

The Destructive Persistence of Myths and Stereotypes: Civilization and Barbarism Redux in Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto*

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Between December 1996 and April 1997 members of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) held over seventy men captive, sequestering them in the Lima home of the Japanese ambassador to Peru. On April 22, 1997, military forces raided the house, freeing the hostages and killing their fourteen captors. Subsequent reports indicated that the soldiers had executed the rebels – many of whom were teenagers – even as some attempted to surrender.

Ann Patchett's novel *Bel Canto* is a fictionalized account of this hostage crisis. In her work, Patchett not only re-writes the horrific events of this lengthy conflict, but also complicates its dynamics by creating participants who represent a wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, classes, and linguistic groups. She also introduces female as well as male characters, creating a complex series of juxtapositions within the confines of the work's cloistered setting. Although at first glance the novel appears sympathetic in portraying the relationships and love interests that develop among its diverse cast of characters, it ultimately reinforces the age-old stereotypes of the good, innocent European/Americans versus the bad, unwashed Primitives, saviors versus sinners, and the triumph of civilization over barbarism.

This essay focuses on the evolution of the traditional binary of civilization versus barbarism in U.S./European-Latin American relations and its political consequences. It contains three sections: first, an overview of the historical "clash of civilizations" articulated in writings about and from Latin America; second, Patchett's deployment of the myths and stereotypes of this duality in the novel; and, third, the way that such beliefs and attitudes rationalize, justify and promote the contemporary political behavior of hegemonic national powers toward their lower-income counterparts.

Before turning to this analysis, the following briefly describes Patchett's retelling of the events. In the novel, as in real life, a group of rebels invades a large gathering of dignitaries at a party. They take the group hostage at gunpoint, allowing nearly all of the women and elderly to leave within a few hours – except for one. She is the central figure in the novel – a U.S. opera singer named Roxane Coss – who is forced to remain with the other hostages for the conflict's duration. Roxane brings "high" culture to the other captives and the rebels, which eventually transforms and metaphorically "saves" many of those involved in the ordeal. It is a story of the triumph of civilization over barbarism, in which the allegedly culturally superior Westerners illuminate the lives of the Latin American "terrorists" – and eventually walk away unscathed after witnessing their massacre.

Creating National Identity: The Myth of Civilizing the Americas

The French conceived of the notion of civilization in the eighteenth century to distinguish themselves from those they deemed to be "barbarians." As Samuel Huntington writes,

Civilized society differed from primitive society because it was settled, urban and literate. To be civilized was good, to be uncivilized was bad. The concept of civilization provided a standard by which to judge societies, and during the nineteenth century, Europeans devoted much intellectual, diplomatic, and political energy to elaborating the criteria by

which non-European societies might be judged sufficiently 'civilized' to be accepted as members of the European-dominated international system (40-41).

Throughout the nineteenth century, as the former colonies in Latin America underwent the arduous process of nation-building, their leaders and thinkers struggled with hybrid identities that combined European and indigenous elements (as well as influences from other ethnic and racial groups in the Americas). For some, embracing European "civilization" was the solution to the numerous conflicts that erupted in the post-Independence period, and perhaps the most prominent proponent of such thinking was Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the Argentine educator and writer who became nation's president in 1868. Sarmiento diagnosed Argentina's violent division between the city and the countryside as a struggle between civilization and barbarism, with the tyrant Juan Manuel de Rosas personifying the latter. Consistent with the French definition, Sarmiento saw civilization as "modern European ideas and practices...based in the cities, particularly Buenos Aires; barbarism, meanwhile, represents the backwardness of the countryside, especially the Pampas" (González Echeverría 12). His seminal work, *Facundo* (1845), which he wrote while exiled in Chile, calls for Americans to "civilize" themselves culturally by adopting European ways:

Si un destello de literatura nacional puede brillar momentáneamente en las nuevas sociedades americanas, es el que resultará de la descripción de las grandiosas escenas naturales, i sobre todo, de la lucha entre la civilización europea i la barbarie indígena, entre la intelijencia i la material....(47)¹

