Baroque Historiographies: Joyce, Faulkner, and García Márquez

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Abstract

This article is the result of extensive readings of the early Anglophone and Latin American reception of Joyce's and Faulkner's work. It was thus possible to establish a parallel understanding of their work in both cultural contexts as essentially 'baroque'. A discrepancy arises, however, in allusions to the baroque in an Anglophone and Latin American context. Early Anglophone critics tended to find their 'baroquism' troubling. By contrast, Latin American mediators found in their baroque propensity a potential model for the expression of native concerns.

In the light of the above findings, the article centres on the connections between Joyce, Faulkner and García Márquez, focusing on the exploration of alternative and suppressed historiographies in their fiction. It discusses their deployment of a 'baroque' aesthetic of difficulty, duplicity, theatricality and temporal disruption to arrive at a representation of 'otherness' that voices their historiographic scepticism.

Faulkner and Joyce have long competed for the crowning position in Latin America's literary pantheon. This is not meant to be, by any means, a reflection on such aspirations. Both men were largely oblivious to the Latin American literary tradition and to the aesthetic and narrative conundrums faced by its writers in the course of the twentieth century. On the contrary, their work is intensely local and preoccupied with their own respective social, cultural and political milieus. Any desires they mav harboured have towards universal influence and recognition would have been a result of their determined efforts to render their own cultures faithfully, and to honour them by such a rendition. Ironically, their preoccupation with the local may be the reason for the influential position that they have long occupied in Latin American letters, for it is arguably their intense localism and its accomplished artistic rendition that has proven inspirational their American for Latin counterparts. Ever since early mediators such as Jorge Luis Borges and Alejo Carpentier heralded their importance, they have been understood to occupy very distinct and, at times, mutually exclusive, positions with regards to their impact on the literature being produced in Latin America throughout the twentieth century. Thus, Joyce has been traditionally characterised as the master of literary audacity, spurring the work of linguistic mavericks such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Julio Cortázar or of poets like Haroldo de Campos. Ulysses, the modernist novel of the city par excellence, would be seen as the inspiration behind some of the most important Latin American urban novels such as Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch and Carlos Fuentes's Where the Air Is Clear. Faulkner, on the other hand, would be heralded as inspiring a wealth of rural narratives, most notably Gabriel García Márquez's fiction, providing an example of colour and texture, to be deployed when depicting the hot and racially-mixed Caribbean area.

In this article I propose to follow a literary genealogy that goes against the traditional study of influence in two ways: firstly, by rejecting the understanding of García Márquez as exclusively 'Faulknerian' and, secondly, by advocating a multidirectional and dynamic approach to the comparative study of the three authors in question. The traditional understanding of literary influence would deny that Faulkner and Joyce have greatly enriched García Márquez's work. Although I do not intend to dispute this contention, I think it is also useful to consider how Joyce's and Faulkner's works have been revivified by García Márquez's readings and those of fellow Latin American writers in ways that are enriching and revelatory of their artistry and accomplishments.

Viewing Joyce's and Faulkner's fiction through the prism of García Márquez's work can alert

us to the deep historiographic drive that underscores their narratives, as well as to the strategies that they deploy to register their historiographic scepticism. The narrative entanglements at the heart of their work can be explained, as I try to argue here, as the result of a desire to give voice to marginal and suppressed historiographies. It is this complex voicing of hidden historiographies that may ultimately anticipate the radical strategies of magical realism exemplified by García Márquez in One Hundred Years of Solitude. The study of literary transmission is inevitably a study of reception and, as a result, I focus on the reception of Joyce and Faulkner by early Anglophone and Hispanic critics. Both groups fundamentally agreed in their assessment of both Joyce's and Faulkner's narrative 'challenges' as baroque in essence. The Anglophone critics' disdain for this baroquism, however, contrasts with the tendency of the Latin American critics to embrace them – at least, in part - precisely because of their perceived affinity with a baroque genealogy. My use of the term 'baroque' in this article stems from this early critical reception, and I hope Anglophone that it retains both its connotations of excessive (and troubling) complication and its Latin American usage as a strategy for the expression of native cultural difference and inscription of the marginal. (2)

On 8 December 1982, Gabriel García Márquez closed his Nobel Prize lecture with a tribute to William Faulkner, and echoed the American writer's own visionary words upon reception of the same prize some thirty years earlier:

On a day like today, my master William Faulkner said, "I decline to accept the end of man". I would fall unworthy of standing in this place that was his, if I were not fully aware that the colossal tragedy he refused to recognize thirtytwo years ago is now, for the first time since the beginning of humanity, nothing more than a simple scientific possibility. Faced with this awesome reality that must have seemed a mere utopia through all of human time, we, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth (García Márquez 1993: 20).

