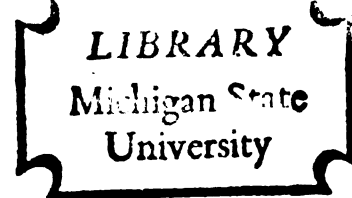


THE NOVELISTIC EVOLUTION OF
ALFREDO PAREJA DIEZCANSECO

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
KARL H. HEISE
1967

THESIS



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THE NOVELISTIC EVOLUTION OF
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By

Karl H. Heise

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Romance Languages

1967

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8/4/67

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To Dr. Carlos M. Terán

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction: THE MAN, THE EPOCH, AND THE RESULT . .	iii
Chapter I: THE EARLY EFFORTS AND ARTISTIC ADOLESCENCE	1
LAS CASA DE LOS LOCOS	1
LA SEÑORITA ECUADOR	3
RÍO ARRIBA	8
Chapter II: NOVELISTIC COMING OF AGE-- THE MARITIME CHOLO	15
EL MUELLE	17
LA BELDACA	29
Chapter III: THE URBAN ZAMBA--BALDOMERA	44
Chapter IV: THE TRAGI-COMEDY OF AN IDEALIST-- DON BALÓN DE BABA	61
Chapter V: BEHIND THE BARS AND INTO THE MIND-- HOMBRES SIN TIEMPO	80
Chapter VI: THE BALANCED NOVEL--LAS TRES RATAS . .	91
Chapter VII: A BOLD EFFORT--LOS NUEVOS AÑOS	108
LA ADVERTENCIA	112
EL AIRE Y LOS RECUERDOS	123
LOS PODERES OMNÍMODOS	129
Bibliography	139

INTRODUCTION

THE MAN, THE EPOCH, AND THE RESULT

In order to undertake a truly meaningful study of an artist's work it is first necessary to arrive at some understanding not only of the artist as a man, but also of the social and cultural epoch of which he is a product. Once that understanding is achieved, it is then possible to comprehend at least to a limited extent the manner in which that social and cultural environment surrounding the artist nurtured the germ of his early creative inclination, in such a way that it would later flourish into a sensitive and mature expression of his talent. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco is indeed an artist. As we shall observe, his novelistic trajectory is one of constant improvement and maturation based upon past experience significant to his formation as a man as well as an artist--a process not of revolution, but of evolution.

Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on October 12, 1908, of an Ecuadorian father (Fernando) and a Peruvian mother (Amalia). All of his adolescent years were spent in that city, and its atmosphere of the tropics, of the river Guayas, of the Ecuadorian coast, and of its toiling inhabitants left an influence on the young man so deep that he would never cease to feel its effect. His early novels all have as their principal settings the city of Guayaquil and its surrounding rural and coastal areas; his later novels may show more of Quito than they do of Guayaquil, but the port city is always reflected through the characters in the works.

Although a youth of aristocratic bearing and ancestry, Alfredo found it necessary to face the harsher side of life at a rather early age. When he was only 11 his father died, and the boy was only able to finish primary school. By the time he was 13 he was already making his own way in life as a salesman for a German businessman. In spite of these early setbacks, young Alfredo "... without the help of a teacher ... went through the high school curriculum and enrolled in the university faculty of law and social sciences."¹ It has been said of Pareja's education that "La suya es el tipo clásico de la formación cultural autodidáctica."² It is not an entirely unlikely conjecture that the fusion of his aristocratic breeding, the experience of earning his own living while still young (thereby coming into direct contact with members of all the social classes), and the sensitive nature of his acutely critical character enabled him to observe the social conditions of the working and middle classes with the air of sincere identification tempered with objective detachment that has come to be characteristic of his work. As Kessel Schwartz so aptly points out:

"Pareja has demonstrated that he would call ethical sympathies in his work, but he has insisted that he does not wish to use his art as an instrument of propaganda. He desired, he said, only to show the realities which cried for justice, as he denounced the corrupt and unjust. Pareja has denied being a left winger, but his best novels have a socialistic goal. Unlike most of the contemporary Ecuadorians, however, emotional considerations do not destroy his objectivity in some of his portrayals of the proletariat."³

1. Lilo Linke, "The People's Chronicler," Américas, Vol. 8, No. 11 (Nov., 1956), p. 8.

2. Quién es Quién en Venezuela, Panamá, Ecuador, Colombia, p. 479.

3. Kessel Schwartz, "Alfredo Pareja y Diez Canseco, Social Novelist," Hispania, Vol. 42 (1959), p. 220.

Our novelist's early and genuine concern for the less privileged members of his society is coupled and paralleled with a keen interest in politics and in history. After a relatively brief participation in politics during his years of early manhood he has since confined his interest to the passive. Harry Kantor, quotes him as saying that "the intellectual should be a witness, not an active participant in politics, except in times of acute crisis,"⁴ and on at least one occasion he has added, "Everyone knows how Thomas Mann stood up for his convictions when Hitler came to power. But in the ordinary course of events, the writer's task is too demanding to permit ties with a political party. Art and literature admit no amateurs. And in his own way the writer makes his contribution to the course of progress."⁵ However, his interest in history has never been subject to the same restrictions. Since his student days when he would migrate from Guayaquil to the less extreme climate of Quito during the school vacations, and became influenced by that city's preservation of the past and of tradition, Pareja has maintained a sense of viewing the world in historical perspective. Not only his works of fiction and of history, but also his works of literary criticism and his essays betray him as being an historian as well as a writer of fiction. This dualism of the novelist-historian appears throughout his work. At times his treatment of history and its personalities is done with novelesque vigor, as is plainly

4. Harry Kantor, "Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco," La América Latina de Hoy (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1961), p. 53.

5. Linke, p. 10.

seen in his "biografía novelada" of the life of Eloy Alfaro, La Hoguera Bárbara, and at other times his works of fiction are pregnant with a feeling for and an awareness of history, as is so evident in his last series of novels, Los Nuevos Años.

Pareja's interest in politics was already reflected in his first youthful attempt at a novel, La Casa de los Locos, which was printed when he was 21 years of age. Lilo Linke points out that "Although the book was immature, two of the author's tendencies were already apparent in its pages: his passion for politics and his keen but detached observation of the world around him."⁶ Indeed, the book was so politically oriented that it never did enjoy a public scanning, due to making enemies in influential circles.

His second novel, La Señorita Ecuador, was published when the author was only a year older. This novel, which Kessel Schwartz correctly calls "a mixture of fantasy and realism" and says "exhibits little artistic preoccupation"⁷ is a highly idealized biography of a proletarian lovely who manages to win an important beauty contest of the day in spite of the aristocratic opposition personified by the other contestants.

Up to this point, Alfredo Pareja had not left Ecuador. While still only twenty-two, however, he managed to find passage to New York aboard an oil tanker. As Lilo Linke points out in her excellently written article, the experience was not the most enjoyable

6. Linke, p. 8.

7. Schwartz, p. 221.

for our author.⁸ Due to the oncoming depression work was becoming ever scarcer, especially for a non-English speaking person. Nonetheless, the ambitious young man was able to find enough employment to maintain some level of subsistence. Rather in keeping with his democratic character, Pareja performed tasks ranging from those of a somewhat menial nature, as a busboy in a cafeteria, to those offering a certain amount of prestige as a Spanish teacher at Berlitz. At one point he even earned some money writing a short story for a Spanish-language newspaper. The merits of that story are perhaps best described by Pareja himself, whom Linke quotes as saying:

"They accepted my story and paid me fifty dollars on condition that they might cut and change it as they saw fit--and that I would never come back for another assignment."⁹

"An insignificant piece about a drunkard that he remembers only vaguely,"¹⁰ that story has long disappeared into what the author might consider a welcome oblivion, and we were unable to read it for ourselves.

Pareja's stay in New York was only of a year's duration, but the experience serves as a definite landmark in the maturation process of the novelist as well as of the man. Upon his return to Guayaquil the young man attacked life in a no-nonsense manner. He took employment as the representative of a pharmaceutical firm,

8. Linke, loc. cit.

9. Linke, p. 8.

10. Linke, loc. cit.

and his days were spent in devotion to his new successful occupation. His nights, however, were spent in devotion to writing, an occupation which he had always exercised successfully, at least in the spiritual, if not the material sense. Pareja's trip to New York was only the first in what was to be a long and constant series of journeys that parallel the increasing complexity of the social, professional, and literary aspects of his life. The momentum adopted by his life beginning with that trip to the United States has continued to gain energy up to the very present, and that momentum is evident throughout the trajectory of his novels.

However, the first novel Pareja published after his return from the northern metropolis, Río arriba, although superior to his earlier attempts, is still somewhat lacking as a mature expression of the author's ability. Schwartz says of the novel that it "turns to Freud, sex and abnormal psychology, as Pareja indulges in a long series of philosophical discussions."¹¹ In a less flattering and much quoted comment Arturo Torres-Río once said of Pareja that he is "hasta su novela Río arriba (1931), un escritor superficial en quien el supra-realismo se limita todavía al florecimiento del disparate."¹² As we shall observe later, Río arriba does possess many of the vices of the author's earlier endeavors, but at the same time it is a sort of breeding ground for the virtues which were to come later. Río arriba, in the

11. Schwartz, p. 221.

12. Arturo Torres-Río, "La Novela de Tema Indígena en el Ecuador," La Novela en la América Hispana (Berkeley: U. of Calif. Press, 1941), p. 235.

trajectory of his novels, like his first trip to New York, in the trajectory of his life, represents a landmark. It is the point at which Pareja's novelistic work gains that momentum of ever increasing maturity and perfection which has not ceased up to his very latest writings.

Two years after the appearance of Río arriba Pareja published El Muelle. The critics gave this novel virtual "rave" reviews, and from then on Alfredo Pareja never had to bear the cost of his own publications. Prestigious names such as Ercilla of Chile and Losada of Argentina grace his list of backers. In the same commentary cited earlier Torres-Ríoaseco further says:

"... En Muelle (1933), novela de ambiente yanqui y ecuatoriano, se hace macizo, intenso; se preocupa de problemas sociales y económicos con un sentido revolucionario y en estilo ya más depurado y una fuerza de observación más real."¹³

In El Muelle we see concrete evidence of the effect of his stay in New York, since Pareja uses that city as the setting for part of the novel's action. In the succeeding years his never ending cosmopolitan experiences shall be reflected in eight more novels, each one the equal, if not the superior, of the one preceeding it. These cosmopolitan experiences are more evident in terms of adding to the artistic maturity of the novels than they are in terms of offering geographic variety to the settings, since with rare exception the action of all of Pareja's novels transpires right in Ecuador.

As pointed out earlier, Alfredo Pareja's novelistic trajectory is one of evolution and refinement by virtue of experience. The

13. Torres-Ríoaseco, p. 235.

variety and the amount of his experiences in life after his first stay in New York assume near-monumental proportions. The following is only a partial list of the events in his life and the occupations he has performed which form the principal landmarks in his total life experience, and therefore have some bearing--be it an active or a passive one--on the maturation process of his novels:

- 1926-30 Student at the University of Guayaquil, Faculty of Law, Political and Social Sciences.
- 1932-33 Professor of History and Literature, Colegio Nacional Vicente Rocafuerte, Guayaquil.
- 1934 Marriage to Mercedes Cucalón.
- 1935-36 Inspector General of Secondary Education, Ministry of Education, Ecuador.
- 1936-38 Persecuted under the dictatorship of Federico Páez and exiled to Chile, after first being jailed. Lived for a year in Chile working for the Ercilla Publishing Company, then travelled to Bolivia he was the first exiled Ecuadorian of the epoch.
- 1938 Returned to Ecuador, and became a Deputy to the National Constitutional Assembly. Dr. Aurelio Mosquera Narváez dissolved the assembly, and Pareja was taken to the "García Moreno" penitentiary. He was in jail for thirty days.
- 1944 Chargé d'Affairs, Ecuadorian Embassy in Mexico.
- 1945-47 Representative of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency in Mexico, Central America, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.
- 1952-53 Member of the Consejo Nacional de Economía, Quito.
- 1948-61 Member of the Board of Directors, Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana.
- 1953-61 Member of the Board of Directors, Banco Central del Ecuador.
- 1951-53 Editor of a daily newspaper, El Sol, of Quito.
- 1960 Member of the Central Campaign Committee of Galo Plaza for President of Ecuador.
- 1953-61 Professor of History and Political Philosophy, Central University of Ecuador, Quito.
- 1961-62 Professor of History and Political Theory, Institute of Political Education, San José, Costa Rica. Also acted as Director of Studies, a position which would correspond to a Dean of Academic Affairs.

- 1962-65 Professor of History and Political Science at the University of Florida.
1965- Professor of Government at the University of Miami, Florida.*

If Alfredo Pareja had never done anything other than the above, his life would have to be considered a full one by any standards. Nonetheless, he always managed to find time to write. If we ignore the numerous articles that he has published in the United States, Latin America, and Europe, and only concern ourselves with his principle publications we would find listed among his non-fiction works two "biografías noveladas," one on Eloy Alfaro, and the other on Miguel de Santiago, the well-known painter from colonial Quito; a complete History of Ecuador; a critical treatment of Thomas Mann; and essays on art, painting, and the struggle for democracy in Ecuador. Discounting his two short stories referred to by Linke, between 1929 and the present he has published no less than twelve novels:

La casa de los locos, Guayaquil, 1929.
La Señorita Ecuador, Guayaquil, 1930.
Río arriba, Guayaquil, 1931.

* Other than the biographical material furnished by Alfredo Pareja himself and the information drawn from Linke's article, the following sources were consulted:

Ronald Hilton, Who's Who In Latin America, Part LL1 (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1951), pp. 103-4.

Quién es Quién en Venezuela, Panamá, Ecuador, Colombia (Bogotá: 1952), p. 479.

Eugene Schuttner, Vida y Obras de Autores Ecuatorianos (La Habana: Editorial "Alfa", 1943). pp. 33-35.

World Biography, Vol. 2 (New York: Inst. for Research in Biography, 1948), p. 3644.

El muelle, Quito, 1933.
La Beldaca, Santiago, Chile, 1935.
Baldomera, Santiago, Chile, 1938.
Don Balon de Baba, Buenos Aires, 1939.
Hombres sin tiempo, Buenos Aires, 1941.
Las tres ratas, Buenos Aires, 1944.
La advertencia, Buenos Aires, 1956.
El aire y los recuerdos, Buenos Aires, 1958.
Los poderes omnímodos, Buenos Aires, 1964.

Regardless of whatever critical evaluation we may give to Pareja's novelistic production, the mere fact that so many of his novels have been re-edited and that some of them have been honored with translations indicates that his work is worthy of study. When we consider the chronological appearance of his novels, and then consider the dates of the main events in his life, it is difficult not to ask ourselves how these two phenomena correlate. Certainly, there is a correlation. However, the nature of that correlation is not one of action and reaction, but one of cause and effect. In other words, the events in Alfredo Pareja's life are not necessarily re-told "blow by blow" through the pages in his novels. There is no doubt that some biographical material of himself does appear occasionally in his work, but the effect of his varied and hard-earned experience on his novels has manifested itself in a somewhat different light. As we review Pareja's novels we shall see that they are a product of a talented, sensitive, and critically observant character that tends to view all of life's phenomena in an ethical and an historical perspective. The combination of the nature of his character and of the variety and uniqueness of his experiences has caused Pareja to constantly re-examine his values, even to revise them if necessary.

This unceasing process of change within the novelist has been reflected in his work, thus giving us a novel with an evolutionary trajectory.

The epoch during which he was born is significant to the overall picture of our author as being a true man of the century. 1908 was early enough so that he could be fully aware of the First World War and its nearly universal effect. By the time he was a young man he witnessed two major social and political upheavals in his country (1925 and 1932), felt the rumblings of the political turmoil in Europe and North America, had first-hand acquaintance with the Great Depression of the United States, and observed the coming of World War II. At the same time that he was viewing these events of rather transcendental importance, however, he was also painfully aware of the social problems relative only to Ecuador and similar parts of Latin America. At first material for his novels was drawn primarily from the latter source, but as he matured he was able to tie both sources together more and more, until in his last novels there is a happy marriage between the regional and the universal perspectives.

