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**“Sympathetic Travelling”: Horizontal Ethics and Aesthetics in
Paco Ignacio Taibo’s Belascoarán Shayne Novels**

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[Accepted Manuscript]

Despite a nineteenth-century war of independence waged in the name of republican values, and a twentieth century revolution fought in the name of democracy—its “verbal banner,” “Valid Voting, No Reelection” (Krauze 239)—Mexico has remained locked within a pyramidal structure that has consistently and aggressively denied political, cultural and economic freedoms, centralising and concentrating power in the hands of an authoritarian few. According to historian and activist Enrique Krauze, the repeated failure of democratic ideals in Mexico has, in large part been due to the fact that, “across the centuries,” it has submitted to the “concentration of power into a single person (*tlatoani*, monarch, viceroy, emperor, President, caudillo, *jéfé*, *estadista*)” (244). In *Mexico: Biography of Power*, Krauze describes the failure of decolonization and the Mexican Revolution to achieve emancipation and democratization as the result of a peculiarly Mexican inability to shake off an “historic” habit, of elevating “personages” over ideals; the result then, of a mass capitulation to “emblematic” all-powerful individuals (243). Such a habit, which Krauze interprets as a remnant of both Indian and Spanish traditions of absolute power, “one emanating from the gods and one emanating from God” (xiv), institutionalized a “social pyramid” (220) in which a virtually untouchable paternalist leader and state presided over a mass of Mexicans who were positioned as “submissive children” (Braun 513). In Mexico, then, power and authority have historically been mapped onto a vertical axis, with the President a personification of power at its apex, the Mexican *pueblo* on a horizontal plane at the pyramid’s base.

Towards the end of the 1950s, however, this pyramid appeared to be on the point of being dismantled. Divergent groups of the population began to take to the streets in order to protest against different manifestations of state oppression, and relations with the government began rapidly to deteriorate. The integrity of the paternalism upholding this “vertical” system began to be questioned and a new kind of connection began to be forged in which Mexicans found their political identity, not through a relationship with the “paternal and authoritarian Mexican state,” but through a shared “uncompromising opposition to it” (Hugo Hiriart, cited in Braun 512).

This crisis in confidence reached its zenith in 1968 when an unprecedented number of students and activists took to the streets, demanding that President Díaz Ordaz should listen and respond to their grievances. The students were themselves responding to the government’s increasingly brutal suppression of minor acts of rebellion. In Morelia in October 1966, a student from Guerrero had been shot to death by police during a demonstration against an increase in bus fares. Having ominously decreed earlier that year, that “No one ha[d] rights against Mexico,” Díaz Ordaz had sent in paratroopers to break up the crowds and ordered the army to enter and search student residences and to carry out a series of evictions, “at bayonet point” (Krauze 689-90). A few months later he sent Mexico City’s “tear gas brigades,” the *granaderos*, to “pacify” skirmishing gangs of high-school students, and used them again violently to disrupt a routine pro-Castro march, killing three students and injuring and imprisoning hundreds (Braun 519). In late August 1968 the students staged walkouts, closing every school and university in Mexico City. During the next few weeks well over 140,000 students and left wing sympathizers marched on their city, their protests culminating in a mass assembly in the Plaza de las

Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco neighbourhood. This time, Díaz Ortaz's propensity to act violently spiraled out of control. The army, the police, the *granaderos*, and a specialist security force trained to police the imminent Mexico Olympics, encircled the protestors and opened fire, creating "a closed circle of hell" (Krauze 719). Thousands were injured and thousands arrested. "Agitators" were rounded up, accused of robbery, assault, incitement of rebellion and even homicide. An unknown number were killed; their bodies disappeared.

For some, what was lost at Tlatelolco was a sense of Mexican modernity. Abandoning history, as history seemed to have abandoned them, these survivors interpreted the massacre as part of a death-driven cycle, in which a peculiarly Mexican "relationship" with murder (Paz 52) manifested itself—the slaughter a kind of return of the repressed that re-enacted the blood-letting of the Aztec human sacrifices and conquistador slaughters, signifying the "stubborn return of the blood" in a place that seemed to "attract death" (Krauze 722). Others though, interpreted it as another kind of return; a reprisal of brutal colonial ideology, in which slaughter was used as "a mode of terror and control" (Krauze 722). For all, though, Tlatelolco symbolized the final collapse of the liberal ideals that the Revolution begun in 1910 had briefly seemed to hold out as a possibility, and the final demise of any hope of a society freed from the authoritarianism inherited from the colonial past, and governed instead by the principles of liberal democracy.

Though, "for a time", immediately after Tlatelolco, "it seemed that nothing had happened," the student protests had "opened a crack in the Mexican political system" (Krauze 733) and the government's pyramidal structure began to disintegrate. Having

failed to respond “paternally” to the students’ demands, the State “had lost its most praised resource: the ability to negotiate and conciliate” (Monsiváis 27) and as a consequence it had lost its power to claim paternal authority. However, although this system started to give way it did so only in order to make way for a new aggressively anti-egalitarian structure; an intricate, all-pervasive inherently antisocial vertical system founded on State sanctioned corruption. Ordinary citizens consequently found themselves newly ensnared in the same old state of “isolat[ion] [...] intimidat[ion] and divi[sion]” that Benito Juárez had diagnosed as Mexico’s colonial legacy over a hundred years before (cited in Krauze 242). Thus, although they had freed themselves of deference to a “tyrannical and omnipresent father” (Monsiváis, cited in Braun 511), Mexicans found themselves maintained in a state of powerlessness by a new kind of tyranny, symbolized by the omnipresent kickback.