It is significant that García Márquez chose to honour Faulkner's own recognition of apocalyptic momentum (prefigured in the all too real possibility of nuclear holocaust) as a site upon which to found a 'utopia of life' filtered through the complementary acts of reading and writing. That, in García Márquez's understanding of his role as a writer, signals the act of literary creation as an act of re-creation, one that affords both the author and his readers the possibility of re-appropriating their historical and political destinies by means of visionary recognition. Thus, Faulkner's 'man', whose end he 'declines to accept', is rendered here as 'the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude', in what is not only an allusion to García Márquez's most famous, and arguably, most accomplished work but also a postcolonial celebration of the colonial subject's eventual liberation, depicted here as the triumphant obverse of apocalyptic demise. García Márquez's words represent a bipartite paean to the notion of literature as the space afforded to the colonial for self-expression and recognition, and for the understanding of history as a narrative whose secrets and possibilities constitute the threads out of which the Latin American writer will weave the rich tapestry of his redemptive tale.

Faulkner is here placed at the crux where history and literature intersect through Messianic re-telling, thus drawing suggestive parallels between his and García Márquez's fictions. Furthermore, this repositioning of Faulkner's 'man' as an analogue to Latin American man forces us to re-evaluate Faulkner's works from a postcolonial point of view, to ascertain why García Márquez experienced an illuminating moment of selfrecognition in coming into contact with Faulkner's 'atmosphere and decadence' (García Márquez 2003: 135) or why he acknowledges Latin America's debt to Faulkner by stating that 'Faulkner is enmeshed in all Latin American literature' (García Márquez, Vargas Llosa 1968: 52-53). (3)

The apocalyptic is at the hearth of Faulkner's creative impulse, something that he revealed by observing that he thought of 'the world [he] created as ... a kind of keystone in the universe', a keystone that, were it removed, would provoke the universe to 'collapse'; as well as by foreseeing his last book as being 'the Doomsday Book, the Golden Book' (Faulkner 1960: 82) of Yoknapatawpha County, the fictional space inhabited by most of his creations. Although his readers were never treated to an apocalyptic culmination of the Sutpen, the Compson, the Bundren, or the Sartoris' dynasties akin to the Buendías' holocaust in One Hundred Years of Solitude, his narratives are a constant re-enactment of the fire and brimstone of the hour of judgement: be it the biblical flood and fire which threaten to desecrate Addie Bundren's corpse in As I Lay Dying, the personal apocalypse of Joe Christmas and Reverend Hightower in Light in August, or the all-devouring fire which consumes Thomas Sutpen's dynasty and legacy by the close of Absalom, Absalom! In the light of Faulkner's recurrent fictive apocalypses, García Márquez emerges as a worthy disciple of the American 'prophet', daring to take his characters to absolute oblivion with the hurricane that devastates Macondo at the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude, thus presenting us with the blank canvas on which to build that 'utopia of the future' that he salutes in his Nobel Prize lecture.

Both authors are further united in their deployment of a narrative exuberance that belies their tales of decay and disaster and underpins the melancholy failures of their characters. It is this exuberance, this 'explosive overcrowdedness', as André Blekaisten has described it, that sees Faulkner's 'language depart from the standards of stern sparseness and high finish the New Critics taught us to associate with Anglo-American modernism' (Blekaisten 1995: 92). It is in this overcrowded narrative space that I propose that we can find the third vortex in the literary triangle that I am trying to trace in this article; for it is precisely in the 'baroque excesses', exemplified by Faulkner's prose and mirrored in García Márquez's novels, where we can find the echoes of that other excessive and baroque writer, James Joyce.

