The mid-twentieth-century dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo established in the Dominican Republic one of the most hermetically tyrannical states in the history of Latin America. The most well-known literary reconstruction of that era in Spanish is La fiesta del Chivo by Mario Vargas Llosa, a grimly denunciatory novel published in 2000. La fiesta del Chivo, however, does not seem particularly subversive. This is due to its general absence of ambiguity at levels of both structure and content. The reader is led tightly by the author from character to character, narrative strain to narrative strain, with little freedom of interpretation beyond that inherent in any literary artifact. By contrast, less-disseminated texts by Dominicans that consider the Trujillato, such as Freddy Prestol Castillo’s testimonial novel El Masacre se pasa a pie and Juan Bosch’s short story “La mancha indeleble,” mask their subversiveness in, respectively, narrative fragmentation and uncertain allegory. These fictions are compellingly indeterminate in that the ambiguities offered by a choppy polyphony in one case and an imprecise symbolism in the other force a reader to work actively to arrive at conclusions about the dictatorship. Although the indeterminate nature of the two Dominican texts leaves open interpretive possibilities that are not contestatory of the regime they consider, at a deeper level such readerly freedom works against the suffocating control of word and person wielded by Trujillo.
lished in 2000 that marked a new contribution to the long tradition of Latin American dictatorship novels. *La fiesta del Chivo* is grimly denunciatory throughout its nearly six hundred pages and yet, arguably, at no point is it particularly subversive, not even in the retroactive sense of revealing the horrors of a vanished regime. This can be attributed to a general absence of ambiguity at the levels of both structure and content. The reader is led tightly by the author from character to character, narrative strain to narrative strain, with little freedom of interpretation beyond that inherent in any literary artifact. By contrast, less-disseminated texts by Dominicans that consider the Trujillato, such as Freddy Prestol Castillo’s testimonial novel *El Masacre se pasa a pie* and Juan Bosch’s short story “La mancha indeleble,” mask their subversiveness in, respectively, narrative fragmentation and uncertain allegory. These fictions are compellingly indeterminate in that the ambiguities offered by a choppy polyphony in one case and an imprecise symbolism in the other force a reader to work actively to arrive at conclusions about the dictatorship. Sharp clarity is not imposed from above as in *La fiesta del Chivo* and as in, nefariously, the Trujillato itself.

Although the indeterminate nature of the two Dominican texts leaves open interpretive possibilities that are in fact not contestatory of the regime they consider, at a deeper level such readerly freedom works against the suffocating control of word and person wielded by Trujillo. By almost any measure, Vargas Llosa is a far better writer than either Dominican, but the consummately polished nature of his novel tends to exclude the openness of text and thought provoked by the rougher products of Prestol Castillo and Bosch. *El Masacre se pasa a pie* and “La mancha indeleble” are therefore far more subversive than the relatively closed *La fiesta del Chivo* despite the paradoxical reality that the former texts are less clearly denunciatory than the latter. An implication that follows is that within Latin American literary studies in North America, the institutional structures of canon formation—classroom syllabi, graduate program reading lists, market forces that privilege certain research over others, etc.—might do well to rearrange their hierarchies by actually promoting certain authors and texts not because they are deemed most accomplished in terms of talent or fame or influence or sales, but perhaps because they are not.

Dominican literature is a particularly noteworthy case for this argument. The Dominican Republic, sovereign over approximately two-thirds of the island currently called Hispaniola, stands symbolically at the center of the creation of Latin America even as its literature is rarely found in the realms
of the North American academy dedicated to southern prose. This contrast is compelling. Columbus visited the island on his first journey and his remains are presumed to be buried there, thus endowing the country with the foundational and (of course) genocidal semiotics of his existence. The uncritical verses to Columbus penned by such keystone Dominican poets as Salomé Ureña de Henríquez (1850–1897) are but one example of how local writers could locate hegemonic imagery in a nation-narration starting point of 1492 rather than 1821, the first time when the country left the Spanish Empire (voluntary recolonization occurred in 1861), or 1865, the definitive date of Dominican independence. Ureña de Henríquez, however, though staple patriotic fare in classrooms across Santo Domingo, is not widely read outside her country. This fate is generally shared by the major Dominican writers who followed her: the poet Pedro Mir, the essayist Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Juan Bosch, and others. Though all are recognized in Latin America as important contributors to their respective genre traditions, they scarcely seem to make it into the North American classroom. The essays of José Martí are likely to occupy the niche that could be filled by Henríquez Ureña; the short stories of Gabriel García Márquez or Carlos Fuentes tend to fill syllabi spaces that otherwise would be available to Bosch; and so on. To be sure, there is the valuable, ongoing work of New York City institutions like Hostos Community College that are intimately involved in Dominican studies due, in part, to the large local population from the island. Beyond New York, however, apart from the occasional graduate course on Caribbean literature, fiction by Dominicans themselves resides mostly at the margins of the North American academic mainstream. Any search for U.S. or Canadian syllabi on the Internet, for example, that include texts by such notable Dominican authors as Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Pedro Valdés, Pedro Peix, or Pedro Vergés, will come up virtually empty.1 Major North American teaching anthologies of Spanish-language literature also are liable to sideline Dominican writers.2

1. This situation is not necessarily doomed to last. The increasing presence of Spanish in North American life may well lead to the increasing profile and availability of Latin American literature in general, both in Spanish and in translation. Such a trend might expand the market, inside as well as outside the academy, for lesser-known voices from more marginalized countries. Within the Dominican Republic itself, presses in the 1990s increased efforts at making contemporary national literature as widely accessible as possible.