It is this corrupt world that Paco Ignacio Taibo II unmaskes in a series of detective novels that are centered upon the adventures of Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, a one-eyed, part Irish, part Basque, naturalized Mexican “private detective in a country where such a thing was unheard of” (*An Easy Thing* 65). These novels, with their unlikely (anti)hero, fantastic plots and playfully ironic style, respond in different ways to an array of different questions triggered by this violent history: how to represent a city that is both “magical” and monstrous (*An Easy Thing* 50); how to respond both to the burden of history and a kind of cultural amnesia; how to imagine a kind of “Mexicanidad, Mexican-ness” that does not simply reproduce “exotic delusions” (*An Easy Thing* 67). At the heart of each novel, though, lies a fascination with the way in which “the masses of men” (*An Easy Thing* 56) are caught within this system that institutionalizes corruption and inculcates

social, cultural and political alienation. *Some Clouds*, the third of Taibo's detective novels, for example, is a novel that describes the detective's attempts to track down the murderer of a childhood friend's family. Like most of the novels of this series the plot moves quickly from a description of personal tragedy to an uncovering of political and corporate corruption. The family is found to be caught up in a web of illegal dealings that implicate police chiefs, politicians and big business and is therefore ultimately unfathomable. Like most of these novels, the detective's quest in *Some Clouds* ultimately ends in a kind of failure; the system proves unstoppable. Yet what is won, is a glimpse of this system and its workings and a gradual understanding of its affect. Though *Some Clouds* ends with death and with exile, then, it also ends with a "consciousness-raising session" (141) through which Taibo articulates a corrupt vertical structure that ensures not only the enrichment of those in authority, but also the alienation of those at the bottom of the pile:

You know what happens to the lowly motorcycle cop who puts the bite on you for three hundred pesos because you ran a stoplight? At the end of the day he has to kick back fifteen hundred or two grand to his sergeant for letting him work the intersections, and if he doesn't, he'll be sweeping streets or directing traffic, left to eat shit. The guy has to pay for the maintenance on his own bike, because if he takes it to the shop at the station they'll steal everything down to the park plugs and, boom, the guy's back on the streets again, on foot. And he starts every day with eight litres of gas instead of the twelve he's allotted, because his major and his chief skimmed off the other four. He pays into a pension plan that doesn't exist either. His sergeant kicks back twenty-five grand to the district chief, who

runs hot plates on the side and takes a bite out of the phoney pension fund. You know how the commanders call roll at the start of each day at district headquarters? With an envelope in their hand. Officer so-and-so reporting for duty, and there goes the money into the envelope. The district commander must take in half a million pesos every day. He's got two officers and all they do is collect money... *That's* the system (SC 140-1).

Taibo uses his novels to describe this new, or perhaps newly exposed system and to suggest that this vertical system of fraudulent economics is even more oppressive, more alienating and more powerful than the one that had preceded it. For the traditional pyramidal structure of the pre-Tlatelolco Mexico at least had at bottom a horizontal plane within which the mass of Mexicans could connect through some kind of shared consciousness (even if it was the "false consciousnesses of blind obedience" (Krauze 242). This new system, described by Taibo in all of his Belascoarán Shayne novels, though, has no base, no end. The "motorcycle cop" in the passage above is "lowly" but not the lowest. He is part of a structure that not only towers above him but also tunnels beneath him, eroding even "the earth beneath [his] feet" (*No Happy Ending* 204). It is a chain of exploitation that extends well beyond what Jason Demers calls the "structured sites of institutions" (5) that had, previously, to some extent contained authority, while also plumbing new, apparently infinite depths. Even the sewers, which seem implied here as a kind of absolute—being "left to eat shit" signifying a kind of end point—are nothing of the kind. A truly "fluctuating network" (Demers 4), they appear in the novels as a diabolical extension of the system, forever on the brink of filling up the relatively few cities which possess them "with shit" (*An Easy Thing* 28).

As there is no base to this power structure, as it is no longer a pyramid but rather a vertical sewer—an endless “Drainage Network” (*An Easy Thing* 28)—there is little potential for a political base either. Little chance then, for solidarity, communication, or anything other than scattered, atomized, ineffectual resistance. Though the demonstrations of 1968 suggested a society on the cusp of real revolutionary action, therefore, the system that survived the aftermath was one that rendered popular resistance almost unthinkable. Reluctant acceptance “of being the forced vassals of a corrupt autocracy” seemed to become the new national reality (Monsiváis 29). Perhaps inevitably, in the post-Tlatelolco era, Mexican resistance continued to find expression, not in revolutionary ideals, but rather in the cult of revolutionary heroes which simply replaced one paternal leader for another.

Detective Fiction in a Mexican Context: “Thou Shalt Not Trust American [Genres]”

In light of this it is perhaps easy to see why, despite the fact that it “bears the imprint of other cultural and historical realities” (Simpson 10), detective fiction has proven enormously popular in Mexico in the years since the uprisings. This genre, after all, presents its readers with a fantasy of an heroic individual pursuing “natural” justice, plunging into chaos and ultimately bringing it to order. The detective exposes corruption, gives voice to grievances and ultimately offers redemption. In this sense detective fiction offers the perfect escape from Mexican political realities, satiating that desire to believe in “heroic personalities” (Monsiváis 15), and enabling a vicarious experience of liberation from disorder.

While detective fiction has enjoyed a boom in the post-Tlatelolco era, however, some Mexicans have been unwilling to acquiesce either to this form of literature, or to the form of hero worship it seemed to feed. The journalist, critic and activist Carlos Monsiváis, for example, has repeatedly criticized this genre, arguing, for example, that it is entirely anachronistic within a Mexican political landscape, requiring a kind of belief in the possibility of justice that he sees as untenable in Latin America: “The exception, the out-of-the-ordinary, isn’t that a Latin American is a victim, but rather that he or she isn’t one” (Monsiváis cited in Simpson 21).

Monsiváis’s attack on detective fiction goes beyond critiquing the extent to which its form could be said realistically to reflect Mexican society. He also has a more serious ideological objection to the writing and reading of detective fiction. He suggests that both activities are, in fact, politically irresponsible. To create fictional mysteries, while surrounded by real ones, he implies, is decadent: “Who cares who killed Roger Ackroyd [...] if no one knows (officially) who was responsible for the killings at Tlatelolco” (Monsiváis in Braham 5).

As his reference to Agatha Christie’s Roger Ackroyd makes clear, Monsiváis is implicitly responding here to only one form of the genre: classical, predominantly English detective fiction. This form, which developed mainly in England and France alongside industrial revolutions, burgeoning middle classes, and the development of relatively stable bourgeois legal systems and modern police forces certainly does depend on an ideal of an ordered society in which a sense of what is naturally just is ultimately reflected in the actions of the police. Though these stories articulated, or fed upon anxiety about social order—their plots flirting with anarchic forces and legal transgressions—

each story more or less began with an ordered universe and culminated with the reassertion of order and the enactment of what was generally presented as natural and social justice.

