

The Latin American Innovative Novel of the 1920s: A Comparative Reassessment

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**Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez,**

**"The Latin American Innovative Novel of the 1920s: A Comparative Reassessment"**

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**Abstract:** In her paper, "The Latin American Innovative Novel of the 1920s: A Comparative Reassessment," Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez examines four early twentieth-century novels from four different Latin American countries. Coonrod Martínez pays particular attention to their innovation and rebellious breaking with tradition in the attempt to create new narrative. The paper includes comparisons of Arqueles Vela, Roberto Arlt, Martín Adán, and Pablo Palacio, and their novels of the 1920s, with works by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Carlos Williams, Upton Sinclair, Ernest Hemingway, and Ezra Pound. In the paper, Coonrod Martínez also compares these early novels to celebrated novels of the Latin American "Boom" in order to point out that the latter authors were influenced by territory gained by earlier generations which, however, were not celebrated internationally as the Boom authors were. Coonrod Martínez suggests that re-evaluations of these early texts and comparison of them to U.S. and European innovators during the same era will help demonstrate gains made by Latin American artists in the early twentieth century.

**Elizabeth COONROD MARTÍNEZ**

### **The Latin American Innovative Novel of the 1920s: A Comparative Reassessment**

The question might be asked: Did Peruvians, Mexicans and other Latin American writers create new fiction before the 1960s -- the era the Latin American novel arrived internationally with what was called magical realism? Even comparative studies focus only on the second half of the twentieth century in comparing Latin American with U.S. and European works. In other words, there is no general critical concern with Latin American literary production during the early twentieth century. That historical era is one of rapid technological, scientific and political change that greatly affected and influenced literary creation. It is an era when the city became a focus of identity for the modern society, and emblematic of human existence. This is reflected in early twentieth century narrative fiction, whether in Europe and the U.S., or in Latin America. As an example, although William Faulkner's influence on and compatibility with Latin American writers in the second half of the twentieth century is often noted, no comparisons have been made of Ernest Hemingway and Latin American authors during the early stage of his writing. Nor are there studies of the compatibility of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce with Latin American innovative writers of their era. More significantly, there exists an erroneous general view that novels produced in Latin America simply followed or imitated the artistic movements in Europe and the U.S. Instead, many 1920s Latin American novels are creations of innovative structure and discourse arising out of the artist's own experience, which appeared simultaneous to new creative fiction elsewhere.

Modernism, the literary era of the first three to four decades of the twentieth century, enjoys a rich profusion of innovative artistic creation. Novelists and poets were influenced by quickly changing technology, science, ideological and philosophical thought, which forever affected contemporary poetry and narrative fiction. Innovative English-language writers include Joyce, Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. While this is considered an important literary period and popular era for the English-speaking world, Latin American literary production for this same period goes largely unnoticed and receives little credit in the English-speaking world. In fact, Vanguardia -- the title in Spanish for the same epoch as Modernism -- is only loosely classified and not as a literary period. For the English-speaking world, the starting point for the innovative Latin American novel is the Boom -- so dubbed because critics considered it to have exploded into existence only in the 1960s and early 1970s, to the acclaim of international readers. But the inception of a new style -- in form and discourse -- actually occurred in a previous generation, before the Boom. This earlier movement highly influenced Boom writers and the creation of novels such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Contemporary Latin American writers have begun to give tribute to their Vanguardia predecessors, but English-language critics still ignore (with occasional exceptions) Latin America's early twentieth-century innovative writers.

It did not help that the principal Boom novelists declared themselves an "orphan" generation -- with no universal Latin American "father" of influence (Donoso 20) -- which supposedly emerged as the first generation of real Latin American novelists. Doris Sommer pinpoints the fallacy of this idea, showing that, while Mario Vargas Llosa says he sought to be "modern" and "different," he acknowledged that this desire fed from an existing tradition of experimentation (Sommer 3-4). Indeed, revolutionary style, a discourse on the (Latin) American experience and the technological era, and modernity are the obvious traits of the Vanguardia novels, and part of a tradition begun long before the Boom's inception. The Boom has been celebrated for its magical realism -- a sense of an exotic Other (different from Europe), but it is also revolutionary in the sense of bringing historical and political contemplations to modern introspective creation. Each of these elements is evident in earlier twentieth-century narrative.

Eurocentric critics have generally considered that Latin American writers reacted to and were influenced by European and U.S. artists and writers in the early twentieth century. What was actually happening, however, was that the world was becoming a smaller place. Cities were becoming larger urban clusters and technology speeding information throughout the globe. Artists not only influenced other artists with their antics and inspirations, they were all revolutionizing -- brutally breaking with the Realism and Romanticism of the previous century and striving for a newness

that explained the newly technological and rapid era -- at the same time. Innovative narrative fiction published in various Latin American capitals is little known because these works were neither translated into English nor did they find an international venue (as occurred during the Boom). Had it so occurred, we would know that, for example, Arqueles Vela (1899-1972) in Mexico was producing a new kind of narrative -- with extremely short sentences, alternating with longer phrases, and short paragraphs-- before and during publication of the Ernest Hemingway novels that won acclaim for their new brevity. Vela's innovative novel *El café de nadie*, which was written as early as 1922, was published in 1926, the same year as Hemingway's first novel *The Sun also Rises*. Vela's characters also demonstrate the impact of new science, specifically, the influence of Albert Einstein's early theories on relativity, i.e., that acceleration and deceleration create no apparent difference in a line or circle. Artistic creation, likewise, should not be hindered by direct flow or stops and starts, according to Vela's narrative fiction.