At the same time, Sarmiento exhorted his nation to open its doors to increased European immigration, asking, "[D]espues de la Europa, hai otro mundo cristiano civilizable i desierto que la América? (16). If only the territory were populated with white Europeans – he would also accept U.S. Americans – its problems would be solved. Having spent time as his nation's envoy to the United States, Sarmiento also marveled over this nation's "taming" of the Western frontier. With the help of his friend Horace Mann and Mann's wife, (the latter became a translator of Sarmiento's works), the Argentine arranged for sixty-five "schoolmarms" to visit the outlying provinces and serve as civilizers of the pampas, just as they had done in the U.S. west (Pike 13).

While white females have often been depicted as symbolizing – or literally facilitating – civilization in the new American nations, Latin American women have been frequently associated with untamed nature, loose morals, and barbarism. Frederick Pike clearly delineates this prostitute/schoolmarm distinction, categorizing among the former group Indians, Asians, Blacks, and Mexicans. In fact, Latina women were constantly portrayed as prostitutes, who "seemed the products of nature rather than of civilization" (Pike 10). "Just as the whores stood for nature that would be exploited and ultimately.... eliminated, so the schoolmarm stood for the forces of civilization that would accomplish the 'domestication of the wilderness'"(13).

The "primitive" American woman – depicted repeatedly in U.S. and Latin American writings – represented the challenges of conquest, subjugation, and "domestication" that attracted men to the untamed (and often dangerous) backwaters of the region. Seen in this light, the title character in Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929) is the archetypal "*devoradora de hombres*" (511) whose power struggle with the civilized Santos Luzardo results in her eventual downfall. In the novel, Luzardo returns to the countryside to bring order to the family ranch. He

clashes with Doña Bárbara, whose wild ways have broken down the boundaries between their properties and allowed her animals to run roughshod over neighboring lands. Luzardo engages in a legal battle with Bárbara and “civilizes” the ranch by branding cattle, erecting fences, and enforcing contracts to protect his holdings. At the same time, he seduces her daughter, Marisela, who had been living in a swamp, unwashed and uneducated. He takes her to live in the ranch house, where they begin an unequal relationship in which the native woman becomes the pupil and Luzardo the teacher; he sets out to domesticate her through the teaching of language, manners and city ways.

In a chapter called, “*Los amansadores*,” the novel simultaneously describes a ranch hand’s domestication of a wild horse named *Catira* and Luzardo’s “taming” of Marisela. The text juxtaposes the two females, debasing the latter to the level of a wild animal:

Laborioso fue el amansamiento, porque la Catira tenía un ‘corcoveo jacheado’ que había de ser muy a caballo para mantenerse encima...

—¿Cómo va la Catira, Carmelito?—solía preguntarle Luzardo.

— ¡Ahí, doctor! Ya está cogiendo el paso. ¿Y a usted, cómo le va en lo suyo?

Se refería a la tarea de la educación de Marisela, emprendida por Santos.

También Marisela tenía un ‘corcoveo jacheado’. No porque le costase trabajo aprender, sino porque de pronto se enfurruñaba con el maestro (622).

As Luzardo continued to train Marisela, she resists his efforts and pleads repeatedly, “*Déjeme ir para mi monte otra vez*” (622, 623, 625). But Luzardo is determined to mold her vocabulary and behavior, “[E]n cuanto a modales y costumbres, los modelos eran señoritas de Caracas” (623). Her sexual “looseness” is also not-too-subtly implied, as she and the mare *Catira* shared the “...[c]orcoveo jacheado’ que había de ser muy a caballo para mantenerse encima...” (622). Having moved into the ranch, Marisela clearly allowed her education to extend into the bedroom. Luzardo corrected her vocabulary throughout the day, but “Las lecciones propiamente, eran por las noches” (623). Marisela eventually submits to him – with civilization once again triumphant – and his victory is proven when she finally asks him to give her a lesson one night. The comparison to the resistant mare resurfaces, with the narrator’s observation: “Lo mismo que la *Catira*, que después de unos corcoveos cogía el paso por sí sola” (625).