During those dramatically important years of the thirties Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco had already budded into a full-fledged novelist. It was also during those same years that Ecuador produced at least 16 other important novelists, who were divided into three principal groups according to their geographical location: "el grupo de Quito," or "de la sierra," "el grupo del Austro;"* and "el grupo

*According to Jorge Icaza (below), the "Grupo de Quito" consisted of Fernando Chaves, Humberto Salvador, Jorge Fernández, Enrique Terán, and himself, while Pablo Palacio, Ángel F. Rojas, G. Humberto Mata, and Alfonso Cuesta y Cuesta form the "Grupo del "Austro."

de Guayaquil, " or "de la costa." Alfredo Pareja, along with Enrique Gil Gilbert, Demetrio Aguilera Malta, Joaquín Gallegos Lara, and José de la Cuadra formed the "Grupo de Guayaquil," which has been quoted as proclaiming, "Somos como los cinco dedos de una mano para golpear en la conciencia nacional."¹⁴

Although these three groups of writers worked independently of each other, it is curious to note that for the most part they were all preoccupied with social problems. While those in the "Grupo del Austro" concerned themselves principally with the cholo, those in Quito brought the indian into a grim spotlight, and those in Guayaquil used the montubio** for their focal point. Jorge Icaza says of the latter group that they "subrayaron lo fecundo y trágico de su manigua tropical, subrayaron así mismo, junto al duro trabajo del montubio, su hambre, su dolor, su superstición, su lujuria."¹⁵ The other groups did much the same with the indian and the cholo.

It is difficult to speculate as to exactly why these young writers so frequently chose such similar subject matter and method of expression. Perhaps it was due to a universal and simultaneous awareness on the part of these new intellectuals of the social anguish

** A cholo is principally a mestizo, but the term is frequently applied to any member of the lower classes; a montubio is a member of the lower classes who lives along the hilly Ecuadorean coastal sections.

14. Jorge Icaza, "Relato, Espíritu Unificador en la Generación del Año 30," Letras del Ecuador, No. 129 (1965), p. 10.

15. Jorge Icaza, p. 10.

long suffered by their homeland--a spontaneous intellectual revolution of sorts--, or perhaps it was due to mere chance. Influences from abroad reaching all of them at about the same time certainly may have also played some part in the movement. The most likely conjecture is that a combination of these and other phenomena acted as the catalyst for the writers' production. Regardless of the reasons, one fact remains firm: the turbulent years of the Thirties produced an entire generation of novelists and short-story writers in Ecuador who served to stimulate the letters of their country in such a way that it nearly re-created the national literature. In effect, the narrative writings of these young artists gave them a spiritual unity stronger than any physical or geographical proximity. Jorge Icaza refers to their writings as "obras todas...en las cuales, a pesar de sus diferencias regionales, latía un fondo unificador, un espíritu de emoción propia que era a la vez el espíritu del continente hispanoamericano."¹⁶ In his penetrating article on this literary phenomenon Icaza further states:

"Parece imposible que se pueda hablar de expresion unificada o de un solo espíritu en un país como el nuestro, dividido hacia lo largo de su geografía, hacia lo profundo de su inconformidad íntima, hacia lo alto de su política regionalista. No obstante, fue la literatura--especialmente el relato en lo que se refiere a novela y a cuento--, la que, adelantándose a la sociología, a la filosofía, al ensayo, advirtió con claridad meridiana--claridad que no quisieron o no pudieron ver los críticos del país--la posibilidad y la existencia de un contorno y de un espíritu definitivos. En esas obras...el contenido emocional era más transcendente y sincero que cualquier experiencia

16. Jorge Icaza, p. 10.

estética llegada de Occidente. Era más elemental, más nuestro--a pesar de su pobreza de recursos técnicos, a pesar de su ingenuidad primitiva, a pesar de su precipitación--."17

It would appear that Mr. Icaza is correct when referring to "pobreza de recursos técnicos," "ingenuidad primitiva," and "precipitación." True, many of the writers of that period were somewhat lacking in the artistic finesse that we came to know in the modernist school which preceeded their movement. These Ecuadorian writers of the Thirties, not unlike many of their contemporaries in Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico, were interested in a literature of pragmatism, rather than escapism. For the most part theirs was a literature born of urgent necessity, of indignation, and of anger. They were little concerned with a nostalgic colonial past, with "noble savages," with distant princesses in ivory towers, or with the gentle eroticism evoked by a woodland nymph. Their world was one of brutal landholders exploiting their underlings in a state of neo-feudalism, of indians laden with disease, overwork, short mortality, and the complete absence of nobility, of no ideal more important than the next meal, and of sensualism born of desperation and resembling the conduct of beasts. When these novelists of the Thirties put their cries of horror in the form of prose fiction they made a shocking impact on the literary world from Moscow to New York. It must be admitted that the novelists of that generation at times emphasized the sordid aspects of their society to such an extent that the final product had little more resemblance to reality than did the modernists'

17. Icaza, pp. 10-11.

excursions into fantasy and exoticism. As Enrique Anderson Imbert points out:

"lenguaje crudo, exageración de lo sombrío y lo sórdido, valentía en la exhibición de vergüenzas nacionales, sinceridad en el propósito combativo, dan a esta literatura más valor moral que artístico."¹⁸

Arturo Torres-Río seco is of much the same opinion as the critic from Argentina:

"... el tema indígena ha sido casi completamente acaparado por un grupo de novelistas militantes que se han dedicado a exponer los despiadados aspectos de la esclavitud india--generalmente más con justa indignación que con destreza literaria--. Estos jóvenes escritores, ecuatorianos en su mayoría, muestran un categórico menosprecio por la gramática, por el estilo, por la sintaxis y hasta por el sentido común. ... Mezclan el socialismo a la psicopatología, a tal punto que algunos de sus personajes nativos parecen ser casos freudianos... Sin embargo, sus libros tienen el mérito incuestionable de mostrar un estado de cosas espantoso y real..."¹⁹

As we may observe from the above commentaries, both of these eminent critics are in agreement that the socially-oriented literature of the Thirties owes its value much more to content than it does to form. Indeed, there may well be certain men of erudition who would even deny that such writings even merit the title of "literature" because of their so frequent lack of delicacy. Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that the generation of which Alfredo Pareja was a part was composed of young men, in what was in reality a very young country. They were only just creating a national identification and individuality, and as Pareja himself

18. Enrique Anderson Imbert, Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana (México: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1961), p. 253.

19. Arturo Torres-Río seco, Nueva historia de la gran literatura iberoamericana (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1961), p. 191.

points out through a character in one of his later novels, "Nuestra novela de hoy es una formidable novela, aunque recién nacida. Y es de suponer que mejorará. Porque un puñado de muchachos no puede hacer más en el primer momento. ¡Experiencia, sagrada experiencia!"²⁰ Ecuador, like all of her sister nations in this hemisphere, does not possess the ten centuries or more of indigenous literary traditions that the European nations possess. With the exception of an occasional effort during the romantic and the naturalistic movements, the first genuine appearance of an entire literary movement completely indigenous to Ecuador and only applicable to Latin America did not arrive until the Thirties, with Alfredo Pareja and his contemporaries. Experience has effected a change not only in Alfredo Pareja, but also in many of the other members of his generation. If we could follow the novelistic trajectory of all of these authors we would find that in many of them the fury and the militancy of youth has given way to the patience and the measure of age and experience.

Nevertheless, it is still the work done during and just after the Thirties that has left the greatest impact on the literary world. Of the three groups of writers appearing in Ecuador during the Thirties the one from Guayaquil was the most prolific. As stated by Lilo Linke, "Of the seventy works of fiction that Angel F. Rojas lists in La Novela Ecuatoriana as published between 1930 and 1944, twenty-one were written by members of the Guayaquil Group."²¹

20. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, El aire y los recuerdos (Buenos Aires: Ed. Losada, 1959), p. 35.

21. Lilo Linke, p. 8.

Of all of the members not only of that group, but of the entire generation, Fernando Alegría believes that:

"Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco (1908), es, tal vez, quien más cerca ha llegado en el Ecuador a un ideal de novela en que los fundamentos sociales no dañen la expresión literaria ni la limiten en marcos exageradamente locales. Pareja posee un amplio dominio del lenguaje; su prosa es gráfica, impulsada a veces por un impresionismo de buena ley que no le hace perder la sobria cualidad de su sentido lírico. Su sensibilidad y perspicacia le permiten calar hondo en sus personajes, dando especial relieve a las figuras femeninas sin perder su equilibrio básico que es la característica de su arte realista."²²

We may infer from the above commentary that Alfredo Pareja is the most enduring novelist of his generation. His work is the most lasting because it is the product of the most thorough evolutionary process. The experience gained through every day of his life is always reflected to a greater or a lesser degree in his next novel. It is also certain that he benefited from his close association with the other members of the "Grupo de Guayaquil," with whom he was united not only by mutual intellectual interest, but also by the bonds of friendship. "Frequently the group met in Alfredo Pareja's apartment...the young men would argue heatedly until the cries of the breadsellers announced the dawn. The talk focused on literature from the four corners of the world--the great literature of the day, with passionate debates about values and trends--and on their own projects."²³

Thus far we have had a brief glimpse of the social, intellectual, and artistic milieu of which Alfredo Pareja

22. Fernando Alegría, Historia de la novela hispanoamericana (México: Eds. de Andrea, 1965), pp. 265-66.

23. Lilo Linke, p. 8.

Diezcanseco is a product. We have seen that his novels are the result of a sensitive personality which developed during years of great world, hemispherical, and national stress; of a constant association with contemporaries who were members of the intellectual vanguard of their society; of an artistic alignment with elements both pragmatic and idealistic; and of a continuous process of maturation, evolution, and re-examination of values.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY EFFORTS AND ARTISTIC ADOLESCENCE

It is not an uncommon phenomenon among Spanish-American novelists that they begin their literary careers with a collection of short stories, or perhaps a book of poetry, before entering the scope of the novel. Indeed, it is worthy of note when a novelist appears who actually began his production with a novel, as is the case with Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco. As Edmundo Ribadaneira notes, "lo que más llama la atención es su fijación vocacional, pues se radica en la novela sin ninguna transición, caso sin duda notable entre nosotros."²⁴

As suggested earlier, however, Alfredo Pareja's first novels, La casa de los locos, La Señorita Ecuador, and even Río arriba hardly possess the artistic quality and maturity enjoyed by his later works. Benjamín Carrión believes that La casa de los locos "ocupa el lugar del libro de poemas de todo joven letrado suramericano."²⁵ The next two novels must be included in the same category; although they may well be the evolutionary superiors of the first one, they still must be classified as fledgling efforts.

La Casa de los Locos is long out of print, and we were unable to obtain a copy for this study. Nonetheless, Benjamín Carrión says

24. Edmundo Ribadeneira M., La Moderna Novela Ecuatoriana (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1958), p. 75.

25. Benjamín Carrión, El Nuevo Relato Ecuatoriano (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1950), p. 174.

of it that it is an "obrilla terriblemente polémica, combativa, como pedrada en vitrina,"²⁶ and in his introduction to La Señorita Ecuador Adolfo H. Simmonds states:

"He dicho que Pareja es autor de otra novela: 'La casa de los locos.' Causará sorpresa esta noticia. ¿Donde está esa obra, que no se conoce? Pues, está guardada en los cajones en los que el impresor entregó la edición. Nadie la ha comprado, nadie la ha leído. Era una novela de clave, en la que se lastimaba a mucha gente. Los ofendidos hicieron una conspiración de silencio al rededor de la obra. Y ésta, claro está, no pudo circular. Sin embargo, ... es una producción de extraordinario mérito. Un corte original, un estilo nuevo, un lenguaje sobrio y, entre líneas, todo el espíritu del siglo. Esta novela, que enfoca un asunto intrascendente y local, en cuya trama quedan muchos hilos sueltos, escrita sin el menor cuidado artístico, es ... el más valioso ensayo de novela moderna hecho en el Ecuador."²⁷

It would appear that the above critic is being excessively kind to his friend, the young author, when he states that the latter's very first attempt at a novel is the most worthy effort to date at achieving a modern novel in Ecuador. We must bear in mind, however, that the novel dealing with contemporary themes in Ecuador did not come into existence until Alfredo Pareja and his young intellectual contemporaries began the impetus during those early years in Guayaquil. Pareja's first effort may have been a frail one, but it was an effort.

Surely, we would no more judge the author solely on the basis of his first novel than we would judge man on the basis of the

26. B. Carrión, loc. cit.

27. Adolfo Simmonds, in Pareja y Diezcanseco, A., La Señorita Ecuador (Guayaquil: Ed. Jouvin "La Reforma," 1930), pp. III-IV.

monkey. In an evolutionary perspective, we must regard La Casa de los Locos and the two novels following it as mere seedlings-- although they may contain all of the necessary elements for the development of what may someday have the strength of an Oak, they are still nothing more than seedlings.

In a commentary published in 1934 José de la Cuadra suggests that Pareja "resulta el más costeño entre los escritores mozos de Guayaquil ... adora la emoción del agua."²⁸ We see evidence of Pareja's consciousness of the water on the very first page of his second novel, La Señorita Ecuador:

"A las siete de la noche debía llegar la canoa de pieza con periódicos de Guayaquil. El río era correntoso y de muy difícil navegación."²⁹

As we noted in the introduction to our study, Pareja's native area has always occupied a place of keen interest for him. Not only does the geographical area hold his attention, but the inhabitants of that area along the Ecuadorian coast are also of eminent concern to him. In the opening pages of this early work we may witness the objective and sympathetic manner with which the young author already observed his toiling countrymen:

"Típico aspecto era el que presentaban los montuvios, unos con los musculosos y morenos bustos desnudos, otros con la simpática cotona de céfiro, abotonada hasta el cuello, y la inevitable espuela ajustada en los talones sudosos y cubiertos de una piel dura y amarilla, resultado de la falta de uso de calzado...."³⁰

28. José de la Cuadra, 12 Siluetas (Quito: Editorial América, 1934), p. 55.

29. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, La Señorita Ecuador (Guayaquil: Ed. Jouvin "La Reforma," 1930), p. 1.

30. Pareja, La Señorita Ecuador, p. 3.

Thus, within the first few pages of this very early novel by Pareja we already see two of the essential elements influential to his development--his sensitiveness towards his surroundings and his sympathy toward the lower classes. Nonetheless, the novel loses impact because of its rather inconsequential "rags to riches" (or poverty to fame) theme of a pretty proletarian girl winning a beauty contest against aristocratic competition. Because it was a "'frivolous' novel that he felt everyone would enjoy"³¹ and only contained a limited number of elements offensive to certain powers (in this case, the United States), the work enjoyed a greater public reading that did La Casa de los Locos. It was hardly an international best-seller, however, and for its very frivolity the novel lost in prestige among the author's peers. Adolfo Simmonds offers his candid opinion in his introduction to Pareja's novel:

"... se propuso hacer una obra para que todos la leyeran, y cosechar con ella baratos laureles. Esta produccion, de utilitarios fines, es 'La Senorita Ecuador'. ¡Pobre Pareja! Una prostitución como cualquiera otra.

La elección de Sarita Chacón le ofreció el tema ideal... No era posible encontrar un asunto más novedoso, sugestivo y populachero. Y se puso al trabajo, sin olvidar un instante su propósito de darle placer al público, de que se refocilara éste en sus páginas, de que ideas y palabras no se elevaran del medio nivel de comprensión común."³²

In spite of being "una prostitución como cualquiera otra,"

La Señorita Ecuador does contain elements demonstrating serious

31. Schwartz, p. 221

32. Simmonds, p. V.

thought, albeit thought at times extravagantly idealistic and betraying the author's youthful immaturity. Kessel Schwartz notes that:

"... Even here ... there appear serious themes, as he discusses the Montuvian in city and country and contrasts his agility and grace in his native environment with his torpor and stupidity in the city."³³

The montubio, however, does not offer the principal ammunition for the author's sentiments toward his land and its people in La Señorita Ecuador. We have perhaps our most accurate glimpse of Pareja's feelings through his feminine protagonist, Sarita Chacón. Sarita seems to represent a synthesis between the young writer's still romantic tendencies and his concern for the future of his country:

"La chiquilla tenía algo misterioso en su alma que la ligaba fuertemente con sus "cholos," con su tierra.....

No quería verla en forma de ciudades.

La huerta, la canoa, el machete, las corvas, el potrillo alegre, sus vaquitas, los cantos de amorfinos, todo aquello había llegado a convertirse, merced a una elaboración subconsciente, en partes integrantes de su personalidad psicológica.

¿Qué sabía ella de cuestiones de raza y de luchas de civilización y continentes?

No obstante, su fina perceptiva mental se lo gritaba arcanamente.

