Going Mundial:
What It Really Means to Desire Paris

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In The World Republic of Letters Pascale Casanova proposes to read modern literary history on a global scale through the movement and definition of literary capital as it circulates independently of broader political and economic networks of power. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s fields of value, she sketches an international economy whose transactions and investments inhere in a shared belief in the “asset” of literary value and that, however divorced it may be from other forms of power, consolidates a geographic and historical center roughly coincident with the commonplace of nonliterary accounts of modernity: “Literary space creates a present on the basis of which all positions can be measured, a point in relation to which all other points can be located. . . . What might be called the Greenwich meridian of literature makes it possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the center of the world of letters of all of those who belong to it.” In Casanova’s proposals, Paris serves as this meridian: because of its long accumulation of literary prestige and its relative freedom from political concerns,


An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Modern Language Association’s annual meeting in San Francisco on December 27, 2008. I am grateful to Marshall Brown and an anonymous reader for their insightful comments and to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania for the use of its archives.
Paris’s cultural scene in effect establishes the present of modern literary time. It has the power both to consecrate authors from the periphery (or, as Casanova often terms it, the “suburbs”) who move within its aesthetic lexicon of universal value and to identify and impugn less transcendent, “provincial” (national) writing.

If it treads uneasily in poststructuralist and postcolonial currents of metropolitan academia that are preoccupied with interrogating notions like “the universal,” “literature,” and “modernity,” Casanova’s rendering of literary modernity directly opposes the perspective from the “suburbs” of world literature, where any attempt to separate literary capital from the web of economic and political domination that shapes that capital is necessarily read as at best disingenuous, at worst imperialist. Not surprisingly, Latin Americanist criticism of Casanova has been quick and decisive: many scholars address how *The World Republic of Letters* “mystifies Western cultural, literary, and artistic hegemony as useful ‘models and resources’ for the emancipation of the cosmopolitan writer and for the modernization of backward literatures”; many also offer an incisive evaluation of the political and economic hierarchies driving Europe’s cultural hegemony during the modern period surveyed by Casanova, as well as of the rhetoric of world literature that continues to mask these hierarchies in the era of globalization. At the core of these critiques, whether or not they mention it directly, is Casanova’s selective understanding of the theorization of symbolic fields she takes from Bourdieu: in its original formulation in *The Rules of Art* and *The Field of Cultural Production*, the symbolic depends on an act of mis-

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3 Françoise Pérus offers an excellent overview of how international markets and changing priorities in Latin America’s governments have conspired to suffocate the region’s literary institutions (“La literatura latinoamericana ante *La república mundial de las letras,*” in Sánchez-Prado, 155–56); see also Juan Poblete, “Globalización, mediación cultural y literatura nacional,” in Sánchez-Prado, 271–306.
recognition, a disavowal of economic or political regimes that grounds the illusory constitution of art’s autonomous field. The symbolic thus stands for a mediating function capable of veiling the incursion of other markets in the cultural field even as it helps broker their ongoing correspondence. Bourdieu makes a point of stressing this interdependence: “Although there is no question of denying the specific determination exercised by the possibilities inscribed in . . . the ‘relatively autonomous field’ . . . it is not possible . . . to make the cultural order a sort of autonomous, transcendent sphere, capable of developing in accordance with its own laws.”4 Despite spotty acknowledgments of the relative nature of literary autonomy, Casanova’s samplings of Bourdieu are overwhelmingly tailored to her prime objective of preserving the literary domain of the republic of letters, an objective placed in express contradistinction to postcolonial studies and other politically minded critical approaches.5 In the resulting portrayal of literary modernity, a cast of hierarchies and conflicts rehearses the familiar schema and vocabulary of imperial discourse as they obscure their political or economic determinations. Ignacio M. Sánchez-Prado pinpoints this omission:

For Casanova, the relations of coloniality seem to be traces that the field of power left in the autonomous system of literature during its formation . . . but that do not necessarily have a role in the literary system’s internal processes of consecration. Because of this partial reading of Bourdieu’s concept of autonomy, Casanova completely leaves out relations between politics and literature that are instrumental to comprehending certain dynamics of the literary world.6

The Latin Americanist response to Casanova thus underlines the need to pay rigorous attention to the historical vicissitudes of literary

5 In one of her more recent essays, this objective introduces a veritable misreading of the notion of relative autonomy: “Issues posed in the political domain cannot be superimposed on, or confounded with, those of the literary space, whether national or international. Much contemporary literary theory seems bent on creating this short-circuit, constantly reducing the literary to the political” (Pascale Casanova, “Literature as World,” New Left Review, no. 31 [2005]: 84). In the rest of this article Casanova drops the qualifier relative, referring only to literature’s “autonomy.”
production in the peripheries she aggregates to the model of Parisian universality. Yet this response, in attempting to repoliticize the literary field—in countering Casanova’s defense of autonomy, in a sense, by privileging its constitutive relativity—risks eliding an influential position in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin American letters, for which Paris did count as the center of world literature, as if to reaffirm what Casanova says of Samuel Beckett, that what “is not well known in Paris . . . is not well known” (World, 127–28). This position, like the political and economic forces behind literary modernity, is an undeniable fact of regional history. Insofar as it sidesteps the paradox between literature’s self-perception and its social and material moorings, the criticism of Casanova follows a strabismic logic in delineating the problematic at hand. While it is a welcome task, training critical focus on the political economy hiding under Casanova’s literary economy makes it easy to lose sight of the tensions that inform Latin American appropriations of Paris: certainly, these appropriations are conditioned by a hegemonic relation, but they also manifest a belief in literary value that resonates with the ethos of Casanova’s republic.