This study will explore Vela's novel as well as novels by three other Latin Americans -- Ecuadorian Pablo Palacio (1906-1946), Peruvian Martín Adán (1908-1984), and Argentinean Roberto Arlt (1900-1942) -- to demonstrate the innovative creative fiction of Latin American writers who are seldom considered in comparative studies on Modernism. These four revolutionary Latin American novelists forever altered and renovated narrative form, and achieved a discourse little understood in their era. They are precursors to the Boom, and to the so-called postmodern novel following the Boom. Each of these novelists breaks with traditional content and structure when many other novelists were writing within the realist/naturalist tradition, popular in Latin America following its earlier surge in Europe. Because of the public's preference for mainstream writing, Vanguardia narrative was overlooked (and these novels remained out-of-print) until recent reviews of the period.

No other era had seen such an incredible burst of technology, thought and science, which simultaneously brought the nations of the world closer together while at the same time thrusting them into world wars. The initiators of the new novel in Latin America "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" -- notions of Postmodern theory (Haraway 154) which fit Vanguardia style surprisingly well. A less self-centered artist than his immediate predecessors (who were equivalent to the Parnassian/Decadent periods) or Romantic precursors, the Vanguardia artist construed his work as a form of activity in step with vigorous times. They synthesized the lyrical and the analytical into an artistically self-critical position, detached from and simultaneously critically engaged with the period in question. As noted by Vicky Unruh (who has published the first text in English focusing on Latin American narrative in the Vanguardia period), these novelists constructed complex, unfinished characters as central figures in their fiction in order to intellectually debate the modern artist's own creative paradox (82-83). Vanguardia artists were actively involved in their societies and responded to a call for universal social and political change. They recognized that a new type of narrative was needed to keep up with developments in science, philosophy, art, and politics that marked the new century. The Latin American Vanguardia extended from as early as the second decade of the twentieth century to as late as the 1940s, with principal works dating from 1922 to 1930. While the avant-garde novels are forgotten, fiction of this period is remembered mainly for its Realism focused on specific regions for purposes of their development or civilizing process: Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929), and the novels of the Mexican Revolution such as Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (1928). In English-language criticism, the few studies on the Vanguardia movement have tended to focus on poetry.

Now, why would criticism on early twentieth-century Latin American literature focus principally on regional representations (using traditional form) of narrative fiction, and yet pick up innovative, revolutionary achievements in poetry? A likely reason is Rubén Darío's esthetic movement, which won literary acclaim in Spain in the late nineteenth century, when poetry was considered the highest form of creative innovation. This idea continued throughout the early decades of the twentieth century in Spanish-language art. Spaniard José Ortega y Gasset even warned against an indecipherable new form of novel in his influential study *Ideas sobre el teatro y la novela* (1925). If art is a deformation of reality and therefore incompatible with [supposed] realistic life, he declared, it would remove the reader from the cares of everyday life (76). Revolutionary novelists -- more in

number in Latin America than Spain -- thought differently. They sought not to reject reality, or even universality as Ortega y Gasset feared, but instead to focus the new twentieth century reality by doing away with traditional components like the omniscient author and the elaborately contrived plot. Ortega y Gasset did not understand that many modern writers wanted to trust their readers' imaginations by having the readers complete the images in their novels. He and other early 20th century critics paid no attention to the subtleties of parody and irony in the revolutionary writers' visions. Still, their observations influenced later critics. Even late twentieth century criticism has also focused on innovative Vanguardia poets such as Vicente Huidobro, César Vallejo, José Gorostiza, or Delmira Agustini, for their experimental language, while the Vanguardia novelists -- who reinvented the novel -- have been mostly ignored and forgotten. Theoretical premises on the novel, however, published mid to late twentieth century, have now provided the possibility of a review in hindsight to better understand early revolutionary narrative fiction.

Recent turns in literary theory offer unique opportunities to reevaluate narrative fiction in the early twentieth century for its influence on the contemporary Latin American novel and its place in literary history. New literary thought can aid recognition of Latin American literary influence and production before its 'discovery' by U.S. and European critics (as with Christopher Columbus, this hemisphere's literature does not exist until it is discovered by the Europeans), and its evaluation alongside innovative works in English. For Mikhail Bakhtin (who began his critical writing in the 1920s, although little of it was published or translated until decades later and arrived in North American scholarship only by the 1970s), the novel was only born with the twentieth century. He considered that the novel is "the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted," while other genres, such as the epic and tragedy, have been exhausted (3). Only the novel includes, ingests, and devours other genres without losing itself; it alone is "organically receptive" to new forms of perception or reading. In fact, the novel would "become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient world" (10). In his essay, "Epic and the Novel," Bakhtin notes that the rapid technological change and intense activity of the new century enhanced the novel's evolution: "In this actively polyglot world, completely new relationships are established between language and its object (the real world), and this is fraught with enormous consequences for all the already completed genres that had been formed during eras of closed and deaf monoglossia. In contrast to other major genres, the novel emerged and matured precisely when intense activation of external and internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity" (12). Contemporary criticism has varying ideas as to the viability of the contemporary novel. While Bakhtin saw the possibilities, Harold Bloom says novels that revealed real-world (i.e., sociological or ideological) information would be "tarnished" (qtd. in Begley 34). The novels Bloom selects to form his *Western Canon* (1994) are valued only for their aesthetics. Another critic cites 'Western thought' as preventing interpretations, because the critic's interpretation could be invented: "Can one look for structure without structuring?" asks Trinh Minh-ha in her study on postcolonial writing by women of color (141). The purpose of her book is to show that stories do not always have a specifically dictated beginning and closure as Western thought suggests: "'Life is not a (Western) drama of four or five acts. Sometimes it just drifts along; it may go on year after year without development, without climax, without beginnings or endings ... In life, we really don't know when an event is occurring; we think it is starting when it is already ending, and we don't see its in/significance" (143).