Era un grito de tierra, un amor ultradivino por sus cosas, por la madre naturaleza, por la generosidad espléndida de su trópico....."³⁴

Although he does it in a rather romantic, even naive manner, Pareja presents Sarita as a type of natural beauty silently crying to be recognized. She is the incarnation of the masses of industrious but backward montubios of her land, and she finally achieves

33. Schwartz, p. 221.

34. Pareja, La Señorita Ecuador, p. 14.

appreciation once her innate good qualities are allowed to come to light, as the author would suggest that the Ecuadorian masses she represents might also one day achieve their proper recognition and appreciation:

"Si triunfaba, sería un himno de gloria para esa región de su amada América que se llama Ecuador.

A América se la imaginaba como la amante para todos los que no eran profanos a sus ideales: una hermosa y fecunda mujer de caderas de ánforas y amplios pechos que invitaban al beso, a ese beso que haría enloquecer de furor y de lucha a los hijos de la Patria Grande.

Y su Ecuador era un trozo, un pedazo de carne, de esa mujer."³⁵

The above commentary is offered through the thoughts of the male protagonist, Juan, Sara's campaign manager. As the following fragment indicates, Juan is quite obviously the young Pareja:

"El porvenir de América, de su América india, le obsesionaba. Adorador ciego de José Vasconcelos, quería llegar a ser también un paladín de su raza. Pero, por desgracia, sin talento para ello y con malos versos por armas, no podría llegar jamás.

Desde muy joven sintió la inquietud de subir... Era entonces case niño. Escribir, defender al humilde, a su pueblo, a sus "cholos," eran sus más fuertes anhelos..... Un convencimiento profundo de su sangre le decía que él era como ellos: nacido entre los campos costeros enlazados por los encajes purísimos de sus mares, entre el pescador y el vaquero, entre huertas de cacao y selvas seculares de esplendor esmeralda.....

¡Cómo amaba a su tierra! Su tierra, su alma mejor dicho, constituía la ilusión y el cariño más sagrado de su vida."³⁶

In addition to being a moving and accurate self-portrait, the above paragraphs show open evidence of the mighty influence

35. Pareja, La Señorita Ecuador, p. 57.

36. Pareja, La Señorita Ecuador, p. 18.

"El mestizaje grandioso, único en la historia, pero imperfecto que entre españoles e indios--dos razas etnicamente opuestas-- se efectuara, completaría al fin con una ola de inmigración total.

The influence of José Vasconcelos on the young Pareja is indisputable, but there appears to be an additional influence, although not so blatant, of another great Spanish-American thinker and essayist, the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó. We have no concrete evidence in the novel that Rodó had exercised a direct influence on Alfredo Pareja, but at times elements appear which are indicative of at least a spiritual affinity with the masterful author of Ariel. The following paragraph, critical of the United States and its alleged decadence of esthetic values, might point out a link between the theories of the Mexican and the Uruguayan:

The attitudes expressed here which are so critical of the United States are filled with the idealism of the vanguard of the

38. Pareja, " " ", p. 43.

Latin-American youth of the first decades of the century, an idealism which was molded to a great extent by Vasconcelos and Rodó. Nonetheless, in Pareja's case it is an inexperienced and still untravelled youth, who had not yet made that first important trip to New York. The criticism of the United States that he voices here was probably so similar to that voiced by his contemporaries that it may well have had the ring of a cliché. As we shall observe, Pareja's later novels offer a considerably more objective and constructive form of criticism.

A detailed account of the action of this little novel would hardly be worth our while here, for La Señorita Ecuador is of little value to us other than as an instrument with which we may gain insight into the author's development as a novelist. We may view the work as representative of Pareja's artistic childhood. Nonetheless, in the words of Adolfo Simmonds:

"Alfredo Pareja y Diez-Canseco tiene madera de novelista. Su fácil concepción, el movimiento preciso de sus personajes, la ensambladura de los elementos argumentales, y, sobre todo ello, el sentido de vida nueva, extravertida, captadora que alienta en su producción, ponen en sus manos un oro de porvenir. ¿Podrá mañana realizar la gestación perfecta? No somos capaces de hacer vaticinios. Pero sí podemos acreditar que él es una esperanza, una legítima esperanza."³⁹

Some critics would like to view Río Arriba as the landmark indicating the beginning of our author's novelistic maturity. Although it is clearly a notch or two on the arbitrary ladder of values above his first two novels, it is still several notches below El Muelle and

39. Simmonds, p. IX.

the novels following that one. Río Arriba is really a work of artistic adolescence. It represents the point at which Pareja's novelistic evolution reaches puberty, but not manhood.

Río Arriba is a much more intense novel than the one preceeding it. It was published after the author had returned from New York. In that it indicates a point of view less concerned with retelling the author's subjective impression and opinions than does La Señorita Ecuador, it is a more mature novel. We will have to wait two more years (until 1933), however, for the appearance of El Muelle before we actually see concrete evidence of the impact that Pareja's stay in New York had worked on him. Río Arriba is an early attempt at writing a psychological novel; the setting for the action is in the minds of the characters, and geographical location is of relative insignificance (in this case all of the action transpires in Guayaquil). There is little doubt, however, that Guayaquil and the river did lend impetus to Pareja's writing the novel. When José de la Cuadra discusses our author's early writings he explains Pareja's obsession with water and wanderlust in the following manner:

"Pareja...era casi un muchacho cuando se dió cuenta de que Guayaquil es tan chiquito que se recorre de punta a punta en media hora de tranvía, y el Guayas tan angosto que se cruza en media hora de vapor. Entonces, empezó a sentir el ahogo de los límites. A sentirse incómodo. Ganoso de rutas y horizontes.

Este río nuestro le indicaba la dirección.

Y Pareja la siguió: río abajo

Iba haciendo su aventura, saboreándola como la hacía.

Estuvo en Nueva York. ...

Allá, en las calles neoyorquinas...la vida no se dejaba vivir. Peleaba contra el hombre. Por lo general, ganaba la pelea. ...

La lucha se volvía infructuosa. ¿Por qué?
¿Para qué?

Sus anhelos profundos eran otros que habitar en la capitalidad mercantil del orbe. De haber perseverado Pareja en el combate cuerpo a cuerpo que libraba en Nueva York contra la vida, habría quizás conseguido el triunfo de no regresar, o sea, de enraizar en la tierra exótica.

Pero su ambición no se compadecía con eso.
Y emprendió la vuelta.

Cuando trepaba por el Guayas con rumbo a la ciudad natal, encontró el título de su próximo libro: 'Río Arriba'. Ya está. Se lo escribe. Se lo publica. Se lo vende."⁴⁰

De la Cuadra goes on to suggest that after publishing Río Arriba Pareja still had not quite found himself as a novelist. The preoccupation with the psychology of the abnormal, with sex, and with Freud so obvious in his third novel was not really his forté;* his final destination would entail a much broader view of the world, which would encompass both regional and universal elements in his novels.

If we remove the abundant philosophical discussions from the novel we are left with a plot that is quite simple: Bernardo Acuña, an extremely sensitive student, has a friend, Luis Barrezueta, who is neurotic and emotionally unstable:

"... mi amigo era un degenerado alcohólico, enfermo de melancolía progresiva, un inadaptado. El estigma hereditario habíase manifestado de repente, a causa

*Pareja's later novels do show a good deal of excellent psychological study of characters, but not done with roots among the Freudian psychologists and the writers of the naturalistic school, as is the case with Río Arriba.

40. De la Cuadra, pp. 57-59.

del crimen que Luis cometiera. Este caso de melancolía era complejo i digno de estudio: Luis, el más alegre, irónico, elocuente, festivo, saturado de una intensa robustez de vida, sufría un ataque de melancolía aguda, que era, después de todo, la cualidad diferencial de su carácter. Su anterior forma de vida pudo ser mui bien un período histérico o erotómano. Recordé que de mui joven padeció un reumatismo articular bastante fuerte, lleno de complicaciones cardiacas, localizadas en insuficiencia aórtica. Pasó esta enfermedad i luego volvió a ser el mismo de siempre: alegre, mui alegre. Mas ahora comenzaba el período de crisis. Mui pronto su dolencia iba a manifestarse en aguda depresión mental, caracterizándose una melancolía estupurosa."⁴¹

Pareja's description of Luis clearly shows the young novelist's concern with abnormal psychology and heredity. Less than one-fourth of the way through the novel we are already aware that Luis is predestined to a tragic end, which is a technique commonly employed by the naturalists.

Bernardo meets a girl, Carmela Nuñez, who turns out to be of no great importance to him. Carmela, however, has a cousin, Petra, to whom Bernardo introduces his friend. Luis and Petra fall violently and passionately in love. Once their love affair has passed the proverbial point of no return, Petra's mother, Doña Laura Villegas, agonizingly informs Luis that Petra is his half-sister:

"-- ¡Oh! ¡No! ¡Eso no! Usted no se casará nunca con élla! No se casará porque se lo voi a decir todo. Escuche, dijo con una voz temblorosa que amenazaba llanto.

--Pregunte usted a su padre por Laura Villegas. Si, él puede contárselo mejor que yo. Hace muchos anos. ¿Comprende usted? Ya él estaba casado... Lo conocí. Yo era mui pobre... Después... Comprende usted lo que pasó después?

41. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, Río Arriba (Guayaquil: Talleres Gráficos, 1931), p. 69.

-- ¡No, señora, no entiendo, no puedo entender!
 -- Algun tiempo después nació Petra."⁴²

By presenting a tragic situation for which the society at large is to a great extent responsible, Pareja touches on a theme of monumental importance to Latin America. As suggested by Kessel Schwartz, however:

"... Pareja discusses the problem of illegitimacy, but his theme, especially in the love between sister and brother, recalls Aves sin nido, and hardly resembles a contemporary problem. Pareja's idealism and love for justice triumph over his artistic talents here."⁴³

Nonetheless, what is of greatest concern to us at this point is not so much how well Pareja exploits a theme of hemispherical importance as is the mere fact that at the age of 22 (he finished the novel in July) he was aware of such problems. Although in an admittedly melodramatic manner, he does present a theme which could easily be paralleled in real life.

The novel ends with Luis committing suicide, Petra learning that she is pregnant and leaving the city, and Bernardo going insane at the loss of his friend and the inability to accept the tragedy of the situation. In the course of his insanity Bernardo does not wash, shave, or cut his fingernails for a month (a rather "stock" picture of a madman) and develops a love-hate ambivalence toward Petra, first wanting to make love to her and then desiring to kill her. By the end of the last chapter Bernardo is in a state of complete madness, travelling up the river in search of Petra, until unconsciousness

42. Pareja, Río Arriba, p. 139.

43. Schwartz, p. 221.

finally overcomes him and in an unlikely manner he dies:

"Después ya no sentí dolor. Lo único era una sensación enorme de ligereza, de abandono. Iba haciéndome cósmico. Tuve un momento de absoluta plenitud. Grande i múltiple, uno, uno. La belleza del cosmos entraba en los misterios de mi psiquis.

Sólo pude ver hacia adentro. Noté que me nacieron alas. Noté que algo mío hacía un esfuerzo por desatarse de otro algo.

El color negro se perdió. Pero no vino otro. No hubo colores. Dejé de sentir frío; dejé de tener sensaciones.

Me había quedado muerto, profundamente muerto."⁴⁴

We can plainly see that young Alfredo Pareja's interest in psychology at this point did not match his artistic ability. Nonetheless, Río Arriba does indicate a sincere attempt on the part of the young artist at delving into the human mind, understanding what he sees, and relaying his finding to the printed page. The diamond is there, but it is still in its rough and unpolished state.

Although not so indiscriminately as in La Señorita Ecuador, we do see the author's own subjective opinions expressed through the male protagonist of Río Arriba. The following thoughts of Bernardo show what the young Pareja might do if he were in command of world politics:

"...Yo...remediaría la crisis universal. Jalaría a Hoover las orejas por malcriado, le afeitaria los bigotes a Briand, le haría un cariñito a Mc Donald i metería en un calabozo a Mussolini i a Hittler, mancornados I desnudos, untándoles miel en el cuerpo para que se los comieran las hormigas. A Gómez de Venezuela no le permitiría hablar sino en quechua; a Ibáñez de Chile le obligaría a hablar,

44. Pareja, Río Arriba, pp. 289-90.

andar, comer, hacer sus necesidades sobre un caballo, sin poder desmontarse jamás; a Olaya Herrera lo dejaría en su puesto; i le prohibiría a Vasconcelos que se volviera a meter en política, fabricándole un palacio de cristal i de oro, con una tribuna hecha de piedras preciosas, desde la cual podría hablar a los americanos, i en cuya mansión se dedicaría al estudio, al trabajo intelectual. Haría que Gandhi triunfase, pero antes le pondría encima una corona de espinas i una cruz."⁴⁵

While the above paragraph gives evidence of Pareja's early awareness of history and world events, coupled with an idealistic sense of justice, it also indicates the major defect of this early novel--an overabundance of philosophical and political digressions. However, the combination of these elements, still youthfully subjective here, will gradually become refined in his novels until it reaches the stage of objectivity and intellectual sophistication that we find characteristic in his last novels, especially in the Los Nuevos Años series.

All in all, Río Arriba is not a "bad" novel. Nor is it a "good" novel. It is an unsophisticated novel, or as we affirmed earlier, it is a novel of artistic adolescence. While Alfredo Pareja's first two novels were completely subjective, regional, and combative, Río Arriba does reach toward the transcendental, albeit through a haze of ornamental rhetoric. The next two years, however, find our young author making the transition from the world of a university student to that of a teacher (1931-33). Those two years must have given our emerging novelist time for a good deal of reflection, for upon their completion Pareja wrote the novel that was to completely eclipse his earlier efforts, and in terms of popularity, many of his later ones--El Muelle.

45. Pareja, Río Arriba, pp. 189-90.

CHAPTER II

NOVELISTIC COMING OF AGE
THE MARITIME CHOLO

While in Alfredo Pareja's first relatively successful novel La Señorita Ecuador, we are clearly shown his interest in his cholos, the novel accomplishes little more than merely making us aware of that interest. The author's view of the cholo in that novel is for the most part a youthfully romantic one, and says relatively little of those aspects of his living conditions which are not on the picturesque side.

Although Río Arriba, appearing after Pareja's first trip to New York, does show more artistic maturity than is evident in La Señorita Ecuador, we still have no concrete indication as to whether the author's trip significantly increased his perspective of the world or whether the process of merely living for another year or so brought about the additional maturity in a natural manner. In Río Arriba the author is much concerned with problems of the mind perhaps the after-effect of a catharsis manifested by his leaving his homeland, struggling for a living in a not entirely friendly environment, then returning home somewhat disillusioned. There is little room in the novel rooted in abnormal psychology for a penetrating look at society and a defending of the rights of the downtrodden.

In the four years between the publication of Río Arriba (1931) El Muelle (1933), and La Beldaca (1935), however, Alfredo Pareja

Diezcanseco passes from novelistic adolescence to full manhood. Now we are clearly able to see the tremendous effect that Pareja's broadening of his horizons in New York had upon him. We now see not just an increase in maturity, but a maturity perhaps ahead of its normal chronological order and based upon eye-witness experience so dramatic that it must be expressed in a strong and crystal voice. No longer do we witness a mere youthfully nostalgic interest in the picturesque aspects of the cholo, but a sincere and conscientious concern for his sorry manner of living.

The nearly inaudible detonations produced by Alfredo Pareja's first novels were totally overshadowed by the literary explosion brought about by El Muelle. The critics received this novel with remarkable enthusiasm. Fernando Diez de Medina suggests that after he reviewed El Muelle "América ya tiene novelistas: Eustacio Rivera, Rómulo Gallegos, Ricardo Güiraldes, Pareja y Diez Canseco."⁴⁶ Benjamín Carrión affirms that if José Eustacio Rivera gave us the novel of the tropical forest, with its heat, dangers, and suffering indians, and diseases, Pareja "nos hace hoy la novela del trópico mestizo, del trópico litoral, espirante a mala vida urbana, con luz eléctrica, burdeles y periódicos."⁴⁷ Luis Alberto Sánchez feels that the novels immediately following El Muelle and La Beldaca are not of the esthetic quality of those

46. Fernando Diez de Medina, "Tres Libros de América--El Muelle," Atenea, XXVIII (1934), p. 38.

47. Benjamín Carrión, in Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, El Muelle (México: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1945), p. 7.

two,⁴⁸ and Angel F. Rojas refers to El Muelle as being "acaso su mejor novela."⁴⁹

Indeed, El Muelle's enthusiastic reception is not an unwarranted one. The author offers us a parallel between the poor man's lot in Guayaquil and in New York that holds our interest even today. He presents us with a view of characters in the ruling and in the working classes that is accurate, objective, and not tainted by rabid dogmatism, while he still accomplishes his goals of seeking social change. As stated by Kessel Schwartz:

"El Muelle...is the first novel in which without denying his social consciousness, he makes it an important element of rather than a substitute for his art."⁵⁰

By offering the settings for the novel in two urban centers which are greatly dissimilar (New York and Guayaquil), yet showing that the societies contained by them affect people in a like manner, Pareja approaches the universality which the Spanish American novel has been able to boast only sporadically. El Muelle may not be a novel of universal significance in the manner of the novels of Thomas Mann, but it certainly does have hemispheric meaning. The problems brought to light in this novel are applicable to nearly all of the Americas. The characters portrayed think and act in a fashion that is indigenous principally to that area between the Río Grande and Tierra del Fuego.

