

ADOLFO PRIETO:
PROFILE OF A PARRICIDAL
LITERARY CRITIC*

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I

Twenty years ago the first publications began to appear in Argentina of a loosely confederated group of writers, leftist in political persuasion, who took strident exception in culture to both the old oligarchic tradition and to the parvenu *peronista* establishment. During the years of the peronista government, the writers and intellectuals who supported Perón had been successful in imposing their own persuasions on the universities and publishing media at the expense of the old guard, represented by the literary supplements, *Sur*, the Academia Argentina de Letras, and the Jockey Club. The young leftists born around 1920 had been snubbed by the old-time writers and persecuted by the peronista regime. Their emergence as a loosely unified assertion of leftist political and cultural values, supported by a similar affirmation in postwar Europe, is a major literary phenomenon in mid-century Argentina.

The Uruguayan critic Rodríguez Monegal recognized early the importance of these writers, and he published a series of articles that were later gathered into a now elusive monograph.¹ Dubbing these writers and critics *parricidas*, Rodríguez Monegal detailed their attitude toward the old-guard generation. Their goal was two-fold: to repudiate their "forefathers" in literature and to promote themselves as spokesmen for the new generation of Argentines that would come to lead the country out of its oligarchic past and the fascist fraud of *peronismo*.

Along with David Viñas, cofounder of *Contorno* and today one of Latin America's most respected socialist critics, and Noé Jitrik, one of the first to analyze the writers of the "nueva promoción,"² Adolfo Prieto, who collaborated on *Contorno* and edited *Ciudad*,³ is one of the most noteworthy examples of the parricidal writers. Twenty years later he continues to be a recognized voice of authority in Argentine literary criticism, and his writings are important documents in the continuing debate in Argentina over the values and objectives of an acceptable literary tradition.

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II

While the parricides were a uniquely Argentine phenomenon—the inevitable result of the profound revision of cultural values brought about by peronismo—José Juan Arrom has identified a general international shift in intellectual and spiritual concerns that took place around the year 1954:

Instalada en un mundo de reducidas distancias, [la Generación de 1954] es en conjunto muy universalista en la visión y a la vez muy nacionalista en la raíz. . . . Solidarizada con el destino del hombre contemporáneo, quiere que sus obras sean testimonio de su tiempo y para su tiempo. Y convencida de que un pasado en quiebra no sirve para resolver las cuestiones del presente, ni acepta vivir de valores heredados ni quiere escribir apegándose a estéticas anquilosadas. . . . Escribe, pues, de cara a la realidad. Y como la iracundia está en todas partes—en la espíritu y en la palabra—en general predomina la frase dura, el verso agrio, el cuento y la novela neo-realistas, el ensayo denunciador y severo, y aparece en escena el teatro del absurdo.⁴

While it is simplistic to insist on a single theoretical posture for a literary critic, it is valid to attempt to identify the general context of his writings. Early on David Viñas affirmed his interest in applying sociological techniques of literary analysis, while Noé Jitrik moved toward an interest in the objective, structural criticism of his mature works. However, Prieto has maintained essentially the same focus as found in his earliest essays. Because of the homogeneity of his criticism, Prieto is most advantageously viewed as an exponent of the prevalent temper of the fifties that is known, somewhat loosely, as “existentialism.” Out of a desire to counter the oppressive burden of a century of academic and establishment criticism and out of a distaste for the thinly-veiled propaganda of the cultural czars of peronismo, the parricides sought an identification with European postwar literary and intellectual revisionists.

It would be difficult to discuss criticism in Latin America of existential inspiration without mentioning the name of Jean-Paul Sartre.⁵ Sartre is referred to often in Latin American criticism and his works have been widely translated, if not widely read and understood. Sartre is virtually the only “outside” authority quoted by Adolfo Prieto in his landmark *Borges y la nueva generación* (see section III). Yet, not even a superficial survey of Sartre’s influence in Latin America has been attempted, to the best of my knowledge.

Sartre’s influence can be seen to assume three basic patterns. First there are the early essays in the thirties, notably the review of Mauriac’s *La Fin de la nuit* and a series of pieces on American fiction (Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos). What is important about these pieces is that Sartre comes off as the paradigmatic parricide. The early essays debunk some of the most solid literary reputations in France (Mauriac, Giraudoux) and praise what were to the educated French reader of that time alien writers—i.e., the Americans noted above. The last six sentences from the Mauriac review, written in 1939, will serve to indicate the tone of these essays: “M. Mauriac has put himself first. He has chosen divine omniscience and omnipotence. But novels are written *by* men and

for men. In the eyes of God, Who cuts through appearances and goes beyond them, there is no novel, no art, for art thrives on appearances. God is not an artist. Neither is M. Mauriac."⁶

In 1948 Sartre published *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*,⁷ perhaps his most influential work. In it he attempts to systematize his concept of literature in accord with his existential theories of man. It is both a set of principles for a literary esthetics and a speculative essay on practical criticism from the existential position. While *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* has been widely read in Spanish, I can find little evidence of direct citation, and Sartre's major influence continues to be based on his early parricidal activities.

The parricidal critics were able to take a new keynote from Sartre's writings in the fifties. The insistence that the writer identify with his immediate "reality," the underlying premise of Prieto's 1961 collection of essays (see section VII), appears to derive as much from Sartre's criticism at this time as it does from equally influential Marxist concepts of literary reality. Frederic Jameson⁸ has described this further development in Sartre's criticism: "In the early 1950s a new motif makes its appearance in Sartre's works: the distinction between the real and an act and a gesture, between the real and an attitude toward it which seems to drain it of its reality, transform it into mere appearance, irrealize it, to use Sartre's term" (p. 203).

While the foregoing comments are hardly an adequate characterization of Sartre's critical positions and his influence in Latin America, they do indicate some of the bases of existential or existential-derived criticism in Argentina and point the way for a more appropriately documentary examination of the matter.⁹

III

Nicolás Rosa claims that Adolfo Prieto has renounced the approach to Borges exemplified by *Borges y la nueva generación* (1954).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the analysis of Borges from a parricidal perspective is fundamental to an understanding of his impact in Argentina. Although in the final analysis negative as concerns any enduring reputation for Borges, Prieto's study is at the same time his inauguration as an Argentine critic to be taken seriously and an example of a criticism based on existential concepts of the role of literature and the writer in modern society. In addition, it was the first book-length study devoted to Borges.