For Ortega y Gasset and Bloom, literature must meet their perspective of "real life," but Bakhtin and Trinh Minh-ha see a less defined or encased possibility. It is likely that neither critic is right or wrong, instead, each opens additional perspectives. Vanguardia narrative identifies no beginning or closure in its search of the artist's inner depths in order to reveal artistic reality. Bloom would not have argued for the Vanguardia artist, whose creation does not follow the structure of Western drama or fiction. Nonetheless, early innovative prose writers in Latin America have influenced subsequent generations of writers whom Bloom has placed in his canon. The Vanguardia novelist sought to "reconstruct boundaries" much as the postmodern artist does presently (Haraway 181). And contemporary writers, like Mario Vargas Llosa, are beginning to acknowledge the ways Vanguardia narrative influenced them (Kinsella 33). According to Bakhtin, all cultural production is

dialogic, in continuous struggle among several voices. If a revolutionary novelist writes to supplant previous voices, is the writer ideologically countering old masters or is he/she an artist of extreme individuality? A postmodern question is: how does one create a future that will acknowledge and incorporate the past without repeating it? This is also a question that concerned the Vanguardia writers. If the postmodern is a moment of extreme artistic self-consciousness, according to Lacanian thought, so was the Vanguardia; its challenge, however, was how to avoid the impasse of recuperation. In order to incorporate without repeating, parody and irony became essential to the dialogic Vanguardia process. Bloom thinks that the true artist must be removed from the world and its ideologies, but what of removing the artistic creation from master narrative control, in other words, resisting esthetic and traditional paradigms? The Vanguardia artist removes himself from the world, but he also defies tradition, thereby committing an ideological act. In the postmodern, this act is called a deconstruction of master European narratives or, a loosening of the bindings of the traditional novel (Spivak 263). Therefore, the artist defies ideologies while implanting his own. Similarly, French deconstructionists separate the components of literary language and texts, and Marxists show how narrative has been used as an instrument of power to establish ideology (Kernan 212). Either the text has no meaning, or it has scores of meanings. Avant-garde literature is only new if it seeks neither lofty esthetic goals nor ideological influences. It must exist for itself, creating its own influence. The Latin American Vanguardia novel's intention becomes clearer in light of contemporary theory.

Thus, there is a need to re-examine and re-read those works overlooked by critics, and from new perspectives. This is the "ex-centric" position, according to postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon. Postmodern theory does not invert, but uses the double paradox to critique the Center from both the inside and the outside. Now, in postmodern times, we perceive the Boom as the Center, thus placing the Vanguardia on the margin. The Vanguardia novel wanted to be "a novel," but only if it could parody, both incorporate and challenge the novel as it had been: this is now defined as a postmodern trait (Hutcheon 251). While critics largely disagree on the inception of postmodern narrative -- some deciding it begins in the 1970s and others suggesting it began immediately following the Vanguardia (Modernism) period -- there are strong arguments for the similarities between the postmodern and the Vanguardia. Jean-Francois Lyotard defines the postmodern as "incredulity" toward metanarratives, a direct product of progress in the sciences (72). Bakhtin says a variety of discourses on a textual space establishes a resistance to the dominance of any one (Lodge 22), and Hutcheon saw the need for modern fiction to parody master works in order to supplant them. Lyotard observes that postmodernism refines sensitivities to invent, to see differences, and to tolerate the incommensurable (73). Finally, theorist Donna Haraway states that postmodern language expresses an awareness of matter and imagination in continual interaction, and that only partial perspectives promise objective vision (190). Therefore, in the twentieth century the novel could only become new if it rebelled from traditional and master narratives, and revealed a variety of perspectives and states of awareness. During the literary periods of Naturalism and Realism, the artist sought to reveal a reality outside the esthetic emphasis of Romanticism. In a similar manner, the Vanguardia artist -- in Albert Einstein's generation -- seeks a perspective that had not been revealed previously. His struggle is against "the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (Hutcheon 175). The new novel -- launched in the early twentieth century -- would be a non-novel that defied master narratives.

The novels in this study represent a variety of Latin American countries, each attempting to reveal the new cosmopolitan identity of their respective cities. Each is a different voice with a similar goal of revealing specific Latin American identity in the new century. They have in common a lack of structure -- their own particular creations of non-structure -- and a discourse that critiques the conventional novel and demonstrates the act of creating new fiction. Each was a first in their respective countries, for their abstract quality and outrageous defiance of traditional narrative. Each is also a highly achieved artistic creation. The creators of these novels were not hailed by their contemporaries nor by subsequent generations. It is only today that they can be saluted for showing twentieth century narrative the future of prose fiction. Arqueles Vela's *El café de nadie* (1926) is a novel in three parts, which can be seen as three different novels (since Vela completed and

published two sections of the novel in 1922 and 1924 in literary magazines). Although unconnected in plot, the three similarly parody a passing era to present a new vision. The third section (which was written first), "La señorita, etc.," is the most technological in language and offers extremely short sentences, often alternated with average-size sentences, for example: "I was overcome by sleep. I felt tired. Her languishing form folded across my arms with the intimacy of a coat, for she had fallen asleep. It was natural. Six days of uncomfortable travel had made her lose her shyness. It wasn't for nothing" (Vela 77; my translation). In this last section of the novel, Vela's short sentences and paragraphs accelerate the pace, leaving memories behind and, by returning to the city, moving toward the señorita. The train movement produces her memory and the artist's thought process: "He is accustomed to living behind a door or in the groove of a window. Alone. Isolated. Misunderstood" (77; my translation).

