

WRITING FOR FEWER AND FEWER:
Peruvian Fiction 1979–1980

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- MIRAFLORES' MELODY. By FERNANDO AMPUERO. (Lima: Serconsa Editores, 1979. Pp. 165.)
- CUSCO, CRÓNICA DE UNA PASIÓN. By ANGEL AVENDAÑO. (Lima: Antarki Editores, 1980. Pp. 165.)
- ALFORJA DE CIEGO. By JORGE DÍAZ HERRERA. (Lima: Ediciones Arte/Reda, 1979. Pp. 201.)
- LA TUMBA DEL RELÁMPAGO. By MANUEL SCORZA. (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1979. Pp. 267.)
- LA BATALLA DE LIMA. By GUILLERMO THORNDIKE. (Lima: Promoinvest Compañía de Inversiones, 1979. Pp. 359.)

The Peruvian book travels with difficulty, if it manages to travel at all. Nor is it, indeed, much read within Peru itself. Hampered by short-sighted official tax policies and gutted by the economic crisis that has pauperized Peru over the last five years, the national publishing industry produces barely ten percent of the books and magazines consumed within the country. High tariffs on imported paper, ink, and machinery raise the costs of in-country printing, although imported books enter duty free. The purchase of authors' rights outside Peru itself is taxed so heavily as to eliminate the practice, while well-known Peruvian authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa and Manuel Scorza are read in costly editions imported from Spain, Venezuela, or Mexico. Despite isolated attempts to build solid publishing houses—such as Abelardo Oquendo's *Mosca Azul*—the Peruvian publishing industry is both cash-poor and parochial. Imports of books outnumber exports by a ratio of over 200 to 1, and the present-day market for works of creative writing appears to be actually shrinking. For novelists and short-story writers, in particular, the climate is not markedly different from that of the pre-boom Chilean market described by José Donoso in his *Historia personal del boom* (Barcelona 1972): "The impresarios of publishing and distributing neither imported nor exported . . . it was impossible to buy novels of foreign writers in our country, and at the same time it was impossible to export our own books."¹

Except for the presence of costly imported books, Donoso's por-

trait is almost as valid for the Peru of 1981 as it was for the Chile of 1957: impoverished *editoriales* that lack the capacity for effective advertising or for mail-order distribution; minuscule printings of one thousand to two thousand copies for works of fiction; a plethora of self-financed books (by no means only in the humanities) whose already steep prices do not represent the true cost of their production; authors who must either distribute their works personally or pay up to fifty percent of the jacket price for the privilege of seeing them gather dust on the shelves of a commercial bookstore. Books, in short, are few and expensive. Until December 1975 Peru had the dubious distinction of being one of the few countries in the world to classify books officially as "luxury goods," a term to which the runaway inflation and the repeated "currency stabilizations" of the late 1970s lent new and ironic validity. At a typical price of, say, 1000 soles (about U.S. \$3.50 in mid-1980, U.S. \$2.50 as of May 1981) books are simply out of the reach of the middle-income Peruvian reader. Small wonder that increasing numbers of manuscripts in all fields go unpublished: neither editoriales nor authors can afford to print them, and fewer and fewer readers can afford to buy them.

In 1976, according to Danilo Sánchez Lihón, author of *El libro y la lectura en el Perú*, the Peruvian publishing industry produced approximately fifteen hundred titles (eighty percent of them textbooks), with an average printing of three thousand copies each.² This figure, which clearly shows the "third world" status of the Peruvian industry when contrasted with statistics from the regional publishing leaders of Argentina and Mexico, translates into the publication of half a book copy yearly per literate Peruvian, and leads Sánchez Lihón to conclude, not unreasonably, that "al pueblo por ahora no se llega con el libro."³ Given the absence of hard data, one can only speculate how dramatically the situation has deteriorated in the five years since 1976. But the continued appearance of excellent novels and collections of short stories in editions of one thousand copies or less bears witness to the near-moribund state of the Peruvian publishing industry, while the ten thousand copies of Guillermo Thorndike's *La batalla de Lima* (underwritten by an investment company) is nothing short of phenomenal and constitutes the exception that confirms the rule. By way of contrast, Vargas Llosa's *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, published by Barcelona's Seix Barral in 1973 and aimed at the entire Spanish-reading market, appeared in an edition of one hundred thousand copies.⁴ Finally, only a minuscule fraction of Peruvian books are published outside Lima, in equally tiny printings. Thus the "significance" to be assigned to the works discussed below is, clearly, very relative.

