seven interpretive essays on PERUVIAN REALITY

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The word "trial" in this case is used in its legal sense. I do not propose to present a discourse on Peruvian literature, but only to testify in what I consider to be an open trial. It seems to me that so far in this trial the witnesses have been almost entirely for the defense and that it is time to call some witnesses for the prosecution. My testimony is admittedly partisan. Any critic, any witness, has a responsibility that he must consciously or unconsciously discharge. Despite dark suspicions to the contrary, I am positive and constructive by temperament and I condemn the iconoclastic and destructive bohemian as unethical; but my responsibility to the past compels me to vote against the defendant. I do not exempt myself from discharging it nor do I apologize for its partiality.

Piero Gobetti, with whom I feel great spiritual affinity, writes in one of his essays: "True realism is devoted to the forces that produce results and it has no use for results intellectually admired a priori. The realist knows that history is reform and that the process of reform is not limited to a diplomacy of the initiated but is carried out by individuals who operate as revolutionaries by setting different standards."¹

I do not pretend to be an impartial or agnostic critic, which in any event I do not believe is possible. Any critic is influenced by philosophical, political, and moral concerns. Croce has proved that even the impressionistic and hedonistic criticism of Jules Lemaitre, which is supposed to be free of philosophical content, is related, no less than the criticism of Sainte Beuve, to the thought and philosophy of its times.²

Man's spirit is indivisible and it must be so to achieve plenitude and harmony. I declare without hesitation that I bring to literary exegesis all my political passions and ideas, although in view of the way this word has been misused, I should add that my politics are philosophy and religion.

¹ Piero Gobetti, Opere critique, I, 88. This idea is entirely in accord with Marxist dialectics and in no way excludes those a priori syntheses so cherished by intellectual opportunism. Outlining the personality of Domenico Giulotti, Papini's companion in the cultural adventure of the Dizionario dell'uomo salvatico, Gobetti writes: "Individuals must take clear-cut positions. Compromise is the work of history and of history alone; it is a result." (ibid., p. 82). In the same book, concluding some observations about the Greek concept of life, he states: "The new test of truth is a task in harmony with the responsibility of each person. Ours is an era of struggle (struggle between men, between classes, between states) because only through struggle can abilities be tempered and can each person, by stubbornly defending his position, collaborate in the life process."

² Benedetto Croce, Nuovi saggi di estetica, pp. 205-207. With relentless logic, this same collection disqualifies the aestheticist and historicist trends in artistic historiography. It declares that "the true criticism of art is certainly aesthetic criticism, not because it scorches philosophy as a pseudo-aesthetic criticism, but because it functions as a philosophy or concept or art; and it is historical criticism, not because it is concerned with what is extrinsic to art, like pseudo-historical criticism, but because, having availed itself of historical data for an artistic reproduction (and at this point it is still not history), once the artistic reproduction is accomplished, history is made by deciding what has been reproduced, that is, by characterizing it according to the concept and establishing precisely what has happened. Therefore, the two trends that conflict in the undercurrents of criticism coincide in criticism; and historical criticism of art and aesthetic criticism of art are one and the same."
This does not mean that I judge literature and art without reference to aesthetics, but that in the depths of my consciousness the aesthetic concept is so intimately linked to my political and religious ideas that, although it does not lose its identity, it cannot operate independently or differently.

Riva Agüero judged literature with the criterion of a civilista. His essay on "the nature of literature in independent Peru" is unmistakably colored, not only by political beliefs, but also by the sentiments of a class system. It is at the same time a piece of literary historiography and a political apologia.