The state of consciousness or thought process described by Vela's narrator is similar to James Joyce's narration in *Ulysses*. Both narrations vacillate between memory and physical presence. He leaves "her" to go in search of her memory -- perhaps one artistic muse for another? It is a muse of mechanical images -- "she" balances harmoniously on the handlebars of the trolley (81), and her breasts and my heart stayed trembling, exhausted, with that incessant sputtering of a motor that suddenly quits (87; my translation). The second chapter of this section begins with a countdown, from 1 to 26. The narrator considers whether it is a clock, then states this is not possible. So he considers a bell. Both images suggest urgency, a ringing to determine time, and a need to escape the village. He decides to return to the city with its telegraphic images, and stentorian and vociferous streets (79). Vela's brevity and descriptions extol the rapidity of the city and life being described, and provide tribute to Futurism (the first title used in Latin America for avant-garde artistic work). The number of pages in each of the three sections of this book shows no consistency or logic, and yet a search for numerical perfection is highlighted throughout the book. The first is 32 pages long, the second is 23 pages, and the third is 19. Literary critics like John Brushwood call the three sections "short stories" even though each section is separated into 10, 6, and 8 chapters (with short titles), respectively. But Vela was calling attention to a new, brief way of constructing the novel by insisting that each of the three parts were novels. The Italian Futurists used numbers in disorder to demonstrate the impact of technology and science. Vela's posthumous novel, *El intransferible* also relies on numbers -- where disorder suggests a multi-presence with the concepts of one and all (a human being and the universe). In the one-within-all are the notions of return, metamorphosis and transubstantiation, confirmed by a play of numbers (Picon Garfield 208-09). This insistence on numbers reflects the author's predilection for the scientific spirit and exact sciences of the new technological society.

The second section in Vela's book, "Un crimen provisional" is a parody of detective fiction and old logic. Vela's style of short phrases continues, although without repetitive descriptions, but the content of this novella is based on the analysis of a crime. This section is especially amusing. A "detective" who carries a flashlight inspects the blinds and imagines both the echo of compromising phrases and the trajectory of criminal footsteps. But he makes no conclusive deductions. The murderer, a "conquering and irresistible character in a light suit with large yellow checks" (60; my translation), says his only defense is the crime itself. The murdered victim turns out to be a mannequin, a fact that is simply stated, and the story goes no further. The crime here is against the detective novel -- the prose of rationalistic philosophy by authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle or Edgar Allan Poe. This novel, or crime, is a precursor to another on the horizon (represented with sunset followed by sunrise in the section "El café de nadie"). The novelist is clearly stating that the novel must be different in the future (in order to survive, per Bakhtin). While Ilán Stavans gives Jorge Luis Borges and other Latin Americans the credit for "revising" detective prose (24), Vela is actually the first to parody, criticize, and bring attention to the need for revision. Vela's irony is effective for its humor, which Carlos Fuentes calls one of the most distinguishing traits in recreating Latin American language in the new novel (30). Vela engages humor, like the French avant-garde writers of the same era, as a device to alter the reader's expectations (Shattuck 172). Humor becomes a tool -- for example the longing for a muse's inspiration, and the silliness of a false muse -- that the *Vanguardia* artist uses to draw attention to the need for a new genre. Humor is

also a tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of survival, and affirming life (Hutcheon 26). Just as irony comes into play because discursive communities exist, so humor reinforces existence-- here the existence of a creative spirit -- while exposing or subverting hegemonic ideologies.

Vela's three novellas (within a book) reflect various states of consciousness, all taking place in cosmopolitan life with access to modern technology. The first section of Vela's tripartite book is undoubtedly important as it carries the title of the novel itself. It contains a description of a café, with its two regulars, whose thoughts and actions seem to be joined, and an enigmatic woman whose name is Mabelina. The café itself is a landmark and symbol of the Vanguardia movement. El café de nadie was the name of a Mexico City café frequented by innovative artists (including Vela) of the radical Estridentista movement. The locale itself represents what the artists were attempting -- breaking with tradition, belonging to no one. In the novella, the café serves as a metaphor of creative inspiration based on new theories, especially relativity. Futuristic images give the sense of an inevitability of mechanical creation. But the mechanical has a human feel -- car honks that sniff the pedestrians' tracks -- and nature fuses with manmade objects. Metafictionally, the artist is seeking inspiration in the new era. The last chapter consists of four short paragraphs, concluding the search within this text for a new muse. After a long, spiritual journey, the artist has discovered that his evocations are punctured by the muse's looks, like an ellipsis. The used-up muse (reflected in the person of a female character who has been with each of the male characters) steps outside the café as dawn commences; the cafe regulars have also left. Einstein's theories on relativity state that a ray of light from a distant star can, when passing near the sun, seem to be attracted to the mass of the sun and reflect the sun's own light. Mass and energy, according to Einstein, have equal value. But that mass has to act, that is, go toward the light or the sun's radiation. In order to create, the artist must abandon the old and move toward the light, hence the old muse departs the café. Vela demonstrates that artistic knowledge needs to move toward the sun or a new center of inspiration. Leaving the old behind required great risk. The women in Vela's three novellas represent the same illusory inspiration and artistic possibility -- as well as frustration -- that the novelist seeks and does not find in mechanical, continuous movement and logic.

The French Cubists held that tradition had to be destroyed, and only new creations were valid. Vela merges the old into and toward the new inspiration -- a more scientific conclusion than the French artists. He sought no aesthetic goal in his creation; instead, his anti-methodology -- presented with three different examples -- was to demonstrate mass moving toward energy, or the inspiration and first steps toward artistic creation. This opened avenues for novels such as Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* and García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. While Vela's peers were still encumbered by long sentences and paragraphs that led to interminable realistic descriptions, he created truly innovative prose and a discourse based on the influences of science. His writing style is similar to Hemingway's, but his intellectual range is much greater. Although the two were contemporaries, it is not very probable that Vela would have been aware of Hemingway's writings. (Vela did not travel to Spain until after he had written at least the early parts of *El café de nadie*. Hemingway, however, had been living in France and Spain since World War I and read Spanish. He could have read Vela's early publications in newspaper magazines). Hence, Vela was a forerunner in rejecting old forms (long, realist images and sentences), and an artist who also attempted to adapt a new logic, based on new scientific discoveries, to narrative fiction.