Trends in the Novel, 1977–1978

Among Peruvian novels published during 1977 and 1978, Mario Vargas Llosa's popular *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (Barcelona 1977) can be seen as a continuation of the "novela de entretenimiento" initiated with *Pantaleón* in 1973 and aimed at an affluent audience. More modest, but also noteworthy in their ability to reach relative "best-seller" status, were the first three novels of Guillermo Thorndike's *Guerra del salitre* tetralogy, which capitalized on the interest aroused by the centennial of the War of the Pacific, as well as the same author's *El revés de morir* (Lima 1978), a volume which contained a novel and several short stories. The *relato fantástico* maintained and expanded its foothold in contemporary Peruvian fiction with Harry Beleván's *La piedra en el agua* (Barcelona 1977; reprinted Lima 1979), and Alfredo Bryce Echenique produced a well-crafted successor to *Un mundo para Julius* (1970) with his *Tantas veces Pedro* (Lima 1977), a highly cosmopolitan novel that traces the amorous, alcoholic decline and fall of its picaresque protagonist.

In 1977 Manuel Scorza continued his epic, magico-realistic saga of the Andean peasantry's extended struggle for land with *El jinete insomne* and *Cantar de Agapito Robles* (both published in Caracas by Monte Avila), "cantares" 3 and 4 of the cycle that he began with the much-praised and equally maligned *Redoble por Rancas* (Barcelona 1970). In addition, a "veta popular" with explicit Marxist social content and utilizing an "oral," vernacular mode of discourse, crystallized in the loosely-linked texts of *Canto de sirena* (Lima 1977), authored by journalist and creative writer Gregorio Martínez. Martínez forms part of the "Grupo Narración," to which also belong Antonio Gálvez Ronceros and Augusto Higa Oshiro, the latter the author of the socio-vernacular stories of *Que te coma el tigre* (Lima 1977). Other texts of interest produced in 1977–78 include the introspective novel of José Antonio Bravo, *A la hora del tiempo* (Barcelona 1977); Rodolfo Hinostroza's clinical-confessional text, *Aprendizaje de la limpieza* (Lima 1978), based on the author's long and unsatisfactory experience with psychoanalysis; and Mario Castro Arenas's linguistic bacchanalia *Carnaval, carnaval* (Lima 1978), which explored the seamy underside of 1940 Lima, exemplified in the decaying *balneario* of Barranco. Finally, Isaac Goldemberg's Jewish-Peruvian novel, *La vida a plazos de don Jacobo Lerner*, appeared in Lima in 1978, two years after its initial publication in English in New York. An extraordinarily rich work, *La vida* not only dissects its immigrant protagonist's alienated personal world, but also chronicles, in pseudo-documentary fashion, the life of Peru's small Jewish community during the 1920s and 1930s. (Goldemberg is currently at work on a second novel, which bears the tentative title of *La conversión de Marcos Karushansky*.)

Female-authored novels are very rare items in Peru, and Laura

Riesco's first novel, *El truco de los ojos* (Lima 1978)—as far as this writer knows—stands alone among works published in 1977–78. The virtual absence of female-authored fiction immediately distinguishes literature in Peru from that of contemporary literature in Argentina, Mexico, or Brazil, and is clearly not gratuitous. It is a fact that Peruvian women writers rarely publish extensive works of fiction, and if they do, the resulting critical silence usually assures that they abandon the enterprise. This absence of female voices gives a curiously skewed tone to contemporary Peruvian writing, which is notoriously weak in successful portrayals of female characters.

Finally, and on a different plane, the year 1978 saw a sharp exacerbation of Peru's economic and political problems, which came to a head with the nation's first successful general strike since 1919 in May, with the discredited military government's decision to return power to "responsible" civilians, leading to elections for a Constituent Assembly in June, and with the Morales Bermúdez government's accommodation with the International Monetary Fund and the subsequent imposition of IMF stabilization (i.e., austerity) policies in August. The patent failure of the major policies of the Revolution of the Armed Forces in its "second phase" (1975–80) called forth voices of violent criticism from numerous quarters, including those of Peruvian creative writers situated both to the right and to the left of the military government.

