuevo* during the years 1966 and 1967, including Carlos Fuentes's *Cambio de piel*, Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, as well as Donoso's *Obsceno pájaro de la noche*. In terms of literary style and narrative technique, these works have little in common. García Márquez's novel is a magical realist fable of multiple generations of the Buendía family based in the mythical town of Macondo. The town can be interpreted as an archetype for Caribbean Latin America: it suffers generations of civil wars and is exploited by a corporation of banana-hungry North Americans before being wiped off the map in a whirlwind. Although *Cien años de soledad* employs a broad narrative scope and jumps in time, it is not self-consciously difficult like Fuentes's *Cambio de piel*, which is replete with pop culture references and earnest philosophical reflections on Mexican and Latin American identity. Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, on the other hand, can be read—according to its author—as one extended joke. There is little in the way of plot and much in the way of sarcasm, bilingual punning, and multiple allusions to Cuban popular music and Hollywood, Cabrera Infante's pet subjects.

Such a diverse range of literary production was an extraordinary feat and did much to call attention to “the new Latin American narrative.” Still, Latin American literature only constituted roughly half of a typical edition of the magazine. *Mundo Nuevo* also included a great many sketches from literary congresses, “happenings”—artists' gatherings that usually involved some improvisational theatricality—and cultural news from

¹¹ The CIA deposited money into non-profit foundations like the Fairfield Foundation, which provided the majority of funds for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, centered in Paris. The CCF then distributed the money to the Institute for Latin American Relations (ILARI), an umbrella organization for “cultural freedom” activities in Latin America. ILARI was cited as the sponsoring organization for *Mundo Nuevo*. This “quadruple pass” was enough to insulate Rodríguez Monegal from charges that he took marching orders from the CIA, although there is inconclusive evidence that he knew where the money came from and why his magazine was started in the first place.

abroad, covered in a section called “Sextante” (Compass). There were also calls for solidarity with jailed writers, including Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, Soviet writers who were convicted in a show trial and sent to hard labor in a Gulag in 1966.¹² Campaigns for cultural freedom in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and elsewhere were carefully framed as non-political interventions. As Mudrovcic has pointed out, *Mundo Nuevo*’s call for cultural freedom for writers like Daniel and Sinyavsky often derived from the magazine’s link to the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Furthermore, as a member of what CIA agent and CCF Executive Secretary Michael Josselson called the *grande famille* of CCF magazines, *Mundo Nuevo* could reprint, in Spanish, works from *Encounter*, *Preuves*, and other CCF-affiliated publications. This meant that writers like Fuentes and Donoso would share space with other writers of international stature like Ignacio Silone, Arthur Miller, and Saul Bellow, as well as avant-guard writers like William Burroughs, Juan Goytisolo, and Samuel Beckett. Indeed, by advertising these names in a minimalist, *sans-serif* font on the cover of each edition, *Mundo Nuevo* seemed to be announcing itself as the late-1960s response to Goethe’s early nineteenth-century call for *Weltliteratur*, an international community of letters. Despite this impressive body of work, *Mundo Nuevo*’s impact on the Boom remains matter of some controversy, since the magazine never overcame the political baggage of being financed by the CCF, which, as has been well documented, was directed by CIA agents with CIA funds. This controversy has obscured a dispassionate analysis of how the magazine impacted the cultural politics of the Boom.

Even if a truly international *Weltliteratur* was not possible due to the exigencies of the Cold War, *Mundo Nuevo* did serve as a vehicle for taking Latin American literature into what Pascale Casanova has called “international literary space.”¹³ Not only did the magazine place Latin American authors on the same pages as other members of the international avant-garde and give Latin America equal billing with the “developed

¹² *Mundo Nuevo*, no. 1 (July 1966).

