

LATIN AMERICAN
LITERARY CRITICISM:
Myth, History, Ideology

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DEMETRIO AGUILERA-MALTA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE TERTIARY PHASE OF EPIC TRADITION IN LATIN AMERICA. By CLEMENTINE CHRISTOS RABASSA. (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1980. Pp. 301. \$27.50.)

EN TORNO A AGUILERA MALTA. By CLEMENTINE CHRISTOS RABASSA. (Guayaquil: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1981. Pp. 269.)

HERMENEUTICA Y PRAXIS DEL INDIGENISMO: LA NOVELA INDIGENISTA DE CLORINDA MATTO A JOSE MARIA ARGUEDAS. By JULIO RODRIGUEZ-LUIS. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980. Pp. 277.)

LA LITERATURA HISPANOAMERICANA ENTRE COMPROMISO Y EXPERIMENTO. By JULIO RODRIGUEZ-LUIS. (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 1984. Pp. 297.)

LA NOVELA INDIGENISTA: LITERATURA Y SOCIEDAD EN EL PERU. By ANTONIO CORNEJO POLAR. (Lima: Editora Lasontay, 1980. Pp. 91.)

The five works reviewed in this article share a common preoccupation with understanding different aspects of the multiple relations between literature and social reality in contemporary Latin America. Written by critics of both cultures, the texts exemplify social criticism of literature, a tendency that is by no means homogeneous in scope, theory, or methodology. From different perspectives, the five texts focus on the relevancy of revising the criteria for reading literary production as a reinterpretation of myth and history.

Most discussions about social criticism of literature have centered on three questions: theories of literary representation of reality, problems related to form and content, and problems of the genesis, evolution, or history of forms. Critics as diverse as José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Josefina Ludmer, Noé Jitrik, and Angel Rama have taken various approaches to these questions. Their responses defy the stereotypes that link social criticism of literature to dogmatic positions or sociological reductionism. One could

view the trajectory of social literary criticism in Latin America, particularly since the turn of the century, as a process of refining methods, a process undoubtedly linked to the increasing division of labor, specialization, and growing identification by intellectuals with the culture of the oppressed.¹

Today, a number of social critics of literature conceive of artistic "reflection" as a complex phenomenon. The object and the subject, reflection and self-reflection, are usually understood when referring to the problem of literary representation of reality. It is rare to find a content analysis that does not stem from form itself; the text is perceived as referring to its own organization as well as to other social series (which may be literary, verbal, or cultural). In sum, the literary work—either as a significant set of references in the communication process or as a specific literary "reflection" of social organization—is most commonly correlated with social reality by focusing on the social fabric of literary form itself. In their diverse attempts to establish correlations between literature and Latin American social reality, the three critics reviewed here begin with the two aspects of form, its content and expressive planes—"what" is communicated and "how" that communication is possible. From these planes, social implications are deduced. But the three critics demonstrate significant differences that will be explored in discussing the contributions and limitations of each in the process of fine tuning the interpretive tools for literary analysis.

Myth or History

Demetrio Aguilera-Malta and Social Justice by Clementine Christos Rabassa could be considered an eclectic or transitional study somewhere between a classic and a strictly social approach to literary criticism. Rabassa wishes to employ interpretive tools that enable her to apprehend the problematic Latin American reality where "subjugation of the downtrodden for centuries dictated radical denunciation and reform" (p. 28). She integrates both approaches with unusual mastery, employing a framework of solid, rigorous classical references without rendering forced comparisons. She easily moves from Greek mythology to *Paradise Lost*, *The Aeneid*, or *Gerusalemme Liberata* in her efforts to establish some of the Western sources in Demetrio Aguilera Malta's texts. Yet the vast horizon of those comparisons does not hinder her keen sense of functionality as she links the compared texts to her main objective of uncovering the universal dimension of Aguilera Malta's writings that "transcended the limits of most Latin American writers" (p. 11).