Gallegos and Sarmiento shared the common political missions of nation-building – each became his country’s president – and sought to shape national identity by asserting their ideals of hegemonic authority in society. Each worked to subjugate, convert, or eliminate existing cultures by forcing upon them language, music, art, literature or other trappings of “high culture” while negating the value of their own traditions and experiences. And each victory, following Doris Sommer’s argument, involved the Gramscian concept of “conquering the antagonist through mutual interest, or ‘love’ rather than coercion” (Sommer 6).² In fact, the teaching of language, music, art, and “high culture” have long served the elite classes as instruments of domination – from the earliest missionaries who arrived in Latin America to today’s globalized versions of cultural and economic imperialism.³ As Marianne Torgovnick writes, “[s]ooner or later those familiar tropes for primitives become the tropes conventionally used for women. Global politics, the dance of colonizer and colonized, becomes sexual politics, the dance of male and female” (17).

Patchett’s twenty-first century rendition of such a culture clash strays little from those written decades ago: it creates a scenario in which a white North American woman finds herself

in a “barbaric” hostage situation in a poor country, and proceeds to teach, civilize and win the love of all who surround her. She does so by introducing them to highbrow art music, which makes them not only forget their political aims and motivations, but also convinces them to reject their own way of life and embrace Western ways. Her efforts are supported by Gen, the Japanese translator who serves as an intermediary between the rebels and the international hostages, and who also becomes a teacher of many and lover of one of the natives, Roxane Coss’ darker-skinned foil.

Civilization and Barbarism in Bel Canto

The irony of *Bel Canto* is that music embodies both its most truly civilized and most barbaric elements. From the very beginning, the Latin American rebels are drawn to the opera singer because of the beauty of her song – not for its words, but for its sound. As they wait in air conditioning ducts for their moment to attack, they overhear Roxane’s singing:

When a girl in their village had a pretty voice, one of the old women would say she had swallowed a bird, and this is what they tried to say to themselves as they looked at the pile of hair pins resting on the pistachio chiffon of her gown:... but they know it wasn’t true. In all their ignorance, in all their unworldliness, they knew there had never been such a bird (24).

As the crisis unfolds, the hostages from every country, speaking a vast array of languages, fall in love with the sound of Roxane’s singing. They are bound together physically, but are also united by their primordial attraction to the music. And it is that music, as Nietzsche reminds us, that gives birth to tragedy—an intensity of emotions and experiences that provides life with meaning:

For a brief moment we become, ourselves, the primal being, and we experience its insatiable hunger for existence. Now we see the struggle, the pain, the destruction of appearances, as necessary, because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life, because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will. We feel the furious prodding of this travail in the very moment in which we become one with the immense lust for life and are made aware of the eternity and indestructibility of that lust. Pity and terror notwithstanding, we realize our great good fortune in having life—not as individuals, but as part of the life force with whose procreative lust we have become one... Our study of the genesis of Greek tragedy has shown us clearly how that tragic art rose out of music... (Nietzsche 102-103).⁴

Both the hostages and the rebels reach a higher understanding and appreciation of their existence while in captivity than ever before. The Japanese businessman, Katsumi Hosokawa, falls in love with Roxane and her music, “Her voice stays inside him, becomes him. She is singing her part to him, and to a thousand other people. He is anonymous, equal, loved” (50). His life is completely transformed:

Everything that Mr. Hosokawa has ever known or suspected about the way life worked had been proven to him to be incorrect these past months... Where there had been a respectable family that functioned in the highest order, there were now people he loved and could not speak to. Where there had been a few minutes of opera on a stereo at bedtime, there were now hours of music every day, the living warmth of voice in all its perfection and fallibility, a woman in possession of that voice who sat beside him laughing, holding his hand (228).