The class system of the colonial encomendero underlies his

3 Although or perhaps because it was written in his youth, Carácter de la literatura del Perú independiente is a vivid and sincere reflection of Riva Agüero's spirit and feelings. His later literary criticism does not basically alter this thesis. In its praise of the talented criollo and his Comentarios reales, his Elogio del Inca Garcilaso could have presaged a new attitude. But, in fact, neither his erudite curiosity about Inca history nor his ardent efforts to interpret the sierra landscape have diminished Riva Agüero's loyalty to the colony. His stay in Spain, as we all know, has intensified his conservative and viceroyal sympathies. In a book written in Spain, El Perú histórico y artístico: Influencia y descendencia de las montañeces en él (Santander, 1921), he shows a deeper concern with the Inca society, but this is only a sign of a scholarly interest that has been influenced by the opinions of Garcilaso and of the most objective and cultured of the chroniclers. Riva Agüero states that "at the time of the conquest, the social regime of Peru aroused enthusiasm in observers as scrupulous as Cieza de León and in men as learned as the Licenciado Polo de Ondegardo, the Oidor Canillón, the Jesuit author of Revelación anónima, and Father José de Acosta. The social content and agrarian regulations of the vagaries of the illustrious Mariana and of Pedro de Valencia (disciple of Arias Montano) may have been influenced not only by Platonic tradition but by the contemporary data of the Inca organization that made such an impression on all who studied it." Riva Agüero does not try to excuse his mistakes, as when he acknowledges that in his early criticism of Olantay he had greatly overrated the Spanish inspiration of the present version in his essay on the "character of literature in independent Peru" and that, in the light of recent studies, even if Olantay still appears to have been reconstructed by a colonial writer, "it must be admitted that its design, poetic techniques, all its songs and many of its passages are in the Inca tradition and only slightly modified by the editor." Nevertheless, none of these demonstrations of scholastic integrity nullifies the purpose and criteria of his work, which is intensely Spanish in tone and which pays homage to the motherland by championing the "deep-rooted" Spanish heritage of Peru.

opinions, which invariably are expressed in terms of Hispanism, colonialism, and social privilege. Riva Agüero departs from his political and social preoccupations only to the degree that he adopts the standards of a professor or a scholar, and then the departure is merely apparent, because never does his spirit move more securely in the academic and conservative sphere. Nor does Riva Agüero bother to conceal his political prejudices when his literary evaluations are mixed with anti-historical observations about the presumed error of the founders of independence in their choice of a republic over a monarchy or when he violently attacks the tendency to form parties around principles in opposition to the traditional oligarchical parties, on the grounds that such opposition would incite sectarian conflict and arouse social enmities.

Riva Agüero could not openly admit to the political bias of his exegesis: first, because it is only long after the time of his writing that we have learned to dispense with many obvious and useless deceptions; second, because, as a member of the aristocratic encomendero class, he was obliged to profess the principles and institutions of another class, the liberal bourgeoisie. Even though it felt itself to be monarchist, Hispanist, and traditionalist, that aristocracy had to reconcile its reactionary sentiment with the practice of a republican and capitalist policy and with respect for a democratic and bourgeois constitution.

With the end of uncontested civilista authority in the intellectual life of Peru, the scale of values established by Riva Agüero, together with all affiliated and related writings, has undergone revision. I confront his unacknowledged civilista and colonialist
bias with my avowed revolutionary and socialist sympathies. I do not claim to be a temperate and impartial judge; I declare myself a passionate and belligerent adversary. Arbitrations and compromises take place in history, provided that the opponents engage in long, drawn-out disputes.

The Literature of the Colony

Language is the raw material that unites literature. The Spanish, Italian, and French literatures began with the first ballads and tales, artistic works of enduring value written in those languages. Directly derived from Latin and still not entirely differentiated from it, they were for a long time considered dialects. The national literature of the Latin peoples was born, historically, with the national language, which was the first element to delineate the general limits of a literature.

In the history of the West, the flowering of national literatures coincided with the political affirmation of the nation. It formed part of the movement which, through the Reformation and the Renaissance, created the ideological and spiritual factors of the liberal revolution and the capitalist order. The unity of European culture, maintained during the Middle Ages by Latin and by papal authority, was shattered by the nationalist movement, which individualized literature. "Nationalism" in literary historiography is therefore purely political in its origins and extraneous to the aesthetic concept of art. It was most vigorously defined in Germany, where the writings of the Schlegel brothers profoundly influenced literary criticism and historiography. In his justly celebrated *Storia della letteratura italiana*—praised by

Francesco de Sanctis characterizes the criticism of the 1800's as "the cult of nationality, which so impresses modern critics and for which Schlegel exalts Calderón, a very nationalistic Spaniard, and disparages Metastasio, who was not in the least Italian." National literature in Peru, like Peruvian nationality itself, cannot renounce its Spanish ties. It is a literature written, thought, and felt in Spanish, although in many instances and to varying degrees the language is subject to indigenous influence in intonation and even in syntax and pronunciation. Indian civilization did not have a written language and therefore it did not acquire a literature; or rather, literature remained in the realm of ballads, legends, and choreography. Quechua writing and grammar are the work of the Spaniard, and Quechua literature belonged entirely to bilingual men of letters like El Lunarejo until the appearance of Inocencio Mamani, the young author of *Tucupac Manashcan*. The Spanish language, more or less Americanized, is the literary language and intellectual tool of Peru's still undefined nationality.