Prieto acknowledges in passing (p. 20) that the Sartrean concept of literature, rooted in a Franco-European context, may be too narrow to be easily transplanted in toto to an Argentine-American circumstance. Yet, an unsigned "Presentación" abounds in the shibboleths of Sartrean criticism: *compromiso, seriedad, literatura auténtica, responsabilidad, sentido del quehacer literario, imperativo*. The underlying spirit concerns the seriousness of the moment and the sort of seriousness one expects to find in literature.¹¹ As far as Prieto is concerned, his is a generation that accepts as its fundamental premise the seriousness of the human condition. But Borges is the spokesman for a generation that sees in literature a game, an eclectic frivolity: Ortega y Gasset's *La deshumanización del arte* (1925) and its rejection of a transcendence for art is Prieto's point of compari-

son. Against the putative Ortegian formula, both the "Presentación" and Prieto's own opening statements refer to the return to a belief in Great Issues (albeit now stripped of their middle-class limitations). Criticism is not a discovery technique, but rather the opportunity for self-identification and personal position-taking. Prieto is not unique in this position, and if it is stressed here it is only to note how explicitly the critic aligns himself with a prevailing European attitude that had only recently begun to influence Latin American criticism.¹²

More significant than the parade of catchwords of the day is the critic's expression of the relationship between Borges and his works. To the extent that parricidal criticism is concerned with the individual's self-identification, the concept of literature as autobiography and the notion—a variant of Romantic and later positivistic criticism—that there is a unique relationship between the author and his works are fundamental. Once again, after the hiatus of New Criticism, there reemerges the prevalent Western belief that the author can be discovered in his separate works, which together are a *summa* of self-revelation. Hence, Sartre's rambling and vast inquisition on Genet and his works. The literary persona has become again the real man, and we will find Prieto later publishing a study on Argentine literary and political memoirs under the title *La literatura autobiográfica argentina* (see section V).

Thus Borges's works reveal not only an ad hoc literary world, but more importantly a world that is the key to a human personality, to a generation of literary fashion, and to a collective opinion concerning the nature of literature and the mission of the writer. Prieto's study begins with an "Aproximación al hombre" (pp. 15–27) that reveals a position difficult to accept today: Borges is the product of his age, just as Adolfo Prieto is of his, and the possibility of a rapprochement between them is minimal. The critic sums up four pages of "contextualization" of Borges with the following disclaimer of resentment: "Si Borges cumple o no con su misión de escritor, si salva el compromiso que le imponen los tiempos, es asunto que nadie está hoy en condiciones de aseverar. Borges nació en su mundo distinto del nuestro; medirlo por nuestras exigencias es, en cierto modo, injusto" (p. 21). This after having earlier stated that: "El joven de hoy no entabla una polémica a fondo con los hombres maduros que enseñorean lo política o el arte; ni se fía de ellos ni se apasiona contra ellos. Los observa, a veces, trata de comprenderlos, porque forman parte de su contorno vital, pero íntimamente se siente desvinculado, ajeno, y se refugia en una completa indiferencia al mundo exterior—caso común—o masculla, casi siempre a solas, los planes para su propio mundo futuro" (p. 19).

However, such apparent objectivity conceals an intellectual trap. Prieto does not set out to evaluate Borges in terms of the demands the members of the new generation placed on themselves. Beginning with the repeated assertion that the bulk of Borges's writings are much less than the disproportionate space displaced by his reputation, the critic does go on to evaluate Borges in terms of the latter's own premises. Toward this end, he refers to Borges's famous 1951 lecture on "El escritor argentino y la tradición." Both agree in rejecting a false nationalism. But where Prieto sees Borges failing is in his self-appointed goal of a universal literature:

Otros escritores de su talla, urgidos por la misma necesidad de integración con el medio—hablo de Martínez Estrada, Marechal, Mallea—han calado más hondo y se han comprometido con mayor inmediatez en la búsqueda de una fórmula de solución. La diferencia no es un cargo excesivo; cada cual elige una actitud frente al mundo y se hace respetable en ella en la medida en que es capaz de sostenerla hasta las últimas consecuencias. Borges, a los 50 años, en un recodo de la vida en el que los hombres honestos se deciden a llamar las cosas por sus nombres, ha declarado lo que piensa del escritor argentino y la tradición; los argumentos que expone no son superficiales; es obligación juzgar su obra desde un ancho contorno universal (pp. 26–27).

Of course, Borges's understanding of the *contorno universal* as an atemporal intellectual phenomenon cannot be the same as Prieto's own commitment: "Estas preguntas no están formuladas desde el limitado panorama de un país y de una literatura nacional, sino desde el amplio sector que Borges ha elegido como de acción personal. El universo (Europa es, además de América, el universo para nosotros), es su tradición y su contorno. Tradición y contorno exigen al hombre en la misma medida que dan" (p. 25). Prieto claims he will measure Borges in terms of the latter's own commitment. Yet he has spoken already of the writer's works as reflecting a poetics that are not only unacceptable, but that are so remote as to inspire only indifference in the new generation. It would seem to be a question of semantics, for "universal tradition" has for critic and subject two separate meanings that are mutually exclusive. Despite the illusion of detached commentary, it does not conceal the fact that Prieto is in the end only criticizing Borges for conceiving of the world and the role of writers in ways that the former cannot accept.

The key to this circumstance lies in the critic's troubles with the works themselves. Prieto may be justified, once we accept his existential premises concerning literature, in claiming that Borges's works are lacking in any redeeming authenticity. But once we realize that there is a particular narrowness in his reading of those works, a superficial literalness that accepts the word on no other basis than its conventional and often trivial reference, we see how Prieto stubbornly refuses to acknowledge a density of meaning for the literary work. Instead, he practices a reductionary interpretation based only on the most obvious of semantic meanings. As Stabb has observed, Prieto's extended analysis of the story "El Aleph" is largely vitiated by an inability to take into consideration its multiple ironies.¹³ The lack of a sensitivity for this fundamental ingredient of the story simply means that Prieto's conclusions are based on another, anemic version of the same fable. (What is more, Prieto has an appallingly distorted regard for the short story as a literary form: "Hermano menor, bosquejo o ejercicio retórico, lo cierto es que el cuento pertenece a una especie secundaria del género novelesco" [p. 68].)

Although the foregoing is based on a more detailed understanding of the complexity of a literary work than Prieto—and Sartre and the entire generation of postwar existential critics—subscribed to, the rather archaic belief in the

relative transparency of meaning in literature does raise questions of durability for his criticism of Borges.

There is one aspect of Prieto's assessment of Borges that deserves special mention: his discussion of Borges as a critic. Borges at several points in his career has engaged in literary criticism of an essayistic or "inquisitional" manner. Many of these writings—and the lines of demarcation for Borges between the critical essay, the literary essay, and the short piece of fiction are as vague as befits a student of Crocean esthetics—date from his second period, after the publication of his first three books of poetry and before *Ficciones*. Borges wrote a series of notes on books and authors in *Inquisiciones* (1925), but Prieto focuses especially on the loosely structured book, *Evaristo Carriego* (1930). This study deservedly attracts Prieto's attention, since it deals with the personality, times, and works of a poet whom Borges describes as having been the "primer espectador de nuestros barrios pobres." Borges, of course, is only maintaining the interest in *lo criollo* that first manifested itself in his early book of poems, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). However, for Prieto, the existential critic who reflects the temper of an entire generation's reaction to the presence and often dominance of creole elements in the works of post-World War I Argentine writers, there is a fundamental difference between local color and a commitment to an "existential reality." The latter involves far more than trivial dalliances with superficial phenomena that Prieto identifies in Borges's commentaries: "Si Borges experimentó simpatía por Carriego—simpatía por el tipo humano que representaba—es menos difícil comprender los juicios que la expresión poética de éste. Un saldo queda, sin embargo, del *Evaristo Carriego* que no se anula con su mero olvido, porque persiste en los demás ensayos críticos de Borges; un saldo netamente desfavorable que me atrevo a reducir a esta fórmula: inutilidad, cosa enteramente prescindible" (p. 32).