The task of relocating Paris on the horizon of Latin American letters may best begin at the site of these tensions. The view from within the republic of letters, for which Paris is a beacon of literary autonomy and advancement, is obscured by the Eurocentric aporias of genre, institution, and authorship attending traditional notions of literariness. But the correction of this view need not reduce Paris to a monitory example of Latin American modernity’s subsumption under the principal narratives and flows of capital. It is therefore necessary to examine how Latin American cosmopolitanism co-opts Paris as a transatlantic space of modernity and in fact leverages the aesthetic, geographic, and economic distance Paris represents for the elaboration of a regional identity. I contend that maneuvers of co-optation are irreducible to Casanova’s field of literary autonomy and ill apprehended by hermeneutic attention to hegemonization: both tools, though essential

to, are insufficient for understanding such maneuvers. Keeping this conflict as a frame of reference, I want to examine *Mundial Magazine*, a little-known periodical that the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío published in Paris from 1911 to 1914. Darío is a central figure in Latin American literature’s long courtship with Paris. The trajectory of his career moves from the francophilia that led him to declare famously, “Mi esposa es de mi tierra; mi querida, de París” (My wife is from my country; my sweetheart, from Paris), in his 1896 collection *Prosas profanas* to outspoken support after 1900 for pan-American cultural unity in the face of North American imperialist policies, as well as for growing acceptance of the role that writers were left to assume as public mediators in Latin America’s new capitalist economies. *Mundial*, the last of Darío’s large-scale endeavors before his death in 1916, concentrated all of these engagements: it was dedicated to promoting a Latin American cultural community, composed in Spanish of contributions from Latin America and Spain, but produced in and distributed from Paris.

*Mundial*’s unique characteristics mirror the tensions inherent in this strabismic perspective on Paris’s place in peripheral literary modernity. Although periodicals and pamphlets were the major organs of literary production in Latin America from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, they are invisible in studies (like those of Casanova or Franco Moretti) that attempt to explain Latin American literature’s development on a metropolitan scale. The oversight is

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8 Peter Bürger, speaking of the European avant-garde, notes that autonomy “describes something real (the detachment of art as a special sphere of human activity from the nexus of the praxis of life) but simultaneously expresses this real phenomenon in concepts that block recognition of the social determinacy of the process. . . . All discussion of this category [autonomy] must be judged by the extent to which it succeeds in showing and explaining logically and historically the contradictoriness inherent in the thing itself” (*Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], 36). Although Bürger’s theory does not consider imperialism, or even national politics, his comments are a useful reference for readings of Casanova’s invocations of autonomy.

especially grave in light of periodical literature’s pivotal role in shaping a regional reading public and a nascent writing profession in the absence of a sustainable book industry. Darío’s friend Luis Berisso complained bitterly about the mostly ephemeral life accorded Latin American literature: “Our letters, banished from the book by the glacial atmosphere that drowns our ideas and snaps our wings, are harbored in newspapers and magazines, to live one day and then disappear into obscurity.” Berisso’s comment is eerily prescient: while an important line of criticism stemming from Angel Rama’s *Rubén Darío y el modernismo* has brought newspaper columns, or *crónicas*, into the purview of scholarship on Spanish American *modernismo*, much less critical attention has been paid to literary magazines of the period. But these magazines are primary actors in the discursive establishment of a Latin American cultural arena; as such, they serve as historical authori-

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10 Boyd G. Carter’s history of Spanish American literary reviews is premised on the unacknowledged importance of periodical literature in Latin American literary history. Newspapers and magazines, he writes, “have published valuable writings that, without a doubt, would never have seen the light of day without the accessibility of their pages.” Such periodicals “have formed successive generations of writers; they have served as aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural catalysts between the past and the present, the urban and the rural, the national and the cosmopolitan” (*Las revistas literarias de Hispanoamérica: Breve historia y contenido* [Mexico City: Andrea, 1959], 19).


ties on regional conceptions of modernity. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that *fin de siglo* periodical literature, rarely available in its original form, has traditionally been organized for study in anthologies arranged by author, genre, or movement. Atomized and regrouped through classifications proper to book publishing, *crónicas*, poems, stories, and articles reveal nothing of their original participation in the essentially heterogeneous forums of magazines and newspapers, which engendered a literacy coded in the visual and textual composition of popular, elite, and commercial elements. As a result, staking out “the modern” in *fin de siglo* Latin American letters often means reproducing the very assumptions reported by Berisso—that books, and book logic, are a minimum requirement for visibility on the scene of modern print institutions—even as it means erasing the political and economic mediation he unconsciously alludes to.