We are faced in James Joyce and William Faulkner with two atypical modernists, ill at ease with their contemporaries, perching themselves at the edge of a 'logorrheic' abyss in their attempts at encapsulating or, rather, recreating or re-appropriating their native spaces through a profusion of language. Perhaps it was this affinity that prompted a contemporary critic to disparagingly describe the writing in The Sound and the Fury as 'more incoherent than Joyce' (Hartwick 1999: 629) and Wyndham Lewis to pithily summarise Faulkner as more 'Joyce than Stein' (Lewis 1999: 643), as an author whose 'hot and sticky' (Lewis 1999: 637) prose displays 'the rhythm' of 'Irish sentiment' (Lewis 1999: 643). If Lewis's summation is redolent of Arnoldian reductions transposed to the Southern States, other commentators have sympathetically framed Faulkner within the Irish tradition. Thus, Seán Ó Faoláin placed Faulkner's writing in a decidedly Irish context, by noting that life in Mississippi as filtered through Faulkner's prose sounded:

[V]ery much like life in County Cork. There is the same passionate provincialism; the same local patriotism; the same southern nationalism ... the same feeling that whatever happens in Ballydehob or in Jefferson has never happened anywhere else before, and is more important than anything that happened in any period of history in any part of the cosmos (Ó Faoláin 1956: 102)

Ó Faoláin's reading of Faulkner as a 'passionate provincial' could be added to a litany of similar appraisals of his work as that of a local raconteur *paradoxically* endowed with portentous linguistic powers, were it not because Ó Faoláin stresses the totalising nature of Faulkner's literary cosmos, whereby the Yoknapatawpha stories force the reader to reevaluate history through the prism of the 'gnawing defeat' (Ó Faoláin 1956: 102) assailing Southern man, to the point where any other perspective is obliterated. This perspective

proved intolerable to many of Faulkner's contemporaries who, imbued as they were with an ideology that stressed the values of modernity, could not easily reconcile his *avantgarde* experimentalism with the recurrent presence of the irrational in his works. To quote Lewis once more, if Faulkner's 'novels are, strictly speaking, clinics' (Lewis 1999: 638), readers are asked to peruse these narratives by attending to the obsessions and preoccupations of the diseased and insane. In other words, their author demands that we adopt the point of view of America's 'otherness'.

This dislocation of perspective, this disestablishing and maddening multiplication of voices that we encounter in Faulkner's work is, of course, central to the post-colonial writer's project. Ultimately, I believe, it is this powerful invocation of the 'other' that proves so seductive to a writer like Gabriel García Márquez, as well as aligning Faulkner with that other 'patron saint' of Latin American letters, James Joyce. Faulkner may have recognised as much himself by describing Joyce's influence with rich and suggestive biblical overtones, stating that '[y]ou should approach Joyce's Ulysses as the illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament: with faith' (Faulkner 1960: 77). The potency of this image belies lukewarm understanding the of Faulkner's 'Joycism' as little other than a capricious and superficial appropriation of the latter's avant-gardism.

García Márquez's view of Faulkner runs counter to the characterisation of the latter's literary experimentation as mere technical folly. In García Márquez's readings, 'the Faulkner method' (García Márquez, Vargas Llosa 1968: 52-53) (4) represents a more than adequate tool to reflect his own reality. This perspective is not only advantageous for what I consider to be a more adequate understanding of the value of Faulkner's work and its impact on Latin American letters, it is also inextricably bound to a reading of Joyce as equally instrumental in the creation of a literary language that renders itself to the expression of colonial experience, and which baroque difficulty and excessiveness are coupled with the process of inscription of the

colonial subject's re-claiming of a distinct cultural and political identity. That is, far from being the product of overzealous commitment to cosmopolitan avant-gardism, Joyce's and Faulkner's daring formal experimentation is intrinsically bound to literary projects that are at once intensely personal and exemplary, as the Latin American García Márquez clearly understood. Thus, the overwrought intricacy of their style is entwined with their desire to re-tell their local and national histories as seen with the eyes of the defeated and colonised, and their minutely-rendered literary cosmogonies are the result of their wish to re-appropriate their native spaces. These are projects that shun the notion of language as a transparent means of expression, just as they underpin a disdain for history conceived as a linear and progressive enterprise, exposing this linearity as dependent on the suppression of the marginalised and oppressed. Their diction is best understood in terms of cannibalisation and repetition, of obsessive, even maddening inclusion, heterogeneity of radical and heteroglossia.