Prieto's "saldo netamente desfavorable" is predictable from his previous introductory comments. What makes it worth noting the conclusions on *Evaristo Carriego* is not so much the critical attitude toward Borges, but rather the larger issues that they imply. It is not trivial for Borges to have been interested in Carriego, and it is safe to say that the *poeta del barrio* would be equally favorably read by Prieto's own generation. Yet they would have seen things quite different from what Borges and his readers in the thirties sought. This is the crux of Prieto's harsh reaction to Borges on Carriego: not only an exigently pragmatic attitude—but a dissatisfaction with an inappropriate focus on an appropriate subject. Carriego cannot be dismissed as *prescindible* like the pseudo-philosophy that is the subject of Borges's subsequent short stories. A significant rhetorical contrast, illustrative of their differing concepts of literature and criticism, emerges when Prieto discusses Borges's role in the publication of the review *Proa* in the mid-twenties (pp. 81ff.). Referring to editorial statements in the first number, Prieto observes that "La revista (ahora se ve claro) no se editaba *para* algo, sino *por* algo; por la euforia reinante, por exceso de vitalidad, de alegría" (p. 81; my italics). Since Carriego's poetry is acceptable to both critics, the point of the contention turns on divergent metacritical demands: Prieto's dismissal of Borges's commentaries is the dismissal of the critical approach to literature of an

early, impressionistic generation. Prieto perhaps would insist that it is an acriticism or an anticriticism because it does not coincide with his idea of what a valid criticism ought to be. More than at any other point in his study, Prieto comes closest here to placing his own values in perspective with those of an earlier persuasion:

La crítica literaria, para constituirse en un género valioso y positivo, debe al menos reunir tres condiciones: aclarar, corregir, aumentar el contenido de los textos, y un supuesto que asusta de evidente, pero que no se tiene siempre en cuenta: hacer crítica cuando sea necesario. Si la obra criticada es valiosa y no lo es la crítica que a ella se adereza, la crítica hace funciones de un apéndice absurdo; si la obra es baladí y la crítica también, el crítico se iguala al rasero del autor (pp. 32–33).

Although he does not return to Borges's essay on *Evaristo Carriego*, Prieto continues to chart the fundamental differences between his programmatic criticism and Borges's impressionism through a series of observations on the latter's major critical pieces, both those on creole themes (the booklet on *Martin Fierro*, the comments on W. H. Hudson) and those on non-Argentine themes (e.g., on Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"). There are also several pages on the famous dispute between Borges and Américo Castro on the Spanish language in the Río de la Plata region. Over and over again, what we have is the polarization of two critical frameworks for the discussion of literature. Thus, these pages respond to contemporary demands for "metacommentary" as a primary ingredient of literary criticism and for a detailed (although nonprogrammatic) statement concerning the critical premises of the new parricidal generation.

The judgment of *prescindible*, which begins with a point of comparison over critical premises, is the unifying thread throughout the subsequent discussions of the creative works—the poems and the short stories—and leads to the final conclusion that:

Para nosotros, ya lo dijimos, Borges es un literato sin literatura, pero un literato de enorme prestigio, cuyo reconocimiento no eludimos pero por cuya existencia temblamos. Borges a los cincuenta años, es un escritor de tantas posibilidades como para justificar un prestigio *a priori*. La aparición de cada libro suyo despierta una milagrosa expectativa en este ambiente nuestro de curiosidad embotada. A esa expectativa contribuye el anhelo de los jóvenes, para quienes Borges es el escritor más dotado de la generación vigente, pero de quien se aguarda todo, absolutamente todo, como de un escritor primigenio. Borges está recluso en el ámbito de su generación; sus contemporáneos lo repuntan como el *primus inter pares*. Paradójicamente, para nosotros aún no ha nacido: es el mesías, no sólo porque hasta ahora no haya acertado con la palabra familiar a nuestros oídos, cuanto porque en el fondo, preferimos esta metáfora a la ultramundana de considerarlo un fantasma que nos estorba el paso. Borges puede dar el salto de una zona a otra; nacer para nosotros o convertirse en fantasma neutro (p. 85).

Sociología del público argentino (1956)¹⁴ is the natural outgrowth of the Borges study and constitutes Prieto's second major monograph. Perhaps because it deals neither with a specific group of literary texts nor with the work of one author but with marginal or paraliterary phenomena, *Sociología* has had little impact on Argentine literary criticism. This is unfortunate, for Prieto's focus and his attempt at a careful argumentation from premises to conclusions make this a unique and valuable contribution. Argentine literary criticism can claim virtually no other study of this sort (although casual and unargued assertions on the nature of the reading public in Argentina abound). Therefore, an assessment of Prieto's accomplishment hinges on the identification of the nature of his study, how it derives from the same premises that underlay the Borges study, how Prieto coordinates claims concerning intrinsic features of literary works and the extrinsic nature of the reading public, and, finally, how Prieto's argument derives from and leads naturally back to a programmatic statement about literature.

The title of the monograph is somewhat misleading. In the first place, it is not clear how this is a "sociology" of the Argentine reading public; that it is the public to which literature is at least nominally addressed is not specified in the title. For example, such a sociology might be a controlled investigation of the nature of the reading public, who reads, what they read, and why it is constituted as it is. Part of Prieto's comments are based on a poll taken in 1943 by Gino Germani with his students at the Universidad de Buenos Aires's Instituto de Sociología. Taken more than a decade before the crucial period in Argentine intellectual and cultural life that Prieto is writing about, it is left undemonstrated that the Germani poll is statistically valid. It is, moreover, questionable whether its conclusions are valid for the use to which Prieto puts them. For what most concerns Prieto—and, as in the Borges monograph, this is an unproven but legitimate hypothesis—is his recognition of the germ of a *new* reading public in Argentina, the consumer pole of his writer-based "nueva generación."

This new public is still minuscule, but it possesses the potential for revolutionizing Argentine literature because it is made up of readers who will no longer accept traditional Argentine manifestations of "evasive" literature, pseudo-folkloristic and local-color literature, and literature that is a cheap imitation of foreign models. Nor will the new public be satisfied with the horrendous translations of both good and bad foreign literature, or, if they happen to belong to the privileged class of those who read in the original, with turning to foreign literature in French or English in order to fulfill their need for "great" literature. Both the "nueva generación" of writers and the new "público" are committed to the possibility of a great literature in Argentina written in Spanish, a literature based on national realities, problems, and imperatives, and a literature that will develop its own formal conventions without the need to imitate foreign models.

What Prieto turns out to be talking about is a *model* for what a reading public *should be*, a model based on well-defined concepts of the mission and the function of literature. Ironically, the two decades since Prieto published his essay have borne out the accuracy of his perception of a new reading public and

legitimized his faith in the development of an Argentine literary pantheon (if not a tradition) that would demand recognition for its own originality, rather than because it represents the satisfactory accommodation of French, American, or British models. It is ironic because the writers of this pantheon may deviate somewhat from Prieto's postwar existential/Marxist criteria of commitment. Writers like Borges, Cortázar, Sábato (at least in *Sobre héroes y tumbas*), and Puig have attracted international attention for their influence upon European and American writers and because they have given Argentines a contemporary literature to boast about. While these writers may not be Prieto's pick of the crop, it would be difficult for him to dissociate their sales successes and their impact upon other writers from the new climate he claims to perceive among readers in the postperonista Argentina of 1956.