Thus *Mundial* plots an alternative literary modernity that continues to be effaced. Yet it exploits Paris’s cultural ascendancy to endorse

13 Tracing the dialectical relationship between the novel and advertising in nineteenth- and twentieth-century periodical fiction, Jennifer Wicke details the importance of understanding these two discourses as mutually dependent, rhetorically affine components of modern textual traditions: “Both literature and advertising are composite, heterogeneous language practices, which need to be read off each other to gauge their respective outlines” (*Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], 14). Wicke’s commitment to reading the relationship between commercial and literary discourses as one of collaboration, rather than of contamination, is an instructive model for the study of Latin American literary magazines.

14 Sean Latham and Robert Scholes assess the difficulties that traditionally impede the study of periodicals as unique cultural objects: “While individual scholars or students might be able to mine [periodicals] for a narrow range of materials relating to their fields, they are rarely in a position to say much about the periodical as a whole. As a consequence, we have often been too quick to see magazines merely as containers of discrete bits of information rather than autonomous objects of study” (“The Rise of Periodical Studies,” *PMLA* 121 [2006]: 517–18). Latham and Scholes project a new critical sensibility in approaches to periodicals that, thanks to advances in digital technology and the increasingly easy dissemination of facsimiles, will treat periodicals “not as resources to be disaggregated into their individual components but as texts requiring new methodologies and new types of collaborative investigation” (518). Such a development will be particularly relevant to and promising for scholarship on modern Latin American literature.

15 Although the importance of periodicals in Latin American discourse has received scant attention in the study of *modernismo*, much scholarship on later periods—the *vanguardias* and particularly the boom and postboom—has analyzed their
Latin American arts; in doing so, it moves through the literary economy profiled by Casanova. Around the time of its first appearance, Darío advertised Mundo in the Buenos Aires paper La nación as “a magazine in Castilian—the first of its kind for its graphic features—that I will seek to make the Parisian vehicle of Spanish American thought.”

His plug highlights an instrumentalization of Paris that was unprecedented among early-twentieth-century Latin American periodicals. From the mid-nineteenth century on, most literary magazines in Latin America engaged in the importation of Parisian and, more broadly, French modes and literature: Boyd G. Carter reports, for example, that the famous Mexican monthly Siglo XIX (1841–96) featured almost as many items by French writers as by contributors from all the Iberoamerican countries combined (17). The manifesto that inaugurates Darío’s own brief collaboration with Ricardo Jaimes Freyre on the Revista de América (Buenos Aires, 1894) foretells an “aesthetic pilgrimage . . . to the holy places of art and the unknown Orient of daydreams.”

With Mundo, however, these transatlantic movements are reversed: instead of reproducing Parisian culture in local publishing centers (primarily Buenos Aires and Mexico City), Darío promises to produce Latin American culture in the metropolis. Furthermore, the details of the magazine’s production play a key role in the process of exaltation initiated by the remoteness of Paris, because the cultural value that Mundo passes along to readers is embedded in its status as an imported commodity.
Darío’s insistence on the term *magazine* instead of *revista* aligns this commodification with a commitment to the latest French and Anglo models of publishing. The proliferation of magazines in France, Britain, and the United States that started in the 1890s, thanks to advances in image reproduction and the prominent integration of advertising alongside textual content, constituted a fusion of cultural and economic spheres. For the first time literature and other cultural artifacts were haphazardly compiled as products for mass consumption. Darío was surely cognizant of the etymological link between *magazine* and the French *magasin*, both designating inventions designed to display a panoramic assortment of goods. Writing about Victorian women’s magazines, Ellen Gruber Garvey stresses the impetus of consumerism subtending this connection: “The grand magasin reframed the task of shopping as a luxurious and eminently pleasurable pursuit. Similarly, the magazine joined in one package, or booklet, the commercial world of goods and sales with the world of private musing and romantic fantasy.”¹⁹ The magazine’s promiscuous melding of high culture and large-scale economism is apposite to the disparities of *modernista* cultural production made iconic by Darío’s own career. As poets displaced by the specializing economies of nineteenth-century Latin America, the *modernistas* survived by working as journalists and, more rarely, as diplomats abroad. Documenting the historical processes driving the development of Spanish America’s literary institutions, Jeff Browitt lists some of the nodal points it created for the intraconversion of cultural and economic value:²⁰

Firstly, the fundamental importance of journalistic work for economic survival and the growing exclusive vocation of the same; secondly, the obvious connection between owners of newspapers, managers, editors,