This book raises important ideological and aesthetic questions about the process of reading a literary text. Rabassa's interpretation intersects an important polemic in Latin American letters since the 1930s:

the proper relationship between writing and regional or national concerns.² The main issue here deals with the universality of art, a question linked to the quest for identity in Latin America because the concept of artistic universality underscores the battlefield of culture, the contradictions between those who have traditionally claimed privilege for “universal” values (embodied by the Western tradition) and those whose very existence challenges that cultural claim. Third World cultural practices thus force a relativization of such “universal truths.”

To many readers, the limitations of *criollismo* and *indigenismo* were inherent in the regional focus (the referent) and were not perceived in connection with the methodology itself (form). From this perspective, the question of how Latin American literature was able to “project universality” became greatly oriented toward changing the literary focus to less “primitive” settings. The polemic about the benefits of cosmopolitanism coalesced along those lines. Yet history has demonstrated that efforts to incorporate regional material (whether linguistic or social) in literary forms would persist, continuing well into the 1970s. This trend involved a series of transformations, including a broadening process (*proceso de ampliaciones*), which Antonio Cornejo Polar ascribes to José María Arguedas in *La novela indigenista: literatura y sociedad en el Perú* (pp. 80–89). Curiously enough, it was by not escaping the problem, but rather by confronting the limitations, that the best *indigenista*—and by extension the best regionalist—literature evolved.

Efforts to achieve universality by merely changing the literary focus to urban settings proved as futile as the narrowest regionalist samples. The text of *Rayuela*, torn between the “mediocre” reality of suburban Buenos Aires and the “excentricism” of Paris, demonstrated that the process of universalization in literature is more directly related to the way in which a text chooses to represent reality than to the fragment of reality that it represents. The focus on the relationship between the referent and the literary representation, not on the abstract referent, involved a broad process of questioning and self-questioning, a growing awareness of the methods of apprehending reality that enriched the so-called regional literature. This trend is best exemplified by such novels as Miguel Angel Asturias’s *El Señor Presidente*, Agustín Yáñez’s *Al filo del agua*, Rosario Castellanos’s *Balún Canán*, Augusto Roa Bastos’s *Hijo de hombre*, most of Arguedas’s production, and (as Rabassa lucidly demonstrates) several of Demetrio Aguilera Malta’s works. A strategy common to all such texts is their incorporation of myth as a key element in the content and organizational aspects of literary form.

The function of myth in literature can be studied at two levels: synchronic (myth seen as unchangeable structure) and diachronic (the changes and transformations of myth through history). Rabassa’s method accents the synchronic aspects of myth in literature, as they

appear in Aguilera Malta's writings. She perceives diachronic movement (evolution of form and other aspects of literary and social history) but resolves such differences into an essential unity. Thus specific characteristics pertaining to Latin American reality tend to be absorbed into an ideal, abstract totality, a universe of archetypes that, in her view, ultimately refer to human nature unchanged throughout time and history. Within the framework of her interpretive model, Rabassa attempts to rescue "universality" from the regional materials present in the texts themselves, without demanding a movement away from the local or regional space represented.

Rabassa's method also synthesizes contradictions between the specific and the general, the particular and the universal, into a universal model—the epic tradition. In characterizing that paradigm, she utilizes specific texts—from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* to *Paradise Lost*, *Os Lusíadas*, and *Don Quijote*. She also works with an implicit theoretical framework that incorporates Brian Wilkie's theses on Romantic elaboration of the epic tradition, Joseph Campbell's studies of the hero, and Sir James George Frazer's contributions to archetypal literary criticism. Her eclecticism also inspires her to incorporate valuable aspects of Bertold Brecht's theory on drama.

Rabassa emphasizes two aspects of the archetypal epic paradigm: the hero's quest and the particular configuration of the territory in which the hero's quest occurs. The logic encompassing both aspects of the paradigm is antinomic: all struggles revert back to the essential conflict between good and evil. This nucleus engenders a series of similar pairs: chaos versus harmony, Satan versus the Saviour, sin versus virtue, man versus nature, and condemnation versus salvation. The critic, pursuing the vestiges of myth in contemporary literary expressions, searches for a metaphysical cause of present-day estrangement by tracing it back to archetypal beginnings. History thus appears as the illusory unfolding of metaphysical causality. One may or may not agree with this methodology; however, Rabassa accomplishes her goal of incorporating the Ecuadorian Aguilera Malta into the classic tradition, a significant objective, given the marginality of Latin American cultural production in Western literary analysis. In this regard, her study helps place Latin American literature on the "map" by making a complex Third World writer accessible to the North American literary establishment.