After identifying the problem for literature—the lack of readers, especially readers for works by Argentine authors—Prieto does not pretend to explain the reasons for this phenomenon (which is, of course, a *sociological* fact that author and publisher must face up to). Prieto does review some of the standard issues, such as the self-defeating elitism of the bulk of Argentine literary history or the problem of discovering for literature an appropriate literary dialect, particularly in a country with such a distinctive colloquial standard (of which Prieto tends to complain fussily from the point of view of the rhetorician casting his scornful gaze on the inadequacies of the *sermo humilis*). The problem of literary dialect is only really solved in the sixties with the abandonment of a documentary criterion by the *nueva narrativa*; its roots, nevertheless, go back to Asturias and Borges in the thirties, forties, and fifties. Being a polemicist and dogmatist for a particular form of literature, Prieto addresses himself in turn to the larger questions of the inherent limitations of literature, and, on a more pragmatic level, to the matter of what literature must do in order to become a new tradition in Argentina with an influential and influenceable audience.

Prieto recognizes a particular problem for the fiction writer. While he does not stress the novel in his treatise, a bit of reflection will remind one that, during the period in which he is writing and based on the criteria he is promoting, the novel and the short story are the preferred literary genres:

De esta situación de la lengua literaria (descontada su molesta neutralidad) se benefician principalmente los ensayistas y los poetas; para ellos es el lujo de la estabilidad y la universalidad del idioma que usan. En cambio, los escritores que incursionan por la novela y el cuento, y los autores teatrales, sufren las fricciones de una incómoda zona de contactos lingüísticos; ellos deben trabajar con la lengua literaria y la cotidiana a la vez, y, en ocasiones, elegir una sobre otra; no pueden atribuir diálogos literarios a la mayor parte de sus personajes sin violentarlos, y no pueden valerse sólo de la lengua cotidiana sin peligro de ahogarse en sus angosturas (p. 129).

Nevertheless, in his concluding remarks Prieto comments explicitly on how, in the final analysis, the novel and the short story will prevail. While the prophecy is true, it is neither completely clear nor self-evident that the *nueva narrativa* has

triumphed by virtue of its adherence to Prieto's specifications in the mid-fifties (cf. pp. 153–54).

Although Prieto shuns the Decalogue approach, the questions that he raises undeniably lead back to a particular concept of literature that he believes Argentina ready in the mid-fifties to develop. It is a type of literature that will serve the goals of the common man and national identification and provide the solution to the defects of contemporary Argentine society. How is literature a socially useful tool? How does it impinge upon the lives of the reading public, and does it "improve" the latter? Or, is it shaped in its form and content by its deliberate association with the common man? How does the literary theorist demand a particular type of literature without becoming himself elitist in his confidence in the primacy of his own convictions? How does one measure the impact of literature on a people? How does literature shape itself in order to enlarge its presumed reading public? And so on. In some cases these issues are more implied than treated explicitly by Prieto. Yet he espouses a programmatic concept—and not necessarily the mimetic one of simple-minded socialist realism—of literature. This overriding concept provides a unifying framework for often imprecisely focused sociological discussions.

Prieto's parricidal focus comes through in his insistence on the presence of a "nueva situación" (p. 1) in the West (which had recently experienced the crisis of World War II and its aftermath) and in Argentina (which in 1956 was still going through the trauma of the deep-rooted peronista upheaval). One is often unsure whether Prieto intends to place emphasis on the long-standing and unfortunate circumstances of literature in his country or on the immediate crises that both demand and encourage a new generation of committed writers. But it is unquestionable that his initial point of departure is based on a perceived relationship between literature and its audience. As a consequence, priority must be given to an approach that takes this relationship into account rather than to one that stresses the "timeless and universal" aspects of literature as an esthetic structure autonomous from any use to which it may be put or audiences to which it may be addressed.

Many defenders of the "traditional" values of Argentine literature will find Prieto's essay unacceptable. But, while it is true that he is not always careful to explain his premises (what is unusual about the impoverished rhetoric of the common man?) and that his sociological approach is in reality a number of approaches, the very fact that subsequent generations of writers and critics in Argentina have continued to agree on the need to begin with the same two questions is "proof" enough of the accuracy of his treatise to make it valuable reading still.

v

Ten years separate the publication of Prieto's monograph on Borges and his second major study, *La literatura autobiográfica argentina*.¹⁵ During these years, Prieto was associated with several little magazines and literary reviews: *Ciudad* (of which he was an editor), *Centro*, and *Contorno*. In addition, he published a

variety of essays on Argentine writers, notably novelists, and organized two cooperative efforts: the student papers on Rosas and Argentine literature, and the survey of opinion on the status of Argentine literary criticism.¹⁶ Thus it is safe to say that by 1964 Prieto had attained a solid position as an academic critic.

Although still fundamentally identified with postwar French literary criticism, by the publication in 1964 of *La literatura autobiográfica argentina*, Adolfo Prieto is much less a contentious Zoilus and much more the experienced polemicist. Moreover, the 1964 study is no longer narrowly confined to observations on one author's literary works. *La literatura autobiográfica argentina* studies a broad spectrum of works—autobiographical writings of authors born before 1900—and addresses issues of a paraliterary, rather than strictly critical and interpretive, nature. Three questions suggest themselves: (1) in what way are the writings studied autobiographical in any unique manner; (2) how are these writings literary, or is such a query irrelevant; and (3) what underlies Prieto's interest in these writings, which, if they are in fact literature, are at best marginal vis-à-vis the "major" genres?

Prieto views autobiography both as one generic form of literature and as a potentially inherent characteristic of all literary forms, and his approach to it differs in several ways from earlier models. Autobiography is not limited to being either the outpourings of a romantically agonized soul nor the esthetic representation of a real individual's self. It is, in addition to the foregoing, a record of the individual's self-examination of his participation in the larger contexts of human life. In the most direct and unadorned of terms, it is a record of events seen through a participant in them. To this extent, autobiography is both an interpretation of events and an interpretation of the individual's role in them.

Prieto points out in his introduction that the documentary value of the memoirs dealt with is irrelevant, although some may be shown to be accurate and others distorted. The facts are not of primary concern and may be mutable, interchangeable. What is of interest is a uniquely personal consciousness and its interpretive perspective on the events and values of the times. These largely subconscious patterns are accurately transmitted by autobiography and can be reliably assessed by the critic. The façade of facts that most concerns the writer (and Prieto points out how a great many of the pre-1900 autobiographical writings in Argentina are the *apologiae* of prominent figures enbroiled in the conflicts of their day) is largely secondary. The contemporary critic concerns himself with the subjective commitment of the writer that is present by definition in the writer's decision to record his involvement with his own era. That intangible, elusive commitment must be sought behind the facade of facts.

Prieto places a quote from Karl Mannheim at the beginning of his introduction and repeats it later in the text (p. 12):

La historia de la autobiografía es, en este respecto, una de las fuentes de información más valiosas: en primer lugar e indirectamente podemos observar de qué naturaleza era en el pasado las actitudes introspectivas de los hombres, de qué modo y para qué fines se observaban a sí mismos; además podemos ver cómo las distintas situaciones sociales e históricas han favorecido distintas

formas de la personalidad, y cómo estas distintas formas de actitudes introspectivas desempeñan inconscientemente ciertas funciones sociales (p. 7).