Three Novels, 1979–1980

The following remarks do not pretend to constitute full coverage of the numerous novels published in Peru during 1979 and 1980, and the works discussed were selected, inevitably, with some arbitrariness.⁵ Nevertheless, these works make it clear that thematic *indigenismo* and the novel of rural class struggle retain major fictional importance, that the urban "novela de entretenimiento" is likewise alive and well, and that the documentary novel, best exemplified in the works of Guillermo Thorn-dike, exercises a powerful pull on those middle-sector readers able to purchase books.

With *La tumba del relámpago*, Manuel Scorza (1928) brought to a close his five-volume cycle on the twentieth-century struggle for land in the Andes. Scorza, despite his role in organizing the successful "Festivales del Libro" in Lima in the late 1950s, occupies somewhat the status of a pariah in the Peruvian literary establishment, and his work has only recently begun to receive attention from serious literary critics in Peru. He is, however, like Vargas Llosa, well integrated into the post-boom circuit of commercialization, and is widely read in translation. Like its four predecessors, *La tumba* was published abroad, and so far has received only modest critical commentary.⁶

In *La tumba* Scorza, a practicing politician and vice-presidential candidate in the 1980 general elections on the ticket of the Frente Obrero, Campesino, Estudiantil y Popular (FOCEP), a coalition headed by leftist leader Genaro Ledesma, chronicles the failure of the large-scale “invasiones de tierras” in the Andean department of Cerro de Pasco in 1961 and early 1962. Significantly different from the four preceding “cantares,” *La tumba*—despite its considerable merits—fails to give, in closing, a coherent focus to Scorza’s rambling peasant epic.

Elements that clearly distinguish the entirety of Scorza’s cycle from traditional indigenista novels include the free-and-easy tone of the narrative, the author’s repeated use of fantastic or magical elements, his employment of jokes, irony, gargantuan metaphors and, in general, of a great amount of poetic license in dealing with a topic previously treated, as critic Tomás Escajadillo points out, “con la más absoluta seriedad, casi con solemnidad.”⁷ Although Scorza’s initial abuse of fantastic devices had already been brought under relative control in *El jinete insomne* and *Cantar de Agapito Robles*, few signs presaged the dramatic shift that occurred in *La tumba*, a work which displays many of the features of a nonfiction novel.

In *La tumba del relámpago* Scorza documents, frequently from a participant’s viewpoint, the social and political drama played out in Cerro de Pasco in 1961 and 1962. While numerous points of contact with previous “cantares” remain—tone, reappearing characters, the use of the fantastic—in this closing volume the exemplary but predominantly fictional or disguised characters of previous volumes give way to the historical figure of Genaro Ledesma as a protagonist of the highland “invasiones.” Nor is Ledesma—Scorza’s own political ally—*La tumba*’s only identifiable historical actor: the leaders of the “Movimiento Comunal de Perú” (which lent organizational support to the peasant mobilizations of the early 1960s), Scorza himself as *secretario político* of the same organization, and secondary figures such as Communist party chief Jorge del Prado also figure as characters in the novel.

La tumba deals with the attempted mobilization of the Andean peasantry at the regional level, a failed attempt which represented both a quantitative and a qualitative intensification of rural class struggle. Scorza’s political message—the neo-Maoist assertion that the highland peasantry forms the vanguard of the revolution in Peru—is central to the novel. Significantly, the scene of action in *La tumba* is no longer the *comunidad* of Yanahuanca or the provincial capital of Yanacocha; it is, rather, the departmental capital of Cerro de Pasco itself where the greatest part of the drama of the 1961 “invasiones” plays itself out. Scorza at times incorporates into his text contemporary documents such as a series of articles he himself wrote on the Cerro de Pasco crisis for the Lima newspaper *Expreso*. Despite the continued use of fantastic elements (the

future “remembered” in the ponchos woven by a blind woman) and of the presence of a lengthy subplot dealing with the *vida y milagros* of “Santa Maca,” an apocryphal Andean bandit-saint, *La tumba del relámpago* represents a clear move on Scorza’s part toward the production of a more documentary and testimonial text.⁸

The year 1979 also saw the completion of another extended narrative project, the *Guerra del salitre* tetralogy of the prolific journalist and novelist Guillermo Thorndike (1940), probably the most widely read of all novelists who publish in Peru. The *Guerra del salitre* series constitutes not only a literary recreation of the War of the Pacific between Peru and Chile (1879–83), but also an attempt to unravel the meaning of the agitated downward course charted by Peru in the nineteenth century, a course which led to its present dependence. Last in the cycle, *La batalla de Lima* relates—with Thorndike’s customary relish for the detailed description of armed violence—the heroic but futile defense of Lima against the Chilean army in January 1881.