It is significant that Rabassa did not choose to concentrate on the works of typical writers of the "boom" but on works that have remained somewhat marginal in Latin American literary circles as well.³ Aguilera Malta has been unjustly marginalized by an often-elitist tendency in literary criticism, possibly because his writing bears the influence of a system of values and references "alien" to Western discourse.

Marginal literature demands adjustments by the critic, a challenge that Rabassa faces with flexibility, thus opening up possibilities for modifying the paradigm and making methodological contributions. In this context, four achievements should be noted: first, her distinguishing a "tertiary phase" within epic tradition corresponding to the contemporary Latin American literature, a seminal concept for future studies of this genre; second, her incorporation of pagan references within the Western model; and third, her inclusion of Third World mythology, particularly of African sources. Finally, her association of "sin" with racial, cultural (social), economic, and political oppression and of "salvation" with human liberation in the Third World affiliates Rabassa closely with important aspects of liberation theology in Latin America.

Perhaps due to the overall dehistoricization of social reality, Rabassa's framework fails to discuss the specific modernity of the novel and the relationship between the genre's emergence and the profound disintegration of feudalism, questions of particular relevance in Latin America. But whether or not one agrees with her method, Rabassa's reading of Aguilera Malta's texts against the background of a mythic "ideal harmony" serves a critical function in regard to the antidemocratic, oppressive conditions in Latin America. Many Latin American writers have used Greek mythology to gauge and criticize existing social conditions, including Leopoldo Marechal, Gabriela Mistral, and Humberto Costantini.⁴

From Myth to History

Julio Rodríguez-Luis's *La literatura hispanoamericana entre compromiso y experimento* deals with the relationship between literary form and history from a very different perspective. He attempts to trace the historical movement of Latin American fiction by focusing on literary forms perceived as evolving out of "experimental" needs and on the criterion of "commitment," the level that most directly correlates the text with social and historical reality. The focus on myth is subordinated to Rodríguez-Luis's concern for history. This concern, which was prominent in his first work on indigenismo (*Hermenéutica y praxis del indigenismo*), became problematic in his second book only in regard to certain authors (García Márquez, among others). His interpretive approach incorporates economics, politics, and social relationships as aspects affecting "content" and "form." Here the task of the literary critic is conceived of as an interdisciplinary praxis where aesthetics and ethics are intricately intertwined.

As the critic himself suggests in the prologue, this book does not quite constitute a coherent, integrated social history of Latin American literature from "El matadero" to contemporary neobaroque texts. *La*

literatura hispanoamericana entre compromiso y experimento is nevertheless worth adding to the established literary histories.⁵ Perhaps Luis-Rodríguez's admitted "shortcoming" reveals some of the problems inherent in attempting to write a single, homogenous social history of Latin American literature. Cornejo Polar begins his thesis on heterogeneous literature precisely by indicating the need to focus on the many histories underlying dominant historiography, or the many "nations" comprising each nation because of the complex, uneven, and fragmentary development of Latin American nations themselves (pp. 67–91).

Thus what first may appear as a shortcoming is an insightful bifurcation of the intended project that indirectly reflects the plurality underlying such concepts as "history" and "nation." Accordingly, one could distinguish at least two subhistories within the main movement traced by Rodríguez-Luis: the problematic development of literary representation of the landowner; and the development of neobaroque forms in contemporary Latin American literature. His second, fourth, and fifth chapters thoroughly discuss the evolving character of the rural landowner in fiction from the Romantic period through *regionalismo* (the *gauchesca* and *indigenista* movements), culminating with contemporary texts such as José Donoso's *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* and García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca*. The third chapter focuses on the development of neobaroque forms in the context of underdevelopment and the transition to socialism. This subject is approached through texts that include Lisandro Otero González's *La situación*, Edmundo Desnoes's *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, and Severo Sarduy's *Gestos*, *De dónde son los cantantes*, and *Cobra*. This subhistory concludes with an insightful overview of contemporary Puerto Rican literature, including a study of Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*.

