Chapter 2

Refashioning Latin Americanism
The Foundations of the Environmental Urbanism of the Open City

If the story of the Open City arguably begins in 1952 with the group headed by Alberto Cruz and Godofredo Iommi moving to the School of Architecture at the Catholic University of Valparaíso, the distilled embodiment of their thought does not appear until the period of 1965–67. In 1965, a group of ten architects, poets, and artists—only four of whom (Godofredo Iommi, Alberto Cruz, Fabio Cruz, and Claudio Girola) were faculty members of the School of Architecture—departed on a voyage through South America to discover the poetic destiny of the American continent.\(^1\) Reflections on this journey would be collected and organized into an avant-garde epic poem, *Amereida*, published in 1967.\(^2\) This epic in many ways repeated ideas that had appeared years before in their work and others’: the drive to reveal the destiny of the continent, Joaquín Torres-García’s inverted map of America, the idea of inhabiting a place based on the poetic discovery of its particular characteristics, and so on. Nonetheless, this 1967 poem synthesized these ideas, in addition to integrating some new ones such as Edmund O’Gorman’s rethinking of the significance of the European-American encounter in *The Invention of America*, into a literary form that would become the keystone text for the thought of the Open City.

*Amereida* has often suffered from a dual problem of interpretation. First, it has almost exclusively been read as a poetic manifesto for an architectural group that would later found the Open City. Although true—with the caveat that such a reading is teleological since between 1965–67 there were as of yet no concrete plans to found the Open City—that the Open City was and is still also populated by poets and that *Amereida* is itself a literary text and not just a poetic manifesto has been overlooked in scholarship (Sanfuentes 2018). Second, almost all discussion of the Open City has focused on how *Amereida* is in one way or another a transplantation of ideas from the European avant-gardes onto American soil. Recognizing these common interpretations, however, *Amereida* is also operating within a modern Latin American intellectual lineage.
devoted to the formation of an autonomous continental culture. Focusing on this lineage, this chapter outlines the genealogy of Amereida, concluding that the poem confronts the problem of defining an autonomous continental American identity by synthesizing two divergent strands of thought in the intellectual history of Latin America: first, Latin American culture must emerge directly from the land itself without looking to European precedents; second, Latin American culture must be renovated through a unique engagement with European cultural forms.

This chapter traces the Latin American intellectual lineage in which Amereida is operating. Starting with the rise of modernismo, this chapter will note a conflict in this literary lineage between a celebration of a mestizo autonomy and a look to Europe for the renovation of Latin American literature. Beginning with the divergent forms of thought between José Martí and Rubén Darío in modernismo, this chapter then tracks how this conflict was reshaped during the years of the vanguards during the 1920s and 1930s. Following the vanguards, this conflict would shift as authors like Alejo Carpentier and Suzanne Césaire began to rethink its boundaries and limitations. By the time we arrive to Amereida, the conflict between mestizo autonomy and cosmopolitan renovation, while still forming identifiable positions, are being reframed and rethought.

This chapter may therefore appear to dive into the treacherous field of Latin Americanism, with all of its attendant problems of essentialization, depoliticization, and over-simplification (de la Campa 1999). The goal of this chapter, however, is not to theorize such a broad Latin Americanism, but rather, very specifically, to trace the genealogy of Amereida’s Latin Americanism. It is the argument here that Amereida engages one of the significant “macronarratives” of the modern American continent: the transatlantic meeting between Europe, Abya Yala, and Africa. Whereas this macronarrative is often framed for the indigenous communities of Abya Yala as “the moment of the Spanish invasion” and for Black communities as the African diaspora beginning with the Middle Passage, Amereida comes to terms with this macronarrative from the position of those inheriting a legacy of European settler colonialism (Walsh and Mignolo 2018: 107). In this way, Amereida embodies the idea of the “New World” as found in Djelal Kadir’s Questing Fictions:

it is a dialectic of exchange between language and the New World reality which language seeks to contain; an antithetical confrontation between the inventive/invented sign and the irreducible Continent as recalcitrant signified—the first fashioning and imaging the latter, the latter skewing, deflecting, evading the former as a protean rebus for a poetic image. The incunabula, the textual fabric, becomes the everchanging record, landscape, terra incognita,
Kadir’s theory is marked by a Eurocentrism, recommending that America was an empty wilderness waiting passively to be discovered by Europeans. *Amereida*, on the contrary, recognizes their inescapable inheritance of a particular colonial realization of this macronarrative in the meeting between an errant language and “the New World reality which language seeks to contain.” In this way, *Amereida* diverges from Kadir’s Latin Americanism in two significant ways: 1.) In contrast to Kadir’s eco-visions, *Amereida* explicitly struggles with comprehending Indigenous socioecological systems and coming into noncolonial relation with Indigenous communities; and 2.) *Amereida* not only recognizes that European languages “seek to contain” New World reality, but it attempts to move beyond this colonial theory of language as the authoritative container of knowledge, embracing the errantry, to use Kadir’s language, of the questing word, with “errantry” understood in the double sense of that which makes an error and that which wanders and travels. The poetic word of *Amereida* attempts to comprehend the otherness of the New World by hearing it in its otherness while inheriting a language that can never comprehend its alterity.

**Chronicling Errancy**

In the introduction I presented the interpretation that the Open City was potentially aligned with a conservative intellectual tradition of twentieth-century Chile through its appeal to the formation of an American cultural soul. Such a conclusion, however, fails to reflect on how the concept of a continental American culture was not the concern solely of modern conservatism in Chile, nor has Chilean conservative politics been recognized by residents as the intellectual source from which the Open City was drawing. Instead, *Amereida* directly quotes, though without any marking to distinguish the quoted text, colonial-era and nineteenth-century texts discussing the significance of the American continent and an American identity, thereby connecting this 1967 epic’s desire to form an American culture to centuries-old thought on the issue. Indeed, *Amereida* prefigures Kadir’s (1986: xxi) thesis that would come two decades later, “the errantry which resulted in the discovery of the New World has become internalized by that world’s imagination; that the first voyagers’ error which led to the necessity of inventing a reality for an unexpected world, the happenstance discovery, serves as precedent for the ever-errant inventiveness of Latin American fictions.” A European language and
imaginary ill-fitted for the American continent coming into relation with that continent’s socioecological systems forms the foundation of Amereida’s Latin Americanism, a cultural foundation of errantry that the epic identifies in colonial-era chronicles.