¹³ Pascale Casanova. “Literature as a World.” *New Left Review* 31, January-February 2005.

world,” the magazine also reflected a liberal, cosmopolitan attitude toward the most pressing political issues of the day, especially issues regarding the repression of cultural freedom in communist countries. Because Monegal realized from the outset that avoidance of political issues would be impossible in a magazine about Latin American writing, he tried to take the radical edge off the revolutionary, dependency-theory mentality of the late 1960s. Central to this attitude was Monegal’s repeated insistence that writers act as “independent intellectuals” and reject right-wing and left-wing orthodoxies.¹⁴ This meant opposing a few actions taken by the U.S. government—the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and the War in Vietnam¹⁵—while also siding with the CCF’s anticommunism regarding dissident writers and upholding individual “artistic freedom” in general.

III.

Like its intellectual antecedent, *Sur*, *Mundo Nuevo* also held fast to anti-Peronism in Argentina and anti-Francoism in Spain. As Jean Franco notes in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City* (2002), *Mundo Nuevo* was inattentive to international movements that embraced Third World causes. As the Cold War expanded outside Europe, indigenous revolutionary movements in the developing world also started to challenge U.S. hegemony in Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere. Third World insurrections posed a different sort of threat than Stalin in Eastern Europe, and required a different cultural response. The CCF and U.S. anticommunists were forced to confront the growing popularity of national liberation movements and the influence of “black power” in places like Cuba. *Casa de las Américas* dedicated an issue to the “Africa en América” (August 1966), which celebrated people like Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon, while *Mundo Nuevo* was publishing translations of U.S. writers like Mary McCarthy and Saul Bellow.

¹⁴ See numbers 1 and 14 of *Mundo Nuevo* above.

¹⁵ See “El P.E.N. Club contra la guerra fría,” *Mundo Nuevo*, no. 5 (November 1966): 85-90, and “Situación del escritor en América Latina,” *Mundo Nuevo*, no. 1 (July 1966): 5-21. Both these articles oppose the Vietnam War and the invasion of the Dominican Republic while maintaining an aloof attitude about the writer’s role in bringing about direct social action.

Mundo Nuevo's liberal cosmopolitanism shaped the cultural politics of the Boom by moving some of its authors away from a "committed" model of literature, which was, in turn, exemplified by official cultural institutions of the Cuban Revolution, including Casa de las Américas. Some of these writers, like Cabrera Infante, did not need to be persuaded of the magazine's carefully crafted anti-Cuba message. In letters to Monegal, Cabrera Infante urged the magazine to be more explicit in denouncing Castro as a "tyrant." Other writers, such as Donoso, wanted to steer clear of any political discussion and bask in the prestige of a Paris-based magazine intimately connected to the avant-garde in Europe and the United States. Writers like Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy were not anticommunist radicals denouncing Castro in the pages of *Mundo Nuevo*. They were, rather, cosmopolitan outsiders with radical aesthetic projects that were seen as "bourgeois" or "counter-revolutionary" in Cuba. By promoting their projects in *Mundo Nuevo*, the magazine was able to practice the "cultural freedom" it so often trumpeted in Monegal's editorials.

Thus, *Mundo Nuevo* attempted to shift the field of Latin American writing away from a paradigm of the writer as a political and aesthetic revolutionary to a model of the "independent intellectual" who could transcend Cold War politics. It is important to note that the emphasis on the cosmopolitan independent intellectual was not the same as depoliticizing Latin American writing, an inescapably politicized field of cultural production. Rather than excise political struggle from its pages, *Mundo Nuevo* tried to show how cosmopolitan writers could create an alternate path of "diálogo" that could end what it saw as petty political strife. This seemingly apolitical effort—to foster dialogue between writers of different political and aesthetic situations in different areas of the world—led to *Mundo Nuevo*'s involvement in some of the most important battles of the cultural Cold War in Latin America. While U.S. funding of the arts through the CCF was surreptitious, its political goals were often obscure and contradictory—especially in Latin America. Writing about a similar event in Cold War history, Deborah Cohn points out in "A Tale of Two Translation Programs" (2006) that U.S. philanthropic organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation funded Latin American cultural activities in the

United States “even though the image of the region presented in the works, and the politics of the authors themselves, often deviated from (and, on occasion, rejected) official U.S. cold war ideology.”¹⁶