These two subhistories are traced from a coherent analytical framework with several salient characteristics: correlation between a specific corpus of real historical and social problems and the internal form of literary texts; the homologies between objective history and the development of the novel (for example, historical transformations of the landowner resulting from the introduction of dependent capitalist modes of production in the countryside); real societal transformations in the transition from underdevelopment to socialism in the case of Cuba; key mediations of biographical data in the genesis of a literary text, including existential and literary influences; awareness of the critic's own reading as praxis ("commitment") in a conflicting field of cultural forces; and the incorporation of other critical readings from a polemical and diacritical perspective.

In *La literatura hispanoamericana entre compromiso y experimento*, Rodríguez-Luis defies current Western trends toward dehistoricization in

literary criticism through a rich understanding of the relationship between social literary history and the historicity of literary forms—the natural and social transformation of literature in different historical periods. The pervasive nineteenth-century tendency toward a historiography characterized by empiricism and positivism left its imprint on literary criticism, which instead of refining its critical tools has tended to give up its focus on the diachronic movement of literature altogether. From this perspective, Rodríguez-Luis's work implicitly underscores the fallacies in the attempts by some poststructuralist critics to overcome the limitations of historical reductionism by disregarding the changing character of literary forms. A case in point is his insightful discussion of the polemic concerning neobaroque forms in a significant core of Latin American novels (p. 150).

Ideology, Myth, History: Heterogeneous Literatures

It is necessary to go back to Rodríguez-Luis's first book, *Hermenéutica y praxis del indigenismo*, to trace a corpus of problems not thoroughly addressed in the theoretical framework of his more recent work: the relationship between myth, history, and ideology in Latin American literature. Rodríguez-Luis states in *Hermenéutica* that "art understood as production denies its own potential for human liberation, supporting on the contrary the ideology of the dominant system" (p. 264, my translation). This statement points to a major polemic within contemporary social criticism of literature in Latin America: the question of how to adjust theories originating in advanced countries to the particular reality of developing countries, a familiar problem for social scientists as well as literary critics. Cornejo Polar's *La novela indigenista* directly addresses this problem by proposing (as have others) a new Latin American, and perhaps Third World, paradigm called the heterogeneous literatures. This paradigm is linked in turn to the concept of literature as production, the idea refuted by Rodríguez-Luis.

Literary production implies intertextuality, a concept asserting that no text can be impermeable to the social life of language; rather, each literary text incorporates the reservoir of language (literary and nonliterary) in a given culture. Writing could thus be viewed as a sociolinguistic operation where meaning is a function (and not merely the end result) of the global process of selecting from that reservoir of language. In this context, the concept of production in literary theory dismantles previously reified notions of the "literary work" (*la obra*). The stress on the object (the text as end product) formerly obscured the process of its elaboration, as occurs in commodity production with the fetishism of the good produced. In traditional literary criticism, two

aspects of production have blurred the writing process and the relations involved: the older cult of the author (the myth of the “creative genius”) and the more recent cult of the object (the technocratic myth of the text as the product of craftsmanship).

The cult of the author, which was romantic in nature, produced the illusion of the individual who, upon creating “his” or “her” work, created his or her conditions as owner. Criticism reflected this personalization of the writing process throughout the nineteenth century. The process itself became obscured by the perception of an individual appropriation of truth, where *individual* connoted *unique* and ingenuity represented the power of “invention.” Intertextuality, productivity, and semiosis (interplay between the semantic and the “formal,” between the expressive and content planes) are all interpretive tools that—far from subordinating the text to the dominant ideology—may help to “liberate” the reading act from systematic subservience to commodity production.

