

De Castro, Juan E. *Writing Revolution: From Martí to García Márquez to Bolaño*.
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Juan E. De Castro's *Writing Revolution: From Martí to García Márquez to Bolaño* analyzes how Latin American fiction portrays various socialist revolutions of the twentieth century. De Castro explores the complexity and contradictions of this era and the novelistic production of several of its major authors. The book explores the limits of revolutionary politics and socialist projects in novels by Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Manuel Puig, Roberto Bolaño, and Carla Guelfenbein. The book is divided into four substantial body chapters. The introduction presents the rise and fall of "revolutionary enthusiasm" as its parameters and uses the term revolution to refer specifically to socialist movements. De Castro traces an ideological evolution from the 1960s optimism in large-scale social projects to an implied acceptance of neoliberal order as the inescapable *status quo*.

The first body chapter traces the ideological underpinnings of the cultural and philosophical writings of José Martí and José Carlos Mariátegui as revolutionary icons. De Castro describes Martí as a reader and critic of Marx, and, although Fidel Castro would later claim Martí as "the revolution's first and greatest influence," De Castro interprets Martí more as an anti-imperialist reformist than an anti-capitalist revolutionary (14). Mariátegui, on the other hand, is considered Latin America's first Marxist. De Castro qualifies Mariátegui's embrace of socialism with the caveat that he rejected the one-size-fits-all approach of Soviet communism. Mariátegui affirms, as De Castro points out, that any socialist project to be implemented in Peru must take into account the local realities. De Castro also underscores Mariátegui's critique of unbridled nationalism as well as the dangers of the cult of the leader.

The chapter, "Boom in the Revolution, Revolution in the Boom: What is Revolutionary about the Novel in the 1960s?" engages deeply with the Boom authors as an established group. He describes their initial joint support for the Cuban Revolution and their various evolutions for and against the Castro regime. De Castro cites the "Padilla affair" in 1971 as the turning point that put an end to the group's joint endorsement of the Cuban government. The book includes anecdotes regarding the personal friendships between the Boom members, including Vargas Llosa's and García Márquez's

“passionate nine-year bromance” ending in Vargas Llosa’s infamous punch to García Márquez in 1971 (60). De Castro presents Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Carlos Fuentes’s *The Death of Artemio Cruz* as critical of revolutions and of revolutionaries. De Castro clarifies that, in light of Mariátegui, the uprisings in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are not revolutionary, as they are merely cyclical changes of power from one party to another that do not bring any socialist structural change. Furthermore, De Castro explains that the novel implies “*conservadurismo* as the de facto ideology of the Colombian people,” since Coronel Aureliano Buendía comes to terms with the concessions made to the conservatives and determines that they are actually positive changes supported by a broad base of the people (65). The next section of this chapter analyzes *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. Fuentes’s novel depicts the Mexican Revolution as another small revolution, since it put its leaders into power without fully implementing its revolutionary promises. In contrast, the novel holds up the Spanish Republic (1931-1939) as a genuine, if defeated, revolution. According to De Castro, both novels present history not as linear, but as cyclical, with no gains toward social progress. In the chapter’s discussion of the Boom novels, De Castro clarifies the differences between the authors’ changing ideologies or lack thereof with how they represent revolution in their novels. He briefly mentions that the North American and European modern novelists (Joyce, Proust, Faulkner) were much more influential to the Boom authors than the Latin American regionalists’ novels of the early twentieth century. The Boom authors’ desire to produce modern literature was just as important a factor, if not more so, than their personal political affiliations at any given time. De Castro provides the example of Cortázar, who was the most radical of the Boom authors in terms of public political commitments, but his avant-garde metafiction is almost politically indifferent. De Castro summarizes that although the Boom novelists were supportive of the Cuban Revolution during the 1960s, they did not idealize revolution in their novels.

In Chapter 3 “The Fall of the Revolutionary and the Return of Liberal Democracy,” De Castro studies two novels published in the post-Boom era: Vargas Llosa’s *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* and Manuel Puig’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Both novels depict the loss of belief in the possibility of the “maximalist revolution” and the acceptance of liberal democracy. Additionally, both novels deal with the issues of identity and sexuality as important literary preoccupations. *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* is a postmodern novel about the impossibility of reaching the truth through history or fiction and presents any attempt at revolution as a disaster. However, in contrast to Vargas Llosa’s conservative ideology, the novel presents the revolutionary protagonist as a sympathetic character. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was written in the context of Isabel Perón’s repressive government and wrestles with the “need

for, as well as the impossibility of, radical action” (110). De Castro contextualizes the novel in the culture of psychoanalysis in Argentina as well as in both fascist and socialist ideologies that promote homophobia. Puig’s novel proposes a radical change in social structures, including sexual identity and orientation and points out flaws in revolutionary frameworks that deny individual liberation.

The chapter “Revolution after the Demise of Revolution” justifies the overwhelming critical reception of the work of Roberto Bolaño, and takes seriously the work of Carla Guelfenbein, who is mainly known as a more commercial writer. For De Castro, Bolaño carries on the exoticism of the Boom years but through excess instead of magical realism. Bolaño captures the hyperbolic realities of Latin America (drug trade violence, fascist brutality, as well as the extreme precarity of Bolaño’s poets) along with the mourning period for the revolutionary movements. Bolaño’s work criticizes the absurdity of the political reality of Latin America in the twentieth century and its “Pied-Piper-like leaders” that led optimistic, naive youth supporters to their deaths (142-43). De Castro characterizes Bolaño as a post-revolutionary and post-political writer who examines the traumas of recent history through an ethical lens. Drawing on Jean Franco, De Castro highlights how Bolaño portrays the Nazi regime and the Holocaust as the “origin” for the many socio-political disasters of the twentieth century, including the Tlatelolco massacre, Pinochet’s Chile, and the femicides of Ciudad Juarez (144). The final literary analysis in the book deals with the novel *Nadar desnudas* (Swimming Naked) by Carla Guelfenbein, which is a romance set against the backdrop of the Allende government and the subsequent Pinochet dictatorship. The novel presents the effects of dictatorship on an individual psychological level. De Castro examines the novel’s intersections with 9/11/2001, the Czech revolution of 1968, Castro’s visit to Chile in 1971, and the domestic instability and violence that led to the defeat of Allende and the rise of Pinochet to power. De Castro claims that although Guelfenbein’s novelistic technique is in response to the demands of the neoliberal market, the novel itself presents a critical view of the neoliberal landscape ushered in by Pinochet’s regime. According to *Writing Revolution*, while Bolaño’s and Guelfenbein’s novels differ in myriad ways, both writers reject revolutionary politics as useful or plausible in any realistic sense.

Overall, according to De Castro, the writers covered in this study express mistrust of revolutionary projects and call out systematic abuses and oppression. The overarching theme of the book is how Latin American writers have used fiction to deal with the failures and impossibility of revolution and the collective acceptance of the neoliberal order. While specialists in the twentieth-century Latin American novel will most surely appreciate the depth and breadth of De Castro’s

analysis, generalists will also benefit from the book's chronological study of Latin American writing alongside major revolutionary and political events of the last century.