2. For example, neither Huellas de las literaturas hispanoamericanas (Garganino et al.) nor Aproximaciones al estudio de la literatura hispánica (Friedman et al.) includes a single Dominican author. Both are widely used in survey courses throughout North America. Another popular anthology,
The last decade of the twentieth century, by contrast, found three significant authors from three different countries who situated the Dominican Republic at the heart of texts that received a broad international readership. All these writers ground Dominican life in the catastrophe that is the central narrative of the modern nation: the dictatorship of Trujillo that lasted from 1930 to 1961. Their respective texts—*Galíndez* by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán of Spain (1990), *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez of the United States (1994) and *La fiesta del Chivo* by Vargas Llosa of Peru (2000)—received extensive acclaim among academic and popular audiences. All are widely read in Spanish (the translation of *In the Time of the Butterflies* has sold well throughout the Americas) but *La fiesta del Chivo* seems likely to deliver the most lasting and influential impact of these impressions of the Trujillato. This is due to the canonical status of Vargas Llosa himself (a position he has occupied for over forty years now), the fact that his text fits squarely in the established Latin American genre known as “the novel of the dictator,” the sheer attention (albeit often critical) given to his frequent comments on politics and literature in globally-accessible media, and the undeniable strengths (whatever the criteria used to judge such things) of the writing in the novel itself.

In short, academics know how to situate this text: its author, its genre, and its overall quality (in both senses of the word) have been familiar for an exceptionally long time now. The fit is a comfortable one. As Donald Shaw observes of *La fiesta del Chivo*, “Thematically, this is an unexpected throwback to an earlier pattern of fiction” (164). Moreover, the appearance of the novel was something of a celebrity event more than a mere publication. Thus Robin Lefere notes that “Se ha presentado *La fiesta del Chivo* (Madrid: Alfa-guara, 2000) como un acontecimiento literario de primera magnitud, hablando incluso de obra maestra” (4: 331). And within the Dominican Republic as well as without, the star power of the novel and its author imme-

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3. This wave of important foreign novels about the Trujillato by older, established writers overlaps with generally more recent texts by notable younger, American authors, such as *The Farming of Bones* (1999) by Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian-American, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz, a Dominican-American. These novels also address the dictatorship directly.
diately overwhelmed all other existing representations of the Trujillato. Indeed, according to one scholar, the novel “es el acontecimiento sociológico literario más importante ocurrido en el país desde la muerte de Trujillo” (Gallego Cuinás 217). This is due not to any particular new information about the dictator contained in the novel but to the immense literary capital of Vargas Llosa that accrued to an otherwise marginalized nation when he invested his fiction in it. As Tomás Castro Burdiez has written,

Nunca antes un novelista de la dimensión de Vargas Llosa había puesto en el mapa un tema dominicano para que el público de otras latitudes nos redescubriera. . . . Debemos felicitarnos por la dicha de que la pluma de Vargas Llosa se haya posado en tema de nuestro patio y darle vuelo universal.

But what about literary representations of the Trujillato from the Dominican Republic itself? What can these relatively untaught texts offer amid the curious phenomenon of the representation of a nation and its primary modern experience being dominated by three major foreign writers?⁴ In particular, how can Dominican texts be seen as in dialogue with the posterior La fiesta del Chivo given that, as Ana Gallego Cuinás suggests, “los dominicanos eran conscientes de que la novela de Vargas Llosa iba a proyectar internacionalmente la realidad histórica y actual de la República Dominicana” (216)? The answer lies within the structure of Vargas Llosa’s novel. It is extraordinarily tight. La fiesta del Chivo operates through three distinct narratives whose respective chapters follow each other like clockwork: the story of Urania Cabral, a Dominican exile who returns to the island and recounts her violation by Trujillo decades earlier when she was but a girl; the story of the conspirators who plot to assassinate the dictator; and the story of the regime

⁴ Many readers might take the novel by Álvarez to be exceptional here, since she herself fled the Trujillato with her family. Nonetheless, the fact remains that In the Time of the Butterflies was written in English and by a citizen of the United States (Álvarez was born in New York City) whose formative intellectual years were spent outside the island; indeed, she was only ten years old when she emigrated to the United States. This presents a challenge to any unproblematized acceptance of the novel as being “from” the Dominican Republic. Notably, the character who appears to stand in for Álvarez in the opening pages of the text—a woman who seeks to learn about the Mirabal sisters murdered by Trujillo for their revolutionary activities—is marked explicitly as a “gringa dominicana” who is culturally alienated from the island because she “has lived many years in the States, for which she is sorry since her Spanish is not so good” (3).
as viewed by Trujillo himself and his henchmen. Within each narrative there are frequent flashbacks and other familiar tropes that play with diachronic time and contiguous space—linearity is hardly absolute in the novel—but the narratives themselves succeed each other with unflinching regularity.\(^5\) Vargas Llosa’s apparent and oft-stated commitment to realism in *La fiesta del Chivo* buttresses this constancy of narrative alteration, for the collective result is that the reader is led every step of the way by the author toward a composite and coherent condemnation of the regime. This does not prove to be the case in the fiction of the Dominican writers Prestol Castillo and Bosch.

In fact, the structure of *La fiesta del Chivo* is put together so well, so completely, that nearly all interpretive possibilities are forestalled and foreclosed beyond the one offered by Vargas Llosa, at least as much as any literary text can achieve that. As María Elvira Luna Escudero Alie notes,

> Vargas Llosa con mucho conocimiento, cautela y minuciosidad va pintado [sic] un óleo perfecto de la época, de los personajes históricos y los creados por su portentosa imaginación, sin descuidar un instante en ninguno de los 24 capítulos de la novela, el asedio constante y preciso de la realidad desde todas las perspectivas posibles.