The form that has achieved enormous success in Mexico, though, is predominantly the American hard-boiled variety which comes via Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler rather than Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, and this is a form in which society is represented as falling apart; hierarchies inverting, institutions of order breaking down, government shown to be crooked. It conjures up a world of corruption and disillusionment and it creates detectives whose task it is, not to “restore lost order” but rather to “reveal its fissures” (Colmeiro 52). It is a form that generally culminates then, not with narrative or ideological closure, but rather with unresolved breaches of morality, legality and—in the case of Chandler—even logic.

While this dystopian vision of society resonates with Mexican experience, the Chandleresque detective also seems a perfect fit for the culture of submission that Krauze identifies as inherently Mexican. For the Marlowe figure offers the fantasy of a return to a stable, vertical world, in which power is held by a benign authority; a benevolent father. Even though his investigations seldom accomplish a complete return to order his own integrity, separateness and fidelity to a more ancient authority means that he simultaneously personifies its loss and symbolizes its potential. Thus a Mexicanized Marlowe has the potential to become another magical name in the pantheon of heroes.

Furthermore, while hard boiled American detective fiction’s focus on institutional corruption creates a point of contact with Mexican experiences and goes some way toward answering Monsiváis’s claim that the genre is fundamental incompatible with

Latin American realities, it still leaves unanswered his accusation that to care about fictional crimes when surrounded by all too real, and all too irresolvable ones is itself a kind of intellectual crime. And it raises another problem too. For though there are correspondences between the social world conjured up in Hammett, Chandler and the rest, and that experienced by Mexicans, this is an American form, reflecting American ideologies. And throughout Mexican history, North American ideologies have regularly denied, and consistently conflicted with Mexican rights. This has literally been the case, with America invading Mexican territory, meddling in Mexican political affairs, and exercising catastrophic influence over the Mexican economy,¹ leading many Mexicans to consider “Thou Shalt Not Trust Americans” to be “the eleventh commandment” of their “official [...] mythology” (Krauze 773). But there are more subtle reasons for this deep distrust too; reasons that call into doubt hard-boiled detective fiction’s adaptability, or its potential as a form to create a narrative space within which experiences and subjectivities other than those of the white Americans who are inevitably its heroes can be inscribed. For while the hard boiled stories of the thirties, forties, and fifties imagined a society in which there was no institutional order, they continued to be organized around another kind of regulatory principle—another kind of order—repeatedly using race as a still-legible sign, even in the chaotic noir universe.

Time and again in these stories American hard boiled detectives were delineated through their distance from and antagonism to ethnic others. These others, often indistinguishable, tended either to symbolize the depths of the depravity that the detective had to plumb, or to function as stooges, who enabled the white hero to shine. Mike Shayne is a case in point. The creation of “Brett Halliday” (one of the pseudonyms of

Davis Dresser), Shayne was the protagonist of a long line of novels beginning with *Dividend on Death* (1939) and ending with *Murder and the Wanton Bride* (1958) (though the series continued, ghosted until the 1980s). What follows is an excerpt from an essay published in Otto Penzler's *The Great Detectives* in which Halliday described the inspiration for Shayne:

I first saw the man I have named Mike Shayne in Tampico, Mexico, many, many years ago. I was a mere lad working on a coast-wise oil tanker as a deckhand when we tied up at Tampico to take on a load of crude oil. After supper, a small group of sailors went ashore to see the lights of a foreign port. I was among the group.

We didn't get very far from the ship, turning in at the first cantina we came to. We were all lined up at the bar sampling their tequila when I noticed a redheaded American seated alone at a small table overlooking the crowded room, with a bottle of cognac, a small shot glass, and a larger glass of ice water on the table in front of him. He was tall and rangy and had craggy features with bleak grey eyes which surveyed the scene with a sort of quizzical amusement [...] there was a certain quality of aloneness about him in that crowded cantina. He was part of the scene, but apart from it. There was a Mexican playing an accordion in the middle of the room and several couples dancing. There were other gaily dressed *senoritas* seated about on the sidelines and some of the sailors went to them to request a dance.

I don't know what started the fracas. Possibly one of the sailors asked the wrong girl for a dance. Suddenly there was a melee which quickly spread to

encompass the small room. There were curses and shouts and the glitter of exposed knives. We were badly outnumbered and getting much the worst out of the fight when suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the redheaded American shove the table away from him and get into the fight with big fists swinging.

Each time he struck, a Mexican went down – and generally stayed down. I was struck over the head by a beer bottle and was trampled by the fighting men [...]. Then I was dragged out of the tangle and set on my feet by the American redhead. He gave me a shove through the swinging doors and I stumbled and went down, to be picked up by my comrades who were streaming out the door behind me.

We got out of there fast, back to the ship where we patched up broken heads and minor knife cuts.

We went to sea the next morning and none of us knew what had happened to the redhead after we left the cantina (146).

It's all here—the critical signs of the hard-boiled detective. He's alone but not lonely. He's independent but not indifferent. He's at ease anywhere, but he's not *of* anywhere. He's skeptical but not scornful. He's silent but his presence speaks volumes.

The signs of the Other are here too, of course, in the stock characters: accordion-player, colorful (provocative?) dancing women; dirty-fighting, unindividuated, previously scarcely acknowledged Mexican men whose obscene 'exposed' knives suddenly threaten American innocence abroad. When the two come together there's only one possible outcome; the American soon-to-be detective will swat the others like flies. The crowding,

chaotic Mexicans in this passage create the sense of menace, cause the confrontation—those polite sailors, with their “sampling” of the local liquor and decorous “requests” to dance are not to be held responsible for what happens. But they also provide the occasion for the detective to show his honour, his integrity, his moral and physical impregnability.² They are then interesting only to the extent to which they illuminate our detective, rendering him more clearly and completely our hero.

“All right, enough already”: Colonizing the Genre

There seems little potential here then for any Mexican writer, let alone a left-leaning, politically engaged writer like Taibo, who has protested American interference in Mexican economic, political and cultural life, who claims to want to create literature that acts as “subversive subversion,” rather than a sop designed to “satisfy” reactionary “desires and whims” (Taibo in Stavans 1994, 36, 34), and who is iconoclastic to the extent that he uses his novels to question the relevance of even Mexico’s untouchable hero, Zapata – “the legend of Zapata had never managed to break free from the hollowness of the towering monuments or the frozen metal of the statues” (*An Easy Thing* 4). Like Carlos Monsiváis, Taibo is suspicious of literature that aims only to provide an escape from the vertical “immoral reality” of Mexican life (Stavans 1994, 36). Like Enrique Krauze he is also conscious of Mexico’s historic habit of fetishising authoritarians, and is equally unwilling to submit to it. However, while Monsiváis bewails Mexicans’ submission to foreign fantasies and calls for literary models that engage more directly with Mexican political realities, and while Krauze diagnoses the Mexican cult of heroes and prescribes a psychoanalyst, Taibo holds to the radical

potential of the colonized *novella negra* and offers instead a “democratic detective” (*Some Clouds* 98).