48. Luis Alberto Sánchez, Proceso y Contenido de la Novela Hispano-Americana(Madrid: Gredos, 1953), p. 267.

49. Angel F. Rojas, La Novela Ecuatoriana (Mexico: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1948), p. 194.

50. Schwartz, p. 221.

The story opens in New York. Here we find Juan Hidrovo, an adventurous, hard-working, but not especially intelligent Ecuadorian cholo. Juan is an appealing young man who carries the flavor of his land in his semblance:

"Juan Hidrovo no era un sujeto feo ni mucho menos. Buena estatura, las espaldas anchas y, aunque las manos estaban endurecidas por el trabajo, eran largas y bien formadas. El cabello le caía ensortijado sobre las orejas, y unas amplias entradas en la frente daban al rostro aspecto varonil y atrayente. Los ojos, negrísimos, y alba la dentadura. En su cara morena sobresalían los pómulos y la nariz aguileña. Su labio inferior, algo caído y grueso, decía de su temperamento sensual, y el otro, nervioso y delgado, era como una línea--expresión de voluntad--que se arrugaba en cuanto el enojo hacía brillar los ojos."⁵¹

Juan's physical appearance may make him a prototype of his race. His dark, handsome complexion, his aquiline nose, and generally masculine bearing are well in keeping with the portrait of the mestizo.

Juan is principally a sailor in the novel, but he also performs tasks ranging from working on the docks to gathering cacao in his homeland. It is while doing the latter that he meets María del Socorro Ibáñez, an attractive and simple girl from Guayaquil just barely reaching womanhood. As Juan may appear the model of an Ecuadorian coastal mestizo, María del Socorro is the picture of a chola:

"María del Socorro Ibáñez era una mujer bajita. María del Socorro era morena, pajiza la cara, lustroso y negro el cabello, con su peineta al comienzo de la trenza y su lacito blanco en la punta que se movía al andar de un lado a otro. No parecían muy grandes los

51. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, El Muelle (México: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1945), p. 34.

ojos: negros, sí, muy negros, y las pupilas dilatadas de tanto mirar el sol. Las ojeras sí que eran grandes, unas hermosas ojeras amoratadas. Los labios de María del Socorro no llamaban nunca la atención: gordezuelos, ni corcortos ni largos, no tan rojos y sin otra expresión que la expresión de todas las bocas. Lo que menos gustaba de ella, su nariz, se achataba aplastando a los lados las ventanas. Después de todo, no era una nariz muy fea.

En María del Socorro Ibáñez se admiraban tres cosas bonitas: las orejas diminutas, perfectas, las piernas y los pechos redondos."⁵²

The proud masculinity of Juan and the combined simplicity and sensuality of María del Socorro do seem representative of the Ecuadorian coastal mestizo, or for that matter, of practically any mestizo, and the hardships they endure do demand justice for their entire race. Nonetheless, neither Juan nor María are prototypes. In this first great novel of Pareja's he has managed to give his characters levels of significance that allows us to appreciate them not only as representatives of their race and their social class, but also as carefully drawn and believable human beings.

María del Socorro was an illegitimate child, and she never knew who her father was. Since her mother died when she was very young, she was raised by her Tía Jacinta. When María del Socorro grew old enough to work Tía Jacinta manages to get her employed where she herself works, in the upper class household of Doña Florencia. Although Doña Florencia at times pulls her hair, pinches, and cuffs María while shouting orders at her, Pareja does not paint the high born lady in an entirely unfavorable light, thus showing us his ever present objectivity. When Juan takes María del Socorro

52. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 41.

away from Doña Florencia's household, the lady shows genuine and sincere concern for María del Socorro's future, and offers her heartfelt good wishes.

Due to a lack of money and of knowledge of cutting red tape, Juan and María del Socorro never do officially marry. Their life is far too simple to worry about the social stigma of a common-law marriage, however, and their first days together are nearly idyllic. María del Socorro does not work and looks after their humble dwelling while Juan works and brings home the provisions quite regularly, with the exception of an occasional drinking bout with "the boys" on payday. They take long walks together, dream of a happy future, and seem literally to live on love. The author's construction of the young married couple is done in such a way that the story is by no means limited to Ecuador, and it may indeed be applied to simple people in love anywhere.

Suddenly, the couple's idyllic world becomes one of grim reality. A mysterious cacao blight ruins the crop, and Juan is left with all of his co-workers in the streets without work. Frustrated at his inability to earn a living, he quite understandably becomes irritable and is at times cross with María del Socorro. The girl bravely goes to work again, but the pittance she earns as a cook hardly suffices for the two of them. In desperation, Juan takes a position on a steamship which carries him first all along the coast of the Pacific down to Valparaíso, and finally leaves him in New York.

Under the impression that he would find a vertiable "land of milk and honey" in New York, Juan is sadly disillusioned. He has arrived just in time for the Great Depression. Even the occasional five-dollar bill he was sending María del Socorro from his earnings as a sailor must cease. Barely able to eke out an existence from an occasional bit of work that comes his way, he joins a group of Latin-American workers who stage a demonstration in front of City Hall to protest job discrimination against them, which results in their lack of the opportunity of earning a living. His good friend from Venezuela, Claudio Barrera, is brutally killed by the local police during the melée resulting from the demonstration.

Juan's final hope lies in "el Tío," a picturesque, pipe-smoking, seagoing, and discretely wealthy character. El Tío acts as the champion for the rights of the Latin-American workers, and is a key organizer in the abortive demonstration. El Tío's main source of income, however, comes from smuggling. Through him, Juan joins a small band of liquor smugglers and is able to earn a sizeable amount of money in one night. Nonetheless, el Tío is deported due to his role in the worker's demonstration, which was supported actively by the local communist party, and Juan has no recourse but to use his last dollars to buy his way into the crew of a ship heading for Ecuador. Life has been so difficult for him in New York that he forgets his original reasons for leaving his homeland.

While Juan is in New York, María del Socorro is enduring her own share of hardships. Her Tía Jacinta becomes ill, and the girl leaves her job to care for her, totally exhausting the savings

that she and Juan were building in order one day to open a small business. With her Tía Jacinta's improvement, María del Socorro finds work as a laundress for the Mariño family.

At this point the author introduces us to the third principal character of the novel, this time a prime representative of the upper classes, Angel Mariño. The son of a landholder, we see Angel as an ego-centered and somewhat sadistic youth:

"... cuando cumplió el niño los diez años, lo llevó a una de la haciendas con el objeto de hacerle tomar el gusto a las huertas. Pero el niño Angel se aburría en la hacienda y odiaba el cacao y el sol. Entreteníase, eso sí, riéndose de los peones, y palmoteaba con entusiasmo cuando su padre derribaba a alguno de un puñetazo o hacía flagelar a otro o meter a la barra al fulano que habíase descuidado en la vigilancia de los tendales de cacao o resultaba cómplice del hurto de un quintal de la preciosa pepa."⁵³

Although this caricature of an excessively indulged member of the upper class may not be entirely objective, Pareja does insert a wry note of humor that seems to soften the innate bestiality of the young Mariño, who almost seems to be a likeable little sadist.

Refusing to become the landholder that his father wanted him to be or the cosmopolitan diplomat of his mother's wishes, Angel finds his delight in contracting for all types of construction projects. By using inferior materials, not building strictly to specifications, and giving "kickbacks" to certain officials, even in municipal projects, such as a new dock for Guayaquil, he has been able to amass a considerable fortune.

53. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 132.

Always very indulgent of his appetites, when Angel meets María del Socorro he becomes fascinated by her physical attributes and appears at her door under the pretense of paying her for his laundry. With a candorous faith in human nature, María del Socorro only with slight misgivings allows him to enter. Mariño forces the trusting girl to commit adultery with him, and then leaves her a few sucres. From then on the girl becomes his steady plaything, rationalizing that Juan is probably enjoying other women in the United States. Mariño descends to bringing his business associates to María del Socorro, thus using her as a tool of his trade, and the young woman practically becomes a prostitute.

Upon Juan's return, however, Maria del Socorro returns to his side; much to Mariño's chagrin, she ceases all adulterous activity as soon as she learns that Juan is returning to her.

Life for the young couple is now no less difficult than it was before Juan became a sailor. Due to Angel's embitterment, María del Socorro loses her job with his family. Work is every bit as scarce in Ecuador now as it was earlier, and Juan is unable to provide a steady income. Through the urging of one of his friends, Pedro, Juan is strongly tempted to become a thief. Pedro offers Juan some convincing arguments for turning to robbery. Here we see the two of them talking after Pedro has exercised his skill in an inn run by a woman from the mountains:

--Le has hecho trampa a la serrana y te has robado un maduro.
 --¡Adiós! Las cosas no son de su dueño sino del que las necesita. Y con estos tiempos, hermano.
 --Pobre longa.
 --¡Qué pobre ni qué longa! Más pobres somos nosotros. La serrana hace plata con su puesto. Ella también mete uña cuando puede, pero conmigo se vara, porque crecí más rápido, aunque ella haya nacido antes que yo.
 --Mal hecho, Pedro. Yo no sé robar.
 --Hermano, si eso no es robar: se llama finanza. Fíjate en los del gobierno: puros financistas no más son, y nadie les dice nada. Tanto que te quejas, y tú llevaste la mejor parte."⁵⁴

A short time later Pedro further affirms:

--Miro Hidrovo --respondió Pedro, con el acento ahora rápido y enérgico--, dicen que robar es una falta, pero cuando se hace por necesidad... Todos roban, menos los pobres, que son los únicos que deberían robar. Así, yo no creo que sea malo. Nos meten miedo ¿verdad?"⁵⁵

Juan is unable to reconcile himself to a life of crime, however, and resolves to struggle until he finds steady employment. When Mariño begins construction on the new dock, Juan manages to become one of the laborers, and the outlook for him and María del Socorro appears to brighten. María has become pregnant, and the aspect of another mouth to feed while he is without work causes Juan to exclaim:

--¿Para que ha de mandar Dios los hijos si no tenemos nada?"⁵⁶

Not only does she become pregnant, but María del Socorro also contracts tuberculosis. She goes to a physician, and in a

54. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 175.

55. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 188.

56. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 215.

statement laden with irony he tells her the following:

"...Cúdate. No debes trabajar. Buena alimentación y reposo. Mucha carne, leche, huevos. Y un viajecito a la sierra."⁵⁷

Never in her entire life has María del Socorro been able to realize even one part of the Doctor's well-intentioned suggestions. Confident in his new job, however, Juan decides that the money he earns will be devoted to the well-being of his wife and child, and that María del Socorro will make her trip to the mountains. The very next day they meet on the dock in order to go shopping for some things for their coming child. When María del Socorro arrives at the dock she comes across Angel Mariño, who is inspecting the work. Upon realizing that her husband is working for him and still embittered over María's rejection of him, he has Juan fired on the spot. The novel ends on a pessimistic note, with María del Socorro wishing to do nothing but escape from the world which has become so excruciatingly intolerable:

"... sintió un misterioso deseo de fugarse, de huir de esa ciudad llena de maldiciones, de irse con su marido y con su hijo al campo. a vivir con los animales, arañando la tierra, comiéndose la fruta de los árboles y recogiendo el arroz de las vegas abandonadas en la noche... Fué como un golpe el recuerdo de su madre, que había venido del campo, de la tierra,... Sí, tomaría de la mano a Hidrovo y tendrían que correr y no regresar más, nunca más, nunca más..."⁵⁸

Thus we see that El Muelle is not only a social tragedy, but also a very human tragedy. The hardships suffered by Juan and María del Socorro are indeed due to the state of the society

57. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 219.

58. Pareja, El Muelle, p. 224.

in which they live, but we tend to pity them more as individuals who are victims of a cruel turn of events than as mere pawns in a capitalistic exploitation of the working classes. It is this very element of what we may loosely call "good taste" in the novel that makes Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco stand out so sharply from his contemporaries.

Neither Juan Hidrovo nor Marfa del Socorro have an educational or intellectual level that would permit them to discourse believably on Marxist dogma, and the author never allows them to do so. Nor do they stand as members of silent and suffering masses who show us the ugly squalor of their way of life in order to evoke our righteous indignation in their favor, as is often the case in the work of another well-known Ecuadorian author, Jorge Icaza. Alfredo Pareja champions the cause of the lower social strata represented by Juan and María del Socorro by artfully telling us their personal stories. Never does he sacrifice form for force; yet when we finish El Muelle the socialistic goals of the novel are discreetly obvious. The characters remain foremost in our minds not as instrumental "types," but as human beings who deserve and receive our sympathy. We would like to see their situation bettered not because they are members of an exploited class brought brutally into focus, but because they are good people whom we have come to know--we feel that they deserve a better chance in life. As so aptly stated by Lilo Linke:

"... Pareja feels that a forceful style does not require machismo,... Even his villains, such as the ironically named 'Angel' Mariño, remain human and credible."⁵⁹

It must be admitted, however, that the character of Angel Mariño does fit to a large extent the picture of the prototype upper-class villain of the Spanish-American novel of social change. Nonetheless, even Mariño is presented objectively. We see Angel more as an overgrown, self-indulgent child who gives poor treatment not only to his social inferiors but also to his family and his business associates.

In this novel Pareja touches on contemporary problems, such as the need for birth control (see note 56) and the reasons behind the growing urban crime rate (as shown through his treatment of Pedro, notes 54 and 55). José A. Portuondo feels that Pareja shows a contrast between the manner in which North and South American workers react against unjust treatment on the part of their superiors:

"...Pareja...ha realizado con 'El Muelle' una vigorosa denuncia de la explotación de los trabajadores...Y esto ...realizado con generoso sentido de universalidad.... La obra muestra, en logrado paralelo, los dos aspectos extremos de la explotación burguesa en...Nueva York, y en...Guayaquil. En la primera, el desempleo y el hambre no pueden achacarse a un nombre propio individual. Trituran las empresas, grandes personajes colectivos que se apoyan en la autoridad venal, el sistema mismo, en fin. En la ciudad iberoamericana, la autoridad sirve a los intereses de un empresario que aún no alcanza la categoría de los grandes explotadores capitalistas, punto de transición todavía entre el bodeguero y el gran señor de las finanzas. La solución es también distinta. En la gran ciudad capitalista los explotados reaccionan

59. Linke, p. 9.

organizándose, llevando a cabo acciones colectivas, actos de masas. En la ciudad pequeña de un estado semicolonial, el explotado se rebela haciéndose ladrón."⁶⁰

The greatest universality achieved by the novel lies not in the parallels drawn between two distinct urban centers, however, but in the human construction of the characters who struggle to live in those centers. Although it was written over thirty years ago, El Muelle still holds a great deal of interest for today's reader.

In El Muelle we see not only the acute awareness of his surroundings that was evident in his earlier novels, but also a very successful weaving of what he has experienced and the lesson it holds into the telling of a good story. The scenes in New York could not have been so vividly written had he himself not struggled for a living there; he had already been struggling for many years in Guayaquil. No longer do the author's own personality and opinions shine through the characters in his novels; now the characters have their own individualities, and whatever the author tells us through them really seems of their own origin. The haze of youthful romanticism and amateur psychology is forever lifted from the pages of his novels. As José de la Cuadra affirms:

"Pareja comienza a ser novelista con 'Río Arriba'. Con 'El Muelle' comienza a ser novelista al modo de hoy día."⁶¹

60. José A. Portuondo, "Una Novela Ejemplar," Letras de México (May 1, 1945), p. 68.

61. De la Cuadra, p. 61.

With the appearance of La Beldaca (1935) we see a reaffirmation of Pareja's ability to inter-weave the keen perception of his surroundings into the artful construction of a story and the masterful creation of characters. In this novel we also see definitive evidence of the author's awareness of and interest in history, and his talent for constructing the characters and the story of the novel within the framework of an historical perspective.