Throughout the twentieth century, the fetishism of the object has permeated literature and literary theories. In the case of the literary fetishism of the object—as in commodity production—the producer (labor) appears to be veiled by the brilliance of the thing (the end product) to such a degree that the object seems to erase the conditions and the relations involved in the production process. Literature as a “textual workshop” (production) implies a resurfacing of the terms erased by reification: producer, product, and circulation are all integrated as interpretive parameters. All terms are subordinated to the instance of production because it is in that activity that all three “moments” and their interrelatedness become redefined, reorganized, and therefore meaningful. In sum, looking at a text’s production is a dialectic way of referring to writing as social praxis.

Cornejo Polar’s *La novela indigenista* points to studies in literary productivity showing that in Latin America the “textual workshop” of the novel, its own mode of production, demonstrates that texts become permeable to voices referring not only to different classes but to different cultures. Indigenous, Black, mestizo, and Western cultures intersect in the Latin American novel. In fact, the question of gender (not addressed by any of the books reviewed here) could illuminate the importance of intertextuality even further. From this perspective, ideology is not merely a literary “projection”; it is present in the very machinery that generates the text. Ideology ceases to be seen as just an aspect of “content”; it is instead a factor in the way in which the material is organized. The literary mode of production itself, the particular way in which choices and combinations work in a given text, are in this sense ideological.

As *La novela indigenista* reveals, viewing writing as production,

rather than as a set of norms, opens up rich interpretive possibilities for Latin American literature. Cornejo Polar, Josefina Ludmer, Angel Rama, and others have subscribed to the concept of production because it permits focusing on problems of ideology in a more complex way. The text refers to its own organization; in turn, this new organization microphysically refers to the economic modes of production and to the question of hegemony.

Rodríguez-Luis's controversial evaluation of García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* in *La literatura hispanoamericana entre compromiso y experimento* (p. 218) does not differ substantially from his earlier hypothesis about José María Arguedas, a central focus of his *Hermenéutica* (pp. 122–226): the critic consistently maintains that the literary representation of myth contradicts the author's progressive ideology. In his second book, Luis-Rodríguez identifies the persistent mythic or indigenous cultural mode as the author's "rejection of history" (p. 249). In turn, Arguedas's "lyric operation" is interpreted as having produced a "distortion of the narrative method." The critic's corollary is the exclusionary opposition of myth versus history, the lyric mode versus the narrative mode, and telluric projection versus social projection. It is important to contrast this hypothesis with that of Cornejo Polar. Ultimately, this contrast should extend to include Rabassa's incursion into the African strata of Demetrio Aguilera Malta's writings. At this point, the three authors, coming from different perspectives, have had to face the complex problem of intertextuality with respect to myth, history, and ideology.

Probably influenced by Georg Lukács, Rodríguez-Luis seems to endow the genre of the novel with a normative function. The genre is viewed as a paradigm whose essential characteristics begin to obstruct the historical permeability of novels themselves. A norm—and no longer a productive code—genre emerges as the barrier that delimits the "abnormalities," "distortions," or "aberrations" of individual novels. Social and historically natural transformations in the genre thus run the risk of appearing as impurities or transgressions that the critic must attempt to "correct." Arguedas's incorporation of "lyrical" modes is interpreted by Rodríguez-Luis as a "distortion" of the novel. Yet such incorporation could be viewed as an important feature of intertextuality in the genre: a polyphony that encompasses other genres, genders, and cultures, all with specific social and historical functions.

Granted, the novel has essential attributes that are in turn rooted in historical development. The novel's particular appropriation of historicity is perhaps one of the categories most directly associated with the genre. But nowhere is it stipulated that historicity must be expressed in a single mode in the novel (for instance, as the biography of the

“hero”). In fact, one of the novel’s most specific attributes is its ambiguity, the heterodox and pluralistic nature of its mode of production. The novel’s ways of expressing historicity are also historical. Moreover, those ways are historically social, implying that the genre will accommodate to particular social formations according to the specific materials they provide. In the Western world, history’s defeat of myth may be seen as a precondition for the emergence of the novel. But in Latin America, the particular historicity of the form may necessitate narrating the profound conflict between history and myth because this conflict is far from over. It actually touches the heterogeneous nature of societies where primitive communism, semifeudalism, and dependent capitalism coexist in a constant struggle for cultural and other kinds of hegemony. In the case of Arguedas, myth and “lyricism” may contribute to the rich heterodoxical and historical representation of Peruvian society.