Taibo’s Héctor Belascoarán Shayne series colonizes hard-boiled American detective fiction, mixing its formulae with other more indigenous forms in order to create fiction that displaces the white American at the centre of the genre’s origins, clearing a space within which another subjectivity can emerge (presenting Mexico as a country that exists outside of the American experience of it; imagining, in a sense, the Tampico bar *before* the Americans get there). With this series Taibo answers Monsiváis’s persistent question, creating a literary form that uses fictional mysteries to address factual ones—inculcating not an escape from political realities but instead a reengagement with them—and, most importantly, assembles iconoclastic narratives that dismantle the culture of dead heroes, replacing “vertical,” politically ineffectual hero-worship with an ethics and aesthetics of horizontality.

So far there are six novels in the Belascoarán Shayne series (five of which have been translated into English), all of which in many ways self-consciously imitate their American precursors, replicating the central elements of the hard-boiled style. For a start there is the city – Mexico City - that looms large over the proceedings, a sign both of ruin and redemption; “a holy mess” (*An Easy Thing* 151). Then there are the stock characters: pornographers, crooked cops, corrupt old patriarchs, beautiful and duplicitous women. There are the conventional sub-plots too: women being blackmailed over comprising pictures; captains of industry using the detective to cover up corruption. There is the underlying acknowledgment of deception and duplicity, the detective at once knowing that he is being deceived and yet going along for the ride, biding his time until the truth,

or perhaps small fragments of truths, start to shine. There is the detective too, of course. His very name sounding echoes of an earlier incarnation and he presents himself, like Mike Shayne, like Spade and like Marlowe, as a lone hero, a “solitary hunter” (*An Easy Thing* 216) whose destiny it is to feel forever “like an outsider, strangely alien to the whole environment” (*An Easy Thing* 75); a man whose “dry, cold, detached” style is the only protection he has from the corruption he immerses himself in; the only thing that stands between him and a city “filled up with shit” (*An Easy Thing* 75, 57, 28).

However, Taibo’s novels pull in two directions, and thus, while these points of contact are palpable, they are also constantly undermined, or perhaps, brought to the surface in such a way that that they are simultaneously celebrated and critiqued, creating a reading experience in which the reader alternately wallows in the familiarity of the genre’s clichés, and revels in the revelation of them *as* clichés. Though all of the familiar motifs of the genre are there in Taibo’s work, then—in the pornography, the smuggling, the *femmes fatales* and the odious villains—the hackneyed nature of their presence is fully acknowledged by a narrative that draws attention to their tiredness and frames their appearance with self-conscious flourishes of metatextual irony. When Héctor first meets the blackmailer and pornographer Burgos in *An Easy Thing*, for example, he responds as Marlowe might have, with a judgment that manages to be both jaded and lyrical, and that is, of course, prophetic (as he does turn out to be a real snake): “Burgos, thought Héctor. Another name on the list. He had cold, teary eyes. Snake’s eyes” (*An Easy Thing* 86). With its pared down language, its spare syntax and its emphatic simile, this is Hector thinking like Marlowe, and Taibo writing like Chandler. This statement is immediately followed, however, with a sentence that draws back from such stylistic symbiosis and

calls it into question (Taibo's detective collapsing into Chandler's collapsing into Greene's): "All right, enough already", the narrative continues, "it was starting to sound like a Graham Greene novel" (*An Easy Thing* 86).

This is also the case in Taibo's representation of the detective Belascoarán Shayne. Almost all of the books begin with gestures towards the conventions of noir: the detective a personification of alienation and existential ennui, standing at a bar, draining drinks, while "letting the time slip by" (*An Easy Thing* 1); sitting in his battered old leather swivel chair, "whil[ing] away what was left of the afternoon" (*No Happy Ending* 3); or standing at the window, smoking Delicados in the dark, silently "watch[ing] the green lights that the streetlights threw on the trees" and thinking about death (*Return to the Same City* 3). He has all the conventional props too: a "wrinkled trenchcoat" (*An Easy Thing* 104); a gun; a constant supply of cigarettes; a body that aches with the memory of old injuries when it rains; a laconic way of speaking; a reluctant but indomitable sense of honour; an occasional, wistful smile; a dusty, paper-strewn desk in the corner of a "grimy office" (*An Easy Thing* 103) situated on the third floor of an anonymous building in a dubious part of town. Yet for each cliché of noir iconography, there is a qualifying deviation, a parodic extension of the ideal, or an equally satiric retreat from it. In addition to the limp and the scars and the ubiquitous "craggy features" (Halliday 147), Belascoarán Shayne has a glass eye, which he doesn't always bother to wear, though he sometimes covers the "scarred socket" (*Some Clouds* 6) with an eye patch which, he imagines, makes him more Count of Monte Cristo than Marlowe (*An Easy Thing* 228).³ Likewise, as well as constantly being knocked out, tied up, or shot at in the way that the genre demands. Belascoarán Shayne is actually killed. At the end of *No Happy Ending* a

“shotgun blast” catches him “mid-torso and lift[s] his torn, broken body into the air” (171). When, due to public demand he is resurrected, reappearing in *Return to the Same City*, his deliberation on the meaning of death on the first page is therefore as much an ironic acknowledgment of authorial (or perhaps readerly) power as it is a conventional expression of world-weariness.