In Ecuador, Pablo Palacio's short novel *Débora* (1927) demonstrated the rebellion of the traditional character, or, at least, the artist's rebellion in creating the character. The essential plot of *Débora* concerns a character that has not yet fully left the artist's head. It opens with a chapter labeled "Lieutenant" and the narrator saying, "You, go, I say, outstretching my arm as a pointer." Then, as the lieutenant tries to go about his development (or life) -- getting ready in the morning, talking to a secondary character, visiting the seedy side of town, musing about his need for a girlfriend -- he is regularly interrupted by the narrator's commentary on him. The novel ends because the narrator has the Lieutenant disappear (he is slashed by a paper cut), thereby neglecting traditional character development. Or so Palacio has the reader believe. While it includes socio-political commentary, and even political denunciation, Palacio's novel is a characterization of art and an attack on the romantic and realist novels of the previous century. His novel agonizes over the rules



of logic of the traditional novel by having the narrator voice them as the characters are being shaped: "The realist novel hurtfully deceives. It abstracts the facts and leaves the field open to emptiness; it gives them an impossible continuity, because the veridical, what would be quieted, would not interest anyone" (72; my translation).

Enrique Anderson Imbert calls Palacio "an excellent monologuer," the artist choosing this technique long before other authors used it to reveal interior realities (262). *Débora* consists of two crisscrossing monologues, one is the character's and the second belongs to the narrator/author, who reflects on the novel in general and the process of creating the novel. It is an anguished narrative -- anguish is felt by both the character and the author -- with no final resolution. Palacio's novel is thus a characterization of art and an attack on literary style -- novels -- of the previous era. A Vanguardia artist, Palacio saw that new politics, science, and a modern society all precipitated the novel's need to change. The artist's labor-in-process, or contemplation of the work's creation, seems similar to that of a philosopher or scientist -- a process to encourage thinking and discovery. His narrator pokes fun of the characters, but with a very serious intention: to remake the novel. Palacio's character should not be sentimental or romantic, but instead should reflect life in the present world (which is the premise for most artists during the Modernist period). *Débora*'s discourse reveals that the matter is larger than the artist himself; our society tells lies and is not interested in the true reality of our lives. The Vanguardia artist wants to stop being subservient to a controlling system. Whereas the French Dadaists wanted to free words, Palacio sought to free his entire narrative from convention. Ultimately, Palacio includes an outright condemnation of traditional writers: "The shamefulness of those lies is that they say: I'm giving you a compendium of real life, this that I write is the pure and absolute truth; and everyone believes it. The only honorable thing would be to say: these are fantasies, more or less coated so that you can swallow them comfortably; or, simply, to not sugarcoat the fantasies and given them entertainment á la John Raffles or Sherlock Holmes. Liars! Tricksters!" (72-73; my translation). Even the "girl" the lieutenant character eventually courts is described as an ignorant, easy, and unbecoming young Indian woman. Palacio pinpoints societal and racial concerns that would later predominate in the Social Realist novel of international recognition (especially with Jorge Icaza's 1934 novel, *Huasipungo*): "The girl walked in. She was a little too much Indian with grossly thick hair. Her part (literally path for fleas) in the middle, separating the braids. But she was exuberant and had a juicy mouth" (Palacio 83; my translation). Neither the plot nor the characters in Palacio's short novel are fully developed, but the narrator/artist's presence is a constant. At first reading, it appears a fragmented novel needing to be completed, as some critics would soon state. But Palacio published this as his second new novel. Said instability or lack of completion was essential to Palacio's purpose -- to mimic and parody the conventional novel and finally put it to rest as useless, to make way for the new novel in which the reader has a part to play. Patricia Waugh has noted that parody is an essential tool of metaliterature in demonstrating artistic style: "Parody of an earlier literary norm or mode unavoidably lays bare the relations of that norm to its original historical context through the defamiliarizing contextualization within a historical present whose literary and social forms have shifted" (66).

Jean Giraudoux wrote metafictional prose in the 1920s that required the reader to use his/her own imagination and participate in the novel (Nagel 78). Similarly to Giraudoux, Palacio does away with traditional components like omniscient author and the elaborately contrived plot. Giraudoux constantly reminds the reader to reflect upon the novel by revealing its conventions and disposing of them. Similarly, traditional fiction dies with Palacio's supposed-to-be romantic character. Susan Nagel's study explains how Giraudoux's subtle criticism of art and society was little understood by contemporary critics and much the same would be true for Palacio's novel with its subtleties and criticism of art and society. While nothing is sure in *Débora*, the plot is the least traditional; Palacio's plot is the remaking of the novel. *Débora*'s structure is like a puzzle: it is a sequence of moments joined by the sole logic of fright or desolation, a grouping of strange meditations, and a coupling of the abstract and concrete (Fernández 319-20). If the story is about a Lieutenant with an unsatisfied wish, to whom nothing of consequence happens before death, then the structure coincides with the plot. The lack of structure and an empty plot filled with pessimism and social

censure renders an empty novel. But Palacio's novel consists of much more than nothingness. His principal character, the pathetic, retrospective, sentimental Lieutenant, dies the death of the conventional novel so that in this "initial and final moment" (Palacio 90; my translation), a new creation comes into being. Palacio's discourse is an explanation of possibility and renewal in life, society, and art. The reader is offered two possibilities: First, the revelation of what is in his own conscience (in other words, that the reader and the author are a part of the internal world being articulated); and Second, an outside, external point of view of the artist's conscience at work, as though someone were describing it (Jitrik 164). Thus, it is difficult for the reader to maintain distance, and, if he does, the reader still sees himself through the external viewpoint of the development and critique of narrative and society.