²⁰ I borrow the term *intraconversion* from James F. English, who proposes it to describe the subtle transactions among the types of capital involved in the phenomenon of cultural prizes (*The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005], 10).
journalists and the literary field; and thirdly, the way in which cultural capital (fame) could be converted into economic capital—securing employment—which in turn stimulates the accumulation of more cultural capital through the financing, dissemination and publicity for the creative work of the writer.21

This fraught entrance on the market is at the core of the literary and journalistic concerns of modernista writing. Tracing the complex accommodations these writers made to their socioeconomic situations, Rama notes that “the poet makes his own, not only the laws of the market, with its circulation of products, but also the subjectivist structure of the economy that has just imposed itself on the Spanish American world” (Rubén Darío, 26). Mundial, published in the twilight of modernismo, offers a summary testimony of the mercenary logic that obtained in the new profession of Latin American letters.22 Conceived along the lines of the first mass magazines of the United States and Europe, Mundial ensured its circulation with funds generated by advertising.23 The advertising pages, grouped at the back of the magazine, are prefaced by the following notice in the inaugural issue:


22 Pineda Franco also remarks how the magazine uses both cultural and economic capital: “With Mundial Magazine, the professional writer put accumulated prestige at the service of the market. . . . In the pages of Mundial, modernismo, like fashion, travel writing, and photography, were part of consumerism as decorative luxury” (48–49).

23 As Richard Ohmann extensively documents in Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century (New York: Verso, 1996), the integration of advertising in magazine copy in the 1890s touched off an explosion of ten-cent monthlies in the United States, making family magazines available to a broader, working-class readership. Darío explicitly refers to Mundial’s own dependence on advertising in an editor’s note: “Cuantos más números circulen, la publicidad será más grande, y cuanta más publicidad, la riqueza y el interés del magazine aumentarán, pues para nosotros la publicidad representa una fuente de ingresos que no podremos esperar nunca de la venta, dado que el número que vendemos a 1 franco, nos resulta más caro” (The more issues that circulate, the greater the advertising will be, and the more the advertising will be, the more the advertising, the greater the wealth and interest of the magazine, since for us advertising is a source of income we could never expect from sales, given that the issue we sell for one franc costs us more than that to produce) (“Notas de los editores,” Mundial, October 1911, 591).
In the domain of business, as in the domain of literature, science, and art, inventions and advancements often revolutionize the production and presentation of the diverse items that we consume and that are the result of the great economic vitality of producer nations. For that reason, we hope that our advertising section will offer an interesting review of all the products, all the manufacturers, and all the items that interest our readers by keeping them abreast of the best, the newest, and the most useful in the world of industry and trade.24

By invoking an analogy between the world of retail and more rarefied disciplines sure to concern the distinguished reader, the magazine’s editors activate a central rhetoric of the crónica, the mainstay of writers like Darío, Enrique Gómez Carrillo, or José Martí, who made their living by describing scenes from the capitals of Europe and the United States. Supporting their poetic vocation through a thoroughly capitalist office, the cronistas served as authorities of consumerism as well as of literature and art, providing a “showcase for modern life, produced for a cultured reader longing for a foreign modernity” (Ramos, 86). Mundial replicated the crónica’s function as a guide for the educated consumer; unlike a newspaper column, however, it manifested the discourses popularized by modernismo in a full-fledged product of modernity, a luxury commodity that delivered good taste through its own design and manufacture. Speaking of the advent of magazine culture in the United States, Richard Ohmann explains: “The visual presentation of the magazine announced its own status as an elegantly made commodity that would grace a modern parlor, and its editors did not subdue its materiality. . . . Readers were invited to regard the magazine they held in their hands as a full realization of nineteenth-century business and industrial genius” (224). Indeed, both the technical and the mercantile underpinnings of the magazine were featured as selling points for Mundial.

24 “En el terreno de los negocios, como en el dominio de la literatura, de las ciencias y de las artes, las invenciones y los perfeccionamientos tienen por efecto de revolucionar a menudo la fabricación y la presentación de los artículos diversos que consumimos y que son el resultado de la gran vida económica de los países productores. Por ese motivo deseamos que nuestras páginas de publicidad constituyan una revista interesante de todas las fabricaciones, de todas las cosas y de todos los artículos que deben interesar a nuestros lectores, al ponerlas al corriente de lo mejor, de lo más nuevo y de lo más útil en el mundo de las industrias y del comercio” (“La publicidad de Mundial,” Mundial, May 1911, 109).
in his editor’s notes Darío often asserts the unrivaled “graphic” luxury of his publication, and in many issues the table of contents lists the number of photographs and other illustrations included with each item. One of Mundial’s scientific articles explains the halftone photo-engraving process—the premier innovation of twentieth-century mass magazines—in technical language accompanied with diagrams. The efficiency and quality of this process allowed for the virtually unlimited dissemination of art as well as snapshots of everyday life, ushering ordinary citizens into the high culture previously cordoned off in salons, theaters, and museums. In “A Small History of Photography” Walter Benjamin asserts that great works of art “can no longer be regarded as the work of individuals; they have become a collective creation, a corpus so vast it can be assimilated only through miniaturization.” For Mundial’s readers in Latin America, of course, the democratization of culture that mass publication caused was doubly significant: it not only brought them elegant reproductions of great art for the price of a magazine but also traversed the geographic and political distances separating them from the modernity they desired. What is more, the conspicuous voyage of Mundial as an imported artifact of modernity parlayed the distance of Paris into a mark of exclusivity, accentuating the status of its readers as privileged and informed consumers. In keeping with Darío’s directives for the magazine, this distinction was mobilized primarily to promote and consecrate a discrete pan-Hispanic cultural space, conjured in the allegorical passage through Paris.