The push for dialogue with Cuba in a CCF-sponsored magazine did not entirely succeed. Although the magazine had been noticed for its high-quality literary texts, many Latin American writers questioned its political agenda. García Márquez, among others, wrote to Monegal in the wake of the revelation of the CIA-CCF connection, telling him he had been “cuckolded” and would never contribute to the magazine again. García Márquez had previously been courted by Monegal as a sort of roving correspondent who would receive monthly salary of \$400. Monegal clearly recognized the Colombian’s talent and potential, even though, at the time, he was less well-known than Fuentes, Cortázar, or Vargas Llosa. García Márquez appeared to be seriously considering the offer—he was extremely poor at the time—until two things happened, almost simultaneously, as luck would have it: one, *Cien años de soledad* was published to immediate international critical acclaim, and, two, Spanish translations of the *New York Times* articles on the CIA started appearing in *Marcha* and elsewhere in Latin America. When Monegal wrote to García Márquez asking if he would accept the offer in 1967, he received a reply that is both scathing and humorous in its rejection of Monegal and his magazine. It is worth quoting at length, because it captures the spirit of the reaction of many members of the Latin American intelligentsia to the *Mundo Nuevo*-CCF-CIA triangle:

Créame que no tengo prejuicios insuperables contra los espías de la vida real. Cuando usted me invitó a colaborar en *Mundo Nuevo*, muchos amigos con menos sentido de humor político que yo, me previnieron acerca de la sospecha universal de que el CCF tuviera ciertos vínculos extraconyugales con la Agencia Central de Inteligencia de los Estados Unidos.

García Márquez appears to reference an attempted “boycott” of the magazine in Cuba before it ever appeared. The boycott was headed up by Fernández Retamar, a former colleague of Monegal’s, who had carried on

¹⁶ Deborah Cohn, “A Tale of Two Translation Programs: Politics, the Market, and Rockefeller Funding for Latin American Literature in the United States During the 1960s and 1970s,” *Latin American Research Review*, 41.2 (June, 2006), 143.

extensive correspondence with Monegal about literary magazines. García Márquez then defends his contributions, saying that it is he who has influenced the magazine, not vice versa:

No me preocupó el que esas sospechas fueran fundadas, porque creo y seguiré creyendo que cuando se escribe para una revista es uno quien influye en ella, y no al contrario, y porque de todos modos se sabía que el CCF era substantialmente financiado por la Fundación Ford, y nunca he creído que haya incompatibilidades muy notables entre los fines de este organismo y los de la CIA.¹⁷ Al margen de todo, no dejaba de tener una cierta gracia el hecho de que parte del presupuesto del espionaje norteamericano se utilizara para divulgar la obra de este escritor, a quien no se le permite entrar a los Estados Unidos como un homenaje a su peligrosidad política...¹⁸ En síntesis, yo creía que en esta inefable historia de espionaje todos sabíamos honradamente cuál era el juego que estábamos jugando. Pero que ahora resulte que el CCF no sabía cual era el suyo, es algo que escandalosamente sobrepasa los límites del humorismo, e invade los terrenos resbaladizos e imprevisibles de la literatura fantástica. En estas condiciones, señor Director, no me sorprendería que usted fuera el primero en entender que no vuelva colaborar en *Mundo Nuevo*, mientras esa revista mantenga cualquier vínculo con un organismo que nos ha colocado a usted y a mí, y a tantos amigos, en esta abrumadora situación de cornudos.¹⁹

Although García Márquez, like other left-leaning writers of the time, publicly rebuked *Mundo Nuevo* and Monegal, his letter makes an important distinction that many critics have failed to make. He argues that writers influence the vision of a magazine, not the other way around. Indeed, without the contribution of Boom writers, *Mundo Nuevo* would have been simply another anticommunist magazine. The CIA had no control over García Márquez's mythological creation of Macondo or Cabrera Infante's experiments with Spanglish punning. What made *Mundo*

¹⁷ Rodríguez Monegal insisted in public until his death that the Ford Foundation was the only sponsor of his magazine. His correspondence with CCF officials—from the accountant to the executive secretary—however, demonstrate that he knew the Ford Foundation would eventually pick up the funding. “Il faudra convertir cette fiction en réalité,” he wrote to Pierre Emmanuel of the CCF in Paris.