Faulkner's voice had If been neatly compartmentalised as a Modernist anomaly, whose 'monstrous' means of expression sat uneasily with his essential provincialism, Joyce was the victim of the opposite misreading, as the pugnacious specificity of his prose was reduced to 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (Eliot 1975: 177), in T.S. Eliot's celebrated words. The disorderly voice of the colonial is thus refashioned as that of a conservative saboteur, inaugurating decades of a critical understanding of Joyce as a relentless cosmopolitan intent on performing a salutary exposé on the perils of ignoring the crumbling edifice of Western Civilisation.

To return to Joyce's contemporaries, it may have been critically more profitable to attend to the objections of those shocked by the perceived squalor of his subject matter. Thus, in retrospect, there might be more truth in Aldington's words, whose review of *Ulysses* T. S. Eliot criticises in 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', than in Eliot's partial appropriation of Joyce's novel. In Aldington's summation, we encounter a variation of the same judgement levelled at Faulkner, that peculiar coupling of admiration and disgust, which exposes Joyce as an unruly, if precocious, child whose 'marvellous gifts' are ill-employed to 'disgust us' (Aldington quoted in Eliot 1975: 176). In wishing to counteract Aldington's simplistic didacticism, T. S. Eliot unwittingly exposes a didacticism of his own, revealing in his desire to rectify Aldington's misreading his own anxiety to control a book that is 'an invitation to chaos, and an expression of feelings which are perverse, partial, and a distortion of reality' (Aldington, quoted in Eliot 1975: 176). Joyce, on the other hand, was happy to absolve Aldington, describing his criticism as 'legitimate' in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver (Joyce 1957: 157).

'Perversity' and 'distortion' are, of course, primary elements of baroque expression. As Brigid Brophy has written, the baroque 'encompasses images devoid of dignity: comic images; domestic images; the taken literally imagist content of religious myths; images of such bodily secretions as tears and milk' (Brophy 1978: 149). In comparing the 'bold embrace' of baroque expression to 'a pair of giant curly brackets that clip together things irreconcilable' (Brophy 1978: 149), she provides us with a good metaphor to understand the revulsion unleashed by Faulkner's and Joyce's fusion of the demotic and the sublime in their fearlessly baroque experiments. In this context Clifton Fadiman's dismissal of Faulkner as 'a Dixie Gongorist' (Fadiman 1999: 263), as well as Jorge Luis Borges's analogy of Góngora's Soledades and James Joyce's works as failed linguistic experiments (Borges 2000: 447) (5), inscribe their re-enactment of baroque expression within the context of modernity. Although Fadiman's and Borges's appraisals may be ultimately disparaging, they provide us with a clear-eyed analogue in the figure of Luis de Góngora y Argote, the sixteenth century Spanish baroque poet, whose name has become synonymous in English with obscurantist linguistic experimentation (6). With his rich and ornate quasi-Byzantine poetry, Góngora

epitomises the 'perversions' and 'distortions' of the Spanish baroque, which, rooted in the culture of the Counter-Reformation, was anathema to the transparency and equilibrium of Neoclassical aesthetics. Góngora's poetry was the maximum exponent of that peculiar malady of irrational excess that afflicted Spain, a country frozen in the ecstasies of debasement and sublimation of the baroque in its stubborn refusal to join the rest of Europe in its march towards modernity. This reading of the Spanish baroque as a culture condemned to inhabit the fringes of Western Europe can be coupled with Jorge Luis Borges's identification of the baroque as an intrinsically Hispanic aesthetic. His reading of Joyce in the context of baroque expression is, for that very reason, more suggestive than it at first appears. In Borges's view, Joyce emerges as a marginal figure, inhabiting the fringes of Western culture, opting for a mode of expression that, in its historical definition, is essentially Catholic and critical of modernity. This vision coincides with Roberto González Echevarría's vindication of Góngora's poetry as, 'Inclusive rather than exclusive, willing to create and incorporate the new, literally in the form of neologisms. He is anxious to overturn the tyranny of syntax, making the hyperbaton the most prominent feature of his poetry' (González Echevarría 1993: 197).