Adds Adriana Aparecida de Figueiredo, “Em *La fiesta del Chivo* podemos constatar três planos narrativos principais, que caminham separadamente, mas que, ao final, conjugam-se em um todo narrativo.” Vargas Llosa is right, of course, to assail Trujillo indefatigably; the stance, on moral grounds, is eminently supportable. Yet the constant lack of interpretive space left open deliberately for the reader works against an ideological message that is manifestly in favor of individual freedoms. If “todas las perspectivas posibles” on the Trujillato are presented by the author through the structure of the text—again, to the extent this is possible in any signifying artifact—what remains for the reader? Is not “um todo narrativo” precisely the thing that an antidictatorial novel might wish to avoid? The intended and unrelenting

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5. This technique is reminiscent of structural alternations in other Vargas Llosa novels like *La tía Julia y el escribidor* and *El hablador*. Alvarez’s novel is marked by somewhat similar alternations, albeit not with quite as regular a rhythm, in that the four sisters who are her protagonists get chances in turn to tell their narrative perspectives. Perhaps in Alvarez’s case as well, this structural consistency is related to the mostly clear lines drawn in the novel between opposition to and complicity with the regime.
determinacy of Vargas Llosa’s structure and stance pits itself against an
autocracy whose control over discourse, though destined to opposite ide-
ological ends, also sought to be all-encompassing.

El Masacre se pasa a pie by Freddy Prestol Castillo (1914–1981), an earlier
treatment of the Trujillato, presents a compelling counterpoint to La fiesta
del Chivo. The text burst upon the Dominican scene in late 1973 and, as
Doris Sommer recounts, “sold 20,000 copies shortly after its publication in
a country where authors often absorb the cost of the first and only printing
of 1,000 copies” (162). The novel immediately entered the Dominican canon
alongside works by earlier luminaries such as the aforementioned Salomé
Ureña de Henríquez. This celerity of success, however, was almost entirely
insular. According to Lauro Capdevila, writing in 2003, the widespread dis-
semination of El Masacre se pasa a pie within the Dominican Republic stands
in acute contrast to its limited availability outside the island:

Yet outside of Santo Domingo, this “clásico” is extraordinarily difficult
merely to locate. Even as of 2007, short of a personal visit to the Dominican
Republic or to a Dominican bookstore in the Washington Heights section of
Manhattan, purchasing the text is well-nigh impossible. Libraries rarely carry
it either; according to WorldCat, the most comprehensive relevant database,
not a single edition of the book is carried by more than a score of institutions
in North America. And availability for readers who do not know Spanish is
out of the question, for as with most Dominican literature and in contrast to
Vargas Llosa’s corpus, no translation of El Masacre se pasa a pie into any
other language appears to exist. In effect, a text that within the Dominican
Republic is probably the most famous and widely read novel by a Dominican
about the Trujillato—the central modern experience of a nation that itself is
central to the historical commencement of Latin America—is largely invis-
ible and inaccessible beyond the borders of the island. This bifurcated phe-
nomenon is strikingly different from the global reception of La fiesta del
Chivo.

Prestol Castillo, however, unlike Vargas Llosa, was not a professional
writer with a half-century of stardom. Trained as a lawyer, he was sent in the 1930s to work near the Masacre River, a shallow waterway that marks the frontier shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. As a result, he lived in that area during El Corte, a genocidal initiative ordered by Trujillo in which all Haitians working on the Dominican side of the river were to be murdered. Trujillo justified the annihilation on the grounds of national interest, portraying Haitians as a primitive, bestial people whose existence threatened the security of the Dominican state. The result in 1937 was the butchering of many thousands of Haitians, most of whom labored in the fields. The slaughter was nearly all done by Dominicans wielding machetes against defenseless men, women, and children. Prestol Castillo witnessed El Corte from close at hand, and El Masacre se pasa a pie is the literary text that he produced as a result. The timing of that production, however, is debatable and ultimately unknown. The publication date of 1973, over a decade after the assassination of Trujillo, may have followed close on the heels of the composition of the novel, or at least a substantive reworking of it. Alternatively, and as Prestol Castillo implies in his prologue, he may have written most of it at the time of El Corte itself, three and a half decades earlier. The impossibility of arriving at a definitive answer to the date of composition is crucial for it tends to produce differing conclusions as to the genre of the text. If assumed to be written shortly before its publication, the book takes on the appearance of a novel deliberately composed long after the historical moment that it fictionalizes. Its dangerousness as a political statement would

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6. Xenophobia and racism (sometimes state-sanctioned, as under Trujillo) directed at Haitians has had a substantive history within Dominican politics. Its roots, in part, are located in the fact that although the Dominican Republic gained its initial independence from Spain in 1821, the following year it was subjected to a Haitian occupation that lasted until 1844. To foment Dominican nationalism and thus further cement his own centrality and power, Trujillo often stoked up fears of irredentist Haitians, desires for historical revenge, revulsions at the alleged barbarism of the African influences in Haitian culture, etc. He claimed, however, that the massacre of 1937 was the spontaneous and righteous expression of the Dominican people for the occupation of a century earlier.

7. The number of slaughtered Haitians is uncertain. According to Rita de Maeseneer, “Los historiadores no acaban de ponerse de acuerdo sobre el número exacto de hombres, mujeres y niños haitianos (e incluso dominicanos) matados. Se suele admitir que fueron unos 15,000. Oficialmente Trujillo dio una compensación a 2,750 víctimas. Hay quienes que elevan la cifra a 40,000 o más” (66). In an overview of different estimates of how many people were massacred, Richard Lee Turits suggests, “perhaps 15,000 ethnic Haitians” with the number climbing possibly to the 20,000 range (590). Bernardo Vega provides a table of 54 different estimates of the dead that were made between 1937 and 1987 (386–87).
Lifshey: indeterminacy and the subversive seem to recede in proportion to its lack of both immediacy and factuality. Yet if considered to be written during the bloodshed of 1937, *El Masacre se pasa pie* appears to be a veridical witness to El Corte that, as such, was so acutely subversive that it had to be hidden from the government until a dozen years after the fall of Trujillo. Doris Sommer essentially takes this to be the case, agreeing to a 1937 date of composition (163) and proposing that the book is “a virtually autobiographical account, in the Latin American tradition of testimonios” (161). She adds that “El Masacre is not a novel; it won’t allow itself enough imaginative and intellectual space” (164).