The priest, Father Arguedas, is similarly enraptured: “What a blessing he had received in his captivity. The mysteries of Christ’s love had never been closer to him, not when he said mass or received communion, not even on the day he took holy orders. He realized now he was only just beginning to see the full extent to which it was his destiny to follow....(156). And the rebel, Carmen, expresses, “[T]his was the happiest time of her life and it was because of the music. When she was a child dreaming on her pallet at night, she never dreamed of pleasures like these” (156). The Russian hostage also declares his love for the opera singer, the gruff rebel leader General Benjamin lays down his weapon and begins to pass his days playing chess, and the uncultured “native” Cesar finds that love awakens his natural talent for opera: “He was only a boy who loved her by singing. Or was it singing he loved? He could no longer remember. He was too far inside...” (267). The music puts the characters in touch with the essence of their true being, reaching Nietzsche’s Dionysian state of “primordial unity,” and grasping their “great good fortune in having life—not as individuals, but as part of the life force with whose procreative lust [we] have become one...” (Nietzsche 103).⁵

Unfortunately, while the text recites the mantra of music as the universal language, it simultaneously asserts the superiority of Western art music over “lesser” forms of cultural expression. Indigenous music – of which there was an abundant collection in the vice president’s house, where the novel takes place – was held in low regard by the hostages. In contrast, though, before they are “saved” by Roxane’s music the Peruvians appreciated their native music. The vice president “seemed only to have a taste for local music. All of his CDs were of bands playing high-pitched pipes and crude drums. The music gave Mr. Hosokawa a headache. The Generals, however, found it inspiring and would not grant requests of new CDs” (133). The “high-pitched pipes and crude drums” disparagingly described undoubtedly represent the centuries-old tradition of Andean music, its existence rendered worthless without the recognition and appreciation of Western ears. Just as there are women in the villages who sing as if they had swallowed a bird, other voices are equally exceptional. When Roxane discovers, to her astonishment, that the rebel Cesar has an outstanding voice, she begins to teach him: “He sang every line, every scale, as if the singing would save his life. He was settling into his own voice now and it was a voice that amazed her. It would have lived and died in a jungle, this voice, if she hadn’t come along to rescue it” (307-308). Thus, the voice not heard in civilization is assumed to be at best, inferior, and at worst, silent.

In fact, music has played a crucial role in the assertion of Western primacy for centuries. In the 1800s, as Europe defined itself as the center of civilization, music began to be celebrated as the “most profound of all the arts” (Kerman and Tomlinson 266). For their part, “opera composers and librettists began thinking seriously about the meaning and ‘message’ of their work; they came to view opera as a type of serious drama in music, not just a vehicle for song, spectacle, and entertainment, as had often the case before” (266). And *Bel canto* opera emerged as a glorification of “beautiful singing” (as its name implies), full of the emotional expression of the Romantic period.

But opera also became the vehicle through which cultural hegemony could be conveyed, as its words delivered messages charged with political, ethnic, racial and gender-biased content. Indeed, for Nietzsche opera signified a rupture with the purity of music’s aesthetic function; it destroyed the unity of human existence and became a means to express individual self-interest:

Opera is the product of the man of theory, the critical layman, not the artist... Since the demand, coming from essentially unmusical people, was for a clear understanding of the

words, a renaissance of music could come about only through the discovery of a type of music in which the words lorded it over counterpoint as a master over his servant (115-116).