The narrative that Mundial tells its readers about the latest feats of print culture is inscribed in an epic of import and export whereby local culture travels to Paris, is magically transmuted by modern machinery, and is shipped back to readers on glossy pages, shimmering with a met-
By enumerating the intricate, somewhat mystical steps taken from the raw contributions of American artists and writers to the finished product in readers’ hands, Darío transforms the magazine into a palimpsest of its own journey to and, for many subscribers, from Paris. In conjuring this journey, he reprises a well-known itinerary of Latin American cultural sensibilities. Traveling to Paris, both discursively and physically, was the sine qua non of social and artistic distinction for nineteenth-century criollos, so much so that by the turn of the century it had been ritualized into the “boomerang” voyage, signaling that young elites secured the real value of the city on their triumphant return home as cosmopolitan subjects. The readers of Mundial followed a familiar route of modernity and prestige, but this time the modernity prepared for them was their own. The peculiar contours of this cultural capital are manifest in Mundial’s announcement of a literary contest in 1912 (fig. 1). Entries solicited from writers in Spanish American countries are to be sent to the editorial office’s Paris address. Cash prizes are to be awarded in francs, and the contestants stand to gain considerable renown: “It is well known that Mundial and Elegancias are the most artistic and most luxurious magazines, and they are much appreciated

28 “Hacer venir originales de todas partes de América . . . , pasarlo al grabado, empleando los medios de reproducción los más modernos, haciendo todos los días ensayos de color hasta llegar al resultado esperado, luego la mise en page, y por último, la impresión, que tan gran importancia tiene en la edición moderna. Agregar a esto la combinación de los tonos y las diferentes clases de papel couché y mate que hemos tenido que buscar y encontrar, y os daréis cuenta aproximada de lo que representa el actual número” (Rubén Darío, “He aquí el número de Navidad,” Mundial, December 1911, 100).

Figure 1. Announcement for a literary contest in Mundial, November 1912
in all Spanish-speaking countries, where they circulate abundantly. This literary contest will not fail to pique the interest of writers who wish to procure widespread acclaim.”30 The editors plot a tale of success that, however implausible, serves as the guiding principle of Mundial: the consummation of artists and writers in Latin America depends on their passage through Paris. Their words conceal a trafficking of cultural and economic value that is paradigmatic of Mundial’s historical situation at the cusp of Spanish America’s emerging culture industry. The announcement capitalizes on a traditional spatial metaphor of Paris—one anchored in the notion of prestige—to promise rewards much more in tune with the interests of a regional class of professional writers. The distinction garnered by the voyage to and from Paris is translated into commodities (a prize in French currency, publication in a luxurious magazine), through which it can confer material and social benefits whose real significance becomes apparent in the pan-Hispanic literary world that Mundial addresses. At this juncture one readily detects the antinomies between Casanova’s proposals on literary modernity and their replicants. Undoubtedly, something like the “belief” in cosmopolitan notions of literary value that she outlines is put into practice in a magazine whose quality and prestige are predicated on its production in the metropolis, even when, or perhaps especially when, the distances involved complicate and add great expense to the publishing process. In a sense, then, Casanova is right to conclude that Darío “rearranged the literary landscape of the Hispanic world by importing the latest edition of modernity from Paris” (World, 96). Her narrative of influence is perfectly probable, but it occludes the long ideological transcript that makes influence possible, starting with Spanish America’s imperial legacies and continuing with the marketing of culture contemporary to modernismo. Indeed, the remnants of such narratives peer out from Casanova’s own sentence with a strange polysemy. From the context of Mundial emerge the many layers of signification enveloped in the importing of modernity, and they summon both a his-

30 “Es notorio que Mundial y Elegancias son actualmente las revistas más artísticas y más lujosas, y que son muy apreciadas en todos los países de lengua castellana, por donde circulan profusamente. El interés que despiere este concurso literario, no dejará de atraer a los escritores que desean conquistarse un gran renombre” (“Concurso literario,” Mundial, November 1912, 668).
torical relationship of cultural dependency and the advantages of new print technology, not to mention the consolidation of class distinctions among Mundial’s readership. The first two associations are also at play in the lexeme edition, recalling the material production of modernity as well as its evolving content. Yet Casanova’s evocation of “the literary landscape of the Hispanic world” remains canny: while the idea draws to some extent on the movement of capital, its discursive consonance with Mundial’s concerns is not exhausted by the landscape’s erasure of imperial hierarchies and modes of production. The intersecting economies of this landscape—both on the properly literary plane asserted by Darío and Casanova and in the material armature they obscure—can be read in Mundial precisely at those points of disavowed interest where its political and rhetorical filaments coalesce.