In literary historiography, the concept of a national literature is neither timeless nor very precise. No systematization can keep

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6 See in nos. 12 and 14 of *Amauta* the news and comments of Gabriel Collazos and José Gabriel Cossio on the Quechua comedy by Inocencio Mamani, who had probably been exposed to the influence of Gamaliel Churata when he wrote it.
up with changing events. The nation itself is an abstraction, an allegory, a myth that does not correspond to a reality that can be scientifically defined. Commenting on Hebrew literature as an exception, De Sanctis states: "The idea of a national literature is an illusion. Its people would have to be as isolated as the Chinese are supposed to be (although the English have also penetrated China). The imagination and style now known as orientalism are not peculiarly of the Orient but of all the East and of all barbaric, primitive literatures. Greek poetry has Asiatic elements, Latin poetry has Greek, and Italian poetry has both Greek and Latin."  

The Quechua-Spanish dualism in Peru, still unresolved, prevents our national literature from being studied with the methods used for literatures that were created and developed without the intervention of the conquest. Peru is different from other countries of America where dualism is absent or does not constitute a problem. The individuality of Argentine literature, for example, expresses a strongly defined national personality.

The first stage of Peruvian literature could not escape its Spanish origin, not because it was written in the Spanish language, but because it was conceived with Spanish spirit and sentiment. Here, I see no discrepancy. Gálvez, high priest of the cult of the viceroyalty in literature, recognized as a critic that "the colonial period produced servile and inferior imitators of Spanish literature and especially of Gongora, from whom they took only the bombastic and the bad. They had no understanding of or feeling for the Peruvian scene, except Garcilaso [de la Vega, el Inca], who was moved by its natural beauty, and Caviedes, who in his acute observations of certain aspects of national life and in his criollo malice should be considered the forefather of Segura, Pardo, Palma, and Paz Soldán."  

The two exceptions, the first much more than the second, are indisputable. Garcilaso was a solitary figure in the literature of the colony. He was the meeting ground of two cultures and two eras. But he was more Inca than conquistador, more Quechua than Spaniard. It is this circumstance, also exceptional, that accounts for his originality and greatness.

Garcilaso was born of the first fruitful embrace of conquistador and Indian woman. He was historically the first Peruvian, if by "Peruvianness" we mean a social formation determined by the Spanish conquest and colonization. The name and work of Garcilaso fill an entire period of Peruvian literature. The first Peruvian, he nonetheless remained Spanish. From a historical-aesthetic standpoint his work belongs to the Spanish epic. It cannot be separated from Spain’s most heroic undertaking: the discovery and conquest of America.

The early period of Peruvian literature was colonial and Spanish even in style and subject matter. All literature normally begins with the lyric, as did the oral literature of the Peruvian Indian. The conquest transplanted to Peru, together with the Spanish language, an advanced literature that continued to evolve in the colony. The Spaniard had already developed the narrative from epic poem to novel. The novel is typical of the literary phase that begins with the Reformation and the Renaissance. It is basically the history of the individual in a bourgeois society and, from this point of view, Ortega y Gasset is not far wrong when he refers to the decline of the novel. The novel will be reborn, no doubt, as realistic art in the proletarian society. For the moment, however, the proletarian tale, as an expression of revolutionary deeds, is more epic than novel.