Obviously Prieto sees in these writings the sort of commitment to and awareness of man, his circumstance—in a more historical (Marxist) than universal (romantic) sense of the word—and his immediate preoccupations that he found so lacking in Borges's works.

Prieto's discussion of Sarmiento exemplifies his approach to autobiographical writings. As befits his importance in Argentine political and cultural history, Sarmiento merits the entire last section of the first part of Prieto's book (pp. 49–66). Sarmiento left two autobiographical documents: *Mi defensa* (1843) and *Recuerdos de Provincia* (1850), the latter one of the most widely read prose pieces in nineteenth-century Argentine literature. Like most radical revisionists of his generation, Prieto is understandably cool toward Sarmiento and the place accorded him by official history. Nevertheless, he attempts to avoid both the "habitual beatería de los apologistas [the spokesmen for the official national myths], como la no menos habitual cerrazón de los detractores [descendants of the reactionary strain in Argentine national life incarnate in the positive versions of the Rosas legend]" (p. 54).

Prieto's lengthy analysis is based principally on the *Recuerdos* and suffers from the lack of any explicit organizational framework. Its underlying motif is the neurosis produced by the circumstances of Sarmiento's age and his unconscious ambivalence toward values held by different sectors of his personality. The keynote of this putative neurosis is the sense of persecution, virtually a complex, that Prieto sees as emanating from the pages of *Mi defensa*. In terms of the original Chilean article to which it was a response and in view of Sarmiento's relative unimportance at the time, *Mi defensa* is an overreaction by someone already hyperconscious of his public image.

Nevertheless, Prieto's identification of a unifying neurosis does not originate with the desire to discredit Sarmiento by *ad hominem* attacks (e.g., the black legend of "el loco Sarmiento"). In keeping with the desire to see these autobiographical writings in terms of the historical ambience to which their writers were reacting, Sarmiento's personality is shown to bespeak the tensions of his time, not deterministically but spiritually: "Una neurosis provocada por la frustración total o parcial de las aspiraciones individuales en conflicto con la realidad social, es un fenómeno lo suficientemente común y conocido para que no escandalice su atribución, aunque sea por vía de hipótesis, a una personalidad que revela tantos síntomas de haberla padecido, como la de Sarmiento" (p. 51). For Prieto, Sarmiento's personality—as revealed both in his public behavior and in his writings—is an example of what Mannheim called the "adulto gesticulante, ese hombre que, durante un periodo de inseguridad organizada, al no hallar satisfacción inmediata a sus aspiraciones en el terreno del trabajo y el reconocimiento social, sustituye sus objetivos y se satisface con meros gestos y símbolos" (p. 51).

In the identification of passages in the *Recuerdos* that reveal Sarmiento's ambivalence toward the lower classes, we often have the feeling that Prieto's

analysis is a reductionary quest for Freudian slips that betray the “true” feelings that lie behind the façade of calculated rhetoric:

Si el pasaje fuera el único del libro, o se repitiera sin contradicciones, debiera deducirse que Sarmiento, revolucionario de política y en literatura, hombre nuevo en algunos aspectos del vivir, permanecía fiel en otros planos a las viejas fórmulas, y que esa fidelidad era vivida sin dobleces. Un Sarmiento definido como él mismo definió a sus antecesores inmediatos, un dios Término con una cara orientada al futuro y otra al pasado, pero con ambos rostros unidos en serena simbiosis, sería un Sarmiento falsificado. Un dios Término, sí, pero un dios Término devorado por insolubles conflictos (p. 62).

What keeps Prieto’s analysis from being the amateur psychoanalysis of a writer (see Juan Manuel Chavarría’s attempts in this vein¹⁷) is the contextualization of the writer in terms of the circumstances to which he was inalterably committed. The writer’s commitment, consciously assumed, reflects itself faithfully if unconsciously in the tenor of his work. This, in the final analysis, is the basic premise of Prieto’s attention to the autobiographical writings of Argentine authors.

VI

Literatura y subdesarrollo (1968)¹⁸ is the logical outgrowth of *El público argentino*, an extension of Prieto’s concern for social configurations and the relationships between works of literature and their implied audiences. Unfortunately, the study contains inherent weaknesses that prevent it from being much more than a rehash of sociological theses on the one hand and a repetition of Prieto’s assessments of principal works of Argentine literature on the other. Its primary interest lies, therefore, in the oblique light it throws on sociologically based controversies concerning Argentine literature. Divided into two parts and 192 pages long, it does give, however, the impression of attempting to be a mature contribution to the critical discussion of the Argentine literary tradition.

The first two sections deal with economic and socioanthropological concepts of underdevelopment and present a competent résumé of opinions on the subject by Argentine, American, and a few European scholars. Prieto’s conclusions concerning Argentina are now widely held among Latin American political thinkers: Argentina, while not a casebook example of a truly underdeveloped and dependent society (the latter now often identified as the Fourth World), is semiunderdeveloped. It is a country that has attempted to assert economic independence and failed. In its failure, it is a consumer-customer of the developed economies, whose industrial artifacts and whose cultural values it uses and imitates in the vain effort to attain the level of the *sociedades modelo*. This is standard Third World dogma. From a strictly documentary point of view, there would seem to be little disagreement as to the nature of economic, and consequently cultural, dependence on the part of the so-called underdeveloped countries. What does constitute a point of sociopolitical contention is whether that dependency is self-defeating—the anti-imperialist assertion that it is impossible

within the framework of modern world economy for the underdeveloped nations to approximate the developed ones, either because the latter have a vested interest in maintaining underdevelopment (this is the more orthodox socialist position) or because the underdeveloped countries, to their credit and by virtue of their intrinsic nature, cannot take on the alien values of the developed countries (the quasi-romantic Third World position)—or whether that dependency is valuable as the opportunity for the attainment of levels of full development.

Prieto clearly sees Argentina as at best a semideveloped country that suffers from *satelismo cultural*, one of the most persistent symptoms of socioeconomic dependency. As far as literature is concerned, the effects of dependency are manifest and lend themselves to description and evaluation:

El análisis proveerá más bien el significado de tendencias generales, de motivos generadores que subyacen en el desenvolvimiento de algunas formas expresivas, de presiones del gusto que canalizan de una u otra manera la elección de temas y de recursos literarios. Intentará, asimismo, ponderar la magnitud de reflejo de algunos fenómenos típicos del subdesarrollo, tanto en sus versiones más directas e ingenuas, cuanto en los registros modificados por las mediaciones de la ideología (pp. 47–48).

In the last three chapters of his study, Prieto surveys these manifestations of dependency and nationalistic-regionalistic reaction. The emphasis is on literary themes, topics, “world-views,” rather than on structural forms. The tone is essentially objective—in contrast to Prieto’s earlier strident parricidalism—and a few works are examined in detail. For example, in a discussion of some recent Argentine novels that represent variations on the imperative to dissect critically the national organism, Prieto refers in detail to the third part of Ernesto Sábato’s *Sobre héroes y tumbas*. This is in the section of “La respuesta nacionalista. El subdesarrollo y la expresión del nacionalismo literario,” and, in contrast to other critics who have denied any value to Sábato’s “psychoanalysis” of Argentina (Marcel Coddou, for example), Prieto is careful to acknowledge the seriousness of Sábato’s efforts (cf., in particular, pp. 128–29).