Cornejo Polar’s *La novela indigenista* is organized around the need to correlate indigenista novels with Peruvian society as a whole. This objective presupposes history and demands focusing on the novels’ “mode of production, the semantic-formal structure derived from that mode, and the way in which it expresses and reproduces one of the most conflictive areas of [Peruvian] nationality” (p. vi, my translation). As a result of this approach, Cornejo Polar’s reading of the indigenista novel allows for a comprehensive and dialectic treatment of the problems raised by the existence of that kind of novel: the conflicting cohabitation of myth and historicity within the genre.

In this context, one of the most serious implications of Rodríguez-Luis’s contrasting of José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa is the fact that the critic praises the historicity of Vargas Llosa over the mythic “distortions” of Arguedas, based on the “absence” of the Indian mode (associated with myth) in Vargas Llosa’s *Conversación en la catedral* (*Hermenéutica*, pp. 250–52). In turn, this absence reflects a more definite displacement of indigenous culture due to the capitalist or “modern” transformations that have taken place in Peru. Cornejo Polar’s study, in contrast, reveals to what extent Arguedas’s literary production expresses the tragic confrontation of the two “patrias” (indigenous and Spanish), two radically different worldviews that are undergoing a process of modernization affecting both primitive communism and semifeudal modes of production. The fact that in Arguedas’s case, the narrative point of view expresses nostalgia for the “old ways”—particularly, the communal organization of the *ayllu*—is related to the writer’s choosing to tell the story from the perspective of the forms that will undergo the transformations: rituals and relations that will have no place in the new organization of society. A similar “tragic” tension exists in such diverse novels as *Don Quijote*, *Cien años*, and *Rayuela*, works in which

the old way is viewed from the “inside,” thus emphasizing the irrevocable nature of the objective, historical transformations already in process.

Perhaps most important, Cornejo Polar’s analysis demonstrates to what extent the existence of the indigenista novel raises unsettling questions about textual production and critical reading in Latin America. He traces not only the development of the indigenista novel but the evolution of literary critiques from José Carlos Mariátegui to Agustín Cuevas. Mariátegui, who pioneered in establishing the necessity of connecting class and ethnic questions, referred to the indigenista novel as “mestizo literature” because it was not written by indigenous authors. Most critics concur in distinguishing distinctive non-Western traits in the structure of such novels, although the genre chosen for the particular artistic representation may well be closely linked to Western development.

Analyzing that apparent “paradox,” Cornejo Polar identifies a number of Latin American critics who have helped elaborate the paradigm known as “heterogeneous literatures,” which can encompass indigenous, Afro-Latin American, and gauchesque literature as well as magic realism (pp. 62–64). For instance, Noé Jitrik characterizes such literatures as manifesting a “fracture in the unity between the *world represented* and the *mode of representation*” (p. 62). Angel Rama presented the fracture as a “battle of the form,” which begins to take place in the process of deciding to write a novel, a Western genre. The novel becomes the site of that battle because the choice of a Western genre does not prevent authors from paying tribute to other cultural forms and genres not chosen: orality, indigenous folklore, and the so-called lyric mode.⁶ This disparity in the textual mode of production refers to the conflict of societies split in two by “historical catastrophes such as the Conquest” (p. 63).

Cornejo Polar’s insights illuminate other corollaries of the concept of “heterogeneous literatures”: the relationship between heterogeneous modes of production and the question of an incomplete process of “national” integration; the coexistence of hybrid modes of imagination and their relationship to the coexistence of different modes of production in Latin America; the disparity between the referent and the text (the Indian is neither author nor reader in such novels); the need to incorporate an analysis of strategies of hegemony in a given reading; and the need to continue to elaborate interpretive models permeable to ethnic diversity. I believe that the transcendence of this field of inquiry in general, and of Cornejo Polar’s contributions in particular, lies in the quest for paradigms that arise from the hybrid, pluralistic, and uneven character of Latin American societies.