Perhaps more interesting though, are the ways in which Taibo draws back from the hard-boiled ideal, for it is at these points that Taibo begins to develop a kind of metatextual antiauthoritarianism that “deliberately incit[es]” readers “to be suspicious and aware of those established codes, discourses and patterns” that “exud[e] power, control and authority” (Vieira 584).⁴ One example of this retreat is at the beginning of *An Easy Thing* when the detective is presented as standing at the bar, drinking steadily, apparently an embodiment of noir cool: “‘One more, boss,’ said Héctor Belascoarán Shayne.” As soon as this tableau is established it is undermined, though. Héctor has, “[f]rom the beginning”, it transpires, been “emptying the rum on the sawdust-covered floor and pouring Coke into the glass,” “spiking it” with nothing other than lime (1). This subterfuge “save[s] him the embarrassment of not drinking liquor in a cantina,” but it hardly adds to his image. Though in this case the “virgin” drinks are explained as a tactic, allowing the detective to do his job more effectively, as this novel develops it becomes clear that he is, essentially, a virgin drinker and a man of basically adolescent tastes. His favorite tittle is orange soda pop and all he ever seems to eat is ice cream. In fact he loves ice-cream so much he even has a theory about it that he explains, apropos of nothing: “His personal theory was that the more complicated the dish of ice cream, the more calories it contained.” Whereas his namesake, Mike Shayne uses cognac to focus

his thoughts, Belascoarán Shayne uses complicated sundaes “made with six different flavors of ice cream, nuts, whipped cream, fresh strawberries, melon, and cherry syrup” (*An Easy Thing* 215). The (perhaps unsurprising) effect of this ice cream is not clarity at all, or at least not the kind we might expect. For when Belascoarán Shayne has finished his ice cream the narrative states that “[n]ow it seemed to him that even if things had become a whole lot clearer than they were before, it was with a particularly dense and impenetrable brand of clarity” (215). The detective’s thoughts have achieved a kind of lucidity, but it is a lucidity that only serves to illuminate the confusion, not end it.

It is clear from the excessive detail included here, in what is essentially an episode in which Belascoarán Shayne takes stock, that Taibo is deliberately creating a distance between his Shayne and Halliday’s, between his detective and the iconic detectives who cast shadows over these books. But this stylistic distance is only part of the point. The real gulf that Taibo opens up in this passage is that between the kind of genre writing that allow readers to indulge in the fantasy of a superhuman individual who can read the chaotic world they inhabit with clarity and confidence, and this kind of writing, that expresses an anxiety about knowledge and power, an understanding of the embeddedness of the one within the other, and a desire to posit uncertainty and provisionality as dignified, intelligent and empowering responses to the chaos of Mexican life. So while Belascoarán Shayne’s revelation is a dispiriting one—he is always measuring himself against “fictional” detectives and finding himself wanting—it is not disabling. In fact, Taibo implies, the “myth” of the hero, the “super-detective” (*Frontera Dreams* 67) is by far the most dangerous force described in these books. Far more perilous even than drug

runners, crooked police or government conspirators, this myth threatens to “eat” anyone who falls for it “alive” (*Frontera Dreams* 67).

Horizontal Ethics and Aesthetics

Taibo not only counters this myth by creating a detective willing to admit both to ontological and epistemological uncertainty. He also takes the “solitary traveler” (*No Happy Ending* 87) cliché that is central to the iconic detective’s heroic status, and, demonstrating its complete inadequacy, creates plots in which the detective only survives, let alone solves anything, by virtue of his being embedded within a series of familial and social networks that stretch across the city and beyond.⁵ While he repeatedly and self-consciously plays the role of the lone hero, therefore, Belascoarán Shayne is almost never alone, and almost never unprotected. For a start he has a brother, Carlos, and a sister, Elisa, who drive him around, cook for him, even educate him when necessary, whether he likes it or not—“Enough, Carlos. The last thing I need right now is a consciousness-raising session” (*Some Clouds* 141). He has a lover—an enigmatic woman with a ponytail—who appears and disappears with a freedom usually reserved for men. He has a landlord whose own antiauthoritarianism makes him a willing accomplice, union officials whose connections with Carlos give him access to the last vestiges of organized political resistance in Mexico, and an old school friend turned radio DJ, “skinny little Valdivia” (*An Easy Thing* 88), who, in *An Easy Thing*, becomes the detective’s own “helping hand on the airwaves” (90). He even has “assistants,” three “very efficient secretaries” who keep him in soda pops, follow up on clues for him, cash

in favors to get invaluable information, take or convey “messages without complaint” (*An Easy Thing* 68), and even participate in gun fights when necessary.

What is interesting about these relationships, apart from the fact that they provide Taibo with another way to unravel the hard-boiled genre – in Jorge Hernández Martín’s words, ‘neatly defus[ing] the cosmopolitan and exotic connotations of the detective myth’(165) - is the fact that they are all, in a sense, horizontal. His familial relationships are almost completely intra-generational and although the siblings repeatedly jostle for position, each is presented with their own area of expertise so that no enduring ascendancy is ever established.⁶ His relationship with the woman with the ponytail is characterized by mutual vulnerabilities and toughness. They are both equally capable of sentimentality and physical violence, the woman often intervening in order to save her lover’s life: “a gloved hand smashed El Chato’s head with a wrench. The big man collapsed over the steering wheel, and Hector had a laughing attack. ‘What are you laughing about, asshole?’ She said, taking off her helmet and swinging her ponytail in the rain” (*No Happy Ending* 144). His relationships with his landlord and old school friend are also marked by mutual respect.

Which just leaves Belascoarán Shayne’s “assistants,” who might seem to contradict this horizontal network. Yet of course these aren’t “assistants” in the conventional sense. Rather they are a plumber, a sewer and drainage specialist, and an upholsterer who sublet a part of their office to the detective. They aren’t employed by him and are his equals in (almost) every way. Nor are they assistants in the sense usually implied in this genre, wherein the relationship is almost always one-way, the (female) assistant demanding nothing in return for her services (sometimes, when times are hard,

not even a pay check). Belascoarán Shayne's relationship with his assistants is much more mutual, much less one-sided. It depends less on the assistant's slavish admiration of the man she understands to be her superior and more on a system of reciprocity in which all men take turns to occupy this "feminine" role: "In return, Héctor was obliged to take job orders for the upholsterer and the plumber, quote prices on the repair of Naugahyde love seats or broken taps, and every now and then, take a message from the engineer's girlfriend" (*An Easy Thing* 68).

The one exception to this pattern of egalitarian relationships is the uneasy relation he has with the unionists in *An Easy Thing*. In this novel Taibo creates a back-story for Belascoarán Shayne which implicates him in the system he now opposes. Giving him a history of complicity within that vertical structure that is shown to create mass poverty, Taibo creates space within the narrative for a clear critique of both the system and the role of the middle-classes in the perpetuation of that system. Called to the "industrial suburb of Xalastoc" (57) in order to investigate the murder of a company executive, Belascoarán Shayne recounts a degraded past during which he was a white-collar engineer:

Twice a day for four long years he'd driven that same stretch of highway [...] He'd tried to ignore it all, driving home in the evening toward the comfortable security of his nauseatingly middle-class neighbourhood [...] trying to separate himself from that industrial wasteland raised up amid the dust and the misery of one hundred thousand new immigrants from the countryside, the sulphurous puddles, the air thick with dust, the drunken cops, the rampant land fraud, the

illegal slaughter of infected cattle, the sub-minimum wages, the cold that rides in on the east wind, the unemployment [...]