The volumes of the *Guerra del salitre* series boast all the trappings of the documentary novel: a focusing of attention on historical actors and events, the reconstruction or invention of unrecorded dialogues, the inclusion of contemporary newspaper editorials and other written documents, photographs, and even the insertion of campaign maps extracted from military histories. Unfortunately, *La batalla de Lima* is not the best of the novels in the series, nor even the most “documented.” In contrast to *El viaje de Prado* (Lima 1977), in which Thorndike made effective use of military and ministerial communiqués, editorials from the Lima newspapers *El Comercio* and *La Patria*, official telegrams, and letters of political personages to create a richly textured portrait of a government in mortal crisis, *La batalla de Lima* focuses almost exclusively on the military actions of December 1880 and January 1881, and on the one-dimensional figure of military hero Andrés A. Cáceres. The book’s organization is strictly chronological—Thorndike relates, from the points of view of multiple participants, the destruction of the Peruvian army, the sacking and burning of Lima’s seaside suburbs, and the subsequent occupation of the capital, saved from looting and destruction only through the intervention of the European powers. *La batalla de Lima* is unabashedly partisan history, and, as in the previous volumes of the tetralogy, Thorndike loses no opportunity to emphasize the atrocities of the Chilean invader. His depictions of military mayhem, rape, and plunder retain their customary, formulaic verve, but lose their effectiveness through excessive repetition well before the end of the narrative.

Ultimately, the ambitious *Guerra del salitre* project provides few answers to the major question posed by Peru’s history in the nineteenth century, namely: how did the most opulent of the Spanish viceroalties

fall prey to impoverishment, territorial dismemberment, and, finally, financial and military disaster? Nonetheless, by tracing the activities of a large gallery of characters ranging from such heroes as Admiral Grau, radical Finance Minister José María Quimper, and Colonel Andrés A. Cáceres to the shadowy villain Nicolás de Piérola, Peru's ineffective dictator from late 1879 until early 1881, Thorndike brings to view the deep divisions underlying the surface of nineteenth-century Peru's fragile political fabric. Over the entire *Guerra del salitre* series hangs the shadow of impending catastrophe, that of conquest by Chile, a ruthless enemy aided by Peruvian incompetence and political division at high levels, by an absence of national consciousness, and a corruption that was subsequently excoriated by Manuel González Prada: "Hoy el Perú es organismo enfermo: donde se aplica el dedo brota pus."⁹

In striking contrast to the historical and partisan concerns of *La tumba del relámpago* and *La batalla de Lima*, Fernando Ampuero's (1949) *Miraflores' Melody* is one of the first Peruvian narratives to deal with an ultracontemporary subculture of drugs, escapism, and radical-chic politics. Its protagonists are young upper-class products of Miraflores, one of the exclusive Lima suburbs, and Ampuero's *niños bien* constitute worthy successors to the spoiled adolescents who people Vargas Llosa's *Los cachorros* and his short stories of the 1960s. *Miraflores' Melody's* ostensible plot is that of a detective novel centered on a handful of upper- and middle-class youths variously involved in avant-garde painting, in the drug traffic, and in political terrorism. For all its underlying negativism, this short book is engaging reading, narrated in a racy, colloquial *tono desenfadado* by a narrator-protagonist who shuttles between his family's Miraflores mansion, the chic apartments of friends and accomplices, and tourist-flooded Cuzco, where he enjoys the no-strings-attached pleasures of hippie life while shrewdly buying up antiques for export to the United States. Ampuero's evocations of the new Cuzco—from the international pick-up site constituted by the Plaza de Armas to the city's modish bars and vegetarian restaurants—are superb, as are his caricatures of both young bohemian *mirafloresinos* and *mochileros* at the end of their pilgrimage.