As the novel purports a normative hierarchy within music, privileging Western art, it goes further and glorifies opera as an even higher form of expression. Thus it is not only the musical form that the civilized must appreciate, but they necessarily must learn to understand the language in which it is written, and to *accept* the values and norms it conveys. This is the crux of the civilization and barbarism distinction: the dominant powers devalue, eliminate and replace the pre-existing culture – language, traditions, values, notions of beauty, religion, music, and art – and install one they deem superior. It is an abhorrent practice when carried out militarily, but perhaps even more insidious when conducted in the name of love. It is a tradition that is repeated endlessly in dynamics between wealthier, more powerful societies against their poorer counterparts, as this essay has explored. In Argentina, Sarmiento imports teachers to civilize the pampas. Venezuela's Santos Luzardo becomes Marisela's teacher, assuming a dominant role in their love affair and allegorically domesticating the llanos. Patchett's Gen becomes Carmen's teacher, and the rebels (and, allegorically, the Leftist guerrillas of Latin America) lay down their arms and embrace his way of life. There are countless other figures – most of them females – who have become model ambassadors for the oppressive conquistadors, such as Mexico's Malinche and the United States' Pocahontas, as well as those who have been lifted from lower-class "misery," such as Shaw's Eliza Doolittle.

The Anti-Heroine: Carmen

Conspicuously absent from *Bel Canto* is any mention of the Peruvian characters' lives or the reason for their boldly political act of terror. In fact, the novel continuously devalues and belittles the nation and culture in which it is set, describing the rebels as if they were animals, screaming, mimicking and jumping up and down when seeing television for the first time (115); with Beatriz not knowing what a watch was for or how to tell time (169); Cesar climbing a tree to escape embarrassment (269); Ishmael following the vice president around "like a dog" (269); and Carmen rejecting her own beauty because it was "too coarse, too dark. At home some people had called her beautiful but now she had seen beauty and knew it was something she could never possess..." In contrast, she admires the ideal of Western beauty, "Yellow hair, blue eyes, skin like white roses brushed in pink. Who would not be in love with Roxane Coss?" (204). There are only mocking references to the rebels' mission, which fails because of the absence of its primary target, the nation's president. The latter is made to look ridiculous as well, as he has opted to watch a soap opera rather than attend to his official duties (10).

Indeed, there is no figure in the novel who more clearly represents the civilization and barbarism distinction than Carmen, the young rebel who "seduces" Gen. In the tradition of Gallegos' Marisela, the Quechua-speaking native begs the translator to teach her Spanish, as well as English. They begin a secret, unequal love relationship that mirrors the more proper interactions of Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa. Carmen serves as the ignorant, primitive foil to the clean, saintly and well-educated opera singer, a contemporary replication of the age-old Latin American prostitute and white schoolmarm dichotomy.

Her role as the dark "barbarian" is further reinforced by the novel's emphasis on opera and its seductive qualities. In fact, Father Arguedas cites Bizet's opera *Carmen* as one of the works that tempts him to think carnal thoughts, "When he suffered from any feelings of questionable discomfort, he simply rectified the situation by not reading the libretti.... Sadly,

there were times when the lust came through the music rather than the words. Having no understanding of French did not keep a priest safe from *Carmen*. *Carmen* gave him dreams... (53). And, of course, the title character of the opera is a Spanish gypsy who lures the virtuous Don José away from the pure, lighter-skinned Micaela into a life of crime.

In fact, Bizet's *Carmen* can be considered a fairly typical manifestation of the nineteenth century French definition of civilization discussed earlier. Although the opera is based on a novel by Prosper Mérimée, its two librettists Halevy and Meilhac converted the original story to fit the audiences' preferences in 1875 France. They added the character of Micaela to accentuate Carmen's promiscuous "dark" qualities, and also eliminated José's telling of the story while awaiting execution for her murder (Thiers). In both Bizet's opera and Patchett's novel, Carmen is mercilessly and brutally killed in the end, with the former juxtaposing her death to that of a wild bull (she dies in a bullring). In each case, her lover remains unpunished and no one is held responsible for her murder: the life of the barbarian holds little value.