This conclusion, however, is highly questionable. *El Masacre se pasa a pie* is extraordinarily full of space. At times, there seems to be little else: space between voices, space between chapters, space between ideological possibilities. Whereas *La fiesta del Chivo* is meticulously narrated, Prestol Castillo’s text is rife with fissures at every conceivable level. The very uncertainty over the date of composition (and the political and aesthetic implications of different resolutions of that question) is but one major example of how a fragmentation unsettles the text from start to finish. The prologue mentioned above is another, for as a metatextual commentary by the author it functions in an unusually disconcerting manner. The purpose of any authorial introduction is to guide the reader toward a certain interpretation of the text to follow, but the notably novelistic nature of Prestol Castillo’s prologue—its rhetoric is melodramatic rather than essayistic—tends to undermine its trustworthiness. For example, the final paragraph concludes an emotional description of the author’s disinterment of the buried pages of his manuscript (they had been hidden from the secret police) as follows: “Tomé en mis manos el cadáver. Con solicitud de padre, he intentado darle nueva vida. Esta es la historia de esta historia” (16). Such imbricated language, metaphorical and metatextual both, alerts the reader that the main of *El Masacre se pasa a pie* is hardly like to be bereft of “imaginative and intellectual space.” It is clear here already that the reader will have an active responsibility to interpret the symbolic constructs of the text and that even the author stands at a certain remove from his own corpus. Such openness to interpretation is difficult to locate in *La fiesta del Chivo*.

Moreover, the structure of the prologue of *El Masacre se pasa a pie* suggests multiple fractures, for it comprises six discontinuous passages set apart from each other by asterisks in a span of only ten pages. The visibly empty spaces that separate the author’s discrete ruminations and descriptions are connections to be filled in by a logic decided upon by the reader. Similarly, the main
text of *El Masacre pasa a pie* is composed of thirty-one chapters that are only loosely related. Although a narrator initiates and terminates the book in a first-person voice that alternates interior monologues with descriptions of events experienced directly, he is absent throughout the segments in the middle. Those sections, narrated from a third-person perspective, leap in apparently random fashion among individuals caught up in the 1937 genocide. For example, the fifth chapter tells of the Dominican elites of the frontier who lament the loss of cheap labor they will endure if all of “nuestras negras,” that is, their Haitian workers, are killed or exiled (47); but with no transition at all, the sixth chapter instead produces the conversations of Dominican soldiers who execute the Haitians; the seventh depicts an episode in which the massacre comes to the family of Manuelita (a Dominican) and Yosefo (a naturalized Dominican of Haitian origins) and their mestizo children; and so on.

These chapters are marked by dramatically different physical spaces and verbal registers as well. For instance, the comfortable interiors where the elites live in chapter five is immediately replaced by village and countryside scenes elsewhere: there is no fluidity of geography that holds the larger narrative together. Equally without transition is a succession of different discourses, such as the sudden appearance of soldiers’ conversations in an extremely heavy dialect. Prestol Castillo represents their language with a non-standard orthography meant to mimic the speech patterns of poor and uneducated recruits. This chapter thus presents an acute contrast to the sounds and appearance of the preceding chapter, featuring the elites, and to the novel’s opening and closing ruminations by the narrator. These latter segments do appear to provide something like a beginning and end to an organic plot, what with their offering a sense of the narrator’s own trajectory through the events of 1937, but this is a superficial read. Actually, there is no plot in *El Masacre se pasa a pie*, at least not at the holistic level, for what kind of a plot has a beginning and ending but no middle? Subjectivity is scattered across the novel. And the polyphony at hand never coalesces into any sort of unified *bricolage*. Only El Corte itself as a general phenomenon appears to link what otherwise are discrete episodes in time and space. Unlike in Vargas Llosa, no common depiction of the Trujillato emerges from the succession of chapters.

The overall nature of Prestol Castillo’s technique of presenting diverse subjectivities affected throughout the Dajabón frontier region is not some sort of comprehensive attempt at traditional realism. The multiple shocks of
time and space and discourse, all of it fragmented, plus the highly symbolic language, render the novel decidedly antirealist in aesthetic terms. The detached sections of the text never synthesize as a collage of 1937 either, for no composite snapshot of what happened in the massacre ever develops. Instead, a logic of synecdoche seems to motivate the book throughout, albeit a synecdoche of a curious and doomed sort: a series of parts that can gesture toward a whole but never possibly represent it. This is suggested early on as the narrator describes his move to the frontier: “Héme ahora hacia Dajabón . . . Hacia aquellas lejanías sólo van restos de máquinas y restos de hombres. . . . Hacia allá voy. ¿Qué será de mí?” (24). Dajabón, then, is a place that gathers only men and machines that already arrive less than whole. This is in keeping with the amputation of life from death and limb from limb that marks the massacre itself. Images of body parts strewn about are commonplace in the novel. Thus at one moment pigs feed on the “cientos de cabezas que vagaban en la sabana en las rutas del cerdo. . . . En el camino había huesos de piernas” (71). In another scene, the butchering of a Haitian named Yusén, “la sabana gana una oreja que ahora se confunde con tantos otros miembros tajados” (109). These brutal dismemberments find their parallel at the structural level of the book, whose most notable feature is its succession of chopped-off narrations. The body of El Masacre se pasa a pie, in other words, is rhetorically evocative of the body of the murdered.