Yet, although Prieto discusses some major works for the first time in his writings, his analysis does not proceed much beyond *Estudios de literatura argentina* (see next section) in the type of literature chosen for discussion or in the esthetic premises according to which works are evaluated. Rather, any originality of his monograph is meant to lie in the link between characteristics of Argentine literature and the overriding framework of dependence elaborated in the first half of his book. Unfortunately, it is here that Prieto fails. Although he describes undeniable features of Argentine literary works that bespeak both an evasion of national values and an insistent interest in national problems, there is no demonstration beyond the most sweeping of generalizations that Argentine literature possesses the characteristics it does as the result of socioeconomic dependence on developed nations. This is why it was stated that his study is composed of two tenuously related components, one on socioeconomics and one on the sociology of literature. The failure to go beyond the unsubstantiated assertion that A (underdevelopment and dependency) produces B (*satelismo cultural*) and C (aware-

ness of the “estigmas del subdesarrollo”) leaves acceptance of what is to be the original contribution of Prieto’s monograph to either dogmatic or ingenuous faith.

Of course, it is impossible to prove Prieto’s hypothesis scientifically. Yet, what can be done is to attempt to demonstrate that Argentine literature is unique because of its unique structure of underdevelopment and dependence, that its cultural forms are to be found only among similarly underdeveloped peoples, and that its literature would be different were it not socioeconomically and culturally dependent. As any student of European literature knows, the development of Roman literature, of forms of medieval Romance literature, of Renaissance literature—of perhaps the entire Western literary tradition—is a complex web of “dependencies,” imitations, and creative assimilation of foreign models. “Autochthonous originality” is far less a question of the treatment of local themes and far more the elaboration of borrowed forms within the cultural contexts of a specific time and place. And if one considers the great European literary traditions—Roman literature, classical French literature, Elizabethan drama, English Romantic poetry, etc.—it would be a futile exercise to attempt to demonstrate any greatness on the basis of the absence of foreign dependence. Ironically, Prieto does come to praise certain Argentine works that are valuable representations of national realities. These works have emerged from the crucible of underdevelopment and bear witness to a singular Argentine circumstance. Thus, unlike some of his other writings and unlike those of dogmatic socialist realists, Prieto is not satisfied to condemn Argentine literature for purportedly being the offspring of an illegitimate union of social forces. Rather, he is able to see how the literature of his country in many significant cases has risen to the challenge of that illegitimacy. Despite the many structural weaknesses of his monograph, this is an aspect of his approach to individual works that is of undeniable interest.

VII

One of the abiding concerns of the “parricidal” critics in Argentina has been to chronicle the alleged failures of national literature. Of course, there are two types of failure: a failure to adhere to a certain criterion of literary accomplishment (a deficiency in the *poetics* of an author) and a failure to fulfill satisfactorily an otherwise laudatory goal (a deficiency in the *rhetoric* of a work and, therefore, a lapse in skill or a limitation on the vision of the author). In his study on Borges, Prieto is concerned with the first sort of failure. Borges, in no uncertain terms, is *prescindible*, dispensable: his world-vision, his concept of the role of the author and the function of literature are so irrelevant to the exigencies of the *nueva generación* that he can be said not to have produced literature at all. This contentiously argued position established Prieto as a major mid-century Argentine critic and spokesman for a “new” criticism of uncompromising commitment to immediate national realities.

Estudios de literatura argentina,¹⁹ a collection of essays first published in U.S. and Argentine journals, is concerned with the second sort of failure. Ar-

ranged chronologically by the works treated, seven essays discuss six major Argentine authors and one literary generation in terms of their self-confessed commitment to "Argentine reality," to "national experience," to the "Argentine common man," to the "immediate creole circumstance" of the author. Some of the figures discussed, like Arlt and Marechal, are usually considered to have written works that are cornerstones to a truly national literature no longer subservient to European models and now offering the Argentine *hombre medio* a vision of himself with which he can identify in his anguished circumstance. Nevertheless, all come off the worse for having been exposed to Prieto's unyielding scrutiny.²⁰

In general, the negative assessment runs as follows. A writer like Gálvez, touted as having brought critical realism and reformist naturalism to Argentine letters, used this realism-naturalism in *El mal metafísico* to attack middle-class Argentine values and to promote the antipositivist sentiment of his protagonist, who becomes involved in the spiritualist movement of the period. Yet, Gálvez failed to describe with sufficient conviction the collision between his protagonist and his surroundings, annihilating reality. By choosing to portray his protagonist in fuzzy terms of an equivocal spiritual romanticism, Gálvez misses the chance to portray a true confrontation of values:

Este desencuentro entre la técnica empleada y la actitud interior del novelista, este efecto de distanciamiento cuya naturaleza nos limitamos, por ahora, a recorrer en su superficie, puede ser ilustrado con *lapsus* similares a los ya transcritos, pero todos ellos ceden en significación ante el conjunto de rasgos con que se propone el destino de Carlos Riga, el personaje protagónico. . . . Riga es apenas una sombra entre cuerpos sólidos, un perfil estructurado que no acierta a irradiar el necesario poder de convicción (p. 15).

This is not the place to take issue with Prieto on whether or not there is anything to be gained by the approach employed by Gálvez (i.e., the use of procedures of naturalism to describe the problems of a rather naive idealist in conflict with his society). Suffice it to say that in this essay, as throughout, Prieto subscribes to the tacit premise that anything other than documentary realism in the Argentine novel is the source of esthetic inadequacy:

Este realismo, sin embargo, no va más allá de la utilización de determinados aspectos de una técnica, o de ciertos recursos estereotípicos de la misma. El realismo, en efecto, en su versión naturalista, exige un compromiso del escritor con la realidad que describe; un compromiso que no garantiza, desde luego, la consecución de la objetividad propuesta por el escritor, pero que pretende asegurar la lealtad de éste para con el mundo que describe, la tensión sostenida, el deseo insobornable de ser fiel registro de lo que capta su pupila. En Gálvez se advierten los usos metodológicos y la técnica del realismo naturalista, pero no la adhesión del escritor a los designios que otorgan sentido a esa técnica (pp. 12–13).

Prieto fails to make clear—and this is a reservation concerning his criticism that does not question the validity of his fundamental premise—whether

Gálvez is attacked for having chosen to portray someone like Riga in the first place (in which case, it is Riga's lamentable lack of contact with reality that is at issue) or whether Gálvez is faulted for not portraying his character in terms other than those of the latter's inner vagueness. One suspects that the latter is the case: Riga's personality, no matter how fuzzy, could have been dealt with better in terms of an unremitting commitment to the reality of his situation. Prieto blurs the distinction by choosing to explain Gálvez's failure as owing in part to his use of biographical material. But this is an attribution that only detours the essay from the phenomenological analysis of the literary text itself into the vagaries of biographical genesis.