This inclusiveness of Góngora prefigures the inclusiveness of artists like Joyce and Faulkner, whose creation of neologisms signals а with dissatisfaction the limitations of conventional language, presenting us at word level with the fusion and duplicity of the baroque. González Echevarría also points out that Góngora was the first to reproduce African inflections in Spanish speech, in what he views as an early inscription of America's 'other' at the heart of Spanish baroque high art. An analogy can be drawn here with Joyce's incorporation of Hiberno-English as part of the cacophonic proliferation of voices and styles in Ulysses, as well as Faulkner's inclusion of African American and Southern speech, even if, unlike Góngora, Joyce and Faulkner are operating from the margins of their respective traditions. Góngora's mercurial use of hyperbaton could not be ignored, as it should not be in Joyce's case. The attack against 'the tyranny of syntax' that hyperbaton supposes has been celebrated as a sign of Joyce's fastidiousness as an artist, best encapsulated in his famous preoccupation with word order within the sentence. We may recall here Clifton Fadiman's flippant description of Faulkner's involved and profuse syntactical structure in Absalom, Absalom! as a nightmare of parsing (Fadiman 1999: 263), in the context of a review that presents us with a Faulkner who, 'as a technician ... has Joyce ... punch-drunk' (Fadiman 1999: 263). The same critic usefully, if short-sightedly, decries Faulkner's narrative in the same novel as 'the Anti-Narrative, a set of complex devices used to keep the story from being told' (Fadiman 1999: 263). This 'antinarrative', which constantly frustrates the readers' desire for completion and unity by keeping the story in the throes of a protracted resolution, reminds us of Joyce's parodic interruptions and digressions in 'Aelous' and 'Cyclops', the two chapters in Uhsses centred on the task of arriving at a native Irish historiography. It is no accident that Absalom, Absalom! should have been the novel where Faulkner most ambitiously tackles his own historiographic project: positing the impossibility of a univocal version of history through the digressive and conflicting range of voices that configure the novel's narrative structure. As Gerald Martin has persuasively argued, One Hundred Years of Solitude is an equally impressive historiographic battleground, where competing versions of Latin American history wage a war whose victory seems to be ultimately a pyrrhic one (Martin 1989: 95-116).

Joyce's and Faulkner's use of time is also warped and distorted, foregrounding their use of a temporal unit that implodes the notion of linearity and the 'Apollonian' and discreet accumulation of time of classical reason: *the instant*. David H. Stewart wrote on Faulkner's deployment oftime in these terms, by noting that in his novels, and more specifically in *Absalom, Absalom!*, '[t]ime, instead of being a process and a sequence with objective periods, is still a compressed instant' (Stewart 1999: 313). In *Ulysses*, the instant is the unit through

which Joyce's characters filter their sensory recognition of their surroundings provoking the collapse of the authorial, all-encompassing gaze. In this regard, Joyce foregrounds the figure of the *flâneur*, whose shifting perspective causes the disruption of linearity, as the cityscape is broken into myriad reflections that refuse univocal recognition. Faulkner's Benjy in The Sound and the Fury represents the culmination of instantaneous temporality and the absolute breakdown of sequential time. In García Márquez, the instant becomes the unit in which competing versions of (hi)story coalesce, a notion underlined in the memorable first line of One Hundred Years of Solitude: 'Many years later, facing the firing-squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía would remember that remote afternoon when his father took him to see ice for the first time' (García Márquez 1987: 7). (7) This implosion of linearity is reckoned as central to the project of the baroque 'which mobilizes the notions of ambivalence and difference to provide ... the "Reason of the Other" which permits us to see the modern world from within' (Turner 1994: 22).