Martín Adán also foresaw the need for a new prose in the twentieth century. His discourse is based on the shifting forces of life that seldom remain the same except in memory, hence, the cardboard house of his title, *La casa de cartón* (1928; *The Cardboard House*, 1990). He documents the tangible and intangible realities of a coastal village on the outskirts of Lima. Through images, Adán demonstrates the sadness of an old way of life that is being lost -- via a contrast with the modern -- but one that at the same time reveals the Peruvian landscape and people. The village is a metaphor for Adán's art and his art a metaphor for Peruvian life: "Afternoons were white in winter, and in summer, a reddish gold ... But in March there was a Monday with a pink afternoon ... and everyone was deeply moved by the pink afternoon" (*The Cardboard House* 44). Like Palacio, Adán documents the making of a novel; he cites and critiques modern and traditional writers, poking fun at conventional rules and structure as he writes his own kind of novel. Similarly to Vela and Palacio, Adán shows that life's shifting forces of political change and modernization have a correlative in the need for modernization in prose. There are no chapters in this novel. Instead, forty fragments of memories and images make up the text. Surrealistic techniques such as the absence of linear time, the blurring of identities, and an emphasis on the irrational provide for an esthetic series of metaphors. Irony and humor abound in the descriptions, making the purpose of the prose seem only to exalt the coastal village. But the impact of politics, outside wars and the world as a whole encroach in the pursuit of creation of a novel based on his region, just as the city of Lima is encroaching on this village.

There is no attempt to describe a reality behind the lives of the residents or visitors (who seem to represent new ideas and philosophies) to a specific vacation house in the coastal village of Barranco, or any sense of encounter between these people. On the one hand, *La casa de cartón* is rich in sensuous imagery that strives to convey myriad sensations and emotions underneath the surface reality of this village. On the other hand, the novel is limited by the subjective perceptions of a shy, sensitive youth whose consciousness filters the images. If the narrator is the artist's alter-ego, the house is his refuge and the place of artistic imagination, from which the author can gaze uninhibitedly at the Peruvian landscape. We are all images conceived during a calm, mule's trot, Palacio notes in one description, images that become foliated, plastered, and fenestrated (*The Cardboard House* 86-87). Art is life and therefore should reflect life. The plot of Adán's novel is no more than an ephemeral shell for his discourse. The characters, not fully developed, are essentially deconstructed as non-stereotypical characters that merge into the sights, smell, and plants of Barranco. Adán teases the reader with possible information that is never provided, choosing instead to take particular memories and develop them into a discourse. He does not overtly tell the reader about the constructions of the novel as Palacio does in *Débora*, but the narrator/author pretends to be describing life and Barranco while he develops his artistic theories. The narrator talks about an ice cream vendor's cart (the vendor's trumpet will open the last fragment of the novel) pulled by an old nag, an image that creates a confluence of new and old technologies. The vendor is representative of the Peruvian: "The rumble of the cart's wheels on the paving stones gladdens the sad waters of the fountain. The Indian -- his cheeks the color of blood-soaked earth and his nose sprinkled with tiny, round drops of sweat -- the Indian [driver] does not allow the cart to roll over the lawn of that meager garden" (*The Cardboard House* 5). In crisp, scintillating adjectives, Adán captures a moment in the hard life of a worker in this vacation town. He also makes note of Latin American racial, physical descriptions. In the fourth fragment, the narrator begins addressing

a "you" which is the narrator's boyhood friend, who is said to look "more Negroid than ever" (The Cardboard House 10). While forging the new cosmopolitan identity of modern life, as with the other novelists in this study, Adán also reflects (as with Palacio) the racial/ethnic composition of his national identity -- an early step in the issue of a search for identity that marks twentieth century Latin American literature.

Adán's narrator speaks to his boyhood friend, in his memory, about wrestling between conscious and subconscious states. Everything in life represents these opposites (The Cardboard House 90). In the final fragment, the artist can no longer be still, contemplating the "indoors or inner being of the subconscious" (The Cardboard House 103). The artist is a workman, not simply a creator (as previous literary generations thought); as a producer of texts, he must relate to the stimuli around him. He believes in the permanence of change and wants to keep his senses sharp to create along with change, or even ahead of it, if he is to be a nomadic intellectual. Adán's narrator also discusses literature with his boyhood friend, and creates metafiction that contemplates literature being published in the very era of the writing of the novel: "It might not be anything. Or perhaps it is a verse of Neruda" (The Cardboard House 59). His contemplation may thus be a verse by Pablo Neruda, who is one of the first writers to exalt a Latin American unique identity. The young characters also learn from characters in international writer's novels: "This is how we learned about the life of that poor Stephen Dedalus, an interesting man who wore glasses and wet his bed" (The Cardboard House 53). James Joyce's character in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, is only one of the fictional characters who influence Adán's narrator and his friends and, essentially, the artist. One critic calls Adán a Joycean, Stephen Dedalus-type (see Aguilar Mora 10). Adán most likely read the Joyce novel in translation as a teenager or in the 1920s when he began writing poetry. His narrator in *La casa de cartón* also cites Luigi Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1920), which Adán must have read in the same period of time, and which had a strong influence on him: "In this way we found out about the trick played on a good theater director by six characters, how they enticed him to write and then ended up not existing" (The Cardboard House 53). The narrator uses this fragment to suggest a new process for narrative fiction, which cannot follow the path of traditional narrative. Adán knows new fiction needs risk. He calls his European contemporaries Pirandello, Joyce, and George Bernard Shaw "idiots" (as he knows he himself will be called by critics), precisely for taking this risk. Then he makes a pronouncement on how he and his peers were educated: "All of us, except Raúl, were steeped in the Spanish and American moldy literary stew. For like on Sancho's Island of Barataria, it is the food of canon and rich men" (The Cardboard House 54). Making mention of Don Quijote's sidekick in Miguel Cervantes's famous novel, Adán slyly notes that the majority will simply follow tradition in order to be part of the canon, just as Sancho went along with Don Quijote's attempt to be part of an elite tradition. He continues to criticize members of the Spanish canon within the novel, subtly demonstrating the influences on his artistic spirit and others he chooses to discard.