Amereida’s debt to colonial-era chronicles and their understanding of errantry has been largely undiscussed in scholarship since its publication. For instance, Amereida’s (1991a [1967]) claim that the American continent is an ignored unknown—“it is a grand sea / and hidden / because although it is seen / most of it is ignored” (28)—is a quote from Fernández de Oviedo’s 1535 text, The Natural History of the Indies (Oviedo 1959); and the need to accept the alterity of America’s “donation,” “terms,” and “borders”—something which Amereida claims Columbus failed to accomplish—is explained later in the poem through a direct quotation of Amerigo Vespucci’s writing put in free verse:

and sailed so far
through the torrid zone
that we find ourselves being
below the equinoctial line
and having
the one and the other pole finally
of our horizon
and we pass through six degrees
and altogether
lost the tramontane star
that scarcely even
the stars of ursa minor were showing themselves to us
or to say it better
the guardians
that revolve around the firmament
—and so desirous
to be the author that designates
the star
of the firmament

of the other pole (32)

*Amereida* recognizes within its very pages that the question of how to create an American culture while indelibly based from within an errant cultural framework inherited from Europe has appeared since the colonial era. Indeed, the poem cites not only Amerigo Vespucci’s and Columbus’s letters and Oviedo’s chronicle but also the chronicles of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (Amereida Group 1991a [1967]: 136–37, 140–41), Antonio Pigafetta (143–52), Francisco López de Gómara (135–36), and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (134–35, 138–39). To come to terms with a settler American identity, *Amereida* implies, one must come to terms with this colonial inheritance.

Central to many of these chronicles is the struggle to come to terms with the new natural setting of the American continent using an errant language that was developed to describe different ecosystems. Antonello Gerbi (1985) has traced this naturalism in early chronicles and letters of the New World, demonstrating that many of these writers framed this natural setting in terms of same as/other than European natural formations. For instance, Gerbi (1985: 80) demonstrates how Martín Fernandez de Enciso’s *Suma de Geografía* (1948 [1519]), like Oviedo’s text, tends to describe the Indies in such a way that “the imperialistic aim gives way to an overwhelming interest in the lands and islands already occupied. The fauna, flora, and peoples of America represent . . . a familiar reality with its own intrinsic importance.” For Gerbi, Oviedo and Enciso are interested in uncovering the novel reality of the Indies in contrast with the distinct reality of European natures. Against this, Giovanni de Verrazzano would produce a “constant likening of American features to aspects of the Old World,” an act that was reinforced by “doll[ing] out generous quantities of names of European regions and localities to baptize islands, bays and rivers” (115). Columbus, Gerbi (18) concludes, oscillates between these two positions.

Furthermore, Gerbi theorizes the political-cultural implications of these two distinct visions. On the one hand, Verrazzano and others’ Eurocentric equation of Old and New World natures—an equation that requires the “Old World” as stable referent, precluding the possibility of decentering the logics built around and within that European context—represents a coloniality, “it is not just a matter of the Old World casting itself upon the New: it is the home world taking peaceful possession of the overseas
discoveries . . . Recognition is already an act of conquest and subjugation” (1985: 6–7). On the other hand, Gerbi argues, the move to note and take account of the difference between natures by those like Oviedo and Enciso opens up a noncolonial space of newness and alterity (7). Gerbi’s analysis illuminates a distinction between a colonial logic tied to the imperial State—the search for sameness between natures is dedicated to an attempt to expand the reach of the Spanish Empire—and the decolonial logic of what Paul Bové (1996: 385) calls a thinking of the interregnum, “that place and time when there is as yet no rule, when there are ordering forces but they have not yet summoned their institutional rule into full view,” or what Emma Pérez (1999: 6) calls the decolonial imaginary, “[the space] where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated.” Gerbi’s analysis illuminates two distinct visions of New World natures in colonial-era chronicles: the colonial Statist attempt to institutionalize and manage the land in the name of empire versus the decolonial interregnum in which, thinking otherwise than the colonial State, the alterity of the terrain is approached in its otherness. As Gerbi’s analysis implies, the discussion of nature in early colonial-era chronicles was a discursive site of (de)colonial struggle, perceiving the New World as that which could be subjected to or that which exceeds the limits of European cultural frameworks.

Regardless of the position that each text stakes out with respect to (de)colonial struggles through their discussions of the relationship between errant European epistemo-cultural frameworks and New World natures, it can be argued that these works were always already engaged in the construction of a colonial literary culture based on the generous use of references to an Old World cultural framework, a culture that served to justify a new State formation organized around “the monopolization of certain types of intellectual labor” by the colonial State (Beverley 1993: 57). The colonial function of this literary culture can be seen, for example, in chroniclers’ use of Greco-Roman epics and myths in order to frame their encounters and observations. As Gerbi notes, chroniclers often perceived the Indies and Indigenous communities as “a miraculous confirmation of the traditions and myths of the Greeks and Romans” (Gerbi 1985: 60); even when recognizing socioecological difference, the distinct social and ecological realities of the New World were erased insofar as they were incorporated into an overarching hegemonic cultural framework of Greek and Roman myth, a framework whose navigation and interpretation was subsequently monopolized by colonial “experts.” The hegemonic installation of this literary culture structured around references to Old World classics guaranteed epistemic monopolization in the hands of
colonial officials; any critique of colonization from within this mode of literariness therefore still supported colonialism by reinforcing this epistemic hegemony and monopolization. That is, following Edward Said (1975: 15–16), European ethnocentrism in the colonial context is not merely a lack of concern for others’ experiences but is a hegemonic discourse that serves to “analyze, characterize, confine inferior non-European cultures into a position of subordination,” a discourse that is then ruled by European functionaries.