9 In his Teoria e storia della letteratura (p. 205), De Sanctis says: "In art as in science, man’s departure point is subjectivity and, therefore, lyricism is the earliest form of poetry. But subjectivity later turns into objectivity and subjective emotion in a narrative is secondary and incidental. Lyricism is the terrain of the ideal, narration is the terrain of the real. In the first, impression is purpose and action is occasion; in the second, the contrary is true. The first does not dissolve into prose except by destroying itself; the second is resolved in prose, which is its natural tendency."
The medieval epic, which was disappearing from Europe at the time of the conquest, was revived in Peru. The conquistador could feel and describe the conquest in epic writing. The work of Garcilaso falls between epic and history. The epic, as De Sanctis remarks belongs to the heroic days. After Garcilaso, the hopelessly mediocre literature of the colony offers no original epic creation. Although the writers of the colony generally repeated or continued the themes of Spanish authors, they lagged behind because of distance. The titles in colonial literature betray the pedantry and outdated classicism of the authors. It is a list that collects and copies, when it does not plagiarize. The only personal voice is that of Caviedes, who expressed the limeño bent for mockery and mischief. El Lunarejo, despite his Indian blood, was above all an admirer of Gongora. This attitude is typical of an old literature which, having exhausted its renaissance, becomes baroque and overly cultivated. The Apologético en favor de Góngora therefore follows the tradition of Spanish literature.

The Survival of Colonialism

Our literature did not cease being Spanish when the republic was founded. For many years it continued to be, if not Spanish, colonial—a tardy echo of the classicism and then of the romanticism of the mother country.

Because of the special character of Peruvian literature, it cannot be studied within the framework of classicism, romanticism, and modernism; nor of ancient, medieval, and modern; nor of popular and literary poetry, et cetera. I shall not use the Marxist classification of literature as feudal or aristocratic, bourgeois or proletarian. In order not to strengthen the impression that I have organized my case along political or class lines, I shall base it on aesthetic history and criticism. This will serve as a method of explanation rather than as a theory that a priori judges and interprets works and their authors.

A modern literary, not sociological, theory divides the literature of a country into three periods: colonial, cosmopolitan, and national. In the first period, the country, in a literary sense, is a colony dependent on its metropolis. In the second period, it simultaneously assimilates elements of various foreign literatures. In the third period, it shapes and expresses its own personality and feelings. Although this theory of literature does not go any farther, it is broad enough for our purposes.

The colonial cycle is clearly defined in Peruvian literature. Our literature is colonial not only because of its dependence on Spain but especially because of its subservience to the spiritual and material remnants of the colony. Felipe Pardo, arbitrarily designated by Gálvez as one of the precursors of literary Peruvianess, repudiated the republic and its institutions not simply out of aristocratic feelings but more out of royalist feelings. All his satire, second rate at best, reflects the mentality of a magistrate or encomendero who resents a revolution that, at least in theory, declares the mestizo and Indian to be his equals. His jeers are inspired by his class consciousness. Pardo y Aliaga does not speak as a Peruvian. He speaks as a man who feels Spanish in a country conquered by Spain for the descendants of its captains and educated class.

This same spirit, to a lesser degree but with the same results, characterizes almost all our literature until the colonía generation which, rebelling against the past and its values, declares its allegiance to González Prada and Eguren, the two most liberal writers in Spanish literature.

What kept this nostalgia for the colony alive so long in our
literature? It was not the individual writer's attachment to the past. The reason must be sought in a world more complex than that usually glanced at by the critic.

The literature of a country is maintained by its economic and political substratum. In a country dominated by the descendants of *encomenderos* and magistrates of the viceroyalty, nothing could have been more natural than serenades under balconies. The mediocre writers of a republic that considered itself heir to the conquest could only labor to embellish the viceroyal heraldry. A few superior intellects—forerunners of future events in any country—were able to elude the fate imposed by history on the lackeys of the latifundium.

Without roots, our colonial literature was meager, sickly, and weak. Life, says Wilson, comes from the land. Art is nourished on the sap of tradition, history, and people. In Peru, literature did not grow out of the indigenous tradition, history, and people. It was created by the importation of Spanish literature and sustained by imitation of that literature. An unhealthy umbilical cord has kept it tied to the mother country.

For this reason, during the colonization we had nothing but baroque and pedantic clerics and magistrates whose great-grandchildren became the romantic troubadours of the republic.