Critics did not recognize Adán's work as incipient new narrative, instead relegating novels such as his to fragments of poetic words without structure (see, e.g., Lindstrom 71). Perhaps because Adán created this novel when he was only twenty years old, his work was not taken seriously. Curiously, García Márquez also wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude* when he was twenty years old (in 1948, and twenty years after Adán's book), coming only years later to an understanding of its meaning (now called Magical Realism) and refining it for publication. In Adán's case, Mario Vargas Llosa has aided that reflection. He is greatly responsible for resurgence in the critical analysis of *La casa de cartón*, owing to two essays he published in 1965. Vargas Llosa considers Adán's novel a better representation of Peruvian reality than the highly acclaimed *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1941; *Broad and Alien is the World*, 1945), by Ciro Alegría. Vargas Llosa notes that Adán sacrificed clarity in plot and structure in order to reach into his inner depths and demonstrate the ambiance, character, color and anguish of Barranco (Kinsella 33). Adán's novel also prefigures the works of several Peruvian writers of ensuing generations, namely, Vargas Llosa, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, and Alfredo Bryce Echenique. Adán's lyrical novel revealed the meaning of new, twentieth century narrative fiction, which can now be discovered in English thanks to the excellent translation by Katherine Silver.

William Carlos Williams comes to mind for purposes of comparison here. While he published several works of poetry and prose in the early Modernist era, his work was overshadowed by the attention T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922) received. In fact, Williams felt that Eliot and Ezra Pound were too attached to European culture and tradition. It was only in the 1950s and 60s that he began to receive deserved recognition for his efforts to invent an entirely fresh -- and singularly American -- poetic, centered on the lives of the common people. This is even evoked in the titles of his prose, *The Great American Novel* (1923), and *In the American Grain* (1925). Williams's epic poem "Paterson." centers on the poet's relationship to a modern city. The poet-protagonist wanders about the city, perceiving its present, remembering its past, and meditating upon his own life in it, until he is able to experience and understand all aspects of the city, and, in a sense, to become the city. William's narrator, like Adán's narrator in *The Cardboard House*, seeks to understand modern life. The past is gone, and the present must be reconciled. Adán's lyrical prose is very similar to the language of Williams' long poem, seeking to express the poet or artist's voice, but speaking in a collective sense for his society. Pablo Palacio and Martín Adán, like William Carlos Williams in the U.S., are attempting to portray a consciousness and reality native to the Americas -- whether the Ecuadorean, Peruvian, or U.S. urban reality. Their work was produced in the same era, but may have been overshadowed by other artists' works because these Americanists were not more European-focused, and that world was not yet ready for a distinctive "American" (as in the continent) reality.

A final example is Argentina, which in the early twentieth century had several prominent writers who sought to reveal a true Argentine reality in its prose, namely, Ricardo Güiraldes, Jorge Luis Borges, and Eduardo Mallea. None, however, broke radically with tradition as Roberto Arlt did. He not only changed narrative structure and strategy, but also produced a discourse on artistic pursuit and the modern dilemma of man. Curiously, only since the 1970s have critics begun to study his influence. For example, David William Foster includes Arlt as a forerunner with Mallea, Ernesto Sábato and Julio Cortázar in his study *Currents in the Contemporary Argentine Novel* (1975). Arlt sought to express the experience of life in an alienated society by creating a chaotic but artistic text. Arlt's expressionistic milieu -- grimy eateries, brothels, bars and their customers -- stand out in his narrative, but it is his novels' structure that marks him as innovator. In fact, his "fragmentary, disjointed presentation and difficult-to-specify narrative data are features that later distinguish the Spanish American new narrative of the boom years" (Lindstrom 79). Arlt focuses on the alienation of technology and twentieth century society in his novel *Los siete locos* (1929; *The Seven Madmen*, 1984). The protagonist, Erdosain, is a madman, but his madness is neither political nor eccentric; instead, it is a complex human reaction to a crazy world. His narrator is an anarchist who believes a return to a simpler, rural society is the only effective solution, and that the solitude of nature will help man regain a sense of identity (Franco 304). His friends and those around him plan to control the world. The overt political message of Arlt's novel is the condemnation of fanaticism, be it political or religious. According to Foster, the key to understanding *Los siete locos* is to see Erdosain as an anguished soul who could be Everyman (28). A byproduct of an exploitative urban society, he is identified early in the novel when he is fired from his job for petty embezzlement and will be prosecuted unless he repays the money immediately. Interestingly, however, he has not spent the money on bettering his own life -- with the exception of buying some meals in expensive restaurants, which food and wine he states not to have been interesting to his palate. He gave most of the money away to waiters and those who appeared in need. He does not even buy himself a new pair of shoes.

In *Los siete locos*, Erdosain is elevated to the level of a martyr figure who thinks he will save his soul and all mankind through his commitment to the new order, even though it involves murder. This gives meaning to Erdosain's otherwise empty existence. For Arlt and possibly for the reader, society is simply a cruel fascist hoax to exploit the helpless, all of which points to the ultimate irony, that is, the tension between the knowledge of the reader and the lack of that same knowledge by Erdosain. Resolution, for the reader, comes in knowing the futility of transcendent orders, the paradox of the human quest for them, and the inescapable truth that if they do not exist (as with God), society will create them (Foster 37), this being a concept developed by Bertolt