The other writers whose works are examined in detail fare much the same as Gálvez: an initial, apparent concern for Argentine reality turns out, upon closer examination, to be a backing away from rigorous portrait and a flight into allegory, fantasy, or neoromantic sentimentality. The latter is the case with Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz's *El hombre que está solo y espera* (1931): despite the almost creatural conception of the Argentine common man—the man of Corrientes and Esmeralda and the tango, silently brooding in his frustrated alienation from a gray and oppressive existence—Scalabrini Ortiz's essay escapes into a sort of creole sentimentality and archetypic figures that Prieto criticizes in Borges's socially uncommitted poetry:

Lástima, sin embargo, que Scalabrini no intentara llegar a una síntesis de ambas tentativas; que no decidiera rehacer la imagen del silencioso Hombre de Corrientes y Esmeralda sobre el trasfondo de la intrincada historia de los convenios ferrocarrileros; que no conectara la enajenación de la riqueza nacional con la actitud fatalista del hombre de la calle; el taponamiento de todo programa de realización comunitaria con la pasividad contemplativa y la in-comunicabilidad de el *hombre que está solo y espera*.

Scalabrini realizó por separado el análisis de un tipo humano y el análisis de una situación. En conjunto, tal vez hubiera dado el ensayo perfecto sobre la realidad nacional. La formulación de esta hipótesis vale para indicar que tal *desideratum* aún no ha sido cumplido (p. 81).

The most interesting essay in the collection is one that Prieto wrote originally as a prologue to the publication of a "forgotten" story by Roberto Arlt.²¹ Arlt is often seen as the paragon of the Argentine "realist" writer, a novelist who dealt in the harshest terms possible with the grimmest aspects of the Argentine experience. The prologue is interesting precisely to the degree to which Prieto takes exception with this standard version of Arlt and the degree to which he backs himself up in his textual analysis. For most critics Arlt's writings are an amalgam of a documentarily inspired scrutiny of the Argentine experience (he was for many years a police reporter for Buenos Aires tabloids) and a highly original *representation* of that scrutiny in terms of literary structures based on expressionist principles. Perhaps his best known works are the two novels, *Los siete locos* (1929) and its sequel, *Los lanzallamas* (1931). The plot, which is the vehicle for Arlt's portrayal of the anguished *porteño* Everyman, Remo Erdosain,

turns on the activities of a Ku Klux Klan-like society (the "Seven Madmen") that is planning to stage a military coup in order to save Argentina from itself. (One of the great ironies of Argentine literature, proving that Oscar Wilde was accurate in stating that life imitates literature, is that Arlt's society was upstaged by Uriburu's fascist-inspired 1930 coup, Argentina's first military takeover; the irony was not lost on Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, who incorporated it as a means of narrative closure in his 1973 film based on the two novels.) Criticism—and this is especially true at the present moment when Latin American fiction is only indirectly documentary—has accepted the originality of Arlt's amalgam and has seen in it an alternative to bourgeois or socialist realism.

But here lies the problem for Prieto's insistence that documentarianism prevail in literature. Prieto cannot recognize the presence of a productive blending of police-blotter reporting and metaphorical or expressionist representation. Rather, he sees an unreconcilable contradiction between a praiseworthy record of Argentine reality and an unfortunate tendency toward an escapist fantasy that he can only explain in biographical terms: the autobiographical elements in Arlt's work (and perhaps one of the defects of Arlt's self-instruction in literature was an inability to objectify personal experience adequately) can breed an atmosphere of neurotic fantasy that impedes the direct reporting he was singularly capable of providing.

There is no doubt that such an effect, which is the result of Arlt's chosen rhetoric, is not favored by Prieto. Prieto, assuming as he does throughout that literature is going to be read by a completely literal-minded public (or at least, by one that will not respond to nonliteral representations), accordingly decries the nonliteralness of Arlt's representation of his vision of an impending apocalypse. Prieto, presuming an existential commitment with "reality," opposes the anti-realist premises that underlay a good part of literature in Arlt's day and that also underlie a good part of contemporary prose fiction. Many critics today have embraced the concept of *la pensée sauvage*, popularized by Lévi-Strauss in his eponymic work. This concept holds that, for those who do not live by the intellectual pretensions of Western Civilization, thought is both nondiscursive and nonrational. In terms of a literary esthetic, *la pensée sauvage* maintains that the audience grasps meanings more precisely when they are "dis-realized," when they are mythicized and presented in terms of fundamental, irrational human emotion. This is the insight that underlies the neo-myths of the most widely recognized products of contemporary Latin American literature, and it is also the insight that underlay the antirealist, expressionist trends of early twentieth-century, presocialist realism fiction. The extent to which expressionism can be identified in Arlt's writings has yet to be studied: certainly it was more a matter of the Argentine's identification with a general esthetic position than any direct influence. Much of his theater is definitely Brechtian, and an acknowledgment of the possible correspondences with expressionism will contribute greatly to understanding the structure of his apparently formless novels and short stories.

Prieto, however, can accept little if any of the above. This is stated not as a condemnation of his analysis of the elements of fantasy in Arlt's work, but as an

indication of how a critic who accepts the rhetorical uses of antirealism might reach conclusions at variance with Prieto's:

Viaje terrible condensa, en ese sentido, los rasgos y el modo de operar de la fantasía del escritor: una pantalla de proyección sobre la que se recortan mundos ilusorios, estrictamente vinculados a experiencias personales; mundos ilusorios que apuntan, a veces, a satisfacer situaciones compensatorias, pero que casi siempre concluyen por soldar un circuito de tipo masoquista en el que la humillación y el sentimiento de culpa suceden, necesariamente, a la exaltación fantasiosa.

La obra de Arlt, tan fuertemente impregnada de contenidos autobiográficos, permite interceptar con bastante facilidad el pasaje de determinadas experiencias personales a su versión literaria. Puede así reconocerse la ingerencia de los elementos fantásticos y establecer sus vínculos psicológicos con el creador. Una dificultad mayor implica ponderar el modo cómo la fantasía interfiere en la percepción de la realidad, cuando la voluntad expresa del autor ha sido percibirla como un testigo, como un observador crítico, razonador, objetivo. . . . Un tajante deslinde parece marcarse entre el punto de vista del narrador y la virtualidad de los personajes que deambulan siempre como seres humillados, como víctimas de sus propias ilusiones, y en ese deslinde debe señalarse la presencia de un fuerte mecanismo fantasioso que sirvió a los intereses del escritor y del hombre, y que concluyó convirtiendo al escritor y al hombre en sus víctimas propiciatorias (pp. 102–3).

The premise here, to which many contemporary writers might take extreme exception, is that the elements of fantasy that crop up in Arlt's characters and in some of his narrators are the projection of his own autobiographical frustrations and that such elements impede the representation of concrete reality. Such a reality can only be presented in objective terms without the "distortion" that it suffers when it passes through the subjective filter of those projected neurotic fantasies. For Prieto, the neurosis of the individual, whether a Kafkaian universal or a sociological conditioning (Prieto discusses Kafka in connection with Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's fiction but, surprisingly, not in connection with Arlt's), is, rather than an instructive example of Everyman held up to the reader for his own self-discovery, the image of a sacrificial victim that vitiates "la percepción de la realidad" Arlt ostensibly aspired to attain.

VIII

Prieto's criticism, especially after the monograph on Borges, is most valuable when it discusses the content of specific literary works in terms of their own "textuality." Prieto does come to develop a respect for the literary text. But with this respect comes the demand for a preordained rhetoric, for a preconceived vision of reality (there is no doubt that, in the first place, Argentine reality for Prieto is what Arlt basically saw and not at all what Eduardo Mallea, for example, thought he saw), and for a particular mission that the writer must assume.