Although Kessel Schwartz believes that in La Beldaca "the characters lack the stature of those of El Muelle"⁶², we must admit that we are in disagreement with his affirmation. To the contrary, the two main characters of La Beldaca, Jesús Parrales and Armando Vélez, are given a careful construction beginning with childhood or youth and going into old age; we do not find the characters in El Muelle constructed that completely. While Jesús represents the lower classes, Armando is representative of society's upper strata. By creating this dualistic approach to the novel through two very completely drawn characters we not only enjoy a very objective view of their culture, but also one that peers down to the roots of where changes might and should be made in that ailing society. We are not suggesting, of course, that the characters of La Beldaca are more or less human or believable than those of El Muelle. They are merely more complete; by that virtue they are at least equal in stature to those of the latter novel. Edmundo Ribadaneira affirms that:

62. Schwartz, p. 222.

"... Alfredo Pareja no ama ni odia a sus personajes sino que los mira desde arriba. En "La Beldaca", Jesús Parrales, con su humanidad rústica y profundamente significativa, es tan simpático como Armando Vélez, explotador y truhán, mala hierba del jardín familiar, en contraste con Alfonso Veléz, el hombre bondadoso y respetable, para quien acumular fabulosas fortunas no constituye motivo de maldad ni lo diferencia en nada de sus semejantes desheredados."⁶³

We might say that La Beldaca has all of the virtues of El Muelle with the addition of a more sophisticated plot and a more acute historical awareness. We are by no means suggesting that history does not play an important part in El Muelle. The Great Depression (which also appears in La Beldaca) and the resulting world economic crisis in that novel are historical facts that do affect the destinies of the characters; on the other hand, the 1896 fire and entrance of Alfaro into Guayaquil affect the characters of La Beldaca in a way that is more in keeping with their society. These historical facts are part of the creation of twentieth century Ecuador, and the novel is primarily concerned with an Ecuadorian milieu.

La Beldaca raises its author several rungs on the ladder of literary prestige. It was the first novel for which he himself did not have to pay the cost of publication. The renowned house of Ercilla, of Santiago de Chile (this was the period of Pareja's political exile), honored the novel with its name. In addition, La Beldaca has been offered in a French edition (1949), a Polish

63. Ribadaneira, p. 82.

edition (1951), and a second edition in Spanish (1954).

As is the case in all of his later works, Pareja writes about life situations with which he has personally come into contact:

"... Alfredo Pareja knew both the people and the landscape. For a time, as paymaster of the Guayaquil-Salinas Railway, he had traveled every week to the terminus on the beach. Nothing had changed much since the turn of the century when the action of La Beldaca takes place."⁶⁴

As we saw it in El Muelle, La Beldaca has a strong tie with the sea, or in this case, with the coastal waters and the river Guayas. Benjamín Carrión believes that there is a kind of mystical and sensual attraction between the sea and Alfredo Pareja:*

"En la Beldaca, Alfredo Pareja, el hombre litoral que movía sus figuras 'en el asfalto de la ciudad caliente', hace su declaración de amor al mar. Su idilio ancestral y presente. Una especie de homenaje filial, cálido, lleno de ternura. Sensual, casi sexual....."⁶⁵

Most of the action of La Beldaca, however, takes place in the urban setting of Guayaquil or in the rural setting around the area of Santa Elena and Salinas. Angel F. Rojas affirms that it is in La Beldaca "donde Pareja hace su primera y única incursión por el campo."⁶⁶

* In La Beldaca, the character of Jesús Parrales' feeling for the sea, his ship, and his land is somewhat reminiscent of the mystic communication between the hero, the water, and the great mangrove trees along the "costa montuvia" in Don Goyo, another novel by another eminent member of the "Grupo de Guayaquil" during the same period, Demetrio Aguilera Malta.

64. Linke, p. 10.

65. B. Carrión, El Nuevo Relato Ecuatoriano, p. 184.

66. Rojas, pp. 194-95.

The opening chapter of *La Beldaca* sets its stage in the birthplace of one of the principal characters, Jesús Parrales. We are in the countryside along the coast, in Santa Elena. The very first paragraph shows us the author's feeling for and consciousness of the sea:

"El mar no tiene aún coloración celeste. Parece, a veces, tenuemente dorado, tenuemente gris, tenuemente negro. Arriba, en el cielo, se ha abierto una hendidura. Poco a poco, se alarga. Luego, se redondea a los lados. Es ya ovalada. Es un plato de luz esa hendidura. No hay más ruidos que el del agua, sin colores precisos, que choca impaciente contra algo, algo que puede ser una piedra. Sobre la arena, es leve el mar, tan leve que apenas se siente un susurrar de bronce, un largo chasquido de lengua."⁶⁷

The scene is of daybreak along the coast. Jesús Parrales and the other cholos who work his ship (*La Beldaca*) with him make their way through the colorful countryside to the sea, where they enter their craft and cast off. Jesús is already an old man when we first meet him. He is still firm and strong for his nearly seven decades, but blows of misfortune have left an air of sadness about him. His unmarried daughter, Juanita, is giving birth.

After setting a mood combining local color with pessimism, Pareja employs a relatively modern technique to fill us in on the remainder of the story--the flashback. We go back some sixty years to the time of Jesús' infancy, and from there the action continues nearly until the end of the novel, when the author blends the remainder of the story with the original point of departure.

67. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, *La Beldaca* (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1954), p. 7.

We learn that Jesús is the son of an interesting coastal woman, Tomasa, and an old cholo, Cipriano Parrales. The caricature of Tomasa is another one of Pareja's well-constructed female characters, full of simplicity and human feeling. Cipriano Parrales passes by only briefly, for he is forced to die of starvation in prison, because the salt mine he was guarding was robbed one night, and he had to suffer the loss through being unjustly punished, quite early in the novel.

Our introduction to Jesús Parrales as a small child shows the vividness with which Pareja describes the poverty of his early life:

"Un niño desnudo anda a gatas. Es en el corral. El corral es sucio. Hay comida de puercos e inmundicias de chivos, y el agua turbia que la mujer echa por la puerta de la covacha. Pero el niño se arrastra por sobre todo eso. El niño es ágil. Los músculos de su cara prieta se ajustan. Parece un pito su boca. La boca es diminuta y le brillan los ojos.

Al fin llega adonde está la chiva parada, junto a la cañas del corral. La chiva lo ha visto venir y ha abierto sus patas traseras. El niño se mete debajo de las patas. Dulcemente el animal se acuesta de lado. Con sus manitas morenas, el niño ha cogido la teta, y así, sucia de tierra y estiércol, la lleva con avidez a su boca."⁶⁸

Tomasa, a hard-working and sensual woman, does all that she can to give her son an opportunity to earn a living. She and the local water-seller, Don Ciro, have an agreeable understanding. In spite of having a family of his own, Don Ciro acts as an adopted father for Jesús, and Tomasa rewards him with the favors that

68. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 26.

would have been directed to her absent husband. Don Ciro takes Jesús with him to the sea, and the boy falls in love with the water and the little sloops--las balandras--that are common in that area. From then on his greatest desire is to own or at least pilot one of the little ships. For him, to be a balandrero is to live.

Don Ciro assumes the responsibility of arranging Jesús' baptismal. The author shows us that in terms of economics a baptismal is no small thing for the poor cholos. Here we see a scene almost humorously critical of the provincial clergy, in which the local priest extracts the baptismal fee from Don Ciro:

"--No tengo plata, Padrecito.
 --Idiota, bellaco. Pues, entonces, no hay bautizo.
 ¡Qué vamos a hacer! Hay que ayudar a la Iglesia:
 Dios lo manda. Lárgate. Por tu culpa se quedará
 moro ese muchacho y se irá al infierno por ti, fíjate
 bien. Lárgate.
 --Pero es que tengo gallinas, Padrecito...
 --Ajá. Eso ya es otra cosa. Cuántas me das?
 --Le daré tres, padrecito.
 --¿Qué cosa? ¡Tres! ¿Estás loco? Por nada...
 Siquiera dame seis gallinas y una docena de huevos.
 --Le daré cuatro, Padrecito.
 --Seis y los huevos.
 --Es que no tengo muchas, Padrecito.
 --¡Seis y los huevos! Ni una palabra más. ¿Entiendes?
 Y si no, puedes mandarte a cambiar con la música a
 otra parte.
 --Bueno, pues, Padrecito. Le doy las seis y los
 huevos.
 --Ajá. Ya sabía yo que tú eras un buen cristiano. ..."⁶⁹

Jesús does get his baptismal, and after the ceremony the priest imbibes with his parishioners to the point of imbalance. The priest obviously represents a corrupt segment of society, but the

69. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 47.

humor with which the author treats him makes us critical of only him, and not the religion that he represents.

The scene of the baptismal party is demonstrative of the unique moral values held by the poor people of the countryside. An event that is taking place for supposedly religious reasons turns into a veritable orgy after the priest has left and more liquor is consumed:

"Don Ciro canta y toca el alza que te han visto.* Es más atolondrado aún este baile. Pero los invitados no se cansan de bailar ni don Ciro de tocar la guitarra.

Al fin, muy tarde, cuando la fatiga los vence, se apagan las llamas de los candiles. El pollino rebuzna debajo de la casa. Cada hombre agarra a una mujer... Don Ciro ha encontrado entre las sombras a ña Tomasa, y se acuesta con ella en un rincón. Candelaria se va al corral con su cuñado. Nadie dice nada. Es la costumbre cuando se está borracho. Alguno, completamente ebrio, se lleva a su propia hermana. Acaso un hombre pega a su hembra, por gusto, por hacerla sentir. ..."⁷⁰

Truly, the above scene is indicative of a society in which the poor are so culturally deprived that they can not afford the moral values and practices which we assume their society would condone. Rarely, however, does Pareja paint a scene with more scatological content than the one cited above. Even the above scene is detachedly objective, and certainly contains none of the detailed, nearly nauseating, descriptions that we have come to expect as commonplace in the modern Latin American novel of social reform.

When he reaches his early teens, Jesús finds employment in the provincial town of Chipipe, with the family of Don Rodolfo

70. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 54.

* The "alza que te han visto" is the title of a popular Ecuadorian song. Constant repetition has caused it to become a part of the local language.

Gómez. The Gómez family teaches the young cholo the ways of cultured city life:

"También a Jesús hubo que civilizarlo. Le prohibieron muchas veces que tratase de tú a los niños. Le enseñaron repetidamente el nombre de los muebles. Le indicaron el uso del verbo abrir y de otros. Pero como Jesús no era bruto, aprendió ligero. Don Rodolfo le enseñó a contar. El niño Augusto se hizo su amigo y con él aprendió Jesús sus primeras letras. Pudo, muy pronto, firmar su nombre. . . ."71

Jesús meets his first love in the Gómez household--the cholita servant-girl, Vicenta Agapita. Vicenta, who has already learned to make love from Augusto, the worldly-wise eldest son, teaches Jesús her newly acquired art. When Vicenta becomes pregnant by Augusto, Jesús believes that the responsibility for her condition lies solely with him, until he sees her visiting Augusto's room late one night. Upon learning of Vicenta's state, the Gómez family blames Jesús and dismisses them both to go their separate ways.

The most logical direction for Jesús to take is toward the sea. His fascination for the little balandras has continued to grow during his years with the Gómez family:

"A Jesús Parrales le gusta su mar y su playa, su pesca y su chola Vicenta Agapita. Pero hace mucho tiempo que a Jesús Parrales le ha nacido otro amor: el amor adoración por la balandra. Un amor que lo impulsa hacia el encanto de lo que no se conoce, que lo invita a caminar.. Cuando pasea por la playa y está solo, se queda largos ratos inmóvil mirando las balandras, el ancla que se trepa como un cangrejo por el costado de proa, el humo sabroso que sale de la cocina, las velas que se desenvuelven blancas para robar el viento."72

71. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 79.

72. Pareja, " " " " , p. 88.

It is hardly unlikely that Jesús' maritime wanderlust is much the same as that felt so often by his creator during his younger years.

Upon leaving the Gómez household Jesús convinces Don Asunción, a wise old riverboat pilot, to take him on as an apprentice sailor. The craft Don Asunción commands is a balandra called La Beldaca.

La Beldaca belongs to Don Alfonso Vélez, who runs a successful salt-shipping business on the Guayaquil river. The son of a hardworking immigrant from Colombia who built a sizeable fortune and married into an aristocratic family, Don Alfonso retains his industriousness of his father and the culture of his mother. He, too, has married a girl from an upper-class family, Laura. The total picture of Don Alfonso is one of an industrious and good-hearted businessman, who finds finances more interesting than family. Having successfully ventured into the business world himself, Pareja is rather well-equipped to give accurate caricatures of businessmen.

One day Don Alfonso and Doña Laura receive a letter from a nephew they have never seen, Armando. Coming from a "poor but honorable" branch of Alfonso's family, Armando wishes to travel to Guayaquil to work at the side of his uncle. Being childless and good-natured, Alfonso and Laura receive him with open arms.

Armando is a handsome and shrewd youth in mid-teens at the time of his arrival in Guayaquil. With hardly any apparent effort he wins the hearts of his uncle and aunt. Alfonso soon has

complete confidence in him, and allows him to handle many of the important aspects of his business.

Meanwhile, Jesús Parrales, who is now in his early twenties, has been becoming a skilled sailor under the tutelage of Don Asunción. His life is now the difficult but lusty one of a sailor, and when in port there is an abundance of song, liquor, and women. Although he is a simple man, however, he is not a vulgar one. He still thinks about his first love, Vicenta Agapita, and does not really enjoy the revelries of his shipmates.

From now on we see a parallel development between Jesús Parrales and Armando Vélez. We see that Armando:

"Es el hombre de confianza en los negocios de don Alfonso. Ya maneja la Caja de la oficina y es el jefe de la contabilidad: han transcurrido dos años desde su llegada: La Beldaca sigue haciendo viajes para llenar de sal las bodegas de don Alfonso. Pero ahora es Armando quien recibe la carga, quien paga a Asunción, quien establece la infaltable merma por la sal que se moja.

Jesús Parrales es ya un marinero en regla. El más fuerte, el más conocedor, el más valiente. Y es, también, el hombre de confianza de don Asunción."⁷³

Although there is practically no direct contact between Jesús and Armando until the end of the novel, we are able to see how the author thoroughly develops these two characters, offering us an effective contrast between the lower and the upper classes of Ecuadorian society.

73. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 124.

When La Beldaca is in Guayaquil, Jesús occasionally does odd jobs for the Vélez family. There he meets his second sweetheart, the servant-girl Manuela. At first he is faithful to the memory of Vicenta, but something happens to soften his resistance.

While anchored in port, La Beldaca catches fire one night and burns, taking Don Asunción with her. Jesús is seriously injured while bravely fighting the fire, and must spend several weeks in the hospital. While he is recovering from his injuries, Manuela visits him faithfully; Jesús develops considerable affection for her.

At the same time that Jesús is in the hospital a revolution, headed by Eloy Alfaro, is erupting against Ignacio de Veintemilla:

"El día que Jesús Parrales sale del hospital, se produce el contacto de las tropas. La refriega lo coge por las afueras, por las calles inmediatas al Estero Salado. Alfaro da la vuelta por el cerro del Carmen. Desciende con todo el ímpetu de su caudillismo, con toda su fuerza combativa que se hace incontenible. Los caballos arañan con sus pezuñas los caminos abruptos de los cerros. Sus tropas se han unido con los que vienen por el Salado. Se pelea con furia, con salvajismo. Don Eloy, al frente, con su típico sombrero manabita de cinta tricolor, contempla impasible el ataque. Antes de entrar en acción ha tomado sobre el caballo una taza de café puro. Fuma cigarro. Sus órdenes son precisas, justas, decisivas."⁷⁴

Here we have an excellent example of Pareja's ability to recapture the spirit of a character from history and put him in a novelistic framework. The above picture of Alfaro differs very little from the style with which Pareja wrote his "biografía novelada" of the same caudillo (La Hoguera Bárbara).

74. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 132.

Fearing that the revolution will take him with it, Jesús takes a job on a ship run by an Italian captain, which takes him all the way to Lima's port of El Callao. Upon his return he goes to work for Don Alfonso again, and renews his relations with Manuela. Nonetheless, he begins to feel nostalgic for his rural home:

"... Jesús Parrales ya no ama a Manuela, ya le tiene un desapego que lo vuelve triste cuando está a su lado. Jesús Parrales guarda muy adentro un anhelo. Es el anhelo de su tierra, que tira siempre a los cholos hacia la pampa. Piensa en la casa en que nació, en Santa Elena, en su madre. Se le ocurre, con un poco de indiferencia, que debe haberse muerto ya. ¡Tan vieja! ¿Y don Ciro? Se acuerda. El barril. El burro testarudo. Cuando duerme le parece ver la pampa, le parece ver el mar, la balandra moviéndose... Ah, si él pudiera tener una balandra!"⁷⁵

Time has been passing steadily, and Jesús is no longer in his twenties. In 1896 a huge fire sweeps Guayaquil, leaving hunger, violence, and general chaos in its wake. Jesús can no longer endure the city and returns to his home, to Santa Elena. Both his mother, Tomasa, and Don Ciro have died, but he resolves to use what little money he has saved to put his old house in order. In Santa Elena he also meets Juanita, the true love of his life. An attractive young girl half his age (he is now 32), Juanita represents home, woman, and land to him, and he marries her.