Textually, the economy of Mundial is expressed in an idiom of sight and space. The magazine’s narrative composition—from its paratexts and images to its editor’s glosses—creates an allegory of distance through which the mythical spaces of Paris compose a panoramic vision of the Hispanic world. That is, Mundial is not just a review of Hispanic culture in Paris; it is a venue where a cosmopolitan pan-Hispanic culture is forged and inserted on the world stage, where this culture comes into sight through the remoteness of Paris’s own cultural scene. As Darío writes in 1912, “Mundial Magazine wants to be not only the most important magazine in the Spanish language but also . . . the official vehicle of the Spanish American world, serving as a liaison to all the republics of the new continent.”31 This allegorical vision is laid out for readers on the magazine’s title page (fig. 2), where an ecumenical group of topics leading to the Paris address of the editors is flanked by two stately columns listing the places of particular interest to their readers.32 The title page displays Mundial’s pretension to be the Parisian conduit of thought from these places, as Darío predicts in his blurb

31 “Mundial Magazine quiere ser, no solamente el magazine más importante de lengua castellana, sino también . . . el órgano oficial del mundo hispano americano, que sirva de vínculo a todas las repúblicas del nuevo continente” (Rubén Darío, “Una nueva rúbrica,” Mundial, January 1912, 282).

32 In Spanish American literary reviews there is, Aching notes, a similar allegorical mechanism based on the use of the subjunctive to help “define the[se] publications’ role as the purveyors not only of self-awareness but also of national and regional, socioeconomic progress” (126).
Figure 2. Title page of *Mundial*, September 1911
for *La nación*. The same spatial configuration is present in many of the magazine’s features and stories, which inform their readers of the geography, history, and culture of their own regions but address and educate them through Parisian coordinates. Each issue, for example, begins with an encyclopedic article on a given Latin American country. These essays aim to instill in their readers a pan-Hispanic or pan-Latino consciousness with an objective summary of the components of this consciousness, thus exploiting a metaphor of distance in the essays’ very format. But in their clinical view they often define Latin American sites with Parisian coordinates, as when Darío labels the Parque del Prado in Uruguay’s capital “el bosque de Boulogne montevideano” (the Montevidean Bois de Boulogne).  

33 Similarly, a young Mexican artist invited to give readers a tour of his country’s magnificent volcanoes locates them “entre los paralelos 100 y 105 grados 60’ W. del meridiano de París” (between the 100th and 105th parallels, sixty minutes west of the meridian of Paris).  

34 At these and other moments regional culture comes into sight through the lens of Paris.

This proviso of visibility structures Alejandro Sux’s review of the Mexican artist Roberto Montenegro. Sux, an Argentine writer who worked to delineate a Hispanic cultural field early in his career, included Montenegro as the sole Mexican representative in *La juventud intelectual de la América Hispana* (1911). Yet his introduction to the artist in *Mundial* is hampered, Sux suggests, by a number of conditions of visibility: “I still have not seen Montenegro’s work in Paris, and I know of his efforts in Mexico only through some photographs that Mr. [Leo] Merelo [Mundial’s publisher] has just put in my hands and that he will publish with these lines. For that reason I will refrain from speaking of any other Montenegro than the man I met in a hotel on the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires.”

35 In following the cues Sux provides as the self-proclaimed purveyor of Spanish American intellectual production,


35 “Todavía no he visto a Montenegro en París, y sólo sé de su labor en Méjico por unas fotografías que el Sr. Merelo acaba de poner en mis manos y que publicará con estas líneas. Por tal motivo me abstendré de hablar de otro Montenegro, que no sea el que conocí en un hotel de la rue Notre Dame des Victoires” (Alejandro Sux, “Un notable artista mejicano, R. Montenegro,” *Mundial*, August 1912, 361).
the reader learns a protocol for recognizing regional culture. Charged with creating international awareness of Montenegro via *Mundial*, Sux centers his appraisals of the artist on his presence in the French capital (an interview conducted there, photographs sent there), effectively suggesting that the other, the Mexican Montenegro, becomes a figure worthy of notice only in Paris. However, Mexico reemerges in juxtaposition with the Parisian avant-garde: Sux expresses delight that Montenegro’s drawings show no futurist or cubist influence, that they are, in this sense, simply American. Similar plaudits of regional idiosyncrasies pepper *Mundial*’s reviews, positing a Latin American cultural autonomy seemingly hypostasized only in the voyage to Paris. One feature praises the realist landscapes of the Argentine artist Svetovar Franciscovich as “genuinely American, made in the grandiose solitude of the Argentine and Chilean Andes, far from all foreign influence.”36 For the reviewer, Ruy Gómez, Franciscovich is the kind of artist whose presence in Paris is necessary for combating European prejudices about America as a mere floodplain of cosmopolitan schools and movements; ironically, the artist’s “distance” from Europe becomes apparent and meaningful when it is displayed alongside the dominant avant-garde aesthetics of Parisian salons. *Mundial* thus delivers a cultural product touted as wholly Hispanic whose existence nonetheless hinges on a visually documented passage through Paris.