In themselves, neither the structure nor the often-violent action of *Miraflores' Melody* are especially innovative. The interest the book arouses lies rather in the nontraditional Peruvian universe portrayed—*niños bien* on the fringes of solipsistic art, narcotics, and naive political terrorism. The colloquial but controlled style of the novel provides a coherence absent from the plot itself. Much in evidence are the latest slang and copious linguistic borrowings (especially from English, the lingua franca of hippiedom), as well as an unusually frank and playful eroticism, a quality strikingly absent from most Peruvian fiction, with

the notable exception of Vargas Llosa's *Pantaleón*. Ampuero is at his best when evoking urban mini-settings he knows well, such as the transformed/deformed Cuzco of the 1970s tourist boom, or low-life Lima bars "donde el lumpen y las nuevas hornadas de poetas apenas se diferenciaban" (p. 81). A visit to a disreputable but popular *salsa* club provides a taste of Ampuero's style, one which is unrelentingly deflationary, laconic, and tongue-in-cheek: "El sitio vendía el encanto de lo inusual y prohibido. Quedaba cerca de todo lo brumoso, en un barrio sotón y pendenciero. Se dejaban caer mulatos oblicuos y cholos endomingados, naturales del ambiente y, últimamente, blanquitos sofisticados o gente de buena familia, como uno" (p. 130). Author of one novel (*Mamotreto*, 1974) and of a collection of short stories (*Deliremos juntos*, 1975), Ampuero exercises his highly individual talents on the margin of "serious" Peruvian narrative, concerning himself with a universe that barely existed prior to the decade of the 1970s.

Two Other Directions

Angel Avendaño's *Cusco, crónica de una pasión* (published, inevitably, in Lima) shares with Scorza's *La tumba del relámpago* the themes of Andean social struggle and autochthonous consciousness, themes whose treatment is shaped by an explicitly Marxist frame of reference. *Cusco*, however, is less a novel than an ageneric series of poetic meditations on the social history of Cuzco, purporting to represent the point of view of the oppressed. Avendaño (1937) is known primarily as a poet, despite having co-authored the novel *Abisa a los compañeros, pronto* (Lima 1976) with Guillermo Thorndike, and indeed, the shorter, more lyrical passages of *Cusco* are generally more effective than its longer, essentially narrative ones. This work, which incorporates photographs by Carlos Domínguez as visual introductions to each of its ten sections, resembles both a collage and a tourist guide with a high ideological charge. Collage, because Avendaño continually interweaves with his own narrative voice fragments of texts by chroniclers such as the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Pedro Cieza de León, setting off the appropriated texts in italic type. Tourist guide, because *Cusco's* shifting narrative voice ceremonially makes the custom-honored rounds of the visitor/sightseer in Cuzco. Stops include the Waqaypata (Plaza de Armas), the megalithic fortress of Saqsaywaman, the colonial mansions constructed with forced labor on the foundations of razed Inca temples and palaces, the colonial parish churches with their ornamented vaults and paintings, the San Blas artisans' district, now producing for the international tourist trade. At each of these stations Avendaño drums home the point that the history of Cuzco—since well before the Conquest—has been one of oppression

and exploitation. And he attempts, with varying effectiveness, to give voice to the silent multitude of Cuzco serfs by employing poetic, collective monologues in sections such as "Llaqtaruna" (The Multitude) and "Wallwisakuna" (The Warriors).

Despite occasional references to twentieth-century political and artistic developments, Avendaño's emphasis falls most heavily on the Colony, the period of Cuzco's most complete and obvious domination by "outsiders." Significantly, the final section of the work deals with the national hero Tupac Amaru II on the eve of his execution by royal officials in 1781. Other historical figures as well—the Inca Garcilaso, Viceroy Toledo, the mestizo painter Diego Quispe Tito—people the pages of *Cusco*, one of whose dramatic high points is an evocation of the great earthquake of 1650 and of the "miraculous" intervention of *El Señor de los Temblores*, the sacred image of Christ venerated in Cuzco's cathedral. The political message of the book is obvious—life has changed little over the centuries for the oppressed.

