When contemplating the course of history in Central America in the second half of the twentieth century, and analyzing the region’s geopolitical relationship with the United States during this period, the coup d’état sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Guatemala in 1954 looms as a constant reminder of the long-term effects sparked by this controversial act of foreign intervention in local affairs. The traumatic events of 1954 serve as an astounding case of successful propaganda campaigns, calculated information manipulation, and psychological maneuvers in the media and the public sphere, culminating in the ouster of Guatemala’s elected leader. The orchestration of incendiary language, alarmist Cold War rhetoric, and graphic images in the media—which operated alongside public relations undertakings on behalf of large corporations invested in the area and on behalf of anticommunist diplomatic sectors in the United States—had the short-term strategic effect of rallying support for the opposition forces and damaging the morale of Guatemala’s government-elect. A more long-lasting effect of waging a significant component of the coup against President Jacobo Arbenz in the symbolic realm of alarmist words and images was the extreme polarization of Guatemalan society and the propagation of a particular version of history that fit into Cold War agendas, but ignored the more subtle and enduring impact of the fight against “communism” on the lives of the individuals affected by its consequences.
In *History at the Limit of World-History* (2002), Ranajit Guha, the prominent historian, political economist, and Subaltern Studies scholar from India, writes about the limitations of historiography as a genre in capturing just such subtleties and nuances. Referring to “World-history” in Hegelian terms, Guha notes that much is left out of history when defined from the perspective of Western, state-oriented concerns. He resorts to Rabindranath Tagore’s notion of “historicality” to account for what is excluded from historiographical accounts and turns to the field of literature for an engagement with the past that revolves around people’s experiences in everyday life: “The noise of World-history and its statist concerns has made historiography insensitive to the sighs and whispers of everyday life” (73). Concerned about the hold of the politics of statism over historical representations of the past, he writes:

> We work within the paradigm it [World-history] has constructed for us and are therefore far too close and committed to it to realize the need for challenge and change. No wonder that our critique has to look elsewhere, over the fence so to say, to neighboring fields of knowledge for inspiration, and finds it in literature, which differs significantly from historiography in dealing with historicality. […] historicality has not been assimilated to statist concerns in literary representation according to Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest South Asian writer of our age. The past, he believes, renews itself creatively in literature, unlike in academic historiography with its insistence on keeping its narratives tied strictly to public affairs. (5)

The term historicality is meant to include the broader discourse of the “prose of the world,” an account of the past that is not confined or powered by statehood and public affairs, but rather is inclusive of the individual and his quotidian encounter with his surroundings. Guha’s glance “over the fence” to literature situates his critique of historiography at the limit of language. He is in search of an approach to talk about the past that incorporates creativity to tell the familiar story of the past in a way that will arouse wonder and astonishment and incite a thoughtfulness that goes beyond or even against the grain of “World-history’s” foundational project of legitimating the development of the state.

This attempt to renew the past creatively in literature, to provoke a more nuanced reflection of its impact beyond official accounts or geopolitical considerations, is the project of the two fictional texts to be discussed in this chapter: Miguel Ángel Asturias’s *Week-end en Guatemala* (1956) and Arturo Arias’s *Después de las bombas* (1979),