By framing its myth of the American continent as a reworking of the Aeneid, Amereida therefore places itself within the legacy of this colonial culture. Indeed, the Aeneid was especially ripe for such colonial citation by New World chroniclers, being used by a variety of authors for a diverse set of purposes: Oviedo and López de Gómara (1922 [1533]), who are both cited in Amereida, repeatedly use this epic as a framing device; Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga’s (1933 [1569, 1578, 1589]) epic poem telling of the conquest of Chile, La Araucana, uses the story of Dido in order to critique colonial thinking while recognizing his position within that imperialist landscape (Quint 1993: 181–84); and Enciso’s Suma de Geografia (1948 [1519]) compares the conquest of the Americas to the acts of Jason and Hercules, thereby justifying the conquest as part of a mythical political dynasty (Gerbi 1985: 79). In other words, regardless of whether the work was criticizing colonialism or recognizing socioecological difference, the very act of citing the Aeneid reinforces the power of what Ángel Rama (1984) has called the “lettered city” (ciudad letrada): the social body composed of those cultured in a vision of literature as a colonial institution, “one of the basic institutions of Spanish colonial rule in the Americas” that led to “the development of an autonomous creole and then ‘national’ . . . culture” controlled by a colonial elite (Beverley 1993: 2). In this colonial literary economy of the lettered city the Aeneid has held a central place, being used as a framing device for Latin American authors from the start of the conquest through the twentieth century (Cussen 1992; 2018: 446, 452). In this way, Amereida’s acts of repeatedly citing colonial-era chronicles, of acknowledging colonial chronicles’ and letters’ use of previous European epics (for example, they cite Vespucci’s citation of Dante to explain the Southern Cross [34]), and (most significantly) of founding its vision of an American identity within a retelling of the Aeneid are functionally an admission of its position within the colonial lettered city.

Does Amereida therefore inherently reinforce the coloniality of power?
Reproducing the foundations of the colonial culture of the lettered city? What I want to offer in the rest of this chapter is that if the poetic in Latin America has often served as an ideological instrument of the colonial nation-state, there is another genealogy of Latin Americanism in which the poetic serves as a discursive space in which to hear those “ungovernable” (to be discussed further in the next section) communities, individuals, and socioecological landscapes, those who cannot be contained by the representational technologies of that colonial nation-state; if Spanish colonization resolved the problematic of an errant epistemo-cultural framework coming into contact with novel socioecological structures by hegemonically installing its framework over and against those structures, Amereida resolves this same problematic by trying to imagine nonhegemonic relation between its errant framework and this new socioecological context. When Amereida takes colonial-era chronicles and places them into free verse, for example, it forces the reader to acknowledge those moments from the invasion of Abya Yala that exceeded colonial modes of representation and State-making. If Indigenous texts “articulating their languages and politics,” in addition to those nonhuman natures that exceed the representational capacity of the cultural foundations of European colonization, are in this way those that “question the hegemonies of national literatures” (Walsh and Mignolo 2018: 38), then the Open City explores what happens when, positioned from within the lettered city, one hears and puts oneself into relation with those Indigenous voices and socioecological realities that question the basis of lettered-city literary endeavors. In this sense, the poetic in Latin America is no longer a colonial epistemo-cultural framework that holds hegemonic dominance, but rather it becomes an open discursive space in which relations between cultural, epistemic, and socioecological differences are negotiated, a nonhegemonic discursive space in which to hear the other. It is this genealogy of noncolonial poetics of errantry from within the lettered city that I wish to trace in this chapter.

**Amereida and Its Modern Precedents**

**Modernismo**

What is surprising in Amereida is the relative absence of modern citations given that, as we will see in this section, there is an already existing genealogy of modern Latin American poetics of errantry in which the 1967 epic is positioned. Euclides da Cunha, for instance, is the only writer from
the twentieth century who is directly cited on more than one occasion (and then only Os Sertões, which he wrote in the nineteenth century). The nineteenth century seems to also receive short shrift, with figures from this century being limited to a list (158) and a long quote from an 1830 letter of Simon Bolívar (161–62). The citation of Bolívar is particularly notable given that, as we will see, it provides a bridge into the formation of what is often described as the first Latin American literary movement: modernismo. Amereida’s quotation of Bolívar focuses on politics, with one central claim being, “America is ungovernable for us” (161). As a consequence of this realization, Amereida claims, Bolívar became entranced,

being entranced bolivar [sic] was encountered stunned and nude all that which has been installed here appeared groundless and artificial how then being entranced to learn to live with the monster? how to become intimate with its threat if this threat is that which touches us in part the most inalienable part of our heritage? (162)

Amereida argues that what they define as the Bolivarian task of imposing a governance structure onto the American continent fails to recognize that continent’s inherent qualities—“the monster” and “its threat,” likely referring to Bolivar’s late-in-life desire to reinforce inherited colonial power structures against the “threat” of “ungovernable” Indigenous peoples, with Bolívar eventually claiming, “all is lost for ever, because the Indians will always be Indians, the llaneros will always be llaneros, and the lawyers will always be intriguers” (Favre 1988: 14). Through its discussion of Bolívar and ungovernability, this 1967 epic proposes a radical critique: the logic of installing a Westphalian nation-state structure onto the American continent as a mode of organizing a living-in-common is always already colonial. Or, as Mignolo (2013: 61) argues, “while the form nation-state came into existence ‘naturally’ in the history of Europe, it was a forced imposition or a forced adaptation in the non-European world.” Amereida’s discussion of politics functions to distance its Latin Americanist social vision from the European conception of the nation-state.

This question of American governance would not disappear in Latin American thought after Bolívar. José Martí’s 1891 text, “Nuestra América,” is dedicated to just this question of governance in the New World. He claims,

the able governor in America is not the one who knows how to govern the Germans or the French; he must know the elements that make up his own country, and how to bring them together, using methods and institutions originating within the country, to reach that desirable state where each man can attain self-realization and all may enjoy the abundance that Nature has bestowed in everyone in the nation to enrich their toil and defend with their lives...
Good government is nothing more than the balance of the country’s natural elements. (Martí 2007: 224)

If Bolívar, as represented by the sections of his 1830 letters quoted in *Amereida*, deems America ungovernable, Martí claims that it is possible to erect governance structures on the American continent but that this task must be realized through an intimate relationship with the unique properties of that continent. Furthermore, Martí links his discussion of governance to the natural qualities of the American continent. Martí is making a double claim in this respect. First, that the “country’s natural elements” differentiate it from other countries. Second, that such distinctions among “natural elements” necessitate differing governance and cultural structures. As Susana Rotker notes, Martí wanted governance to be of “our time, in front of our Nature” (1992: 125). As such, Martí imagines a nature in a common postcolonial manner as providing a foundation for cultural self-definition “set apart from the imperium” of the European metropole (Buell 1995: 54).