¹⁸ The State Department had denied García Márquez, like many Latin American writers, a visa to enter the country due to his leftist politics. The CIA, on the other hand, had long realized the usefulness of cultivating ties with the so-called “non-communist left,” as Keith Botsford explained to me in an e-mail dated January 31, 2007.

¹⁹ Gabriel García Márquez to Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal. Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal Papers, Princeton University. Box 7, Folder 12.

Nuevo distinct from other CCF magazines is that it published unique and subversive literature while still holding fast to a loose doctrine of "cultural freedom."

Other writers—including Monegal himself—expressed public indignation about the CIA link, but privately continued to support the magazine, which, after all, had proven to be a stable and well-paying outlet for modern Latin American writing.²⁰ Donoso, for example, continued to count on the editor's support in publishing his experimental *Obsceno pájaro de la noche* when he had trouble finding a publisher. In his memoir, he cites the influence of another writer increasingly at odds with the Cubans in the late 1960s: Carlos Fuentes. Donoso claims that it was Fuentes who connected him with a U.S. literary agent, Carl D. Brandt. Both Fuentes and Donoso were part of a handful of writers—Severo Sarduy, Augusto Roa Bastos, and García Márquez were others—who were published multiple times in *Mundo Nuevo* from 1966 to 1968. Nevertheless, the fact that it was in Donoso's best interest to portray *Mundo Nuevo* as the definitive vehicle for Boom literature—while also completely eliding the question of CCF and CIA influence—does not entirely discredit his statement. Donoso's account of the 1960s has proven factually correct and the magazine's impressive track record of publishing quality writers supports Donoso's favorable appraisal of *Mundo Nuevo*'s role in the Boom.

IV.

Many Latin American writers and critics questioned the commercialization of the Boom, especially its success in the U.S. marketplace. Hernán Vidal, for example, famously criticized the Boom as a symptom of a liberal bourgeois attitude that saw literature as a

²⁰ See "La CIA y los intelectuales," *Mundo Nuevo* no. 14 (July 1967), 11-20. In this issue, Rodríguez Monegal published many documents relating to the connection between the CIA and the CCF in an effort to clear the air and seem—as always—above the fray of Cold War politics. An introduction to the issue proclaimed:

Ante este hecho [the clear connection between the CIA and the CCF], *Mundo Nuevo* expresa la más enérgica condenación. Porque no se trata sólo de que la CIA haya engañado a tanto escritor independiente: se trata, sobre todo, que ha engañado a quienes habían demostrado su independencia frente al fascismo y al stalinismo en horas en que parecía casi imposible atreverse a decir una palabra.

“denationalized” commodity.²¹ For Vidal, Boom writers—especially Fuentes—embraced the marketing successes of Boom novels because they seemed to presage a liberal utopia: an economic system in which modernity and middle class status are available to everyone, regardless of nationality. Fuentes and other presumably leftist writers were, for Vidal, liberals in disguise. In this sense, Vidal sees the Boom as a “reaffirmation” of liberal Romanticism. He writes:

Se trata, por lo tanto, de una forma literaria que refleja y responde a la nueva fase de dependencia latinoamericana bajo la hegemonía económica de los conglomerados multinacionales, en especial aquellos con base en los Estados Unidos. Por ello, el término narrativa del *boom* es de gran utilidad para designar este movimiento, ya que apunta a sus raíces sociales. La aparición de sus obras más representativas coincide en su auge e impacto con la orientación consumista de las economías hispanoamericanas más avanzadas, desde mediados de la década de 1950 hasta fines de los sesenta.