Avendaño makes use of Quechua with considerable effectiveness throughout his text (despite the presence of 157 vocabulary footnotes), especially in the sections of *Cusco* that deal with the pre-Conquest period. His use of intercalated passages from the chronicles, on the other hand, often falls flat. Avendaño has attempted to compress the essentials of Cuzco's centuries-long *pasión*, complete with historical characters, toponyms, architectural monuments, and evocative Quechua terms, into a sack that at 165 pages is too small. The result is that *Cusco* suffers from a lack of focus. Nonetheless, this highly mannered collage, shot through with bitter invective against Cuzco's dominant minority, is occasionally capable of great dramatic force.

Finally, one short-story collection, Jorge Díaz Herrera's *Alforja de ciego*, deserves particular mention. In many respects, the short story has been Peru's strongest fictional genre in the twentieth century, and over the last several years established *cuentistas* such as Julio Ramón Ribeyro and Carlos Zavaleta have continued to produce high-quality collections, while numerous younger writers have emerged and others have shifted course. In 1977 Ribeyro published in Lima *Silvio en El Rosedal*, the third volume of his complete stories (collectively titled *La palabra del mudo*), while Alfredo Bryce Echenique's production was drawn together in *Todos los cuentos* (Lima 1979), and Carlos Zavaleta's collection *Un día en muchas partes del mundo* appeared in Madrid in 1979. J. Edgardo Rivera Martínez drew together his neorealist Andean stories in *Azurita* (Lima 1978), while in a second collection, *Enunciación* (Lima 1979) he continued a hermetic line begun with the text "Amaru," written in 1973 and included in *Azurita*. Alfonso La Torre's *La lira de Nerón* (Lima 1979) constitutes a varied, ironic, and occasionally festive treatment of human suf-

fering, whose quasi-fantastic stories alternate with lucid mini-texts resembling Zen *exempla*. *La lira de Nerón*, like many another high-quality Peruvian book, was published in an edition of only one thousand copies.

Similarly, Díaz Herrera's *Alforja de ciego* appeared in an edition of only two thousand copies, despite the fact that its author (1941) is a relatively well-known literary figure. *Alforja de ciego*, which, as its title suggests, contains a little of everything, is made up of nearly a hundred mini-cuentos, few of them more than two pages long. In these texts, all ornaments are eliminated and the story is reduced to the presentation, in a conversational tone, of a unique event, a novel situation, or a bizarre psychological trait. The themes of isolation and frustration recur consistently throughout the five major sections of the collection. The texts of the sections "Locuras y corduras" and "Entre lazos y abrazos" focus on individual character and on the social circumstances that condition it, while "Discretas indiscreciones" contains Díaz Herrera's harshest social and political satire, most of it directed against the then-governing military.

A major innovation of *Alforja de ciego* lies in Díaz Herrera's style, which effectively mixes first, second, and third person narration, and incorporates dialogue into the narrative flow without the need for paragraph breaks. While third-person narration predominates, additional voices are habitually worked in, as in the following passage from the text "Arte puro":

A los veinticuatro años de edad, Mario Tejada llegó al convencimiento de que él había nacido para ser un escritor, por algo todos admiran en tus conversaciones tu gran habilidad para relatar historias que en boca de cualquier otro no producirían el menor interés. Quedó convencido también de que su propia vida sería la mejor veta para sus propósitos de novelista, y mi primera obra tratará acerca de mi infancia y mi segunda de mi adolescencia y después ya veremos, que no sirve adelantarse mucho, ¿no te parece?¹⁰

It is primarily this fusion of first, second, and third persons into a single paragraph-text, in addition to an extreme restriction of focus, which makes possible the amazing concision of Díaz Herrera's *brevicuentos*.

As Washington Delgado points out, Díaz Herrera's *métier* is that of Lima bureaucracy, and many of *Alforja de ciego's* honed-down characters indeed move within that sphere, either as lower-level employees of private firms or as advisors to the "revolutionary" generals in power.¹¹ The author uses irony copiously both in his plots and in his titles ("Los precursores" and "A otros les ha ido peor," for example, both deal with unmitigated personal failures). Díaz Herrera is at his most biting when satirizing the governing generals and their civilian underlings, at his most poignant when narrating the frustrations of the lower-middle class *empleado*, whose sufferings lead far more often to whimpers than to explosions. The innovative orality of Díaz Herrera's texts links him with

other young writers such as Augusto Higa, and the varied contents of *Alforja de ciego*—whose predecessors outside Peru include the brevi-cuentos of such authors as Marco Denevi and Augusto Monterroso—succeed in breaking new ground in a genre which has been dominated in Peru by relatively traditional forms from the time of Clemente Palma down to the present day.