As John Beverley (2001: 49) has noted, this focus on the governability of the American continent speaks more broadly to “the incommensurability between . . . the ‘radical heterogeneity’ of subaltern social subjects and the ‘reason’ of the modern nation-state.” The idea of governability as expressed by Bolívar and Martí speaks to a broader issue examined more recently in subaltern studies: the Westphalian nation-state is often a colonial political formation, the expansion of which is correlated to attempts to erase non-European modes of living in common. As such, decolonial social structures must rethink how to form a life in common on the American continent otherwise than that of one organized around the nation-state. As Beverley argues, “If . . . the subaltern is to ‘become’ the state (to recall Gramsci’s formulation), it is not only the subaltern, but also the state—and along with it, the state ideological apparatuses, including the education system—that will have to undergo a transformation” (61). It will be the later claim of this book (see Chapters 3 and 4), that the Open City went a step further: the nation-state at its various scaled manifestations (local, regional, national) implies a coloniality of power, and therefore one decolonial option is to utopically construct a mode of living in common otherwise than that of the nation-state.14

The absence of an explicit discussion of José Martí in *Amereida* is additionally surprising given the text’s attempt to develop a poetry proper to the American continent. Martí is famously one of the lead figures of the Latin American literary movement, *modernismo*, which has often been
described as the first Latin American literary movement, rather than an imitation or transportation of a European style (Paz 1974: 127; Rama 1985: 10–11). Not only was Martí arguing for a form of governance that recognized the uniqueness of the American continent and its natural phenomena, in addition to its supposed “ungovernability” within the framework of the nation-state, but he was also a leading figure in the discovery of a particular poetic voice for this continent. Martí’s influence on modernismo, however, is only one half of the coin: the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, and his cosmopolitanism would prove to be the flip-side to Martí’s focus on the formation of a Latin Americanist identity based on an autonomous relationship with the natural properties of the American terrain. If Martí is often defined in terms of his Latin Americanist identitarian politics, Darío is often cited as the figure who engaged foreign European literary traditions. His work, Azul, for instance, receives its name from a citation of Victor Hugo, and he routinely references French and Greek works rather than Latin American poetry. Darío frequently represents the other side of modernismo, what Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot (1983) refers to as the Europeanization of Latin America and its poetry in the nineteenth century.

This lack of concern for the American continent seems to be similarly reflected in the (not-so-)natural spaces often represented in Darío’s poetry: gardens. As appears in one of Darío’s descriptions of Valparaíso, Chile, “There was nearby a beautiful garden, with more pinks [rosas] than blues and more violets than pinks. A beautiful and small garden, with vases, but without statues, with a white pitta, but without pumps, close to a small house as if it were made for a sweet and happy tale” (1990: 58). Nature, in Darío’s representation, is cultivated and formed by the gardener, rather than being the basis of cultural self-definition. In other words, Darío’s vision of nature draws from culture rather than, as is the case with Martí, culture drawing from nature. It may therefore appear that Darío is merely reproducing European cultural norms on American soil or that he is calling for the colonial replacement of the ecosystems of the American continent with those from Europe. This latter process, as John Richards (2003: 346) shows, has been a common act of colonization in the American continent, “As the Indians rapidly died off, the Spanish immediately replaced their ecological system with one more to their own liking.” One cannot help but ask: Are Darío’s gardens merely an aestheticization of this ecological and genocidal violence? A reframing of colonization as the introduction of the “true” beauty of European nature?
This equation of Darío with coloniality is to ignore his poetic method, which was concerned with renovating Latin American literature through an engagement with and transculturation of the culture and literary traditions of Europe. As he would describe the relationship of Azul, his groundbreaking 1888 book of poetry, to French poetry, “Upon penetrating certain secrets of harmony, of hue, of suggestion that are found in the French language, it was my thought to discover them in Spanish, or to apply them . . . Azul is a Parnassian book, and therefore French. In it appears for the first time in our language, the Parisian ‘story,’ the French way of using adjectives, the Gallic turn inserted into the Spanish paragraph” (Darío 2005: 483–85). In other words, as José Olivio Jiménez notes in his invocation of Darío’s own description of his relationship to French poetry, through “the secrets of harmony, of hue, of suggestion that are in the French language, [Darío’s literary activity was] the prime responsible party for the profound renovation in meter and language of Spanish-language poetry that was accomplished by modernismo” (2011: 168). Darío did not merely imitate or reproduce French influences, he used French poetry as a departure point for the renovation of the Spanish language in Latin America; Darío was attempting to create a dialogue between Old and New World, not replace the latter with the former. In this way, gardening in Azul can be seen as a conversation between errant ecological knowledges of Europe with the socioecological systems of Latin America.

It would appear that we therefore have two distinct lineages of modernismo creating two distinct cultural self-definitions based on two distinct ideas of what defines nature on the American continent: that of Martí and that of Darío. Such a distinction, although popular in many interpretations of modernismo, is far from accurate. Martí, for instance, did not define America in terms of a purity from Europe, but rather in terms of its autonomous mestizo culture that integrated multiple cultural sources, including sources from the North Atlantic (Rotker 1992; Siskind 2014). Furthermore, as we have already noted, Darío’s engagement with European literature allowed him to produce a distinct Latin American poetry; engagement with his “foreign neighbors”—in quotes since his engagement with these poetic forms demonstrates precisely the inadequacy of the foreign/domestic binary—allowed Darío to produce a particular American literature. Both Martí and Darío, then, were pointing to a similar end: modernismo as a Latin American literary phenomenon that struggled with the relationship between an independent American culture, its external connections, and its inheritance of errant European cultural forms.
Avant-Gardes in Latin America

This conflict identified in the poetics of Martí and Darío between what can be categorized as two differing modes of poetic errantry would continue in the divisions that appeared in the literary and artistic avant-gardes in Latin America. If the previous dichotomy in modernismo could be summarized as the conflict between Martí and Darío, the conflict found in the avant-gardes of Latin America could be summarized as that between a European-oriented avant-garde, represented by the Chilean Vicente Huidobro, and an avant-garde represented by the Peruvian poet, César Vallejo, developed through an engagement with the perceived mestizo character of Latin America. In this moment, the conflict between Martí’s lineage of a mestizo autonomy and Darío’s lineage of a localized cosmopolitan renovation comes into its own with the avant-gardes in Latin America.