The Boom is a middle-class phenomenon that reinforces the values and economic demands of the marketplace:

El libro producido en América y España, convertido en mercancía de distribución y consumo masivo, [es] sometido a sistemas de propaganda, promoción y comercialización similares a los del cine, la televisión, la ropa de moda y los aparatos de uso casero... No es un azar que algunas de las figuras más claramente asociadas con esta narrativa—Carlos Fuentes, Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar, Juan Carlos Onetti, José Donoso, Mario Vargas Llosa—provengan de los países hispanoamericanos que alcanzaron una mayor modernización dependientista durante este período.²²

One could dispute Vidal’s claim that Boom writers come from Spanish American countries that have achieved the greatest degrees of “dependentista” development. García Márquez, probably the most high-profile of the Boom writers, comes from Colombia, a country not as economically developed in the global economy as Argentina or Mexico. Regardless of the truth or falsity of Vidal’s claims, his critique represents a powerful rebuttal to the cosmopolitan project of Monegal, *Mundo Nuevo*, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Vidal foregrounds the economic and political inequality between, on the one hand, Europe and the United

²¹ Vidal, 67.

²² Vidal, 66-67.

States, and Latin America, on the other. The social consciousness was also at the forefront of Cuban cultural production.

For Monegal and CCF member Keith Botsford, however, there was another model for the Latin American Boom that would foreground its formal innovations and its hyper-modern artistic sensibilities. Although Monegal never sought to “depoliticize” literature—as some of *Mundo Nuevo*'s detractors would claim—he did try to integrate Latin American literature into the field of world literature, so that the modernist experiments of a Julio Cortázar or a Carlos Fuentes would be read on par with a Günter Grass or an Alain Robbe-Grillet. In this model—best expressed by the term “liberal cosmopolitanism”—literature would neither be a sacrosanct canon of dead Europeans nor a “responsible, committed” movement that exposed oppression by imperialists and petits-bourgeois. In their model, the Boom would represent the emergence of Latin American modernism, a modernism as intellectually sophisticated and self-conscious as the work of Proust or Faulkner.

Before he became editor of *Mundo Nuevo*, Monegal wrote an article in the CCF-sponsored journal *Encounter*, claiming that the second half of the twentieth century would witness a flowering of the Latin American novel equivalent to what happened in Russia and the United States in the nineteenth century. Guillermo Cabrera Infante wrote to Monegal after the article came out, excited about Monegal's bold prediction. “Estoy de acuerdo con su apreciación de que esta segunda mitad del siglo vera surgir la novela de America de habla española con la fuerza con que surgió la novela rusa y americana,”²³ Cabrera Infante wrote from London, where he was privately venting his frustrations with the Castro government to Monegal.

Cabrera Infante, an early supporter of the Cuban Revolution and director of the wildly experimental literary supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, corresponded with Monegal frequently, often to complain about the political threats from the Cuban regime he had turned his back on. When Monegal started editing *Mundo Nuevo*, Cabrera Infante saw an

²³ Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal, letter to Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal Papers, Princeton University. Box 4, folder 3.

opportunity to regain a position at a prestigious literary magazine and earn a steady income, something he sorely needed in London. “Estoy realment mal económicamente,” Cabrera Infante told Monegal in April, 1967.²⁴

In 1966, Cabrera Infante was still working on *Tres tristes tigres*, purportedly revising its contents in line with his disillusionment with the Cuban Revolution. Carlos Barral, the famous editor from Barcelona, had agreed to republish the novel, and Monegal worked out a deal with Barral to publish individual chapters in *Mundo Nuevo*. Although Cabrera Infante is generally considered among the “second tier” of Boom authors because he never enjoyed the overwhelming critical or commercial success of the four core Boom writers, he was a subject of intense interest among the upper echelon of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, including the devoted anticommunist and co-editor of *Encounter*, Melvin Lasky. Cabrera Infante told Monegal that he had been interviewed by Lasky, and a version of the discussion would run in *Encounter* in March. “Contaría con pelos y señales el problema cultural de Cuba,” Cabrera Infante said.²⁵ As a militant anticommunist, Lasky recognized that it was important to give visibility to Cuban writers willing to question the legitimacy of the Cuban Revolution. Cabrera Infante was ready to formally break with the Cuban regime, but Monegal urged him not to do so. Monegal argued that taking an explicit stance on Cuba would politicize the magazine and embolden its critics on the left. By 1967, Cabrera Infante had taken preliminary steps toward signaling his discontent: he had pulled a story of his from a British anthology of Cuban fiction when he learned that the editor would write that all the contributors were loyal to the Castro government. “Este repudio mío es mi primer acto público en contra declarada al gobierno de Máximo Bully,” Cabrera Infante wrote, using a stinging pseudonym for Castro.²⁶