At the end of every day his car waited for him at the factory gate, and he drove the next three miles without ever leaving the main road, with his windows rolled up and the stereo on.

His eyes and ears had been closed. (58)

It is this willfully blind, willfully silent complicity that the detective is atoning for in this novel. He wants to “escape, forget his past” (62), to change sides. He wants to move from the atomized stratified world he inhabited as a “foreman-accomplice to The Bossman” (62), into the harsh, vulnerable but communal world of the “workers”. However these workers will not allow it. The union men with whom Carlos associates with such ease resist Belascoarán Shayne’s attempts at comradeship. When they meet, their refusal to recognize either his name or his right to ask them questions are clear signs of their moral authority, while the detective’s unusual, demeaning and unsuccessful attempt to ingratiate himself with them marks him as obviously subordinate: “He paid for the juice, and ventured a weak smile in the direction of the workers. They ignored him” (*An Easy Thing* 59). Taibo burdens his protagonist with a truly antiheroic past; one in which he has passively accepted a position of privilege. Consequently he owes a debt to the working men that is only cleared through the loss, at the very end of the novel, of one of those formerly “closed” unseeing eyes. It is, then, only when he is physically marked by his active opposition to the State that he achieves a kind of correspondence with these workers, the gunning down of the detective correlating with the running down of the striking workers, allowing their fates briefly and symbolically to intertwine:

They broke the strike about three days after you went into the hospital—with the cops charging in on horses, the whole shooting match. They brought the scabs in, but our men refused to go back to work for fear of reprisals [...] Of course, the struggle goes on inside. It ebbs and flows. (232)

Inevitably, it is a connection forged through suffering violence at the hands of “the system” (232).

After this, Belascoarán Shayne’s penance is complete, as is his transformation. The detective is, from this point, represented as a man who has fully extracted himself from the vertical system of exploitation and has the scars to prove it. Henceforth he is recognized everywhere and by everyone as a fully “democratic” man:

He got off the bus, balancing carefully on his cane, and walked toward the three-storey building. Three men were pitching pennies in the street in front of an autoparts shop.

“Got room for one more?”

They looked him over from head to toe, and smiled among themselves.

“Sure. Why not.” (*An Easy Thing* 233)

What interests me here though is the way in which this antagonism between two different ways of being—complicity, acquiescence and financial reward versus resistance, solidarity and extreme hardship—is represented. For it is predominantly described in spatial terms, symbolized through the ways Belascoarán Shayne moves across a landscape that is, perhaps because of its obviously makeshift nature and apparent fragility, a “real Mexico” (67).

For Taibo chooses to symbolize Belascoarán Shayne's political shame as a car ride. In order to describe the calculated blindness that the middle classes inculcate in order to insulate themselves from a recognition of the fact that hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, trapped in urban 'wastelands', are paying the price for the middle class's "nauseating [...] neighborhoods" (*An Easy Thing* 57), Taibo puts his not-yet-detective in a private car, that seems magically to appear "at the end of every day" at the factory gate, and has him drive in shameful solitude through a devastated landscape that encapsulates a history of political, geographical and environmental exploitation. The car, with its wound-up windows and its expensive stereo, enables class stratification and atomization, and prohibits meaningful, horizontal exchange. The very fact that the car is described in a narrative focalized through Belascoarán Shayne as appearing, "waiting for him at the factory gate" every night shows just how complete this insulation is; he does not for a moment pause to wonder how this car materializes so magically every evening. Taibo subtly suggests that such a man is more likely to anthropomorphize the car (it "waited" for him), than to acknowledge the invisible workers whose role it is to uphold a form of privilege they will never themselves experience.

What Taibo pits against this, especially in *An Easy Thing*, is a different kind of spatial engagement with the city and its inhabitants, one that physically and culturally reintegrates the detective. Retracing his steps, re-enacting the journey he used to take as a fully-fledged collaborator, Belascoarán Shayne distances himself from his previous self by taking the bus. Travelling this time with the workers, whose presence he previously refused to register, he reclaims a kind of horizontal relationship with the land and its people. No longer "trying to separate himself" (*An Easy Thing* 57), he steps out of the

temporal, spatial and political limbo of the car, and enters a public space in which physically, intellectually, and even spiritually he experiences a kind of connection the vertical sewer is designed to militate against:

[O]ne's city creates its own sympathies, tepid dams made of toothpicks that occasionally resist the spate of the flood. The smile of the clerk in the paint shop; the wink of casual complicity on the bus with the guy who's reading the same novel [...]; the hostile look shared by the passersby before the corner cop who is chewing out a motorcyclist. And inside one's own city, other cities are made [...] that connect every once in a while with other people's cities (*Return to the Same City* 21).

The self-styled “solitary traveler” therefore takes instead to “sympathetic” travelling, and the horizontal network reaches out across the city. Henceforth, bus rides, metro rides and even walks through the city “reaffirm” Belascoarán Shayne; they convince him that he belongs, that he is “just another mexicano trying to make it in the Mexican jungle” (*An Easy Thing* 67).

What being a mexicano actually constitutes, however, is not straightforward. Taibo's books are full of casual references to Belascoarán Shayne's “Mexican-ness,” yet what this might actually signify is more difficult to ascertain. Belascoarán Shayne, with his unpronounceable name—“You cannot—you never—I cannot pronounce it” (Taibo cited in Goodman 2005)—is, of course, part Basque, part Irish; a migrant to Mexico, rather than a native. According to his genealogy he should be as incongruous within the Mexican landscape as his namesake was drinking Cognac in that Tampico bar. Yet the detective has little trouble fitting in; little trouble persuading other, indigenous Mexicans

of his “Hispanic” (Martín 161) characteristics, his credentials as a “sympathetic” fellow traveler.