What is often considered the first avant-garde poem of Latin America was paradoxically published in 1918 in Madrid: Vicente Huidobro’s Ecuatorial (Hahn 1998). Huidobro’s poetics have traditionally been interpreted as a type of literary cubism highly influenced by European literary trends, even polemically being declared at moments to have been mere plagiarism of other European cubists (Bajarlía 1964). Even further, Huidobro explicitly declared his dissatisfaction for American poetry with two exceptions, Rubén Darío and Edgar Allen Poe (Huidobro 1975: 80–81). At a glance, Huidobro’s poetry is a consequence of an interaction with Europe and a disdain for his American home. In contrast to this traditional interpretation, however, many have recently argued that Huidobro’s work represents a transatlanticism, effectively staging a dialogue between European and Latin American poetic forms (Infante 2013). For instance, claims that Huidobro’s ideas of poetry as creation came from Reverdy or Apollinaire miss that one of Huidobro’s famous explanations of poetry, “the first condition of the poet is to create; the second, to create; and the third, to create” (1963: 673), comes directly from Darío, who, speaking about poetry in Prosas Profanas, says, “And the first law, creator: create” (1990: 12), and Huidobro explicitly cites the poetic ideas of an author from the United States, Ralph Waldo Emerson, as a precursor to his poetics (Woods 2018b: 129). In this way, and similar to Darío, Huidobro’s focus on Europe was not an expatriation from the Latin American literary tradition but a renewal of this tradition through the artistic and literary innovations that were occurring in Europe in the early twentieth century.
If Huidobro’s formation of a continental American culture through his transatlanticism continued the lineage of Darío, the poetry of César Vallejo would in many ways continue the lineage of José Martí. Vallejo’s (1992 [1922]) Trilce has long been lauded as a renovation of the Spanish language and Latin American literature. As Antenor Orrego would claim in his 1957 celebration of Trilce,

Free of the Incan hypogaeum, of the Spanish colonial coffin, free of servile imitation of Europe!... Since then [the publication of Trilce] America began to have universal voice and could aspire to be incorporated into the ecumenical core of human culture with its own effigy... [César Vallejo] intends to create, nothing less, inside of the Spanish language and without foreign model, a new poetic language, a new rhetoric, a new literary technique. (quoted in Matos and Villanueva 1987: 8–9)

If Huidobro and Darío focused on renovating the Spanish language and Latin American culture through European literature, Vallejo was initially understood within the intellectual lineage of Martí: forming a Latin American culture based within the American continent itself yet recognizing its European (colonial) cultural inheritance.

This early interpretation of Vallejo received a formal development in the writing of Vallejo’s colleague and writing correspondent, José Carlos Mariátegui, in his 7 Essays On the Interpretation of Peruvian Reality. Although the central purpose of Mariátegui’s essay on literature is specifically to discuss the formation of a national Peruvian literature and not a continental American literature (2007: 191), his concern is still on the formation of a culture independent from Europe. His foundational theoretical claim is similar to Martí’s:

The thinness, the anemia, the flaccidity of our colonial and colonialisit literature comes from its lack of roots. Life, as Wilson affirmed, comes from the earth. Art has, as of necessity, to be nourished by the sap of a tradition, of a history, of a people. And in Peruvian literature has not bloomed from a tradition, from a history, from an Indigenous people. It was born of an importation of Spanish literature; was nurtured later by the imitation of that same literature. (2007: 201)

For Mariátegui, Vallejo proves to be the first poet in the history of Peru to express the voice of its particular mestizo character, against the “imitation” of “imported Spanish literature.” Moreover, according to Mariátegui this dedication to the formation of a national literature is expanded to a continental scale in Vallejo’s poetry, “There is in Vallejo a genuine and essential Americanism; not a descriptive and localist Americanism” (2007: 260–61). Vallejo, according to many interpretations leading up to the publication of Amereida, was the first “proper” American poet.

Just as was the case with Martí and Darío, this clean distinction between cosmopolitan Huidobro and Americanist Vallejo is not as neat as
many present. Huidobro’s early poetry, especially that of Adán is very much focused on Chilean naturalism. For instance, Tomás Gabriel Chazal’s 1916 prologue to the first edition of Adán argues that Huidobro’s poetry is supported firmly by intimate contact with Chilean nature (11–12). It has even been claimed that this early poem provides the key to understanding Huidobro’s later avant-garde works (Wood 1977). On the other hand, Vallejo’s (1927: 201) own critique of the avant-garde in Latin America would seem to place him squarely on the American continent, “America borrows and adopts the European clothing of the so-called ‘new spirit’ . . . Today, as before, the writers of America practice a borrowed literature, that turns out tragically bad. The aesthetic—if this grotesque, simian nightmare of the writers of America can be called an aesthetic—lacks, today perhaps more than ever, its own physiognomy.” If we look at his specific critique of French surrealism in his essay, Autopsy on Surrealism (Vallejo 1982), however, we find that he opposes this European artistic tradition with a different European tradition: Marxism. To say that Vallejo is a purely autochthonous and autonomous voice ignores this influence from across the Atlantic. Similar to the supposed conflict between Darío and Martí, Huidobro and Vallejo’s distinct poetic visions represent conflicting visions of how to understand Latin American errantry.

After the Avant-Garde

Following Huidobro and Vallejo, the conflict over differing visions of the formation of an American literature and culture would continue to find new life in both new vanguard and post-vanguard positions leading up to the publication of Amereida in 1967. In 1943, for instance, Suzanne Césaire would publish, “Surrealism and Us,” claiming that surrealism was blossoming in the Americas and providing a conceptual foundation for anticolonial struggle:

Millions of Black hands will hoist their terror across the furious skies of world war. Freed from a long benumbing slumber, the most disinherited of all peoples will rise up from plains of ashes.