There is no true equivalency here, of course: an aesthetic strategy of representation is irrelevant compared to the deaths of thousands. Yet if synecdoche is taken to be the motivating principle of the novel’s structure, what is the whole to which the parts gesture? In service of what conclusion does the fragmentation work? The answer is contradictory. For starters, the disjointed nature of the textual structure forces the reader to take an extremely active interpretive role. It is up to the reader to make the connections among chapters and to construe whatever messages Prestol Castillo might be trying to communicate. The multiple discourses and segments and voices of El Masacre se pasa a pie work directly against the uniformity of a hegemonic code imposed, for instance, by any autocrat and particularly by such an extraordinarily dominant dictator as Trujillo. The novel is replete with interstices in which readers are at liberty to forge their own sense of causality, their own verdicts on the massacre and its representation. As each middle chapter opens up a new narrative space not directly linked to its predecessor or successor, a polyphonic Dominican Republic emerges in which partial, limited and diverse voices arise all claiming different perspectives on El Corte. The
chapters are also disjointed internally, each one consisting of multiple detached passages set apart by asterisks and blank spaces. Even at the level of sentence structure, many phrasings are left incomplete: there are hundreds upon hundreds of ellipses used in the novel, often more than half a dozen per page. The reader is thus left to choose among these competing fragments, to weigh their relative claims and to interrogate the spaces that sever them. Individual freedom of thought, which suffered under Trujillo possibly its most comprehensive repression in the entire history of Latin American national tyrannies, is opened to the reader by the ruptured text of Prestol Castillo. *La fiesta del Chivo*, by contrast, is a model of structural fluidity and narrative determinacy. Indeterminacy flourishes almost nowhere, in inverse proportion to the literary polish of the text and the discursive control wielded by Vargas Llosa.

The subversiveness of *El Masacre se pasa a pie*, however, is paradoxical, for its very multiplicity of spaces allows for a variety of perspectives that seem to be exculpatory of both the massacre and the Trujillato. For example, the aforementioned soldiers who carry out the actual executions of the Haitians say that they are unhappy with having been forced into the job. Indeed, they make plans to flee the army and are shot as deserters as a result, causing the narrator to conclude that the conscripts are “‘tan mártir como los mismos haitianos’” (57). As for the commanding officer who is the character most clearly marked as evil in the text, Captain Ventarrón, he is often drunk and thus apparently not quite responsible for his actions either. For all the blood on his hands, his comeuppance after El Corte is simply that “ahora debe vagar como enantes, manso, humilde, anónimo, bajo los viejos robles de las plazuelas de la capital del país. ¿Quién le conoce, ahora? Casi nadie!” (148). Meanwhile, the narrator, a passive witness to the events of 1937, tries to convince himself that he is exempt from blame because “Escribo mis notas de este crimen! Es para denunciarlo!” (153). Responsibility does not settle squarely even on Trujillo despite the acknowledgment that the massacre came about due to “‘un señor todopoderoso en la capital de mi país. Este ordenó: ‘Mueran todos los haitianos!’” (111). This, actually, is an isolated sentence. Trujillo makes only one appearance in the entire text, a moment that lasts less than a page (he speaks in just one short paragraph), and is never referred to by name (158–59). In other words, as an embodied character, he is virtually absent in the novel. Prestol Castillo condemns the genocide and the amorphous state of society in which it took place, but he never harangues against the man who launched it nor his regime per se, nor, really,
anyone directly involved. There is no extended *ad hominem* denunciation of Trujillo at all, no examination of his person or political machinations remotely as minute or accusatory or enduring as that found in *La fiesta del Chivo*, in which he is a principal character and a wholly nefarious one. The format of *El Masacre se pasa a pie* allows each character the space to voice his own defense of his actions. As a result, condemnation is not focused on a single maleficent man or his policies and, indeed, ultimately settles on no one individual or social class in particular.

The novel instead claims to be a “Veraz cuadro de nuestra miseria nacional” (154). The massacre of 1937 turns out to be not the fault of Trujillo so much as, somehow, the Dominican Republic in general. All are complicit and yet none is ultimately responsible. Everyone is both guilty and not guilty. The abuse of power emanates not only from a recognizable leader but from numerous and varied elements of Dominican society, many of which are allowed the space to justify their actions. This hardly amounts to a message of bold denunciation. And yet it is this space for indeterminate morality that makes *El Masacre se pasa a pie* subversive in the end. Different readers will come to different conclusions about how blame is apportioned in the novel. Multiple and contradictory judgments remain viable both in terms of how the characters view their role in El Corte and how readers in turn evaluate the characters and, through them, the ideology of Prestol Castillo. In *La fiesta del Chivo*, by contrast, good and bad are visibly marked terrains. Moral relativism is limited at best. Forces of evil are clearly indicated and centralized in the figure of Trujillo and his henchmen. Thematically as well as structurally, nearly all lines are quite clearly drawn.

The structures of the two texts reflect their contents, for the fragmented and limited perspectives of individual characters that succeed each other without much apparent order in Prestol Castillo are contrasted by the smooth repetition of the three narrative strains in Vargas Llosa. It is evident that the author of *La fiesta del Chivo* has a comprehensive worldview that is sharply opposed to the Trujillato in moral and ideological terms. Yet this is not so much the case in structural ones, for the pitting of one internally consistent, holistic discourse against another elides the fact that neither presents much space outside the narrative realm of the author or autocrat within which individual thinkers can adopt differentiated postures. The very freedom that results from Prestol Castillo’s structural fragmentation and ideological equivocation permits by its nature a range of political and aesthetic liberties. In terms of their content, some of these postures are far less con-
demnatory of the Trujillato than Vargas Llosa, but by virtue of their very indeterminacy, they nonetheless constitute paradoxically an even more fundamental resistance to authoritarian reach.