He has little trouble convincing his readers either. In episodes such as that in which Belascoarán Shayne and his siblings gather to pay their respects to their dead mother, Hispanic motifs dominate. The description of the aunts ‘dressed in black, s[itting] in the corner opposite the door, whispering among themselves’, to say nothing of the appearance of the dead woman whose grey haired head is covered by a ‘Spanish mantilla’, seem to produce a convincingly, if rather hackneyed, Latin-American scene. Similarly, when the siblings, Héctor, Carlos and Elisa, gather to eat and talk and energetically discuss the minutiae of Mexican politics and life, it is generally their localism – their embeddedness in what Héctor calls ‘the real Mexico’ (67) – rather than their genealogical distance and difference, that is emphasized. Thus even critics have been lulled into repressing through their readings the extraordinary, to use Salman Rushdie’s word, ‘impurity’ of these texts and their characters (Rushdie 394), falling instead for the rather romantic ideal of a distinctive, Hispanic “spirit” (Martín 161) that they often seem to privilege.

In, for example, an essay that stresses the “particularly Mexican” aspects of these novels by reading them as books that are interesting primarily because they help to “create a national literature, forged with national rules that make it verisimilar to the particular context of origin”, Jorge Hernández Martín suppresses full acknowledgment of the hybridity of the Belascoarán Shayne siblings in favor of a claim of an overarching, and apparently homogenous “Hispanic nature” (Martín 161). Despite the fact that he fully acknowledges the detective’s immigrant status, outlines the father’s history and briefly

references the nationality of his mother, Martín's argument seems to protect Héctor, Carlos and Elisa from the complexity of this cultural inheritance, presenting them not as multiculturalists who have brought with them segments of other cultures, nor even as creolists, who, out of the cultural mix have created something new, but rather as indigenists; migrants who have no remnants of cultural otherness but who have rather found themselves in their adopted home, found a "common destiny", a way of "sort[ing] out [their] life", a "spirit" (163-5) in Mexico. Consequently, though they are half Irish and half Basque, Martín's logic insists that they are model Mexicans, siblings whose relationship, with its 'spirit of camaraderie and mutual support' is a 'notable characteristic' of their, and the novels' "Hispanic nature" (161).

Of course, in a sense, Taibo's narratives invite us to respond in this way. The three siblings are characters who deliberately and often quite self-consciously participate in what I am calling indigenization. Taibo presents them as immersing themselves in local cultural forms, perpetually authenticating themselves and, in turn, re-authenticating this local culture in two ways; through the self-conscious consuming of Mexican goods that function as symbols of resistance to the kinds of global homogenization that threaten to flatten out cultural difference and diminish the meaning of the kind of nationalism Martín celebrates, and through participation in established rites and rituals that maintain a sense of cultural particularism. In this way, both Héctor's devotion to sickly "soda pop" and his concomitant dedication to "recurrent discussions of the rise in [its] price" explicitly function as "daily dose[s]" of local culture that maintain and 'reaffirm' his 'mexicanidad, Mexican-ness' (*An Easy Thing*, 67-8).

On the surface, then, it can seem that Belascoarán Shayne's hybrid genealogy is a rather empty gesture on Taibo's part – a device used simply to add a non-elitist, post-colonial exoticism to his character (his pedigree ensuring that his ethnic difference symbolizes persecution and perpetual struggle rather than privilege). For it is localism that seems repeatedly to be reasserted; a localism that seems determined to tie these texts and the cultural life they describe to a specific Mexican national history and to issues that, in Schulze-Engler's words, can be "defined in self-enclosed cultural [and] political terms" (59); failed revolution, the "social pyramid", Tlatelolco. I want to suggest, though, that Taibo's representation of what 'Mexican-ness' might be is more complex than this, or at least more tangled. For though Hispanic motifs certainly dominate, time and again they are challenged by reminders of other cultures, other ethnicities. I want to suggest that, although the novels are filled with clichés of "Hispanic nature", the detective's ethnic inheritance ensures that they are also peppered with signs that hint at creolization, ensuring that the horizontal ethic, that explicitly creates a lateral intra-national network enabling interconnectivity and solidarity, also implicitly extends beyond the boundaries of the nation, reaching out to a multitude of other states, each with their own individual experience of colonization and "vertical" power structures: Ireland, Basque, Morocco, Tunisia, even Canada are drawn into this network through the experiences and inheritances of the Belascoarán Shaynes.

For example, the aforementioned image of the mother which, as she is depicted lying "seren[ly]" in her coffin, seems one of uncomplicated Mexican conformity, is, as the book continues, thoroughly challenged by details that depict her not simply as a suffering but resigned traditionalist, but rather as an internationalist; a woman who,

through a spirit of transnational solidarity left a home in Ireland in order to join the socialists in Spain, who took her Irish folk songs to New York City, who cherished her very un-Hispanic “beautiful, bright red hair” (*An Easy Thing*, 8). The sister Elisa is similarly unconventional. Though hints of the clichés of Mexicanness are inevitably there – she plays the guitar and secretly writes poetry – she also deviates from the norm. Physically she is different – with her freckles and red hair – culturally she is different too. She has recently returned from Canada when the first novel begins, a place which, though it often “bored [her] to death” (*An Easy Thing*, 78), has left its mark on her. For as a consequence of this travelling it seems, she has developed cosmopolitan tastes in sharp distinction to her determinedly parochial, sweet-toothed brother:

Elisa dedicated herself to the plate of spaghetti in front of her [...].

“Do they eat a lot of Italian food in Canada?”

“Plenty,” she said with her mouth full (*An Easy Thing*, 136-7).

It is, in *An Easy Thing*, the dead father’s letter that most powerfully extends the boundaries of this, and the other novels’ physical and imaginative geographies though. This letter, inserted into the main narrative as it comes to some kind of conclusion, creates lines of continuity that stretch from Basque country, to Spain, to the northern tip of Africa, and finally to Mexico. It articulates a form of ‘sympathetic travelling’ that extends beyond the nation state, stretching across a Western colonized world and it hints at, to borrow Jürgen Habermas’s phrase, a kind of “world citizen’s solidarity” (Habermas in Schulze-Engler 56):

The revolution broke out in October 1934 [...] I was compelled to spend more than a year working out of the south of Spain as a sailor on ships bound for

Morocco [...] After a while I renewed my contacts with the [socialist] party, and collaborated in writing and distributing *The Southern Seaman*. We organized the cadre of the longshore union, and helped comrades escaping to Africa. During this time I came to know the Moroccan and Tunisian coastline like the back of my hand, or perhaps better, if that's possible, as well as the untamed coast around Spanish Sahara, Guinea, and Sidi Ifni. I made good friends, and I found out that the white man's world isn't the only one there is. It was an amazing revelation for a twenty-five-year old Basque (170-1).