During all of this time Armando Vélez has been doing well for himself. He succeeds in having a love-affair with his aunt Laura, and at the same time he practically controls his uncle

75. Pareja, La Beldaca, p. 160.

Alfonso's business. By the time the fire hits Guayaquil he has embezzled a sizeable amount of money and left for Santa Elena to go into business for himself. With his usual shrewdness, however, he remains in good standing with his aunt and uncle. He leaves them a note saying that the missing money was due to a bad business investment on his part, that he is consequently too ashamed to face them, and that he will oneday repay them.

In Santa Elena Armando receives business competition from a local power figure, Doña Dolores Cerro. He soon strikes an entente cordiale with her, however, and both of them increase their wealth. With the passing of the years Armando's uncle, then his aunt, die, leaving him their entire fortune. Already 60 years old, he marries Doña Dolores' coquetteish seventeen year old niece, Cristina, thereby cementing his control over the entire area.

While Armando has been amassing wealth and power, Jesús has been living the rugged life of a cholo. His children have dysentery and one of them even dies. Both work and food are often scarce. One day, however, Jesús and his oldest son, Apolinar, discover a treasure of Spanish gold and silver doubloons. At last Jesús will be able to realize his fondest ambition and buy a balandra!

Jesús takes his find to the richest man in town--Armando. Armando pays him less than half the value of the doubloons, and Jesús scarcely has half enough money to have a boat constructed. Armando lends him the rest of the money at an astronomical

interest rate, and the old cholo is momentarily content. He gets his balandra, and christens it La Beldaca, after the first ship he worked with Don Asunción.

Unfortunately, Jesús is a far better sailor than he is a businessman, and his little cargo enterprise barely scrapes along. Unable to repay Armando, the interest on his loan soon deprives him of ownership of La Beldaca, and he is reduced to being merely the pilot of the ship that he once proudly called his own.

The final blow to Jesús comes with the Americans building the Guayaquil-Salinas railway. Two of the Americans trick his daughter, Juanita, into accompanying them in their car in order to show them directions. When they get her alone they rape her, and she becomes pregnant. We are now at the point where the first chapter left off.

With La Beldaca laden with an expensive cargo, Jesús, ship, and crew disappear. Armando is left an old man with a sizeable business loss and a coquetteish young wife. Thus the novel ends as it began, in the sea.

La Beldaca shows us once again that Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco has developed a great capacity for combining various elements and creating an artful and meaningful novel. The humanity and the careful construction of the characters, the credibility of their situations, the historical framework within which they act, and the author's combined sympathy and detachment toward them, coupled with his sincere feeling for his land and the sea and his communication of that feeling to

us, make La Beldaca at least the equal, if not the superior, of the novel preceeding it.

It may be a matter of personal tast and choice from now on to decide which is Pareja's greatest novel since El Muelle, but what most concerns us here is that every novel does reflect at least to some extent the ever-increasing maturity and experience of the author. Be that as it may, it is more than obvious that with El Muelle and La Beldaca behind him, Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco has joined forever the ranks of the professional novelists of the world.

CHAPTER III

THE URBAN ZAMBA

With Baldomera⁷⁶ Alfredo Pareja has created perhaps his most colorful novel. This story of a massive, fierce zamba and a diminutive, plucky thief in the torrid and odorous barrios of Guayaquil shows a formidable acquaintance with lower class Ecuadorian life.

Some of the scenes presented in this novel may seem incredibly realistic to those who may not have had the opportunity personally to experience the ways of the Ecuadorian lower classes, or for that matter, of the lower classes from practically anywhere in the world. The cultural values, the morals, and the general manner of living of many of the characters in this novel, as in Pareja's earlier novels, offer a picture somewhat alien to that of the middle and the upper classes. As Ricardo A. Latcham so aptly suggests, however, "debemos considerar que la moral mestiza, imperante en el trópico, está muy distante de todos los convencionalismos."⁷⁷ Baldomera gives us the sketch of a sub-society which, although falling within the framework of a larger society, lives by a set of values which are completely its own. The values of Ecuadorian society, as defined by the upper classes

76. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, Baldomera (Santiago de Chile: Ercilla, 1938).

77. Ricardo A. Latcham, "Baldomera, Novela, por Alfredo Pareja Diez-Canseco," Atenea, Año XV, Tomo LII, No. 156 (Concepción: Universidad de Concepción, Junio de 1938), pp. 426-28.

and as would be imposed on the lower classes present a goal so unattainable for the latter that they have little choice but to live in the manner best suiting their circumstance, regardless of how much they may desire to live like their upper-class examples.

Pareja sub-titles this work "La tragedia del cholo americano". Like the two novels before it, Baldomera is a social tragedy. In terms of types of characters and elements of society presented, and the photographically realistic manner with which the author exposes them, this novel resembles a great many other novels of social tragedy. As Antonio Montalvo says of Baldomera's realism, "su crudeza...no es sino la crudeza, el dolor, de toda tragedia social."⁷⁸

Regardless of the elements that may or may not make it a "form" novel, Baldomera is outstanding for the intense humanity that flows from its pages. Antonio Montalvo further states that:

"...Sus personajes quedan grabados, con vida propia en el escenario vernacular, con proyección de ecumenidad, sin embargo, en gracia de la fuerza de humanidad que los anima."⁷⁹

As Pareja continues in Baldomera the elements of social realism and credible humanity that were characteristic of him in El muelle and La Beldaca, he also continues to show us that he is always aware of the historical circumstances surrounding his plots.

78. Antonio Montalvo, "Baldomera," América, Año XI11, Vol. XI1, Nos. 66 y 67 (Quito: Imp. Mtrio. Gbrno., Trimestre 4 de 1938), p. 256.

79. Montalvo, op. cit., loc. cit..

The characters in Baldomera take part in the well-remembered strike of November 15, 1922, in which members of the working classes of Guayaquil swarmed into the streets in demand of a better living and were shot down by the score in answer to their protests. Kessel Schwartz notes that "Pareja, fourteen years old at the time, was vividly impressed by the murder of his fellow citizens and writes with the warmth of a horrified eye witness."⁸⁰ Once again Alfredo Pareja makes good use of his personal experience in order to give his novels a more multifaceted significance.

The proletariat portrayed in Baldomera is somewhat different from the one in Pareja's earlier novels. Although still characteristically ignorant, we see elements appearing that challenge its simplicity. The lower classes, as personified by Baldomera and her husband Lamparita, now demonstrate an aggressive spirit that tells them they must do battle to proclaim their rights. It appears that Pareja would suggest in this novel that social improvement for the working classes will not come about through a change of heart by members of the ruling classes. Although the working classes in Baldomera do not achieve social vindication, the author now shows us that they are no longer content to silently accept their subservient condition.

We are treated to a vivid picture of Baldomera's environment from the very first pages of the novel. As the big zamba

80. Schwartz, p. 223.

peddles her snacks and tidbits in the streets of Guayaquil she introduces us to people from all of the social stratae. When she barterers with the Italian storekeeper who supplies her little business, or when she stops in the local bar after work to down one or two bottles of hard liquor until the women of the night begin to ply their trade, we are witness to an accurate portrayal of the harsher aspects of Ecuadorian life. Baldomera's world could have only been presented by someone who knew her city from every angle.

Pareja's other characters in this novel are by far dwarfed by Baldomera's towering stature. Although a rather uncouth character, we enjoy being in her company. Her portrait is a far cry from the simple and gentle heroines of the two novels proceeding this one:

"...Sentada, se la ve mediana. Pero si Baldomera se levanta, hay que ver. Parece tener más de un metro ochenta de estatura... Sólo quien contemplara los pies de Baldomera, metidos en las chancletas, podría calcular su corpulencia. Son unos pies descomunales. ... Un traje... que no dibuja ninguna forma. Porque Baldomera hace tiempo que no tiene cintura. Es cuadrada. Sencillamente cuadrada. Sobre la barriga, casi le cuelgan los pechos. Los pechos de Baldomera son largos y, al mismo tiempo, gordos: dos masas de carne embutida. ... Su cara chata que mantiene constantemente una expresión de furia. Los ojos son pequeñitos; casi no tienen pestañas. .. Su nariz, roma, de muy abiertas ventanas, se enrojece en la punta. De la boca de Baldomera no hay mucho de que hablar: es ancha, carnosa, abultada. En cambio, su barba es llamativa. Al terminar, es redonda, regordeta. Mejor dicho, no termina nunca. ... Viéndola un poco de lejos... se apostaría que no tiene barba. Pero, no. Es inconfundible: sus pelos. ... Son pocos pelos, verdad. Pero qué pelos! Largos, duros, gruesos. Y cuando Baldomera está con rabia, su gesto revelador y característico es

tirarse algunos y luego sobarse la barba nerviosamente con la palma de la mano para calmarse la picazón."⁸¹

The author introduces us to Baldomera when she is already in her later life, and later employs a long flashback to fill us in on the background of the story. By the time we first meet her, Baldomera has already given birth to several children and is pregnant with another. Let us review the action of the novel from this point.

While Baldomera is in a bar one night, nearly asleep from the quantity of alcohol that she has consumed, some men enter the bar with several prostitutes in their company. One of the men begins to make sport of disturbing the slumbering Baldomera until, infuriated, she attacks him, knocking him to the ground with a powerful blow. Even when the fallen one's companions join in the fray, Baldomera gives a very good account of herself. She is only subdued when several policemen arrive and brutally beat her. When she is taken to the police station, one of the policemen kicks her in the abdomen before pushing her into her cell. Baldomera consequently aborts, and nearly dies due to the inadequate medical attention given her. As an anti-climax to this unpleasant episode, Baldomera's children must pay the dishonest policeman in charge of her a considerable sum of money which he falsely claims to be her fine.

81. Pareja, Baldomera, pp. 10-11.

Scorn, violence, brutality, and injustice have been nearly the daily fare for Baldomera during her entire life. Our zamba is not alone in her plight, however, for she is representative of an entire social class. Ricardo Latcham feels that she is "un símbolo de la familia chola que, sin destino claro, busca el suyo de cualquier modo, por las cabales o por la violencia."⁸²

Although no other character in the novel reaches the stature of Baldomera, one character does approach it-- Lamparita--thereby lending a harmonious balance of personalities. Lamparita is a famous cuatrero in the highlands, whose name is derived from a little light that he carries with him during his cattle-rustling adventures. In order to tell us his story Pareja once again employs the flashback, taking us back a number of years and into the countryside.

Lamparita's physical picture is nearly the antithesis of Baldomera's:

"...Lamparita era un hombre pequeño. Tenía las piernas abiertas en el medio, curvadas, separadas casi hasta los talones, donde se volvían a unir. Era flaco. Se le veían los huesos pegados a la piel. El cabello, liso. Las manos, extremadamente largas y huesudas. La nariz de Lamparita era fina y un tanto ganchuda. Las cejas abundantes daban más profundidad a sus ojos, ya de por sí grandes y negros. No tenía casi uñas en las manos, porque todas se las comía en ratos de nervios. Andaba un poco inclinado hacia adelante, y no tanto, que no se adivinara un cuerpo ágil y dispuesto a la carrera. Y sus hombros sobresalían en punta por la espalda. Lamparita era, en verdad, un hombre chiquito y encogido."⁸³

82. Latcham, p. 427.

83. Pareja, Baldomera, p. 46.

Lamparita is a fearless little man who only robs out of necessity. Somewhat in the fashion of a Robin Hood criollo he usually steals only the cattle of the rich hacendados. Only out of desperation would he steal from a traveler. There is a close relationship between Lamparita and his horse, a spirited stallion called Escorpión. Here we see a man-beast relationship told with such finesse that we wonder why Pareja never again exploits that side of his literary talent.

However, Escorpión is not the only one to share his master's affections. Lamparita has a girlfriend named Candelaria, who, with her sister Agustina, runs a rural general store. While Lamparita's band is at the girls' establishment one day, the rural police surround them and a fight ensues. Only Lamparita escapes, because he happens to have been with Candelaria in a solitary spot some distance from the action. After that point the rurales seem to be everywhere, and it is no longer safe for Lamparita to live in the countryside. Reluctantly, he sells his beloved Escorpión and goes down the river to Guayaquil, leaving Candelaria behind him and promising her that he will one day return for her.

When Lamparita reaches Guayaquil, he readily adapts himself to his new urban surroundings. Making a transition from cattle-rustler to first pickpocket, then night-time thief, he is able to maintain a standard of living several notches above starvation.

It is at this point that Pareja unites Lamparita with Baldomera. While she is working as a dance-hall girl of easy

virtue, the ponderous zamba is promptly enamoured by the brisk little cholo, who by this time has nearly forgotten Candelaria. Lamparita is the only man who has every been able to knock Baldomera off her feet in a "fair" fight:

"...rechinándole los dientes, Baldomera agarró una silla. Y ya la iba a lanzar contra Lamparita, pero él tomó impulso y en el mismo instante en que Baldomera levantaba la silla sobre los hombros, Lamparita la embistió de una cabezada. Cayó Baldomera cogiéndose con ambas manos la barriga. Quedó un momento en el suelo. Lamparita, muy tranquilo, dijo:

--Y no te he querido dar duro de verdad.

Baldomera, levantada ya, pretendió volver a golpear. Ahora, Lamparita, riéndose, le cruzó el pie entre las piernas de ella y lanzóla al suelo. Esta vez, Baldomera, al caer se dió un fuerte golpe en las costillas. Frunció los labios. Y allí mismo, en el suelo, habló:

--Eres el único hombre que me ha tumbado...

Y con lo garrapata que pareces...

Despues, se sentó en una silla, sobándose las costillas. Al cabo de un momento, mirando a Lamparita, que, de pie, esperando, reía, le dijo:

--Vámonos adentro, Lamparita."⁸⁴

From that time on Baldomera and Lamparita have a relationship marked by the paradoxical violence and tenderness of their first encounter. Although she already has an illegitimate son, Inocente, Lamparita marries Baldomera, with the simplicity of a civil ceremony. Shortly after their marriage Baldomera bears the first of Lamparita's children, Polibio. The difficulty of the new family's domestic situation is complicated by Inocente's animosity towards his stepfather, as well as by the normal problems of economics.

84. Pareja, Baldomera, p. 86.

Shortly after his marriage to Baldomera, Lamparita comes across his old sweetheart, Candelaria, who informs him that after he abandoned her in the country an unfortunate chain of events brought her to the city, where she earns her livelihood as a prostitute. Lamparita momentarily forgets about Baldomera and undertakes a brief residence with Candelaria. His memory is refreshed, however, when after four days Baldomera seeks him out in the red-light district and administers a fierce beating to his girlfriend. After Baldomera reflects on Candelaria's situation, she quite believably and humanely realizes that the young country girl has had little more choice in deciding her fate than she herself has had, and she apologizes to Candelaria, crudely offering her friendship and understanding. As the story progresses, Baldomera becomes more and more the embodiment, as well as the sympathetic but ignorant spokesman, of her class.

Alfredo Pareja, faithful to his historical consciousness, now introduces the revolution of November 15, 1922. Although the story could well progress without the inclusion of this historical incident, it does serve as an instrument to draw more fully the principal characters and their social class in a more complete perspective.

Baldomera herself is caught up in the fighting, and once she begins to fight, she does so fiercely. We already know that Baldomera's character is a violent one, but now we see it going to the extreme of homicide during that bloody strike. Edmundo Ribadeneira suggests that Baldomera's chief motivations for

fighting are her innate hate for authority symbols coupled with no understanding of the transcendental significance of the strike:

"...Baldomera toma parte en la lucha impulsada, según el autor, por su inexplicable temperamento bélico, por su odio innato al uniforme pretoriano que tiene que ver mucho con su costumbre de armar escándalos fenomenales; en cambio, Baldomera no comprende, al parecer, el verdadero significado de los acontecimientos de noviembre, no llega a sus ojos ni siquiera una vislumbre del despertar popular que se opera en la fecha fatídica del calendario guayaquileño y, por ende, nacional."⁸⁵

Mr. Ribadeneira further suggests in the same commentary that Baldomera is not a true symbol of her social class, that she is perhaps too picturesque, that she is endowed with too many individual characteristics to give an accurate picture of her segment of society. Although Baldomera may possess as many elements that evoke our laughter and our admiration as she does those that arouse our pity or our indignation, we must not view her as an inadequate instrument for inciting social reform. By creating a character with interesting--albeit extraordinary--human qualities, Pareja has in Baldomera a useful and a credible example not only of the lower class as an unfortunate entity that is often exploited by certain representatives of the ruling classes, but also of that class as being composed of very human beings. We find Baldomera a novel that successfully juxtaposes these two qualities of thesis and careful attention to character construction, in order to tell an interesting story involving unforgettable personalities while it still manages to relay an important message.