Our surrealism will supply this rising people with a punch from its very depths. Our surrealism will enable us to finally transcend the sordid antinomies of the present: whites/Blacks, Europeans/Africans, civilized/savages—at least rediscovering the magic power of the mahoulis, drawn directly from living sources. (Césaire 2000: 136)

At a glimpse, Césaire is treading the same ground as Darío and Huidobro by arguing for the renovation of anticolonial struggle through an engagement with French surrealism. Yet in contrast to Huidobro and
Darío’s movement to French poetry to renovate Latin American verse, Césaire (2000: 134) argues that surrealism arrived in Martinique and “blossomed” there. In Césaire’s framework French poetry has become Americanized instead of Latin American poetry renovating itself by appealing to French language and literatures.

Near the same time, Alejo Carpentier would move beyond avant-garde cultural formations and present a sustained Americanist critique of surrealism in his prologue to El reino de este mundo (1969 [1949]). Although this prologue has subsequently been described as a theoretical examination of the genre of magical realism, Carpentier’s prologue disproves this categorization: he is interested in marvelous reality, not magical realism. More precisely, he argues that the attempt by surrealists in Europe to produce a “marvelousness” in their works is only an artificial imitation of the lived reality of the marvelous as is found in the nature and on the soil of the Caribbean,

But observe that when André Masson tried to draw the jungle of Martinique, with its incredible intertwining of plants and its obscene promiscuity of certain fruit, the marvelous truth of the matter devoured the painter, leaving him just short of impotent when faced with blank paper. It had to be an American painter—the Cuban, Wilfredo Lam—who taught us the magic of tropical vegetation, the unbridled creativity of our natural forms with all their metamorphoses and symbioses on monumental canvases in an expressive mode that is unique in contemporary art. (Carpentier 1995: 85)

If this seems to be limited to the Caribbean, Carpentier would later expand his analysis to the American continent

I found the marvelous real at every turn. Furthermore, I thought, the presence and vitality of this marvelous real was not the unique privilege of Haiti but the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies. The marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry: from those who searched for the fountain of eternal youth and the golden city of Manoa to certain early rebels or modern heroes of mythological fame from our wars of independence, such as Colonel Juana de Azurduy. (Carpentier 1995: 87)

The marvelous in American literature, according to Carpentier, is a consequence of the lived reality found on American soil and in the particular terrestrial characteristics of the American continent. Even further, Carpentier claims that this relationship with America is found in the cracks of chronicles’ representations of colonial-era quests to “marvelous” spaces like the Fountain of Youth and Manoa (a similar decolonial against-the-grain reading of chronicles that we find in Amereida).

The final artistic proposal for a renewed Latin Americanism to be
touched on in this period is that of Joaquín Torres-García. In his Universalismo constructivo, his theoretical work that follows his intellectual trajectory in Montevideo from 1934 through 1942, he argues for the foundation of an autochthonous American culture based on constructivism. Although Torres-García’s position would shift over these nine years, a consistent thread remained in his focus on the “structure” of a work of art—the internal organizing relationship of the elements of a work as constructed by the artist—and a rejection of works that imitated the external world; the work of art was to be a unified creation of ensembles of pictorial elements within an aesthetic order. In this way, a painting was to be based on a structure and geometry, in which each of its parts are related to a whole within an all-encompassing architecture. To arrive at this mode of structuring the canvas, Torres-García demands that the artist look within their own self, creating by giving form to the unknown part of one’s soul within the aesthetic order of the work of art (1984: 43). He is also insistent that this personal force of the soul must be given form through “constructive reason,” with the work of art representing the “co-penetration of these two living forces” (1984: 532).

This focus on the force of the soul expressed through universal constructive reason allows Torres-García to argue simultaneously for the particularity of the school of constructivism he was erecting in Montevideo as well as the universality not only of constructivism but of all American art prior to the invasion of Columbus, considering his constructivism to be a continuation of the Indigenous Andean artistic tradition.20 Torres-García argues that while the principles that order the work of art come from the particular spiritual properties of the artist, they are expressed within the geometric laws of a universal Reason that structure any painting. In other words, to invoke one of Torres-García’s metaphors, the artist expresses their own particular position within a universal Reason just as each person expresses their individual voice linguistically through an alphabet (1984: 620). It is in this way that we arrive at Torres-García’s position in terms of Latin Americanism: the need for the School of the South,

A great School of Art ought to arise here in our country [Uruguay]. I say this without any vacillation: here in our country . . . I have said School of the South; because in reality our north is the South. There should not be north, for us, but rather through opposition our South. For this we now put the map upside down, and then we have the right idea of our position, and not as the rest of the world wants it. (1984: 193)

In this way Torres-García departs from both Martí and Darío by locating the particularism of an American culture within a universal Reason, thereby arguing neither for mestizo autonomy nor for cosmopolitan
renovation. His global constructivist mapping struggles with the relationship between the American continent and artistic voice, but this struggle is now ordered around the formation of an autonomous voice within a universal reason.

Lastly, one must acknowledge the nonartistic historical work of Edmundo O’Gorman’s *The Invention of America* (1961), the book that is often cited both within and outside of the Open City as a central inspirational text for Amereida. O’Gorman’s central claim is that Columbus never discovered America since he went to his death bed believing he had landed on Asia. As O’Gorman argues, Columbus’s conviction relied on *a priori* assumptions: that the world was formed by three continents—Asia, Europe, and Africa—all connected by a single land mass, thereby legitimizing the belief in the expansion of humanity from the single ancestral source of Adam and Eve. To imagine America as a separate continent was therefore to invent, quite literally, a new world-system that disrupted the former worldview of Europe. For this reason it is Vespucci who, epistemologically speaking, discovers America through his assigning the term “New World” to the American continent. As O’Gorman (1961: 62) writes, “When Vespucci speaks of a world he refers to the old notion of ecumene, of a portion of the Earth fit for human habitation. If he illicitly designates the recently explored countries as a new world, it is because he intends to announce the effective finding of one of these other ecumenes.” Discovery in O’Gorman’s sense is not defined by the encounter with an entity universally unknown, but more specifically the encounter with an entity outside of a particular epistemological and referential framework, thereby challenging its very foundations; discovery is always defined in relation to a specific epistemology. As such, Vespucci comes to be a culture hero for O’Gorman insofar as he accepts the radical alterity and shock of the American continent.21