The short story “La mancha indeleble” by Juan Bosch (1909–2001) offers a third way to approach the interrelation of subversiveness and representations of the Trujillato. Rather than a comprehensive and internally consistent critique as constructed by Vargas Llosa or a disjointed multiplicity of commentary as produced by Prestol Castillo, an allegory of imprecise symbolism is offered in “La mancha indeleble” as a way to refract the Trujillato through a paradoxical evasion of the same. Ambiguity of meaning here, rather than fragmentation of voices, becomes the way in which the desire of the dictator to determine all discourse is held perpetually at bay, leaving the reader (or citizen) again in a position to be free to arrive at interpretive positions distinct from those that the author (or autocrat) would propose and implant. The story, which consists of three pages of first-person narration, begins with a sentence that immediately establishes an air of the unreal: “Todos los que habian cruzado la puerta antes que yo habian entregado sus cabezas, y yo las veia colocadas en una larga hilera de vitrinas que estaban adosadas a la pared de enfrente” (237). The unnamed narrator, on seeing these heads, is “paralizado por el terror” (237). A disembodied voice then commands that he “Entregue su cabeza,” and the narrator stalls for time, trying desperately to think a way out of this predicament (237). Something similar can be said at this point for the reader, who has no way of knowing what exactly is going on, where the scene is taking place, or who the narrator or the voice is.

As the narrator tries to stave off the surrender of his head, the reader actively is questioning the situation with his. That the ability to pursue unique thoughts is the central issue here is rendered clear by the following conversation between the disembodied voice and the narrator:

—Aquí no tiene que pensar. Pensaremos por usted. En cuanto a sus recuerdos, no va a necesitarlos más: va a empezar una vida nueva.
—¿Vida sin relación conmigo mismo, sin mis ideas, sin emociones propias?—pregunté. (238)

Soon after this exchange, the narrator bolts for the door and escapes to the street. He hides at home for a week and then finally goes out to a café, whereupon two men sitting next to him recognize him as “el que huyó después que ya estaba . . . [sic]” (239). The narrator, completely unnerved, spills
coffee on his shirt; this is the eponymous stain that then persists despite repeated washings. “La mancha indeleble” ends with the narrator’s unabated fearfulness and his admission, “Pues en verdad ignoro si los dos hombres eran miembros o eran enemigos del Partido” (239). There is no resolution of the story beyond this: no explanation of why the stain will not disappear, no confirmation of the ideologies of the two men, no hint even of what will befall the narrator. There is but ambiguity. And still-further unknowns in Bosch’s story abound. Neither the country nor the city nor the narrator is ever named; nor is the disembodied voice nor the Party. The precise reasons for people willingly decapitating themselves and handing in their heads is never specified: only the action itself is shown to be routine and expected. The narrator, rather than a heroic figure who stands up to power and rejects mindlessness, is actually a weak and frightened man who bears an indelible stain of his own making, not of the Party’s or of the disembodied voice’s. In short, there is no easy interpretation of the story offered within the text itself. The narrative is coherent internally and in this sense is entirely unlike El Masacre se pasa a pie, but what it signifies is equally unclear.

At first glance, however, the life of Juan Bosch, the author, would seem to lend the story some determinate and definitive meaning. Bosch was a Dominican intellectual who in 1938, after being offered a post in Trujillo’s government, fled the island and became a principal figure of opposition to the regime. He did not return to the Dominican Republic until 1961, after the assassination, but served as president for seven months in 1963 until being deposed by a military coup d’état.8 “La mancha indeleble,” the last short story Bosch ever wrote, was composed in exile in 1960. It appeared in his anthology Cuentos escritos en el exilio in 1962, the same year as his presidential campaign victory. Given this context, the allegorical correspondences of “La mancha indeleble” seem at hand, for the disembodied voice that will think for everyone would appear to be that of Trujillo and the state he controlled utterly, its discourse as well as its politics. The narrator who refuses to turn in his head and flees for the outside world would seem to be Bosch in exile; and the two men in the café would equate to the regime’s spies that Bosch no doubt felt were always keeping an eye on him while abroad. Such a reading of “La mancha indeleble” is neatly encapsulated by Beatriz Carolina Peña when

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8. Bosch became a fixture of island politics for decades thereafter, running for president frequently throughout the next forty years.
she notes that it is the only story in *Cuentos escritos en el exilio* written in the first person and that “tiene similitudes con la vida política agitadísima y controversial del autor” (128). She adds that “Juan Bosch abandona la oferta del dictador de convertirlo en diputado del gobierno y se fuga al exilio. La aceptación hubiera significado la renuncia a sus ideas, cuya metáfora en el relato podría equivaler a la entrega de la cabeza” (129).

This interpretation, however, is unsatisfactory. It is too mechanical in its mapping of an author’s life to his narrative—a limited approach to any text in any case—particularly given that “La mancha indeleble” works constantly against arriving at any definitive interpretation or conclusion. Ambiguity, not determinacy, is the unsignifying code at hand. As but one example, the narrator does not take a hard stand against the Party, unlike, say, Bosch in real life. Nor, for a variety of reasons, does the protagonist appear as a heroic figure of resistance to evil in a manichaean world. First, the disembodied voice is actually somewhat comforting despite its panoptic control: “A pesar de que no era autoritaria, la voz llenaba todo el salón y resonaba entre las paredes, que se cubrían con lujosos tapices. Yo no podía saber de dónde salía. Tenía la impresión de que todo lo que veía estaba hablando a un tiempo” (237). Second, faced with this ubiquitous and comprehensive voice, the narrator’s decision to flee is more a reflex than a rejection: “En medio de mi terror actué como un autómata. Me lanceí impetuosamente hacia la puerta. . . . Mi necesidad de huir era imperiosa, y huía como loco” (239). That is, he does not even process rationally a decision to escape. Third, and most important, the indelible stain is not caused by any malevolent force but rather by the narrator himself. And as he admits, “a cada esfuerzo por borrarla se destaca más” (239). The mark would appear to be of some imprecise culpability in which the narrator is complicit, not the fault of the regime that asked him to turn in his head. The open ending of the story with the mysterious two men who may or may not be friendly to the unspecified Party—an institution whose relationship to the narrator, in turn, is unidentified—is fully in keeping with the ambiguities that lace the text from its start.9 The

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9. In occasional extratextual moments, Bosch noted that the subject of “La mancha indeleble” grew out of his friendship with an individual who had been a Communist Party member and then repented of it: the friend “fue muy generoso con la causa dominicana, con la lucha contra Trujillo. Pero desde luego que hubo en él una pérdida de la integridad . . . yo no me explicaba por qué este amigo quería hacer tanto esfuerzo para quitarse la mancha de haber sido comunista. Si fue comunista, fue comunista; eso no es un delito” (Fernández Olmos 168). This information, if taken into account, would render even more complicated any interpretation of “La mancha indeleble,”
reader must take an active and ultimately shifting role on how to glean meaning from the story. The controlled and denunciatory expositions of the rotating narratives of *La fiesta del Chivo* could not be further removed.