85. Ribadeneira, pp. 83-84.

Up to this point we have seen how Pareja has in a relatively short time completely drawn and blended the two principle characters, following much the same pattern set in El Muelle and La Beldaca. At the same time he has gently introduced elements for sub-plots, which he then continues to develop with the progression of the story.

Inocente has grown into manhood, and the rift between him and his stepfather, Lamparita, has grown ever wider. Consequently, Inocente spends most of his time away from home, looking for an opportunity to improve his condition. That opportunity comes one evening when Inocente is able to save José Luis, the son of don Honorario Paredes, the owner of a local sawmill, from getting a beating in a cabaret. As a reward, Inocente gains employment in the elder Paredes' establishment during the day, while in the evenings he accompanies José Luis on his nocturnal excursions, not as a companion, but as a bodyguard.

An able and quick-witted young man, Inocente soon gains the confidence of his fellow workers. By now he has seen life in a more attractive light than he had previously, and he yearns for "better things". Inocente has become a social climber.

For a while, life does indeed seem to go well for Inocente. He meets a lovely little lady, Celia María, one of his co-workers in the sawmill, who is another literary sister of María del Socorro of El Muelle, falls in love with her, makes her his mistress, and plans to marry her.

Inocente sees another opportunity to advance his situation when he learns that his fellow employees are planning a strike against the sawmill, after they find out that Paredes has lowered their wages in order to compensate for one of his own financial losses. Playing "both ends against the middle", Inocente pretends to join the strikers, but in reality relays all of the happenings to the Paredes, in the anticipation of a substantial reward.

The strikers are led by a foreigner, a Spanish Communist called Ignacio Acevedo. Pareja follows the precedent he set earlier of importing a mysterious and colorful stranger (El Tío of El Muelle) to champion the exploited workers. As Kessel Schwartz suggests, we question why Pareja does not produce a leader for the workers from within their own ranks, or at least from among their own countrymen:

"The standard introduction of Acevedo, the labor agitator who suggests revolution as a solution for ills, is artificial, and upon reading the novel one wonders why Pareja introduced him, since the impression which he sought to convey, that such a solution is inevitable, arises from the situations themselves."⁸⁶

Regardless of the national origins of the dissatisfied workers, Inocente betrays them all. He even falsely accuses his immediate superior, a worldly Jamaican Negro called Míster John, of being involved in the strike, with the hope of moving into his position upon his dismissal. Inocente's character is fast degenerating; as final evidence of his corruption he betrays his mother, for Baldomera

86. Schwartz, p. 223.

is completely on the side of the strikers.

Let us momentarily leave Inocente, and learn what has been happening with Lamparita. After his marriage to Baldomera, Lamparita continues to make his living as a thief. One night he is trapped, however, and seriously wounded before being captured. He is taken to a hospital, where he receives disgustingly poor treatment. The nun in charge of him only haphazardly follows the Doctor's orders, and appears to delight in watching Lamparita vacillate between life and death. Through Sister Leoncia's sadism, Pareja display some of his most anti-clerical writing:

"Un día, el doctor mandó ponerle inyecciones. Fué la hermana Leoncia quien le puso la primera, no obstante corresponderle al practicante de turno. Pero la monja gustaba de poner inyecciones. Y siempre lo hacía, con deliciosa y lenta voluptuosidad. Tal vez por ofrendar a Dios esa nueva prueba... Lo cierto es que una tarde cogió la jeringuilla, mal hervida, agarró el esquelético brazo de Lamparita y le clavó una aguja despuntada. Le corrieron por el brazo una gotas de sangre. La monja pasó un algodón en el sitio de la picadura. Lo frotó reciamente. Y se fué a atender otro enfermo."⁸⁷

By the time Lamparita is well and free, he is too well known by the authorities to continue his occupation as a thief. Unfortunately, he knows no other work, and the family's total support continues to rest with Baldomera, who has been carrying that burden since his capture in addition to faithfully visiting him. The zamba becomes more alcoholic and embittered, and her family feels the pangs of hunger. Inocente, quite busy with his own affairs, offers little assistance. Polibio, barely leaving adolescence, decides to go to

87. Pareja, Baldomera, p. 120.

the country and fend for himself. When he tells Lamparita that he can easily find work as a peón, he is met with a heated reply:

"--¡Mentira! Pagan poco y todito se lo roban. Son unos desgraciados. Se enriquecen con el sudor del pobre. No te vayas. Yo no fuí peón. Los hombres no son peones nunca. Yo fuí cuatrero -- remató Lamparita con un tono de orgullo."⁸⁸

When Polibo reaches the countryside, he becomes not a peón, but the romantic reincarnation of his father. Pareja seems to suggest that a life of crime is justifiable when it is in lieu of one of ill working conditions and even poorer pay.

With her family going their separate ways, her husband incapacitated and unable to provide any income, and her economic situation becoming increasingly difficult, we are not surprised that Baldomera so strongly supports the strike which her son is helping to squelch.

Inocente, however, soon has his illusions thoroughly shattered. His girlfriend, Celia María, has been seduced by don Honorario, who wryly dismisses his advances to the girl as "impulsos demócratas". José Luis has also been taking advantage of Celia María.

Inocente discovers Celia María's infidelity, and realizing that his benefactors were merely using him as a pawn against his fellow workers while they were abusing his honor, his world has practically ended. Enraged, he stabs Celia María, but not mortally, and is in imminent danger of imprisonment. Baldomera, however, with the hazy idea that if given a bit of a chance, perhaps

88. Pareja, Baldomera, p. 132.

her son would be able to make a better life for himself, takes the blame for his crime. In a perhaps incongruous note from a character built more on actions than on words, Baldomera tells Celia María not to betray Inocente:

" 'Estoy presa por lo que hizo I. No lo delates por nada. Serías una traidora. Si lo quieres, debes decir que fuí yo. Me han dicho que tengo atenuantes. ¡No me importa! En cambio, as I. lo mandarán al Panóptico por diez y seis años. Tú, después de lo que hiciste, estás obligada a salvarlo. Recomiéndale a I. que se haga cargo de los muchachos. Si no lo salvas, eres una perra (sic), una desgraciada. Si lo dejas fregar, te juro que te mato. Soy vieja y no me importa la cárcel. Además, te juro que yo me escapo pronto. Di que te quise matar porque quisiste quitarme a mi marido. Cuidado, pues, con decir la verdad, porque te estrangulo. --Baldomera.' "89

In the last chapter Baldomera is sent to jail for two years, and Pareja gives us the brief glimpse of prison life that he will later polish into a full-sized novel (Hombres Sin Tiempo). Inocente goes free, greatly the wiser for his experience.

Angel F. Rojas feels that Baldomera is one of Pareja's best novels, and that its final pages constitute "una sobriedad artística admirable y de fuerza patética excepcional. ... quizá el desenlace mejor logrado por Pareja..." 90

Mr. Rojas must have some supporters, for Baldomera was offered in a German translation (Hamburg, 1954) and edited recently (1957) for the second time in Spanish. Baldomera has a happy combination of local color, fast action, well-constructed and personable characters, and a basic theme that is transcendental

89. Pareja, Baldomera, p. 248.

90. Angel F. Rojas, La Novela Ecuatoriana (México: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1948), p. 195.

and still very contemporary. That combination seems to plead for a conscientious rendering in many other languages, for it is a novel that could hold the interest of and give meaning to a reader in any land where there exists a working class, a sense of humor, and a compassion for humanity. We remember the novel for the overall impression of lower class life in the port city, for the message that it relays, and most of all for the personality of the big zamba herself, who "can be found in almost any Latin American port among the ambulant fruit vendors or cooking a typical dish over a charcoal fire, surrounded by a mob of hungry urchins."⁹¹

Lest we become overly effusive in our praises of Baldomera, we must readily admit that it is by no means a perfect novel. Although the characters are well-developed and balanced, and the sub-plots are blended into the main story line without excessive friction, there is a loss of what might be called "thesis-impact." This loss of possible effect on the reader (i. e., encouraging him to sympathize with the unfortunate protagonists) is brought about by the abundance of anecdotal incidents and the very magnitude of the principal characters (Baldomera, Lamparita, and Inocente) themselves. We find that the characters and their deeds are of more interest than is their surrounding social situation, which would usually be expected to be brought to the fore in a novel of social reform. Looking at the novel in this light, we could state that purely as a novel inductive of social change, Baldomera may be inferior to the novels immediately preceeding it.

91. Linke, p. 10.

On the other hand, it would be unfair and erroneous to judge a literary creation totally on the basis of what it might have been. We must judge it for what it is. By being a novel in which the human elements have a marked predominance over the social elements, Baldomera achieves a more universal significance and appeal than do El Muelle and La Beldaca, although those novels are by no means lacking in human elements. From that point of view, we might hold that Baldomera is superior to Pareja's earlier novels.

We should also reaffirm that Baldomera follows the trends set by Pareja since the beginnings of his novelistic endeavors. The author continues to employ his personal experience as a fountain for points of departure, resulting in not only an historical but also a personally compassionate perspective of his novel's milieu. Nonetheless, at the same time Pareja manages to remain quite objective, and never resorts to moralizing or flag-brandishing. We see in Baldomera a growing complexity on the parts of the characters; they are individually possessive of more variables in their personalities and they are collectively more aggressive as the representatives of certain social groups. Our overall opinion of Baldomera is that it is a solid example of Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco's continually growing literary maturity, and a suitable match for his already excellent handful of novels.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAGI-COMEDY OF AN IDEALIST

Don Balón de Baba⁹¹ is a work that has brought its author ambivalent success. Angel F. Rojas notes that when Pareja wrote this novel "La crítica extranjera fué severísima con el libro."⁹² Yet, according to Lilo Linke it:

"...was published by the Book Club of Buenos Aires as one of the twelve best American novels selected by the club in 1939, along with works by such authors as John Dos Passos and Eduardo Mallea. Pareja's was the only work chosen from Pacific Coast authors. It brought him more royalties than any of his previous books, but it was not a success in Ecuador. Politics was still too serious a subject for his countrymen to enjoy Pareja's mocking treatment of the pompous, would-be political leader Don Balón, a native Don Quixote."⁹³

As we may well deduce, not only was the author's success with this novel inconsistent (i. e., high royalties versus poor acceptance at home), but the critics' opinions of the book were also contradictory. Perhaps by creating a character that came all too close to being a true prototype of a Latin American political idealist, Pareja may have hit a mark very near the feelings of the Latin American critics of the late thirties and early forties, and was therefore unable to receive truly objective reactions. In more recent years, however, Don Balón de Baba has enjoyed a more objective and favorable scanning.

91. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, Don Balón de Baba, (Buenos Aires: Club de Libro; 1939).

92. Rojas, p. 195.

93. Linke, p. 10.

The Quixotic overtones of Hechos y Hazañas de Don Balón de Baba y de su Amigo Inocente Cruz are obvious, but not exaggerated. Shortly after the novel appeared, one reviewer had this to say about its principle characters:

"The two individuals who supply the present novel with its title resemble two characters in Don Quijote. Like Don Quijote, Don Balón de Baba sees everything in glorified form. He feels that he has an important mission in life which he alone will be able to accomplish: he must create a better social order for the world. Like Sancho Panza, Inocente suffers from limitations of intellectual endowment, and he shares his predecessor's propensity to speak in proverbs. Although he is devoted to his friend, he can see things only as they are, and his fondness for comfort prompts him to deceive Don Balón at times."⁹⁴

Had the reviewer examined the novel more carefully, he would have seen that Inocente's care for his friend's well-being was his principle motive for deceit, and that the principle characters' psychology is far more complex than a simple parallel on those in Don Quijote.

Another element of the novel that may be interpreted as a Cervantine flavor is that "el lenguaje que emplea es impecable y lleno de riqueza castiza."⁹⁵

Edmundo Ribadeneira feels that the principle character, Don Balon, does not necessarily have to be from any specific country,⁹⁵ and we may thereby deduce that like Don Quijote, Don Balón achieves a universal stature.

94. Virgil A. Warren, "Hechos y Hazañas de Don Balón de Baba y de su Amigo Inocente Cruz," The Inter-American Quarterly, Vol. 2, No. 1, Jan., 1940.

95. Rojas, p. 196.

96. Ribadeneira, p. 86.

Of course, it is impossible that Don Balón could approach universality in the lofty sense of his Manchegan predecessor. Nonetheless, our hero is concerned with all of mankind, and his chief desire is to improve the lot of humanity not only in Ecuador, but also on a global scale.

We title this chapter "the tragi-comedy of an idealist." As we discuss the novel, we shall see that the principle character is an idealist--a grandiose, political, paternalistic, sympathetic, and ill-fated idealist. The ridiculousness of his approach to solving his country's and the world's social ills and in pursuing his amorous inclinations causes us to chuckle at him, yet the pathetic hopelessness of his ever achieving his goals and his disastrous end arouse our most profound compassion. Comedy without tragedy is apparently an unknown occurrence in the Ecuadorian novel, for as Ribadeneira suggests, "nuestro ambiente no justifica hasta hoy un personaje o hechos en función de la risa."⁹⁷

The author appropriately introduces us to Don Balón while he is having one of his many romantic dreams, in which he is always a bold hero, a champion of justice and of ladies in distress, in a world of danger and mystery. Our very first impression of Balón is one that shall remain constant throughout the entire novel. He is a dreamer, an idealist, and a romantic. His ideas are too stratospheric to be understood by the common folk whom he would

97. op. cit., p. 95.

vindicate, and he is doomed to failure. The parallel between Don Balón and Don Quijote, and between Inocente Cruz and Sancho Panza is quite apparent in its concept, but not in its manifestation. Balón is completely criollo and of the twentieth century, and the language of the novel is also modern, although unimpeachably correct.

Although Don Balón de Baba is one of Alfredo Pareja's longer novels, it owes much of its length to passages flowing with pompous rhetoric in keeping with the nature of the protagonist which also demonstrate a successful exercise in stylistics. The plot lines are relatively simple.

When we first meet Don Balón he has already reached maturity. He dreams a lot, lives in a rather unbecoming neighborhood, spends long hours talking with a group of tolerantly understanding friends in a local Botica, and is in love with his pretty next door neighbor. While reading the newspapers he shows great concern for his country's future:

"...don Balón se puso a leer con avidez. En veces, dejaba el diario a un lado y lanzaba una exclamación:

-- ¡Qué barbaridad!

Volvió a ver el punto llamativo para cerciorarse y decía:

-- ¡Pero qué gobierno tan imbécil!

Nuevamente sus ojos recorrían el diario y al volver la primera hoja casi gritaba:

-- ¡Pero qué gobernador tan animal! ¡Qué ministro para bruto! ¡Pobre país!"⁹⁸

Balón's concern for his society consumes him. He fancies himself the head of a political movement, the "avanzadismo

98. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 29.

revolucionario socialista," and creates a secret society (the Nolens-Volens-Dixi) which is dedicated to furthering that movement. So intense is his desire to take charge personally of his fellow man's well-being, and such is the aura of mystery with which he surrounds himself, that his maid, Micaela, worries for his mental health. He spends a great deal of time in a secret room, which is his laboratory; he becomes frantically upset when his grandfather clock tolls; and his amorous overtures toward his neighbor, la Niña Cándida, seem to be favorably received. None of this is even slightly comprehensible to Micaela. She even suspects that he may be in league with the devil.

We should note that while Micaela is not a primary character in the novel, we see in her more evidence of Pareja's ability to create strong female characters. On one occasion, after Balón had intervened in a fight between two rugged characters of his neighborhood and was about to be carried off by the police as a reward for his pacific efforts, Micaela saves the day for him, showing a resolution reminiscent of Baldomera:

"El policía rabioso tiraba de él, cuando Micaela que, de pie junto a don Balón había contemplado la escena, adelantó un paso. Reparó en ella don Balón y le dijo:

--¡Micaela, Micaela linda!