Conclusions

The preceding comments might almost give the impression that the Peruvian narrative these days is not so badly off, after all. Works representing a fairly large variety of literary currents continue to be published, and signs of cross-fertilization from foreign literatures are much in evidence. Thematically, Andean social and class struggle continue to occupy the attention of numerous Peruvian writers, while the “*novela de entretenimiento*” has made its appearance and—like the nonfiction novel—will undoubtedly stay, at least in the short run. Finally, active narrative innovation is taking place, as exemplified by texts such as Avendaño’s, Díaz Herrera’s, and those of the so-called “*Grupo Narración*.”

Such a rosy perspective, however, would be misleading. None of the works discussed in this essay—with the possible exception of Thorndike’s—reaches an audience that could by any stretch of the imagination be described as “mass” or even moderately large in terms of the number of potential readers and of available technology. On the contrary, the commercial market for fiction in Peru has been sinking for the past several years, and there are no signs that it has yet reached bottom. Peru, now as in almost all decades of the twentieth century, is not lacking in excellent (male) narrators, some of whom have been effectively integrated into the international circuit of publicity and distribution—often at the cost of emigration. However, like the vast majority of their predecessors, young Peruvian novelists and cuentistas continue to write for a virtually closed circle of fellow writers and critics, and for a minuscule commercial public. The chance that they will be read outside the borders of Peru, except by professional literati, is virtually nil. As poet Juan Gonzalo Rose once remarked: “Lima es una fosa en el mapa bibliográfico de América, en la cual cae un libro sin posibilidad de resurrección.”¹² Barring significant changes in governmental tax policies toward the end of reviving the comatose Peruvian book industry, as well as a reversal of the slide toward national pauperization, the future for Peruvian authors without access to international contracts and markets remains bleak.

NOTES

1. José Donoso, *The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History*, trans Gregory Kolovakos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 25.
2. Danilo Sánchez Lihón, *El libro y la lectura en el Perú* (Lima: Editorial Mantaro/Grafital Editores, 1978), p. 77. Many of this essay's remarks on the present-day Peruvian publishing industry are based on data provided by Sánchez Lihón's study.
3. Sánchez Lihón, *El libro*, p. 73.
4. Janina Montero, "Observations on the Hispanic American Novel and Its Public," *Latin American Literary Review* 6, no. 11 (Fall-Winter 1977): 9.
5. For additional comments on very recent Peruvian literature, see Dick Gerdes, "Novedades del Perú," *Hispania* 63, no. 3 (Sept. 1980): 586-87. A valuable theoretical article on the topic is provided by Antonio Cornejo Polar, "Hipótesis sobre la narrativa peruana última," *Hueso Húmero* (Lima), No. 3 (oct.-dic. 1979): 45-64.
6. See, for example, "Seymour" (Alfonso La Torre), "Se cierra 'la Balada' de Scorza," *El Comercio* (Lima) 17 junio 1979, p. 19; and Fabienne Bradu, "Scorza: entre la desilusión y la polémica," *Revista de la Universidad de México* 33, no. 8 (abril 1979): 49-51.
7. Tomás Escajadillo, "Scorza antes de la última batalla," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* (Lima), Nos. 7-8 (1978), p. 189.
8. Gerdes (p. 586) reports that Scorza intends to publish, as a supplement to his novelistic cycle, a collection of photos and documents substantiating the numerous claims and accusations made in the five volumes.
9. Manuel González Prada, "Propaganda y ataque," *Páginas libres*, ed. Rufino Blanco-Fombona (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Librería, 1915), p. 174.
10. Jorge Díaz Herrera, *Alforja de ciego* (Lima: Ediciones Arte/Reda, 1979), p. 43.
11. Washington Delgado, "Prólogo," in Díaz Herrera, p. 11.
12. Cited by Sánchez Lihón, *El libro*, p. 79.