The unifying thread of Prieto's essay is his recognition of the author's goal to discharge that mission. However, he must conclude that, with very few exceptions, few Argentine writers were capable of meeting these demands. Their failure ranges from the alleged class inhibitions of Gálvez and the Florida writers, through the class pretensions of the Boedo writers, to the neurotic crippling of Arlt. The overall impression of Prieto's criticism is curious: his essays are good to excellent, written (as his book on Borges was not) with an implied acceptance of the demands of academic criticism. And yet, they are all essentially negative in their conclusions. One can fault Prieto on his failure to consider other explanations for the phenomena he describes or on some of his premises. But from the point of view of his particular conception of what literature should be and his understanding of what Argentine literature has been, his studies are in the last analysis convincing examples of "parricidal" criticism. Because of the importance of the *parricidas* in mid-century Argentine culture, Adolfo Prieto's writings deserve our attention as undoubtedly the most representative example of the demands that were placed upon the writer and the critical scrutiny to which the Argentine literary tradition was subjected.

NOTES

1. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *El juicio de los parricidas, la nueva generación argentina y sus maestros* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Deucalión, 1956). See also Ángela B. Dellepiane, "La novela argentina desde 1950 a 1965," *Revista iberoamericana* 34 (1968):237–82; and Martin S. Stabb, "Argentine Letters and the Peronato: An Overview," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 13 (1971): 434–55.
2. Noé Jitrik, *Seis novelistas argentinos de la nueva promoción* (Mendoza: Biblioteca Pública Gral. San Martín, 1959).
3. Concerning these journals and their impact on Argentine intellectual life, see María Luisa Bastos, "'Contorno', 'Ciudad', 'Gaceta literaria', tres enfoques de una realidad." *Hispanérica*, nos. 4/5 (1973): 49–64.
4. Juan José Arrom, *Esquema generacional de las letras hispanoamericanas, ensayo de un método* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1963), pp. 216–17.
5. Enrique Anderson Imbert, *La crítica literaria contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Gure, 1957), for example, mentions Sartre only in passing. Although the following passage is accurate in indicating the position taken by the *parricidas* in their correspondences with Sartre, it is the only attention Anderson Imbert gives him in what is still the principal overview of literary criticism in Latin America: "Para Jean-Paul Sartre (*¿Qué es la literatura?*) la crítica consiste en comprender cómo cada escritor elige su manera de ser: oscilando ante abyecciones y heroísmos, tomando posición ante su tiempo, dirigiéndose a sus contemporáneos, asumiendo su responsabilidad de militante en el Reino de los Fines, el escritor trasciende las condiciones que lo rodean y afirma su libertad en una literatura comprometida que, en el fondo, es la realización del proyecto singular y absoluto de su propia vida" (pp. 61–62).
6. Quoted from Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 24–25.
7. Translated as *¿Qué es la literatura?*, trad. de Aurora Bernárdez (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1950).
8. Frederic Jameson, "Three Methods in Sartre's Literary Criticism," in John K. Simon, ed., *Modern French Criticism, from Proust and Valéry to Structuralism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 193–227. The pagination of the quotes is indicated at the end of each one.
9. There are three major studies on Sartre's literary criticism: René Girard, "Ex-

- istentialism and Criticism," *Yale French Studies*, no. 16 (Winter 1955–56): 45–52; Eugene F. Kaelin, *An Existential Aesthetic: the Theories of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962); Benjamin Suhl, *Jean-Paul Sartre: the Philosopher as Literary Critic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).
10. Adolfo Prieto, *Borges y la nueva generación* (Buenos Aires: Letras Universitarias, 1954). Prieto's book is discussed in an overview on Borges criticism: María Luisa Bastos, *Borges ante la crítica argentina 1923–1960* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Hispamérica, 1974), pp. 263–83.
 11. An excellent survey of Prieto's development as a critic is Rodolfo A. Borello, "Adolfo Prieto: literatura y sociedad en la Argentina," *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, no. 214 (1967): 133–46. Two recent scholars mention Prieto's work in panoramas of critical commentary devoted to Borges: Martin S. Stabb, *Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Twayne, 1970), pp. 139–40 (in his chap. 5, "Borges and the Critics"); and Nicolás Rosa, "Borges y la crítica," *Los libros*, no. 26 (1972): 19–21. See also the comments by Allen Phillips, who refers to Prieto's "ligereza crítica, su arbitrariedad y el grave error de juzgar a Borges según una filosofía del arte francamente ajena a la obra que estudia" ("Notas sobre Borges y la crítica reciente," *Revista iberoamericana* 22 [1957]: 41–59; quote is on p. 55). But, then, of course there are critics who would not agree with Phillips's assertion that Prieto's critical philosophy is methodologically alien to Borges's work. Is there only one critical method appropriate for analyzing any one literary work, or are all critical theories equally valid, the only restrictions being their own intrinsic limitations and the reader's demand that they be applied with a convincing rigor?
 12. The only major criticism of Prieto's book that I have been able to discover is the exchange between Roy Bartholomew and Prieto in *Ciudad*, nos. 2–3 (1955): 93–106. Although Bartholomew is basically sympathetic to Prieto's critical commitments, the defects he points out prefigure subsequent reservations: "podrá ejercer Prieto la crítica con honradez, no lo dudo, pero le está vedado juzgar a Borges primero porque no lo entiende y segundo porque lo mueve o lo distancia 'una motivación psicológica', un desagrado personal y físico" (p. 100).
 13. *Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 140. Prieto's analysis is also disabled by his implicit rejection of the principles of the union between form and content (despite his presumed readings in Marxist esthetics, Prieto appears to see only content).
 14. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Leviatán, 1956.
 15. *La literatura autobiográfica argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Álvarez, 1966). Originally, Rosario, Arg.: Universidad Nacional del Litoral, 1964. Basic reviews are: Borello, "Adolfo Prieto" (see note 11); Alfredo A. Roggiano, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 4 (1964): 662; Jaime Rest, *Revista de la Universidad de Buenos Aires* 8, no. 2 (1963): 332–36.
 16. *Proyección del rosismo en la literatura argentina* (Rosario, Arg.: Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Seminario del Instituto de Letras, 1959), with an excellent introduction of scope and methods by Prieto; and *Encuesta: la crítica literaria en la Argentina* (Rosario, Arg.: Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Instituto de Letras, 1959), a series of responses by critics to six questions (it is regrettable that Prieto did not include himself).
 17. Juan Manuel Chavarría, *Densidad espiritual de Sarmiento* (Buenos Aires: López, 1962).
 18. Rosario, Arg.: Editorial Biblioteca, 1968.
 19. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1969.
 20. It is no accident that Arlt's literary stock has risen steadily during the last three decades when Argentine culture has become increasingly polarized in tune with almost unresolvable political tensions. Marechal's "rehabilitation" has come about in very recent years (he died in 1970, still virtually ignored by the establishment writers he had angered by his peronista sympathies), and, as is to be expected, paralleled the "rehabilitation" in the early seventies of peronismo and its "discovery" by elements of the radical left.
 21. Roberto Arlt, *Un viaje terrible* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1968).