Reading Rabassa’s second book, *En torno a Aguilera Malta*, in the

context of the paradigm of heterogeneous literatures demonstrates to what degree she is aware of what Rama termed “the battle of form” in Latin American literatures. For Rabassa, that battle has to a certain degree been won: “the spiritual victory of the autochthonous and black element becomes evident when the white man becomes a flattering slave to the mythologies of the peoples that he has conquered” (p. 16, my translation). Its outcome is demonstrated by the persistence of non-Western myths, which this critic characterizes as a tendency toward the “syncretism” of pagan and Christian elements. Yet, her own analyses show that the “battle” is still latent. Aguilera Malta is himself aware of the contradictory nature of the cultural “fusion” when he points to the effect of African resources in his writings. Irony, irreverence, and the “aesthetics of excess” are mostly possible through the invasion of Black carnival, a “mixture of liturgy and folklore” (p. 119).

Rabassa agrees with Gerardo Luzuriaga’s description of *hibridismo poético-temático* in Aguilera Malta’s texts as a “poetic-thematic hybrid mode” that obviously fits the characteristics of heterogeneous literatures.⁷ The ambivalent, dismantling effect of Black culture in Aguilera Malta’s writing accounts for its modernity, for its connections with Avant-Garde and with Negritude in particular. Black myth coexists in the text with an essentially subversive function: it initiates a return of the repressed, an upsurge of what has been subjugated as culture and as class.

The issue of heterogeneous literatures is crucial to Latin American literary criticism because it underscores the need to reinterpret the past using a critical, historical approach. But the importance of this paradigm is not only as a tool in conducting a “rereading” of the past. The past is a corpus that may require interpreting and reinterpreting, particularly if it contains elements that persistently resurface in social reality (literature included). Although I think that the tragic conclusion in Arguedas’s texts may point to a decline in indigenista literature, the issues raised by those novels are still very relevant to social criticism of literature. As late as 1984, the indigenista play *Lautaro* shook Chilean society by highlighting the complex situation of the Mapuche people in Chile today. By focusing on an important national minority, the play effectively challenged the authoritarian, orthodox, and “homogeneous” logic underlying Chilean society.

The questions raised by indigenista literature will probably continue to challenge notions of homogeneity in Latin American literature until indigenous peoples find themselves in a position to create their own written culture and are thus no longer mere “referents” but producers and receivers. It is impossible to foresee now what literary forms will emerge from such circumstances. What is important at this point is that indigenous peoples, acting in self-determination and as

subjects of their own history and artistic creations, be able to determine the course of their own development within the web of contradictions created by class, gender, and ethnic oppression.

NOTES

1. See Angel Rama, "Rodolfo Walsh: la narrativa en el conflicto de las culturas," *Literatura y clase social* (Mexico City: Folios Ediciones, 1983), 195–220.
2. See Angel Rama's *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982).
3. Hernán Vidal analyzes the network of ideological and market determinations in the construction of the so-called literary boom during the 1960s. See his *Literatura hispanoamericana e ideología liberal* (Buenos Aires: Hispamérica, 1976).
4. Several readers have pointed out this critical function of mythology in literature. See Georg Lukács, "El ideal del hombre armonioso en el capitalismo," in *Problemas del realismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1967); Héctor Mario Cavallari, *Leopoldo Marechal: el espacio de los signos* (Xalapa, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 1982); and Herbert Marcuse, *Eros y civilización* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1976).
5. See, among others, Fernando Alegría, *Nueva historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (New Hampshire: Ediciones del Norte, 1986); Enrique Anderson Imbert, *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957); *América Latina en su literatura*, edited by César Fernández Moreno (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1969); and Jean Franco, *La cultura moderna en América Latina* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1971).
6. Rama says in this respect, "From that choice we observe an internal treatment of those forms, introducing notorious modifications [of the genre] and at the same time fortifying that operation with the support of elements from the native culture" (quoted by Cornejo Polar, 62; my translation).
7. See Gerardo Luzuriaga, *Del realismo al expresionismo: el teatro de Demetrio Aguilera Malta* (Madrid: Plaza Mayor, 1971), 141, quoted by Rabassa in *En torno a Aguilera Malta*, p. 185, n. 27.