Although *Mundo Nuevo* had been conceived by CCF leaders—especially the CIA agents Michael Josselson and John Hunt—as a way to create an alternative cultural voice to the Cuban Revolution in Latin America, the editor, Monegal, was not eager to have an outright dissident

²⁴ Rodríguez Monegal letter to Cabrera Infante.

²⁵ Rodríguez Monegal letter to Cabrera Infante.

²⁶ Rodríguez Monegal letter to Cabrera Infante.

as one of his premier contributors. The Cuban Revolution was still a touchstone for international intellectuals who hoped for a non-Soviet version of socialism for the underdeveloped world. Monegal told Cabrera Infante that, although he sympathized with the latter's increasingly pessimistic view of the situation in Cuba, it would be prudent not to seem hostile toward the Revolution. Indeed, Monegal's reply to Cabrera Infante comes off as a diplomatic entreaty for caution with respect to Cuba:

Es muy importante que una revista como *Mundo Nuevo* esté por encima, no sólo de las críticas malintencionadas de nuestros enemigos sino también de las bien intencionadas de gente que todavía se resiste a creer que las cosas en Cuba andan tan mal como andan. Hay que darles tiempo a que lo vayan descubriendo y en esa labor nosotros tenemos que ser sumamente cautelosos.²⁷

It is reasonable to conclude from the exchange that Monegal saw Cabrera Infante as a key element in *Mundo Nuevo*'s project to shift the Boom's political allegiances away from the Cuban Revolution with its model of the committed, responsible writer. Monegal's exchanges with Botsford and Cabrera Infante make it clear that the Uruguayan viewed the Cuban regime as totalitarian and nationalistic, even as he expressed a positive view of it in public, such as in his interview with Carlos Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina."²⁸ Monegal also seemed to realize that enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution helped feed international enthusiasm for the Boom and that to explicitly denounce the Revolution might get him labeled a reactionary. The correspondence between Monegal and Cabrera Infante also shows that Monegal knew that to express these political beliefs outright would be suicide for his magazine. For this reason—not because *Mundo Nuevo* was "committed to dialogue," as he often claimed in the magazine—Monegal published pieces that reflected an ambivalent attitude towards Cuba. Only later, when the Padilla Case came to international media attention in 1971, would Latin American writers begin to explicitly break ranks with Cuba.

The struggle over how best to deal with Cuba while promoting a liberal, cosmopolitan view of the Boom was only one of *Mundo Nuevo*'s

²⁷ Rodríguez Monegal letter to Cabrera Infante.

²⁸ Emir Rodríguez Rodríguez Monegal, interview with Carlos Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," *Mundo Nuevo*, no. 1 (July 1966).

dilemmas in its first two heady years. The other main struggle was with cultural nationalism that defended literature as an autochthonous expression of a nation's identity. This cultural nationalism found a political voice on the right in Peronism. The anticommunist liberalism of the CCF had already led to a feud with Miguel Angel Asturias before *Mundo Nuevo* even began publishing. Literary movements in early- to mid-twentieth century Latin America like *regionalismo* and *criollismo* had provided rhetorical power for a defense of the nation. But to Donoso, the regionalist trend in Latin American fiction was oppressive for his generation. In fact, Donoso asserts that Boom's defining characteristic is its rejection of realist, provincial fiction from Latin America and Spain and its simultaneous embrace of European and U.S. modernism. In Donoso's memoir—perhaps the single most revealing document about the relationships between writers, publishers, literary agents, and editors during the Boom years—he voices his generation's frustrations with cultural nationalism. Donoso rails against the regionalist tradition embodied by *criollismo*:

With their entomologist's magnifying glasses, the *criollistas* were cataloguing the flora and proverbs which were unmistakably ours. A novel was considered good if it loyally reproduced these autochthonous worlds, all that which specifically makes us different—which separates us—from other areas and other countries of the continent, a type of foolproof, chauvinistic machismo.²⁹

Mundo Nuevo would provide exactly the kind of antidote to the “local color” Donoso found so repugnant. As Monegal explained it, the name of the magazine came from a desire to break free from the region's literary traditions while also referencing the “New World.” Donoso wanted to transcend the ideological battles and nationalistic literary traditions that had hampered the development of an innovative Latin American literature. But while *Mundo Nuevo*—like its founder—tried to be diplomatic about the project to recast the Boom as a liberal cosmopolitan movement by accepting “dialógo” and the “fecunda circulación de ideas y puntos de vista contrarios,”³⁰ Donoso expressed his distaste for the overt political content of much Latin American writing:

²⁹ Donoso, 33.

³⁰ “Presentación.” *Mundo Nuevo*, no. 1 (July, 1966), 4.

Along with the *criollistas*, social realism also attempted to raise isolating barriers: the novel of protest, preoccupied with national concerns, with the "important social problems" which urgently needed to be solved, imposing a lasting and deceptive criterion: in addition to being unmistakably ours, as the *criollistas* wanted, the novel should be, above all else, "important ... serious," an instrument which would be directly useful to social progress. Any attitude which might be accused of leaving the bad taste of something that might be labeled "Aestheticism" was anathema. Formal experimentation was prohibited.³¹

This was a view shared by Carlos Fuentes in his interview with Monegal in the first edition of *Mundo Nuevo*, "La situación del escritor en América Latina", in which Fuentes drops names of prominent Hollywood figures and then-voguish thinkers like Marshall McLuhan. Indeed, one of the few common characteristics of the core Boom writers was their dim view of the preceding generation of writers from their home countries. In the years before the Boom—especially the 1930s and 1940s—writers like the Ecuadorian Jorge Icaza used stripped-down prose and one-dimensional characters to portray exploitation of the indigenous people of the Andes by the local ruling class and North American capitalists. As Donoso notes, these writers sought to reconstruct national conflicts within the world of the novel and rejected narrative innovation as "europeizante."

V.

Because the core writers of the Boom—García Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa—managed to transcend regional boundaries and occupy canonical places in "international literary space," scholars have devoted their critical energies to analyzing these writers' use of language and literary innovation. Traces of Faulkner, Kafka, and Borges have been analyzed in novels and narratologists have laid bare the complicated structures that underpin Boom novels. Critics who have paid serious attention to the political and commercial apparatus of the Boom, on the other hand, have tended to dismiss the period as a corrupting influence of liberal capitalism. Remarkably few critics have focused on these writers' relationships to the social and historical milieu from which they emerged in

³¹ Donoso, 33.

a way that avoids reenacting Cold War-era polemics about the writers' responsibility to social action.³² As Casanova points out, scholarly focus on the networks of patronage and prestige in literary studies need not imply that formal aspects of writing do not matter. Rather, it helps us put into perspective which sort of formal qualities are valued, who constructs this value, and to what political ends literature can be deployed. This is a subject that writers themselves—who have a vested interest in protecting the integrity and mystery of their craft—have been reluctant to discuss. Nevertheless, when we consider Boom texts in the light of Cold War political struggles, we see the enormous value invested in literature in particular, and in cultural production more generally. Careful scrutiny of funding, publishing histories, and networks of patronage for the arts reminds us of the incredible vitality and dynamism of a true work of art—as well as its ability to resist propaganda.

³² Exceptions—and inspirations for this current project—include Deborah Cohn, “A Tale of Two Translation Programs: Politics, the Market, and Rockefeller Funding for Latin American Literature in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s,” *Latin American Research Review* 41.2 (2006) 139-164, and Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola, “Consuming Aesthetics: Seix Barral and José Donoso in the Field of Latin American Literary Production,” *MLN* 115.2 (2000), 323-339.