Nowhere in “La mancha indeleble” is the Dominican Republic identified by name. The story could just as easily be read as a universal allegory without exclusive referents and, indeed, without exclusive signification. As in *El Masacre se pasa a pie*, the narrator’s defense against the regime at hand and its decrees is half-hearted at best. Culpability does seem to rest with the protagonist; after all, he is the one with the indelible stain. And yet even here the reader cannot be sure, for instead of an allegory with one-to-one correspondences to the life of Bosch or indeed to the Trujillato in general, loose ends are present everywhere. This has not stopped scholars, however, from trying to tie up those ends and produce a more coherent narrative. Peña, for instance, tries to explain away the two men at the café by declaring that “Lógicamente, la razón por la cual el personaje desconoce si aquellos son integrantes o contrarios al Partido, es porque desde ambos grupos la actitud hacia él es acusatoria: los miembros lo tildan de desertor y los adversarios lo acusan de haber estado afiliado” (129). This would be convincing but for the fact that there is no proof in the story of the attitudes of either “los miembros” or “los adversarios.” The reaction of the disembodied voice to the narrator’s flight is completely unknown, while conceivably the two men may be talking with admiration as much as accusation.

Another critic, Guillermo Federico Gutiérrez, concludes his analysis of the story by awarding the narrator a different but equally definitive storyline:

El héroe de la fábula escapa de la cueva para buscar la luz. Su meta es regresar para liberar de la obscuridad a los que allí estaban cautivos. El conflicto en esta fábula es cómo persuadir a los que están cautivos en la sombra de que la luz ofrece un mundo mejor. Esta interrogante queda inconclusa en la tensión-distensión de *La mancha indeleble*. (164)

This description of the narrator’s motives likewise seems implausible because the narrator at no moment cuts such a figure. When he flees the “cueva” (the room with the disembodied voice or, by allegorical extension, the Dominican...
Republic under Trujillo), an instinctive repulsion drives him rather than a rationalized search for any light, either real or metaphorical. Thereafter, the narrator certainly does not evince any signs of intending to return to the cave and liberate from its darknesses those who already had turned in their heads. There is also no effort at persuading the headless inhabitants. On the contrary, the narrator hides for a week, briefly shows up at the café and then returns home in a mix of isolation, fear, and ignorance. Gutiérrez seems to acknowledge the problems with his own interpretation by granting that, in actuality, the story ends “inconclusa.” This, of course, belies his invocation of “fábula” as an applicable generic category in the first place. Fables have morals; they are pedagogical texts in service of whose teleology the hero labors. Like El Masacre se pasa a pie, “La mancha indeleble” teaches no moral and offers no hero.

Scholars like Peña and Gutiérrez do what scholars do, namely, try to make sense of things. Ambiguous and open stories resist that. Reading the life of an author, especially one whose biography is as public as Bosch’s (or for that matter, Vargas Llosa’s), into the meaning of a text is a strategy of interpretive determination with a long history. Specifying unspecifiable imprecisions is another. Yet these attempts fail with “La mancha indeleble” because its ambiguities never do give themselves up to discursive control, either by the author or the reader or within the text itself. As such, this story is impressively subversive of the Trujillato, a regime that it does not even mention. Faced with a tyranny wherein almost every political discourse and nearly all of its ideological signification are controlled by a remarkably coherent hegemonic order, a text of incoherent and indeterminable import is perhaps the most subtle and yet powerful challenge that can be crafted. “La mancha indeleble” is replete with uncertainty of both meaning and culpability, and that very uncertainty—and the freethinking, active reader that it requires—constitutes an acute challenge to the centralized imposition of any orthodoxy whatsoever. As in El Masacre se pasa a pie, the uncontrollability of the narrative and its meaning, this time the causal trope being allegorical ambiguity rather than multivocal fragmentation, is what lends the story stature as an antidictatorial text. Paradoxically, of course, the lack of a comprehensive critique of the disembodied voice equates to an absence of a sharp denunciation thereof. Victims of the regime, such as the narrator, turn out apparently to be complicit in it: they bear a stain of their own making. Thus, in favor of multiple and open possibilities of interpretation, blame in both Prestol Castillo and Bosch is shifted away from a central power despite its unceasing demand that
heads roll. Yet beyond the lack of a sustained attack on that power in “La mancha indeleble” and El Masacre se pasa a pie is the more profound resistance to authorial and autocratic control that is the readerly freedom of thought inherent in both texts.