As González Echevarría has recognised, this 'Reason of the Other' is intrinsic to the adoption of baroque aesthetics in a colonial context. This explains why the aesthetics of the baroque was such an attractive proposition to New World artists in the Spanish colonies (8), even if the baroque was also the dominant mode of expression of imperial counterreformation Spain. The vindication of the baroque as a primary Latin American mode of expression is echoed in Alejo Carpentier's definition of Latin American art as essentially baroque in his well-publicised essays about 'The Marvellous Real' in Latin American literature (Carpentier 1967: 92-112), as well as in José Lezama Lima's theories about its essential 'baroquism' (Lezama Lima 1969: 33-57). Thus, Alejo Carpentier's theories on the 'marvellous real' have the effect of transfiguring magical realism into another manifestation of an eternal Latin American baroque. Inscribing the work of a magical realist like García Márquez into a baroque genealogy forces us to consider how his work, with its assured historiographic drive, contributes to the multiplicity of versions of

history 'whose main feature is the shuffling of competing histories which attempt to find the master version of American history' (González Echevarría 1993: 171). This is an American history which preys on the monstrous and insatiable aesthetics of the baroque, and may well be engulfed in the cannibalising thrust of its expression.

It is at the crux of these warring versions of history that I propose we may encounter Joyce's, Faulkner's and García Márquez's baroque projects, as the Latin American artist seeks allegiances with those marginal figures of modernity intent on voicing their own history subversion of through the prevailing historiographies. kind А special of historiographic revision requires, thus, a special kind of expression, one that will enable us to hear the voices of the 'other', and will relentlessly pursue their cultural re-inscription. language baroque expression, The of characterised by cumulative exhaustion and disruption, and duplicity (exemplified by the stylistics of the pun, the portmanteau word, irony, pastiche, parody and allegory) represents the summa aestetica of the post-colonial imagination. In this regard, the deployment of baroque expression by the three authors under discussion will be understood as an a fortiori aesthetic source for the apocalyptic and Messianic drive of their narratives. It must be understood as uncompromisingly intertwined

with their re-creation of national and local narratives from the point of view of the colonial and the defeated, rather than as a felicitous or regrettable by-product of an aesthetic of modernity. Joyce's recourse to allegorical parable in 'Aeolus', where the aspirations for liberation of a colonial people are paralleled with the Mosaic Old Testament story of delivery from bondage, as well as the repeated elevation of Bloom to prophetic status in 'Cyclops' and 'Circe' attest to the impossibility of a univocal historiography resulting in the erasing of oppressed and marginalised voices. Stephen's 'Parable of the Plums' in 'Aeolus', as ambiguous, oblique and sensual an allegory as one could expect from baroque expression, acts as a further negation of a transparent and straightforward Irish historiography intent on suppressing the specificity of its subject(s). Faulkner's recurrent fictive holocausts act as a literary reminder of the dangers of burying a suppressed alternative historiography. As the last author in this genealogy, García Márquez brings the apocalyptic entanglements and complications of the post-colonial baroque to their resolute climax, ensuring that 'the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.'

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<u>Notes</u>

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2 According to Lezama Lima: 'amongst us the baroque was the art of counter-conquest' ('entre nosotros el barroco fue un arte de la contraconquista') (Lezama Lima, 1969: 47).

3 'Faulkner está metido en toda la novelística de América Latina'.

4 'el método faulkneriano'

5 In his preface to a 1971 edition of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Borges writes: 'To speak of literary experiments is to speak of exercises that have failed in a more or less brilliant way, such as Góngora's Soledades or the work of Joyce'.

6 Roberto González Echevarría provides us with the Webster dictionary definition of the term 'Gongorism' as: 'a Spanish literary style esp. associated with the poet Góngora and his imitators, characterized by studied obscurity of meaning and expression and by extensive use of metaphorical imagery, exaggerated conceits, paradoxes, neologisms, and other ornate devices- compare EUPHUISM. 2a: an excessively involved, ornate and artificial style of writing' (González Echevarría, 1993: 196).

7 'Muchos años después, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo'.

8 Or how they may be 'a source as well as a tradition' (González Echevarría, 1993: 5).

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