Like its citizens, the country itself is described as "ridiculous" (70) and a place that Mr. Hosokawa only agreed to visit after being assured that Roxane Coss would be there to perform for his birthday celebration. It is portrayed as a barbaric nation, where people live in the jungle and even terrorists cannot remember what they are fighting for. Disturbingly, the novel explicitly refers to its Peruvian setting, mentioning local drinks (*pisco sours*), the light rain or drizzle of the coastal areas (*garúa*), and regional expressions (*requetebueno*), as well as lampooning its former Japanese-Peruvian president. Why, then, does the text never name the country where it takes place? Even the book's back cover describes its location as "somewhere in South America." All of the other characters in the work are assigned nationalities, and their personalities reflect characteristics of the cultures they represent. But not the Peruvians, who are stripped of their nationality and – although transformed and "saved" by their exposure to their Western hostages – remain lesser human beings than their "civilized" counterparts.⁶

In the end, soldiers storm the house, freeing the hostages and gunning down the rebels. The two characters wielding the most power – Gen, for his ability to speak everyone's language and Roxane, for her music – survive the ordeal and move to Italy, where they marry. Safely in Europe, Gen comments that there was no mention in the press of any of the female rebels, observing to another former hostage, "Carmen and Beatriz are never mentioned in the papers. Everything I've read says there were fifty-nine men and one woman... I've called the papers and asked them to publish a correction, but no one is interested. It's almost as if they never existed" (317). In fact, for much of the world, the poor Peruvians, (both in the novel and in reality), never do exist. The text creates them as a means for its "first world" characters to discover the true essence of their own existence, through their captivity and through contact with pure, primitive, uncomplicated natives. To return to Nietzsche, one could say that they entered an illusory, Apollonian dreamlike state, only revealed to them through the Dionysian chorus composed of the "wild" Latin Americans. The music transfigures the tragedy they are witnessing to make it bearable, allowing them "a uniquely truthful insight into the nature of reality" (Heckman 351). The Peruvians, who briefly taste civilization but must ultimately be sacrificed, serve as vehicles for the hostages' rebirth.

The Politics of "Civilized" Discourse

As a U.S. novel written in English, *Bel Canto* falls into the category of Western intellectual production, reinterpreting events in a manner complicit with the hegemon's political and economic interests.⁷ Not only are its characters denied their own voices – some of them Quechua – but the text itself cannot be understood by non-English speakers. It is therefore

doubly removed from Peruvian reality, which is relegated to the farcical, stereotypical realm of the backwards republic where political leaders are impotent buffoons and the natives are like untamed animals.

But naming Latin Americans (or other residents of so-called “developing” countries) as uncivilized or primitive is not merely farcical. It justifies any number of political actions – ranging from covert support of opposition parties to militarily overthrowing uncooperative regimes. As Marianna Torgovnick eloquently articulates, this labeling has repeatedly rationalized aberrant behavior in Western foreign policies:

[I]deas about primitive societies, and, very important, the persistent Western tendency to process the third world as ‘primitive’ have made things happen in the political world. Many events in this century would have been less possible without operative notions of how groups or societies deemed primitive become available to ‘higher’ cultures for conquest, exploitation, or extermination: the partition of Africa, the invasion of Ethiopia, the Nazi ‘final solution’ for Gypsies and Jews, for example. Events closer to us in time have similarly been influenced by shifting views of what is or is not primitive: Vietnam, U.S. actions in the Persian Gulf, Western backing of dictatorships in countries like Zaire, for example. Once we recognize the persistence and fluidity of primitivist discourse, Western attitudes toward and media coverage of many events can be seen as extensions of older and, to some, extent, discredited, traditions (13).

That *Bel Canto* re-tells the story of the Peruvian hostage crisis of 1996 – 1997 falls squarely within the dynamics of the sort of “primitivist discourse” that Torgovnick describes. As long as the first world persists in portraying residents of the third world as faceless, dangerous and subhuman, it can continue to exploit, invade, and dominate at will. This discourse creates conditions of fear and distrust in the imperial population, rationalizing military, economic, political and cultural aggression. Whether based in reality or in fiction (or a blurring of the two), it is an effective tool of political propaganda, as J.M. Coetzee observes in *Waiting for the Barbarians*:

[S]tories began to reach us from the capital of unrest among the barbarians... The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war. Of this unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe (8).