Juan Bosch was an important author of his nation in literary as well as political senses even though he spent more than a score of years outside it. He is easily the most famous short story writer of the Dominican Republic and, like Prestol Castillo and Ureña de Henríquez, is canonical domestically. Also, he has had a recognized if limited influence on other Latin Americans of more widespread renown. According to Miguel Ángel Fornerín, for instance, both Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez have acknowledged his legacy and “este último se ha incluido dentro de los alumnos de Juan Bosch. García Márquez participó en un cursillo que sobre la técnica de cuento dictara Bosch en Venezuela en la década del cincuenta” (448). Silvio Torres-Saillant even has termed Bosch “el narrador dominicano más conocido en la arena literaria internacional” (“La cuentística boschiana” 83). Nonetheless, the marginalization of Dominican literature in general within the continental canon vastly restricts the readership of his oeuvre. This is the case particularly in North America, where substantive mainstream overviews of Latin American literature such as Donald Shaw’s A Companion to Modern Spanish American Fiction and Jean Franco’s classic An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature do not even mention Bosch at all; Shaw does, however, consider explicitly La fiesta del Chivo. Torres-Saillant is entirely correct when he suggests that

hablar de renombre internacional para un narrador dominicano es, sin duda, algo que exige explicación dada la seria condición de marginalidad que históricamente ha padecido la literatura del país vis-à-vis la creación literaria de los países de tierra firme hispana. (“La cuentística boschiana” 83–84)

Even within the genre of the short story, adds Torres-Saillant, Bosch “no ha recibido la atención crítica de que han gozado los demás ‘príncipes’ del cuento hispanoamericano. No se han acumulado en torno a sus cuentos las copiosas bibliografías que rodean la obra de un Rulfo a la de un Cortázar” (“La cuentística boschiana” 88).

Prestol Castillo and Bosch, therefore, occupy an unusual place in the history of literary representations of the Trujillato. They are authorial voices of
notably high renown within the Dominican Republic who are simultaneously, at best, marginal voices of limited repute outside it. This stands in contrast to the internationally prestigious authors from Spain, the United States, and Peru who recently have produced major fictionalizations of the Trujillato: Vázquez Montalbán in Galíndez, Alvarez in In the Time of the Butterflies, and Vargas Llosa in La fiesta del Chivo. These three texts already have entered the machinery of canon formation as subjects of new dissertations, graduate reading lists, cinematic productions, syllabi, and the like. In the half-dozen years since its publication, Vargas Llosa’s novel in particular has dwarfed in popularity and influence all other Spanish-language portraits of the regime. This is so much so that the case can be made that La fiesta del Chivo will be the first text of any genre or theme to land a place in the inchoate canon of twenty-first-century Latin American literature. Its strengths are many, from the smoothness of its plotting to the evocative power of its well-researched details to the pervasive and righteous indignation at the depravity of what may have been the most comprehensive of modern Latin American dictatorships. Yet the very clockwork nature of the book and its structure, the very ease with which it leads the reader from character to character, chapter to chapter, results in a text consistently resis-
tant to interpretation. There is little for the reader to do but react viscerally to the horrors and sadesses that unfold one after the other. This is an invaluable affective response to provoke—our world is surely in eternal and urgent need of antidictatorial voices, whatever their quality—but it should not be the only one.

El Masacre se pasa a pie and, albeit less so, “La mancha indeleble” are not neatly polished literary products like La fiesta del Chivo. The fragmentations of the former and the ambiguities of the latter create narrative environments that, while strikingly different from each other, are both essentially indeter-
minate. This in turn immediately charges the reader with exploring that indeterminacy, thinking actively about how to interpret the texts rather than passively receiving them. Due to the absence of unequivocal denunciations of the Trujillato, however, the two texts actually permit readings that do not blame anyone in particular for the tragedies at hand. As an equivocating stance while heads roll, this is morally problematic. Yet it is also critical. The most subversive challenge to a dictator may be not opposition to his politics of degradation but to his powers of diktat. A text that slips out of discursive control, that offers itself willingly to interpretation, that is self-contradictory and ruptured, and uncertain rather than consistent and coherent and com-
The Trujillos of history always claim the power of significative ascription to all discourse that they can comprise. Resistance to the same, rather than an opposed but also all-inclusive worldview, is thus contestatory to the core.

The case for teaching and reading Dominican literature emergent from the Trujillato is both strong and overlooked. The nation, though currently occupying a peripheral space within the Americas both politically and aesthetically, is nonetheless “the epicenter of Caribbean historical experience,” as Torres-Saillant rightly observes, for “the first settlement of Europeans, the first genocide of aborigines, and the first cohort of African slaves” all took place on the island (“Dominican Literature” 1: 49). This historical centrality alone warrants at least some inclusion of the national texts in regular consideration within metropolitan academic circles. Beyond history and geography, however, lies the reality that representation of the Trujillato, as arguably the most repressive of all Latin American dictatorships, ought to be seen as one of the most pressing questions to consider within the long trajectory in the Americas of literary responses to tyranny. It would be unfortunate if Vargas Llosa’s work, however well-executed, were to dominate that representation so completely that the qualitatively different approaches of Prestol Castillo and Bosch were to continue almost unnoticed outside the island.10 The argument here is not a simplistic or subtly xenophobic plea for insular fiction to trump the work of non-Dominicans, nor is it a backhanded attempt to shore up support for writers to the political left of the well-known (and in the academy, rarely admired) right-wing proclivities of Vargas Llosa. The argument also is not that El Masacre se pasa a pie and “La mancha indeleble” are superior artistically, however that might be defined, to La fiesta del Chivo. Rather, the texts by Prestol Castillo and Bosch deserve a certain consideration because they do all that dictators do not: open up space in diverse ways for variegated inclinations of thought. The contradictions and fragments and ambiguities in their texts are precisely the imprecisions not permitted by Trujillo and all the egregious Latin American despotisms of which his was

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10. Any number of other Dominican writers, among them Efraim Castillo, Ligia Minaya, the aforementioned Veloz Maggiolo, Valdéz, and Vergés y Peix, have offered fictional representations of the Trujillato that equally merit attention. For a solid overview of some of their work as well as that of Vargas Llosa and Prestol Castillo, see Rita de Maeseneer’s Encuentro con la narrativa dominicana contemporánea.
perhaps the paragon. Nothing, perhaps, is quite as subversive as a space that rests outside of reach and out of control.

Works Cited