O’Gorman’s thesis, as Enrique Dussel (1995) has since noted, is Eurocentric insofar as it bases its discussion of the European-American encounter around its significance for a European worldview. For O’Gorman, the significance of this encounter is that it interrupts European thinking. The scope of *The Invention of America* remains in this historical realm, outlining the process through which Columbus landing on America eventually led to the revelation of the newness and unknown of the American continent for European subjects. Nonetheless, one can also note an epistemological opposition between O’Gorman and Torres-García. Whereas for Torres-García, the unknown is within the individual based in
a particular context that then streams out to form a new culture within the contours of a universal Reason, the unknown for O’Gorman is the American continent which shatters European modes of thinking and therefore demands a new epistemic framework. Although the significance of this mode of thinking about America goes unexamined in O’Gorman’s work, his thesis, which demands an interruption and destruction of European thought based on an encounter with the American continent—a decentering errantry at the center of O’Gorman’s Eurocentrism that goes unacknowledged in Dussel’s critique—will become the foundation of Amereida’s resolution to the problem of forming a noncolonial American culture that recognizes its colonial European inheritance.22

**Coloniality, Settler Identity, and Amereida**

By the time Amereida is published, the mission of forming a continental American poetics of errancy had therefore become well-worn territory. The various figures discussed in this chapter from Darío to O’Gorman even had varying direct influence on the group responsible for Amereida: Godofredo Iommi was a student of Vicente Huidobro for a brief time; Claudio Girola interacted with the Art Concrete group in Buenos Aires (some of whose members had personally studied with Torres-García), and Torres-García’s inverted map of America is explicitly reproduced in the epic (though without acknowledging its author)23; while there is no definitive link between the group and José Martí, the only other instance I have discovered of Amereida’s esoteric phrase, “difficult trees” (4) is in Martí’s Nuestra América; and Edmundo O’Gorman’s work is repeatedly cited as an influence on Amereida. Despite these direct connections, what is more significant is the position of Amereida within this genealogy of Latin Americanist thinking. In other words, if one can trace an errant genealogy of Latin Americanist poetics since modernismo, one must now investigate how Amereida itself operates within this field.

The opening section of Amereida places the epic directly within the lineage of José Martí. In Chapter 1, I quoted the passage from the opening section describing Columbus’s failure to arrive to America. In this passage, Amereida frames the American continent as the land that provides its donations, its terms, and its borders against the expectations and errant conceptual frameworks of European explorers; the epic explicitly distinguishes itself from the colonial task of “establish[ing] another alien world as the dominant order” (Byrd 2011: 64). Martí’s focus on a
“country’s natural elements” that distinguish it from others is mirrored in Amereida’s particularism. Where Martí and Amereida differ, however, is in the latter’s claim that the destiny of the particularity of the American continent can only be revealed poetically. That is, while the epic locates itself directly within the logic of Martí—to govern well, one must “balance the country’s natural elements”—it has shifted focus from the governor setting the destiny of the American community to the poet, thereby distancing the poet from the State while celebrating the former.\textsuperscript{24}

This opening section also distances Amereida from what may appear as the poem’s most obvious influence: Vicente Huidobro. Given both that Huidobro was the principal figure in Chilean avant-garde poetry and that Lommi personally knew Huidobro, it might lead one to immediately assume that the epic would develop a Huidobrian poetics. The distinction between Huidobro and Amereida can be seen in their respective visions of nature. Amereida is centrally concerned with the poetic illumination and revelation of the unique natural elements of South America. Throughout the epic appear various flora, fauna, and natural phenomena that are endemic to this continent as well as nature-words that are particular to the Spanish language: gannets (alcatraces, 59); médanos (usually translated as “sand-dune,” this particular type of smaller sand dune appears outside of Latin America but is a particular word to the Spanish language, 11); river-basins where multiple rivers meet (cuencas, 131, 133); maizales, yuca, batatas, ajues (162); and the New World dove (torcaza, 64). More precisely, as Sergio Elórtegui (see Chapter 6) pointed out to me in conversation, these words are adaptations of errant Spanish terms to a New World reality for which that language was unprepared. Huidobro, on the other hand, rejects nature as it appears, focusing instead on the creation of a new nature. As he puts it, “The poet creates outside of the world that exists that which ought to exist. I have a right to want to see a flower that walks or a flock of sheep crossing a rainbow” (Huidobro 1963: 654). This conflict between Huidobro’s creation of a new nature and Amereida’s revelation of the distinguishing features of the American continent’s natural elements separate the two frameworks.

Against Huidobro, it seems that Amereida is more in line with the work of Alejo Carpentier, reflecting his idea that a particular literary and artistic mode of expression and form will emerge organically from terrestrial qualities of the American continent. Similar to Carpentier, Amereida contains a passage in which an unnamed first-person narrator encounters “the marvelous” at a South American circus where circus posters are
painted with a background that “turn[s] so vertiginously” (105). This conceptual convergence with Carpentier is complicated, however, when Amereida claims that these circus-poster painters learned their craft by imitating European painters (104). Within this logic, European painters are not making a cheap knock-off of the American marvelous, as Carpentier claims, but rather the opposite. Amereida concludes, however, that within imitations, “is given an act that goes beyond imitation” (105). As such, it appears that Amereida is also operating within a logic similar to that of Rubén Darío: Latin American artistic and literary forms are renovated through an engagement with European artistic and literary techniques. Indeed, if the epic opens (3–21) by emphasizing the failure of colonial explorers to accept what the American continent offers, the section immediately following shifts course noting that they have inherited the boundary that “here europe gave us / the ancient robbery / . . . / the heritage gives course / transforms the water into river / released / to the adventure of the channel or disappearance / what do we inherit / dawned on this border?” (26–27) In other words, this 1967 epic claims that Martí’s Latin Americanism is naïve at best: a settler American culture can never blossom immediately from the “natural elements” of the continent since the conceptual tools used to produce that culture arrived via European colonialism. Amereida focuses on the dilemma of forming a Latin Americanism around the errantry of European cultural formations that come into contact with a “New World” and that need to be decolonially renegotiated; the hope for a totally autonomous cultural foundation is dispensed with outright.