In the case of Peru, barbaric terrorists were not mere inventions of political propaganda, but the situation was far more complex than *Bel Canto* would have its readers believe. The true tragedy of Peruvian reality in its recent history was that approximately 70,000 of its citizens were murdered between 1980 and 2000 by either the military or rebel groups. Three-quarters of the casualties did not speak Spanish as their first language, despite the fact that less than one-fifth of the population belonged to this group. Indigenous people – traditionally marginalized by the state

– were widely recruited by and coerced to join rebel organizations, and were then overwhelmingly caught in the violent clashes between security forces and terrorists (Comisión de la Verdad). As the novel accurately recounts, many of the “terrorists” in this hostage crisis were teenagers who were playing soccer when soldiers burst in and killed them. Like the fictional Beatriz, many of them raised their hands in surrender and were shot anyway. And, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as violence raged, the United States government increased its military assistance to Peru, eventually making it the second largest recipient of aid in the world.

Bel Canto blurs the line between fact and fiction, and as such becomes one version of the truth. As it interprets reality, it shapes it, either creating new concepts and images of people and places, or reinforcing existing ones. When speaking in the voice of the hegemon, the Western novel must understand the power of its words and the consequences of its discourse. Not to do so would be nothing less than barbaric.

Notes

¹ According to González Echevarría (I), Sarmiento attempted to reform and simplify the Spanish language by eliminating the letter *y*, which represents the same sound as the *i*. Although his efforts failed, some subsequent editions of *Facundo* remain faithful to the author's original orthography.

² Sommers' *Foundational Fictions* refers specifically to the national romantic novels that emerged during the foundational period of Latin American nation-building. She discusses an "erotic of politics" in which patriotism and romantic love are inextricably intertwined, and heterosexual relationships served as catalysts for successful domestic governance and civil society.

³ Frederick Pike observes that in the post-WWII period, the United States actively promoted the performance of "pure" classical music – free from ethnic influences – to assert the nation's cultural predominance and distinguish it from the "barbaric" Communists. He also links the participation of big business (the RCA company and NBC) to the promotion of such music, in collaboration with the government's political agenda.

⁴ In many ways Nietzsche's complex intermingling of the Apollonian and Dionysian elements that combine to create tragedy can in themselves be interpreted as reflections of the civilization and barbarism distinctions. The notion of barbarism was created to give life to that which was "civilized," and one cannot exist without the other – the Dionysian – unfettered, free, and natural (and often viewed as feminine)– can be compared to the masculine order that is Apollonian in a way that mirrors "primitive" cultures versus civilizations.

⁵ For a discussion of differing views of the role of music in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, see Heckman. It is unclear whether Nietzsche viewed art as a vehicle of truth, or one that provides illusions rather than truth. Although his later writing altered somewhat his position on art, he clearly maintained a strong association between music and "the world will" (Heckman 357).

⁶ Deborah Weisgall interviewed Ann Patchett about the notion that *Bel Canto* was about the "redemptive power of art," asking, "[B]y the end of the book, you make the argument that art is the only possible redemption. But on the other hand, art can save nobody." Patchett responded: "Heavens! Roxane *did* redeem them. She gave them all freedom, beauty, love. She gave them art, in many cases introduced them to art. Their lives were shorter than they should have been, but at least they had a little while to know brilliance. What does it mean to be saved? What if opera takes on the role of faith, what if it saves the soul?" In other words, not only does the text imply that exposure to high Western art "saves" or "redeems" the rebels, the author apparently believes it as well.

⁷ On Western intellectuals' complicity in furthering economic interests at the expense of subaltern groups, see Spivak's brilliant essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

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