Brecht in his plays of the late 1920s. Irony, a key aspect of *Los siete locos*, is a powerful, apolitical tool wielded against authority (Hutcheon 27). Arlt, like the other novelists of this study, achieves the duality of socio-political commentary and demonstrating the way toward new narrative strategies. In his novel, Arlt resorts to shifting points of view, chaotic monologues, and alternations of time and space, or Bakhtinian chronotopes, such as meeting/parting (separation), loss/acquisition, search/discovery, recognition/nonrecognition (Bakhtin 97). Although supposedly chronological, it is not clear whether some events are imagined. It is often confusing as to who narrates -- an omniscient narrator, a commentary on Erdosain's oral and written confessions, Erdosain's own voice, or his wife Elsa's thoughts. In addition, every few pages, the narration stops for a footnote (as part of the fiction) or makes reference to what is contained in an unwritten future novel. This technique can cause confusion, and some critics during Arlt's time, expecting a linear structure, were baffled by the contradictions (not realizing they were purposeful) within the text. For some, Arlt did not know how to structure his writing, and he was judged to be grammatically incorrect. This is still believed in 1960s criticism: "That askewed novelistic eye seems to belong to one of the lunatics in the novel. The prose is awkward and at times illegible" (Anderson Imbert 301). Throughout, several items are never clarified: who exactly are the seven madmen? Does the Astrologer finally explain to Erdosain that he did not have Barsut -- who was held for ransom to finance the Astrologer's plan to control society -- killed after all? (Erdosain assumes he has seen his enemy Barsut's dead body.) The Astrologer is untrustworthy as the reader has already discovered. Erdosain, while sitting in a café, observes a man at another table. Soon he hears a shot and glances back to see the man slumped over the table. He mentions this to the Astrologer, who later contests his impression of the same: "By the way, where did you get that story about the suicide in the café? I have looked at yesterday's afternoon papers, and this morning's edition, and none have any news about this incident. You must have dreamed it. 'Nevertheless, I could show you the cafe,' Erdosain says. 'Well, then you dreamed in the cafe,' the Astrologer contests. 'Could be, it's not important,' Erdosain responds" (238; my translation). Not even his friends are supportive. Finally, will Erdosain go to jail as he believes when he hides with the Commentator and tells his story? If these things do not matter, is the purpose of the story to get the reader to think -- to see himself as Erdosain, neither a madman nor a savior, but a complex human consciousness?

The world in *Los siete locos* is a labyrinth without an exit. Anguish arises from the concept of existence in the universe, but it can also arise from the artistic act of devouring and replacing the previous artistic/creative generation. That is Arlt's anguish. Parody and irony are essential to the dialogic process; expressing dislocation or distortion is only a part of that process. The realization of the overwhelming role of irony in the novel and the particular form that this irony assumes is ultimately what the critics did not grasp. That is why, decades later, Argentine novelist Ricardo Piglia (in his novel *Respiración artificial*, 1980; *Artificial Respiration*, 1994) thought it necessary to make this point for postmodern literature: "Any grade school teacher, including my Aunt Margaret, Renzi said, could correct one of Arlt's pages, but no one could write it, except him" (Piglia 132). Structural participation in the action invited doubts as to Arlt's competence as a writer (Foster 44). If Arlt's novel were only a statement on the unacceptable circumstances of the lower classes, and their need for a belief in transcendent promises, *Los siete locos* would be a social realist novel. But it is much more innovative. Erdosain is not simply a disenchanting Everyman seeking escape from the urban, political world; he is the creative product at the hands of a perhaps maniacal artist seeking ultimate expression. There is no better "artist" than the Astrologer to make such a statement (44). The artist (Astrologer) offers the character (Erdosain) a "new order," and the hope of new meaning (in the genre). In Arlt's new order, the character finds a greater sense of life by seeking to establish meaning in his existence. The artist controls that expression, losing it occasionally to the character, that is to say, to artistic expression itself. Further, Arlt is in some ways reminiscent of Upton Sinclair, with his novel condemning the abuse of the urban worker, *The Jungle* (1906). It is easy to see that the challenges brought to city life and its populace by the new speed and technology of the modern era became a ready discourse for the writers of this era in any country. Even Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1926) expresses the robotization of the worker under a new capitalist mindset. All avant-garde artists were influenced by the quickly changing tech-

nological society, which made people more aware of and dependent on each other. The turn of century brought several key developments: the internal combustion engine, the diesel engine, and the steam turbine; electricity and petroleum as new sources of power; the automobile, the tractor, the telephone, the typewriter, and the tape machine -- all of these established a rapid city life. Modern bus systems appeared in major cities during the first decade of the twentieth century, joining streetcars and trolleys, soon to be followed by subway systems. Orville Wright's 1903 debut in the air led to the manufacture of warplanes, while the first modern battleship appeared in 1906. These developments, together with the new ideologies, such as Fascism and Marxism, scientific theories such as Einstein's, and Sigmund Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, were impressive influences on artists who sought to develop a new poetics and discourse that revealed their new reality.

The Latin American artists considered here are as talented and innovative as those of the Modernist era in Europe and the U.S., but they have been overlooked by a Eurocentric world that did not choose to "discover" them. This is why Roberto Fernández Retamar calls attention to the Latin American and especially Caribbean voice of Caliban the savage of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, who is "tamed" by Próspero, the European, and taught his language, but who later transforms that language to his own purposes. Latin American Vanguardistas are not imitators and they did not seek to completely destroy the past as other international avant-garde poets suggested; instead, they transformed their art from Hispanophone to the evocation of specific Latin American identities. They sought to reveal their respective cosmopolitan identities, the anguish of their societies and their artistic consciousness. With their creations, they sought the exploration of continuity and change in the new scientific era, that is, they sought the formulation of a new discourse. Arqueles Vela, Pablo Palacio, Martín Adán, and Roberto Arlt are certainly not the only innovators or precursors to the Latin American Boom novelists. Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges has long been cited as a precursor to Boom fiction (although he never wrote a novel), and more recently Chilean María Luisa Bombal (her two novels and short stories were published in the 1930s and early 1940s) has been hailed as another significant influence (Agosín 28). This study has attempted to show that the creative work of Vanguardia novelists, in their specific socio-historic situations, laid the groundwork for the narrative production that followed. It also demonstrates that Latin American writers of this era were as revolutionary in their ideas as European and U.S. writers of the same era, while also seeking to express their American (continental) experience. The novels cited herein provide a foundation for rereading other novels of this period, often deemed only fragments or experiments by critics. With the close of the twentieth century, there is a need to examine why critics and novelists cite the Boom as the first flowering of a Latin American new novel. We can repair that mistake by reevaluating early twentieth century Latin American novels, and making comparisons of these with works by U.S. American and European novelists and poets of the similar Modernist period.

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