The same predilection for autochthonous Hispanic expression is patent in the editorial presentation of literary selections: perhaps most strikingly, for a magazine published in France by the most famous of the modernistas, *Mundial* during its entire run included only two poems in French and negligible contributions from French writers. One of the magazine’s few non-Spanish-language items, a translated short story from the United States, warrants a prefatory justification: “The literary directors of *Mundial* aim to collaborate exclusively with authors of the Spanish language. This does not prevent us from offering, from time to time, some pages from other authors, especially when they are somehow

relevant to Spanish America or to Spain.” The ethical stance conveyed in the story’s proem, and also, frequently, in the editor’s notes, hints at the historical and political motivation for the bivalence of Paris in Darío’s cosmopolitanism. Indeed, Mundial’s seemingly irregular alternation among Spanish American, pan-Hispanic, and pan-Latin allegiances (apparent, for example, in the contrast between the promotion of Spanish-language literature quoted above and the title page’s inclusion of Brazil, Haiti, and Portugal) suggests a strategic navigation of the cultural referents available to a Spanish American reading public at a geopolitical crossroads. Spain’s defeat by the United States in 1898 and the definitive end of its imperial reign brought with them a new set of transatlantic relations, which a number of intellectuals—starting with José Enrique Rodó in Ariel (1900)—saw as a chance to reassess their discursive lineage and chart a globally recognized realm of Spanish American culture. By recouping their continuity with Hispanic origins, cosmopolitans like Rodó and Darío could at once combat North American imperial advances and reverse colonial hierarchies; they envisioned Spanish America, in Arielist fashion, as the heir of a bygone civilization. The opposition to the United States and the redefinition of historical attachments to Spain are triangulated by a continued recurrence to Paris as the linchpin of Latin cultural coherence. This articulation of cultural alignments provided a key narrative of identity for Spanish America’s intellectual elite for much of the twentieth century. As Graciela Montaldo points out, the ideological terrain of Latin “spirit” deflected the encroachment of Anglo-Saxon morality while reasserting the preeminence of the region’s intellectual class: “The disdain for the United States entails the readjustment [reacomodo] of Spain in the discourse of Latin American elites, but it also involves the readjustment

37 “La dirección literaria de Mundial se propone que la colaboración sea exclusivamente de autores de lengua castellana. Esto no obsta para que de cuando en cuando se ofrezca alguna página de otros autores, sobre todo cuando por algún punto tienen relación con la América española, o con España” (“La penitente,” Mundial, January 1912, 272).

38 In Ariel Rodó mounts an allegorical defense of Spanish America’s civilizational heritage through classical rhetoric and referents, much as Darío creates a worldly Hispanic poetic idiom through the assimilation of French elements. In this sense, as Aching argues (104–14), the two writers’ visions of cosmopolitanism were similar, although their work represents competing variants of modernismo.
of values within national cultures: no to utilitarianism (life organized according to modern values), yes to spirituality (the need for intellectual aristocracies).” Montaldo’s insights signal the nuanced stratification of interests imbricated in Darío’s pan-Latin vision—inter- and intranational, aesthetic and political—all of which are invoked in Mundial’s discursive and physical movement through Paris.

To sift through this entanglement, and by way of conclusion, I want to return to the conflict between Casanova’s republic of letters and Latin Americanist critiques of hegemony. Given the array of discourses through which Paris is marshaled to express Spanish American culture, how can a phenomenon like Mundial be responsibly mapped onto world literary space?

Such a mapping cannot avoid parsing the functions of the “universal,” either in Darío’s promotion of Paris or in The World Republic of Letters. In his discussion of Casanova, Hugo Achugar reminds us, as if it were necessary, that “universality is always a tale narrated by the victors and usually one where the losers are invisible.” If this perspective has become rote positionality in the ongoing critique of colonial discourse, it is nonetheless useful to those who insist on continued attention to the historical constitution and transformation of the universal. As Judith Butler eloquently argues in her dialogues with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, the life of the universal—what is in principle abstract and unchanging—depends on its repeated instantiation in new and heteroclite forms. Both G. W. F. Hegel (in his elaboration of Spirit) and Laclau (in his theorizations of the hegemonic relation) describe a paradoxical configuration: as an ideal form, the universal cannot be embodied in or claimed by any historical particularity, and yet it can only be in these very claims, whose discursive instance it overflows and carries to other particularities. Butler points out, however, that this configuration is best observed when the universal is claimed by subjects outside its presumed trajectory: “The universal announces, as it were, its ‘non-place,’ its fundamentally temporal modality, precisely when