“Mexican-ness” in these novels must therefore be understood as, to some extent, creolist. Not merely because of the country's colonial past – with its enforced mixing of Amerindians and Europeans – but also because of its post-colonial present – through its inevitable participation in an increasingly transnational world. Though Taibo's novels are in some ways thoroughly attached to the romance of beleaguered indigeneity – to Mexican-ness as something homogenous and bounded – the internationalism of the central character's inheritances and experiences demand that we question this indigeneity; that we understand the culture that Belascoarán Shayne participates in so enthusiastically, not as a pure expression of bounded place, not as a unique response to an enclosed national history, but rather as “a combination of diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation” that can only be understood in “the context of global center-periphery relationships” (Hannerz 1996, 67). Seen in this light the Belascoarán Shaynes' apparent localism is revealed to be part of something much wider: the mother's wearing of a Spanish Mantilla is a gesture that reminds us of international struggles against oppression. Brother Carlos's commitment to the unions and their struggle against

corporations is not simply a local affair – a response to the verticality of the Mexican economic and political system - but rather both an echo of his father’s internationalism and a response to “transnational dynamics” which exaggerate this verticality, “widening [the] gap between the political sphere of democratic participation and control” (Schulze-Engler 56). Even Héctor’s commitment to Mexican soda pop is a reflection on global economics and a deliberate example of innovative cultural “counterflow” (Hannerz 1996, 6); a self-conscious participation in the so-called soft-drinks war in which Mexican brands attempt to resist the hegemony of the American giants, Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

The spatial horizontality that I am suggesting develops this understanding of Mexican culture as “diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation” is not just present in the content of these novels, though. It is apparent too in their aesthetics, in the kind of textual landscape they sketch. For, though these novels more or less follow the requirements of the genre, beginning with a mystery and ending, if not a resolution, then certainly with a discourse on the desire for resolution, the path these novels take between these two points is digressive and often ostensibly arbitrary—“horizontal” in its placing of apparently contiguous, disparate literary forms alongside one another.

An Easy Thing, for example, mixes conventional chapters with ones given titles that echo the so-called “Red News” crime pages popular in Mexico for nearly a century (Monsiváis 148). Disrupting things still further these chapters are themselves interrupted with the voice of “El Cuervo” (the skinny Valdivia), whose enigmatic late night broadcasts offer to be “a guide and companion [...] ready to lend a hand where help is needed” (129). In *No Happy Ending*, things become even more tangled as Taibo throws Testimonies⁷ into the mix as well as chapters that forgo narratorial consistency in favor of

a kind of reportage. Added to this are a plethora of iconoclastic acts of irreverent name-dropping (Octavio Paz, for example, is the name given to a duck in *Return to the Same City*), quotations and intertextual references that embed Taibo's texts within a cultural network that, again, stretches beyond Mexico's borders, encompassing Chandler novels, Paul Newman films, Vietnamese protest poetry, African music, even the philosophical writings of Jean Paul Sartre. Through this placing of different indigenous and imported traditions, genres, styles and formats alongside each other, Mexico becomes a "magical" space (*An Easy Thing* 50) of connectivity and creativity, while Mexican-ness becomes creolist, perhaps even, to borrow from Édouard Glissant, rhizomatic.⁸

One of the effects of this unremittingly digressive prose, that is forever shooting off in different directions, is a repeated refusal to provide answers to virtually any of the questions the narratives raise, from what becomes of Octavio Paz, to whether Zapata is really alive, to what happened to the bodies of those students killed in Tlatelolco in 1968, to who the Halcones were and why were they never brought to justice. The answers to these questions, ultimately, prove as impossible to pin down as the question of "Mexican-ness," and in their refusal to give answers—in their determination to return again and again to the central question of culpability—Taibo's novels keep the questions, and the spirit of questioning, alive. Rather than offering resolution then, his texts, in their playful, ironic way, model a kind of perpetual "struggle" (232) through which a kind of liberation from the tyranny of blind obedience is effected, and an on-going process of political, cultural, intellectual and spatial "reappropriation" (Hardt 363) is established:

"Well ... the people have to learn from the struggle. That's the only way to do it.

[The strike] wasn't a victory, that's for sure, but in this town, it takes a lot of work

... I don't know what to say, exactly. It wasn't a victory or a defeat..." explained

Carlos [...]

"Not one or the other ..." said Héctor. (*AET* 232)

Notes

¹ One of the most Machiavellian instances of this is, perhaps, US Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson's involvement in the plot to overthrow Francisco I. Madero, one of Mexico's few 'scrupulously' liberal Presidents. See Krauze, pp 265- 267.

² Detectives in this genre are not always so physically impressive, of course. Chandler's Marlowe, for example, spends a considerable amount of time being knocked unconscious.

³ This eye patch is possibly a parodic reference to Brett Halliday, the creator of Mike Shayne, who lost an eye as a child and wore an eye patch for the rest of his life.

⁴ Vieira is referring specifically here to Brazilian postmodern writers. There are correspondences though, between these writers' project, and Taibo's own.

⁵ Braham cites an unpublished essay by Glen Close that seems to be arguing a similar point. Close also seems to interpret Taibo's detective as one whose 'effectiveness depends almost entirely on the collaboration of (...) friends, acquaintances and strangers' (84). Close also draws attention to Belascoarán Shayne's horizontal 'interaction with the city.' Rather than interpreting it as a way of resisting Mexican corruption and authoritarianism, however, he seems to read it as a device that 'complements' Taibo's 'use of the 'vertical' mass media' (91).

⁶ Though *An Easy Thing* begins with Belascoarán Shayne's mother's funeral and the revelation of a letter written by his father that to some extent casts a shadow across the narrative, these remain rather digressive facts within the novel and Belascoarán Shayne's emergence as a 'democratic detective' coincides with his final acceptance of his orphaned state.

⁷ For a comprehensive account of Testimonies and their place in Latin American literature see Gugelberger's *The Real Thing*.

⁸ Glissant describes the rhizome as "une racine demultipliee, etendue en reseaux dans la terre ou dans l'air, sans qu'aucune souche y intervienne en predateur irremediable. La notion du rhizome maintiendrait donc le fait de l'enracinement, mais recuse l'idee d'une racine totalitaire" (23). It is suggestive here, I think, not only because of its spatial implications, which echo those I've been outlining in this essay, but also because of the idea it articulates of culture as interconnective and always in process.

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