Amereida is therefore aligning itself both with the lineages of Darío and Martí. For instance, one section of the epic describes the inventory of everything brought on the voyage through America (51–61) and the revelatory experience of a trip through Europe (62–70). This “travel” section circles around the tension buried in this apparently contradictory alignment of different ways of resolving the errantry embedded in the epic’s Latin Americanist vision. If the section opens by listing the necessary items for a voyage through the American continent—thereby mirroring similar lists found in European epics—it quickly changes course and discusses “a turnaround in hearing in Europe” (viraje de oído en Europa) where “life sprouted” (63). The poem does not stop there, claiming,

how many french invocations but if we confine it to only its noise the language would be returned foreign what gratitude but a poem by french sounds in alliance with pure phonemes from here—bouglainval and cerqueux—would not be sufficient. (65)
While deemed insufficient in itself, the poem argues for the renovation of American poetry by pushing its phonemes through the sieve of the French language. Even a trip to France for artistic or literary growth has a long history in Chilean avant-gardes, with trips to Europe for art students becoming commonplace starting around 1912 (Lizama 2003: 15). If Amereida follows in the path of Martí, it simultaneously aligns itself with the lineage of Darío and the Francophilia of early twentieth-century Chilean avant-gardes.

The question therefore becomes how Amereida reconciles these two apparently contradictory strands of theorizing Latin American errantry. This reconciliation, I argue, occurs via the poetic act of naming. A little more than halfway through the epic, Amereida calls for a specific theorization of language “fully enrolled in the environment of arriving a word that as a result could not appear as a remedy that arrives in order to cure a sickness already declared like a word-response” (126). To explain this theory of language, Amereida compares it to a paratrooper who, upon approaching the earth, has to take a position to receive it, so that it receives the paratrooper and does not break their body (126). In other words, language becomes that which accepts the arrival of the earth. That such a reception of the earth is necessary is heralded by the criticism of Columbian coloniality in the pages of Amereida: the naming of the land from preconceived notions is a geo-epistemic equivalent to colonial domination. This epic’s theory of naming effectively codes a critique of the invasion and genocide of and land theft from Indigenous communities and points towards a rethinking of Indigenous-settler relations outside of the contours of such coloniality.

Immediately following this passage is then asked the following question, “but then / how are there names?” Such a question points to a potential limitation of the theory of language outlined only moments earlier: If one must wait for the arrival of the earth, then how can one create a word with which to name an object? How can one name an object that appears without such an act being “like a word-response”? Answering this question, Amereida directly quotes and comments on various colonial-era histories of the New World that regale the reader with stories of how various places on the American continent received their settler names. An example and description of this process is provided in the discussion of how the country of Peru came to receive its name in a quotation of Garcilaso de la Vega’s Commentaries:

its own name
saying
berú
and added another
and said
pelú...

the christians understood conforming to their desire
imagining that the indian had understood and responded in tum as if
he and they had spoken in spanish and from that time that was the
year fifteen fifteen or sixteen they called that rich and great empire
perú corrupting both names as the spaniards corrupt almost all
vocables that they take from the language of the indians (137)

Mark Thurner (2009) has read this passage as it appears in Garcilaso’s text
as a representation of the experience of the “founding abyss of colonial
and postcolonial history” (62) that “disrupts the intelligibility of signs and
opens a gaping, or in Badiou’s terms, nameless ‘ontological fissure’ or
‘destruction’ in the existing structure of experience and discourse” (47).
Even further, he notes that this shift from “Beru” to “Peru” within
Garcilaso’s hybrid commentary-historical discourse—Garcilaso de la Vega
operates in a space between historical representation and commentary that
shifts smoothly between the historical present (“saying berú”), the past
tense (“Christians understood”), and the present tense (“as the Spaniards
corrup”)—marks the shift from an Inca ethnoterritorial identity to a
Peruvian one marked by colonial domination (54–56). Expanding
Thurner’s analysis, it might be said that Garcilaso de la Vega prefigures a
troubling mestizaje marked by: the fragmentary presence of Indigenous
languages in Latin American cultural formations, the rem(a)inder of
colonial domination, the abyss of the conquest, and the (false) presumption
of the disappearance of “Original Peoples”—that is, Indigenous
communities and persons are the “Original Peoples” of the American
continent who no longer exist (Saldaña-Portillo 2001; Stephenson 2001).
Through its use of historico-commentary discourse and of switching
between tenses, the Peruvian identity outlined in Gracilaso de la Vega’s
representation of the naming of Peru is one that acknowledges both its
hybrid Peruvian identity and violent colonial past—the name of Peru
contains an Indigenous word while testifying to the colonial position of
settlers—while relegating Indigenous identity to history books.

Amereida departs from this mode of identity formation by placing its
own commentary on top of García de la Vega’s,
but nothing is corrupted
if on the adventure
a language announces that which one hears
and another word
is born. (137)

If one follows Margarita Zamora’s (2009) thesis that García de la Vega’s tripartite use of epic, historical, and commentary discourse functions to distinguish between conquest and colonialism—celebrating the former through its epic rhetoric while critiquing the latter through its commentary on historical events—then it appears that Amereida through its own invocation of the epic voice not only maintains García de la Vega’s troubling celebration of the conquest but also removes the anticolonial undercurrent of his work by claiming that “nothing is corrupted.” Yet one must note the careful use of the present tense in Amereida’s commentary on García de la Vega’s commentary. This passage’s temporal flattening through the singular use of the simple present serves to lift the settler-Indigenous encounter out of the past and place it into the present. The narrative of conquest and colonisation as singular events in the past that erased Indigenous identity and led to the construction of a new hybrid American identity is eschewed in favor of an identity formation in which colonial settler and colonized Indigenous identities are continuously reproduced in the present day, thereby making (de)coloniality an active and contemporary process and structure. As Arnold Hirsch once commented, “More than a simple legacy of the past, the contemporary [US] ghetto appeared a dynamic institution that was continually being renewed, reinforced, and reshaped” (1983: xii); Amereida argues that the same can be said today about the colonization of Indigenous communities in Abya Yala. Within Amereida, Latin American identity is forced not merely to acknowledge its abyssal colonial foundation that lies in the past, but to decolonially reconfigure itself in the present. For this reason, a refrain appears repeatedly through Amereida, “tomorrow we depart to roam across [recorrer] america”; the opportunity to engage in a decolonial encounter and quest of the American continent (i.e., to shift away from a colonial invasion and conquest) exists today.

Even further, in this commentary the act of naming is redefined as a triple process: listening to the other, enunciating what one hears in an