challenges to its existing formulation emerge from those who are not covered by it, who have no entitlement to occupy the place of the ‘who,’ but nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them.”41 In such unlikely or absurd demands, she continues, we can see the universal in action, surviving in the performance of its conjuration: “This form of political performativity does not retroactively absolutize its own claims, but recites and restages a set of cultural norms that displace legitimacy from a presumed authority to the mechanism of its renewal. Such a shift renders more ambiguous—and more open to reformulation—the mobility of legitimation in discourse” (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, 41).

Butler’s insights are easily transposed to the discursive principles of Mundial, as well as to a century-old tradition of cosmopolitanism in Latin American letters. Much like the work of Martí and Rodó before him, or like that of José Vasconcelos, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, and Octavio Paz after him, Darío’s efforts as editor of Mundial promoted a universal realm of Latin American culture; like many of these other figures, he assimilated France’s heritage to a teleology of Latin identity, a notion that originated with French imperial campaigns in Spanish America in the nineteenth century.42 These historical sediments, in light of Butler’s postulations, provide an acute portrayal of the mechanism of renewal through which the universal evolves as it crosses historical contexts and lines of power. At this point Casanova’s claims to Paris’s universal literary value seem particularly naive. However, they do accurately describe the shared belief in Paris’s omnipotence in the literary space of modernity that inspired and sustained the enterprise of Mundial.

When Bourdieu lays out the fundamental characteristics of the symbolic field, he emphasizes its communal composition as “the product of a vast operation of social alchemy jointly conducted, with equal conviction and very unequal profits, by all the agents involved in the


field of production” (81). Participants in the symbolic field renounce economic value even when “symbolic” success—including their own profits—is measured and guaranteed through economic transactions. This misrecognition of value is prominent in the editor’s note that opens *Mundial*’s second issue: “We would be remiss not to extend an expression of gratitude toward those who have known how to value the importance of a publication that is one of the most eloquent manifestations of the vitality of a race, and at the same time a noble banner of a noble ideal.” Darío’s expression of gratitude illustrates the nexus of transactions that render *Mundial* a symbolic artifact of Latin America’s universality. When he thanks his readership for knowing how to value its importance, his gesture is predicated on a willful conflation of fields. That is, the discrimination of readers who support the consecration of Latin American cultural production as an incarnation of great ideals—an incarnation centered on the mechanism of the universal that Butler highlights—is solidified in their purchase of the magazine; their shared belief in the place of regional artists and writers in universal culture is secured only by their economic investment, which profits Darío himself. This invisible substitution of monetary for cultural value, in fact, is what makes *Mundial* a symbolic product, according to Bourdieu’s prognosis, just as it supplies Casanova’s schematics with a fantasy of autonomous literary value, an economy “based on a ‘market,’ . . . which is to say a space in which the sole value recognized by all participants . . . circulates and is traded” (*World*, 13).

Casanova’s belief in the autonomy of Paris’s literary capital, much like Darío’s circuitous references to *Mundial*’s value, is founded on the suppression of the heterogeneous economies that contaminate and threaten it: neither author can account for the ways that *Mundial* packages the city’s prestige as part of a commercial venture in which cultural distinction is inextricably caught up in the new technologies of reproduction and marketing that made the magazine’s distribution possible. This interchange of symbolic fields points up the importance of the periodical as a unique venue where the belief in symbolic currencies of

43 “No podemos dejar de exteriorizar [el] sentimiento de gratitud hacia quienes han sabido valorar la importancia de una publicación que es una de las manifestaciones más elocuentes de la vitalidad de una raza, y al mismo tiempo noble bandera de una noble Ideal” (Rubén Darío, “Aviso al público,” *Mundial*, June 1911, 115).
the modern and universal is cultivated and secured. By understanding objects like *Mundial* as significant artifacts of print modernity, rather than as incidental repositories for other literary forms, we can better ascertain how the traffic of ideas, capital, and technologies between Paris and Latin America helped consolidate a reading public grounded in part in the belief of the universal value of the center. Addressing the reader’s beliefs may mean grappling with the same challenge identified by Bourdieu: “The major difficulty lies in the need to make a radical break with this belief . . . without thereby forgetting that [it] is part of the very reality we are seeking to understand, and that, as such, [it] must have a place in the model intended to explain it” (35). In other words, to grasp the universality and autonomy of Paris—as well as of Latin America—we must grasp their moral force as popular convictions while refusing to be persuaded by that force: indeed, this dynamic tethers the belief in literary universality, as a field of value, to the hegemonic relation without reducing it to a simple relation of power. Extrapolating such fields of value, in Darío’s moment as well as in our own, may be the first step to knowing what it really means to desire Paris.

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