Colonial literature, despite an occasional pale evocation of the empire, lacked any aptitude or imagination for reconstructing the Inca past. Its historiographer, Riva Agüero, precluded from criticizing this incapacity, hastens to justify it and cites in his support a writer of the metropolis. "The events of the Inca empire," he writes, "according to a famous literary critic (Menéndez y Pelayo), can be of no more interest to us than are the tales of the Turdetanos and the Sarpetanos to the Spaniards." He ends his essay with these words:

There is a theory, which I find limited and unproductive, that literature can be Americanized by going back to before the conquest and bringing to life the Quechua and Inca civilizations with the ideas and feelings of the natives. Menéndez y Pelayo, Rubio, and Juan Valera all agree that this is not to Americanize but to romanticize. Those civilizations and semi-civilizations are dead and extinct. There is no way to revive their tradition because they left no literature. For criollos of Spanish blood they are foreign and strange and nothing links us to them; they are just as foreign and strange to the mestizos and Indians who have been Europeanized by education. Garcilaso de la Vega is unique among the latter.

The mentality of Riva Agüero is typical of the descendants of the conquest, the heirs to the colony, for whom the views of the scholars of the Corte were articles of faith. In his opinion, "there is much more material to be found in the Spanish expeditions of the sixteenth century and in the adventures of the conquest."11

Even when the republic reached maturity, our writers never thought of Peru as anything but a Spanish colony. Their domesticated imagination sent them to Spain in search of models and even themes. The *Elegia a la muerte de Alfonso XII*, for example, was written by Luis Benjamín Cisneros, who was, nonetheless, within the graceless and heavy romantic style, one of the most liberal spirits of the 1800's.

The Peruvian writer has almost never felt any ties with the common people. Even had he so desired, he was not capable of interpreting the arduous task of forming a new Peru. The new Peru was vague; only the Inca empire and the colony were clearly defined, and he chose the colony. And between this fledgling Peruvian literature and the Inca empire and the Indian came the conquest, isolating them from each other.

After Spain destroyed the Inca civilization, the conquistador established a new state that excluded and oppressed the Indian. With the native race enslaved, Peruvian literature had to be-

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11 José de la Riva Agüero, *Carácter de la literatura del Perú independiente* (Lima, 1905).
come more criollo and coastal as it became less Spanish. For this reason, no vigorous literature could emerge in Peru. The mixture of invader and Indian did not produce a homogeneous type in Peru. To the Spanish and Quechua blood was added a torrent of African blood and later, with the importation of coolie labor, a little Asiatic blood. In addition, the tepid, bland climate of the lowland where these diverse ethnic elements were blended could not be expected to produce a strong personality.

It was inevitable that our motley ethnic composition should affect our literary process. Literature could not develop in Peru as it did in Argentina, where the fusion of European and Indian produced the gaucho. The latter has permeated Argentine literature and made it the most individualistic in Spanish America. The best Argentine writers have found their themes and characters in folklore. Santos Vega, Martín Fierro, Anastasio el Pollo were all folk heroes long before they became literary creations. Even today, Argentine literature, which is open to the most modern and cosmopolitan influences, reaffirms its gaucho heritage. Poets in the vanguard of the new generation proclaim their descendence from the gaucho Martín Fierro and from his bizarre family of folksingers, Jorge Luis Borges, saturated in westernism and modernism, frequently adopts the accent of the countryside.

In independent Peru, writers like Listas and Hermosillas and their disciples almost invariably disdained the common people. Their fantasy of provincial nobility was impressed only by the Spanish, the viceroyal. But Spain was far away. Although the viceroyalty survived in the feudal regime established by the conquistadors, it belonged to the past. All the literature of these authors, therefore, appears to be flimsy and weak, dangling in the present. It is a literature of undeclared emigrants, nostalgic relics.

The few writers with vitality in this weary procession of wornout dignitaries of rhetoric are the ones who somehow por-

trayed the people. When it ignores the authentic, living Peru, Peruvian literature is a heavy, indigestible miscellany of Spanish literature. The "ay" of the Indian and the pirouette of the zambo are the only notes of animation and veracity in this flaccid literature. The fabric of Tradiciones sparkles with the thread of Lima's gossipy lower class, which is one of the vital forces in traditionalist prose. Melgar, scorned by scholars, will outlive Althaus, Pardo, and Salaverry, because his melancholy songs will always give the people a glimpse of their sentimental tradition and genuine literary past.