Sin decir nada, Micaela lanzó como un arieta su puño a las manos del policía, obligándolas a soltar el calzoncillo de don Balón. El guarda intentó agredirla, pero ella, erguida, alta, firme, con los brazos en jarras, sólo dijo, silabando:

--Cuidadito...

Y era tal la figura de Micaela, que el guardián del orden quedó en suspenso, mientras que ella volteaba hacia don Balón y le gritaba:

-- ¿Qué se queda haciendo allí? ¡Corra!
¡Lárguese para arriba!"⁹⁹

In spite of her strength of character, Micaela is unable to control Balón. Out of desperation, she sends for Balón's oldest and truest friend, his boyhood chum from Baba, Inocente Cruz.

When Inocente arrives we learn through his conversations with Balón much of his friend's background.

As a young man, Balón already demonstrated a desire to be the political leader and social reformer of his people. His efforts in Baba met with short success, however, and at the age of twenty he went to Guayaquil, where he thought he might be better appreciated, leaving behind his clumsy, solitary, and devoted friend Inocente, who was to become himself a wealthy exploiter of the cacao workers and the father of a sizeable family. The desire for recognition first lead Balón to try his hand at literature:

"...Sólo quería ser grande, hacer cosas dignas de la historia. Un anhelo profundo de grandeza me henchía el pecho y corría por mis venas en raudales incontenibles de entusiasmo. Pretendí, al principio, ser escritor. Quería hacer poemas, novelas, cuentos, ensayos, filosofía, teatro, abarcarlo todo. Comencé a emborronar papeles. Pero de pronto me di cuenta de la miseria que es la literatura. ¡Diversión, bah! ¿Qué son los literatos? Gente orgullosa, páfida, envidiosa, capaz de matarse entre ellos por alcanzar un jirón de gloria, las más de las veces o inmerecida o tardía. ¿Y qué hacen? Niñerías. Nada útil. Mienten diciendo cosas que jamás sintieron. Todo lo reducen a la farsa y al engaño. ...No volví a escribir mas. Yo no podía ser parte de una ética especialmente conformada para el chisme y la mentira. Allí se quedaron mis cuadernos y todavía duermen entre los cajones, sumidos en polvo y en olvido."¹⁰⁰

99. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 34.

100. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 126.

While he was still writing poetry, Balón fell deeply in love with a girl who offered him both physical and intellectual companionship. Their idyllic situation was soon brought to a more terrestrial level, however, when the girl became pregnant. Neither of them wishing matrimony, in spite of their mutual affection, the girl fled to the country to await her delivery. When the baby was born--a son--the mother never recovered from the effects, and died in agony. Balón saw little of beauty in his personal experience with the "miracle" of childbirth:

"...Ella marchó al campo. Y me hizo avisar cuando llegó el momento, el de la tragedia, el del cataclismo biológico de la mujer. Hay que comprenderlo: el parto no es un proceso fisiológico normal, como dicen los médicos. Nada de eso: tiene de destrucción y de terremoto, y esto no puede nunca ser normal: es ruina, escombros, anulación y nueva vida que surge de las cenizas y del deshecho. ¿Puede haber un normal proceso fisiológico, como la digestión o la respiración, cuando todo es sangre y sufrimiento? Es absurdo afirmarlo. Tú no sabes de esto, Inocente. Yo lo he visto, lo he estudiado, he gritado junto a ella, he sentido en mis entrañas todo el dolor de las tuyas. Antes de la catástrofe, mi amada se lo había dado todo: su vida, su sangre, sus energías. Todo lo absorbía el pequeño monstruo que se gestaba, el insaciable demonio que llevaba en su vientre maravilloso. Y para ella, para la amada, dolor, dolor y dolor. Cuando mi hijo nacía, lo odié."¹⁰¹

Balón had to take the body of his sweetheart and his newborn son in a canoe to Guayaquil, where he suffered the abuses of her family and was left with a child to raise for whom he felt no love, only resentment for causing its mother's death. Nonetheless, as the child began to grow older, Balón was able to love him. The boy's innocent, childlike ways endeared him to the embittered Balón,

101. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, pp. 127-28.

and helped fill the vacuum left by the loss of his beloved. Life had only just barely begun to brighten for Balón, when his awakening joy was suddenly and brutally shattered:

"--...Mi hijo tenía un año y medio. Era guapo: tenía la elegancia de la madre, su fino talento, su belleza, pero masculinizada. Una tarde, temprano aún, lo dejó* dormido. De repente, mientras leía yo junto a mi cama, se estiró hacia atrás como un arco indio. Corrí y lo tomé en brazos. Ardía de la fiebre. Volé por un médico. Era el primer ataque de perniciosa palúdica. Todavía se contorsionaba, cuando llegó el doctor. Pusimos grandes dosis de quinina, lavados helados, baños... Quedó luego flácido (sic), aguado, amoratado, agónico. Entonces, el médico hizo el último esfuerzo tratando de producir choques nerviosos. Pero apenas si se estremecía. Otra vez, como cuando ella se fué, cayó la tarde y ya en la noche en un último ataque se lo llevó... Precisamente, cuando yo más lo quería... ...Y cuando, al fin, quedó sin movimiento, en ese mismo instante el reloj, ese reloj de la alcoba, lanzó sus campanadas lúgubres, tranquilamente perversas. Y recordé que allá, en el campo, cuando se me perdió la amada, un reloj parecido contó las mismas horas con el mismo tono lento, con el mismo sonido de oración fúnebre... ¿Oyes? ¿Oyes el reloj? ¡Inocente! ¡Me mata! ¡Me mata ese reloj! ¡Maldito sea! ¿Lo oyes? ¡Está sonando! ¡Cuenta! ¡Cuenta! ¡Otra vez, otra vez! ¡Ja, ja, ja, ja!"¹⁰²

Thus is explained the mystery of the clock, and the reason for Balón's madness when it tolls. If Pareja had chosen to write the novel with this point as its ending, demonstrating perhaps a tragic chain of events leading to Balón's possible suicide, he would have produced a novel with powerful naturalistic leanings that would have been somewhat in imitation of but would have fit in well with

102. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 131.

*The verb "dejó" refers to the maid, who left the child sleeping.

the Latin-American naturalistic movement at the turn of the century. Pareja, however, is not content to imitate; he is a literary pioneer. The unfortunate events in Balón's life here referred to are merely the point of departure for the construction of a greater character. Upon the loss of his personal happiness, Balón seeks compensation in working toward universal happiness. It is for that reason that what began as a youthful desire to win fame while working toward bettering his fellow man's lot far exceeds normal proportions, and becomes for Balón a fury that totally devours him, leaving him tainted with a paranoid madness. The shock of losing his sweetheart and his son, coupled with the steady and disappointing blows of life that rain on his sensitive nature, cause Balón to enter the study of science, philosophy, and metaphysics in an effort to seek the meaning of his existence--to find God. Again, he is met with unreconciling frustration:

"...¿Adónde está? ¿Adónde? ...Dios, Dios, lo busqué en la ciencia, y no lo hallé. Reproduje el átomo en la pantalla, y sólo vi agitación y cálculo. Estudié los elementos, ... y no lo hallé. Oh, Inocente, Inocente ¿dónde está Dios? De nada me sirve la ciencia, si no lo encuentro. ...Sólo he visto substancias y substancias... ¡Dios! ¡Dios! La Nada. El vacío. ... Quise comprender el significado de la nada, y fracasé. ...Es terrible. He realizado todos los experimentos de los sabios, los he comprobado, ... ¡Bah! Siempre basura y miseria es lo que hallé. ¡Ah, si la hubiera descubierto, yo mismo, yo mismo, yo sería Dios!

...

--Dios no existe. No existe, no puede existir. No tengo ninguna prueba de su presencia. La cobardía humana ha pretendido acumularlas... Pero todas han sido productos exclusivos del miedo, de la mísera condición de la ignorancia. No está en ninguna parte o está en todas. ¿Quién que es, podría entenderlo?

Las palabras sonaban duras, cargadas con el tono chillón, y sin embargo gutural de esa voz extraña.

...

De pronto cobró ánimos y gritó, todo él descom-
puesto:

--¡Imbéciles! Yo lo descubriré. Yo haré el mundo. ¡Yo seré Dios! ¡Ja, ja, ja! Muéstrate, Dios, si es que existes... sal de tu escondrijo... ¡Ah, dolor! ¿Eres tú el Dios? Los hospitales, los enfermos, los presos, las guerras, la miseria, el hambre... La vida grita y padece y Dios no se muestra. El instinto vital es el placer, pero éste no vive sin dolor. Un estremecimiento de goce nos acerca a lo divino, y este goce es padecer y llorar. Es la descarga. ¿Después? ¿Qué hay en el dolor?

Agitó los brazos, miró a lo alto, como clamando, y alzó la voz.

--¡No hay Dios! ¡No hay Dios! ¡No hay Dios!

Luego sufrió una convulsión. Cayó de rodillas, inclinó la cabeza, salieron de sus ojos abundantes lágrimas, y exclamó, sollozante y trémulo:

--¿Qué me hago yo sin Dios? ¿Qué hago sin Dios? ¿Qué soy? ¿Qué puedo hacer?

...

--¿Adónde estás, por fin? ¿Qué me hago yo sin Dios?"¹⁰³

Here we see all of the pathos and the tragedy of Don Balón de Baba. In spite of the many humorous incidents that befall him, and the comical way of making his way in the world that he so often displays, Balón is basically a tragic character.

Inocente is truly concerned over his friend's state, and he unsuccessfully plots with Micaela to put Balón under professional attention. Balón's thoughts and actions confound, amaze, and fascinate Inocente, but in spite of himself, he finds himself participating in his friend's affairs, being swept up into Balón's

103. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, pp. 210-20.

incomprehensive and fantastic world.

After Balón tells him the story behind the clock, Inocente suggests that they dispose of the machine and aids Balón in relieving himself of that disturbing item.

On one occasion Balón bumps into an Italian immigrant, causing him to drop some glasses and attack him with strong words. Balón's paranoid reaction is that the Italian is Mussolini's special emissary sent to thwart his social movement, and immediately challenges him to a duel, which never takes place because at the last moment Balón discovers that the Italian is merely a butcher, and of much too low a station to honor with manly combat. Again, in spite of his better judgment, Inocente finds himself in the position of Balón's second for the planned duel. It is impossible for Inocente to resist the mysterious attraction of Balón's world:

"También a don Inocente Cruz de Sepedillo tocaríale algo de la gloria de su amigo. Aunque fuere por antítesis. Quiso vivir en paz, y hélo allí traicionado. Quiso no ocuparse más que de cosas necesarias, y hélo allí traicionado. Quiso imponer su sabiduría popular, y hélo allí, también, traicionado. Era doble traición y doble la embriaguez de verse de nuevo. La de los demás, a cuyo juicio estaba sujeto, y la de él, que era derrota y desconocimiento.

Compañeros inseparables de un día, pudieron dar, ambos, una vida entera. Se necesitaban y se completaron. ¿Qué misterioso lazo los unió para siempre? Habría que preguntar y preguntar. Porque ya se presentía el paso de lobo que acechaba y algo malo se tejía entre las sombras... Acaso fué sólo la simple obligatoriedad del contraste, de la eterna posición fructífera. Uno y otro eran idénticos y distintos. Uno y otro nacieron para hacer vida. Lo extraordinario y lo simple, lo grande y lo pequeño, si es que puede haber pequeñez en lo sencillo, ¿cómo no iban a caminar sobre las paralelas del espíritu en tinieblas?"¹⁰⁴

104. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, pp. 184-85.

Before he realizes what is happening, Inocente finds himself taking part in the painful blood initiation of Balón's secret society, the "Nolens-Volens-Dixi". The identification and uniting of Balón's and Inocente's spirits reaches its climax when both of them have simultaneous dreams in which each mysteriously enters the other's dream, and while sleepwalking they awaken in a brotherly embrace:

"La verdad había nacido...

-- ¡Balón!

-- ¡Inocente!

Y era que ambos amigos habían despertado a una, y hallábanse abrazados con lágrimas en los ojos y palpitantes golpes en el corazón.

...

Se miraron largo rato. Cuando lo permitió la emoción, se dijeron, con suave y tímida voz:

--¿Me has comprendido, Inocente?

--¿Qué pasó? Yo siento que ha pasado algo muy grande, Balón. Te he entendido. ¡Todo, todo! Te vi en sueños y hablé contigo.

--Yo también te vi y te hablé y salvé tu espíritu.

--Sí, Balón, sí. ¡Qué miedo siento! Es como si hubiera estado muerto, muerto...

--No temas. No te amedrentes. El espíritu se lanza, desdoblado en cuerpo astral, y se encuentra con los cuerpos afines, para las grandes causas y las máximas creaciones."¹⁰⁵

Inocente's understanding of Balón is in reality more a feeling of understanding than it is an actual comprehension. However, Inocente is more in this novel than simply Balón's incomprehending companion in a nebulous march to "glory"; in a way more important to us, he is the sad witness to his friend's gradual destruction.

Balón's Dulcinea, la Niña Cándida, adds another cruel step to his downfall. While she is outwardly giving appearances of

105. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, pp. 276-78.

corresponding to Balón's romantic overtures, Cándida is inwardly laughing at the aging Romeo. She delivers him a lethal stroke when she arranges a meeting between him and a mysterious admirer, "la dama del antifaz", who is an old prostitute hired by Cándida to make fun of Balón. When Balón realizes that the whole affair is an unkind joke on him by his worshipped Cándida, the shock is more devastating than a bullet to the brain.

The final disillusionment comes for Balón when he is invited to a leftist worker's meeting nominally called to voice support for the Loyalists in Spain's civil war. When asked to say a few words to the workers attending the meeting, Balón launches himself into a pompous discourse about the "Nolens-Volens-Dixi", the "avanzadismo revolucionario socialista", and his willingness to lead them all down the path of glorious revolution. Noble though his thoughts may be, he is met with a most harsh incomprehension, capped by the arrival of a police raiding party:

--Sí, compañeros, sí. Yo os lo aseguro.
 ¡Yo, el líder! -- Y se iba exaltando, con grandes
 movimientos de brazos y golpes de puño sobre la
 mesa. --Yo soy el que lo digo. ¡El único! ¡El
 intelectual en acción! ¡El cerebro que organiza y
 manda! ¡Seguidme a mí! ¡Seguidme a mí! ¡Viva
 la revolución avanzadista! ¡A la lucha, camaradas,
 a la lucha! ¡Yo soy el maestro de la luz!

Los trabajadores comenzaron a protestar.
 Algunos se levantaron de las bancas y lo señalaron
 con el dedo. Otro, más osado, lo acusó a grito
 pelado:

-- ¡Abajo los intelectuales!
 Fué la voz inicial. La protesta se levantó
 unánime y las exclamaciones subieron de punto.
 -- ¡Abajo!
 -- ¡Traidor!
 -- ¡Mentiroso!
 -- ¡Farsante!

--¡Traidor a la clase obrera!

--¡Mueran los intelectuales!

Y don Balón no pudo ni replicar, porque, en esos momentos, subía la policía, sable en mano y ordenando:

--¡Retirarse!

--¡Disolverse!"¹⁰⁶

Balón and Inocente are forced to flee through the city and into its outskirts with the police seemingly at every corner. They take refuge in the dense stands of manglar trees. Crazy by the disastrous succession of events, Balón still believes that he will in the end triumph, and momentarily takes the shadowy forms of the trees for a force of enemies. When he realizes that he is only fighting trees, he is delivered the coup de grâce to his illusions:

"--¡Ven a mí, pueblo! ¡Ven a mí! ¡Ven!
¡Yo soy el maestro de la luz! Quise bondad, y no la tuve. Quise amor, y se me huyó. Quise ciencia, y todo fué vacío pensamiento. Quise a Dios, y se me burló. Todos me traicionaron. ...No me entendieron los hombres, y me arrojaron las piedras de sus burlas. Y solo estoy en la cumbre. ¡Solo!
¡Ja, ja, ja! ¡Ven a medirme conmigo, Dios insensato!
¡Dios felón! ¡Ven a probar mi fuerza, que es la del universo que creaste! ¡Yo soy el maestro de la luz!
¡Pueblo! ¡Pueblo!

De súbito, se volvió y sus miradas, en el máximo extravío de su pena, contemplaron el bosque vecino. Cerró los ojos un instante. Se pasó la mano por ellos, y volvió a mirar. Abrió los brazos en Cruz. ...

...

Y corrió hacia los árboles.

...

Avanzó, entre los gigantes, mordidos los labios en insana furia, y dió comienzo a la batalla.

...

Y golpeaba, enfurecido, y el combate se hizo grande y peleó toda la tropa de ideales.

Don Inocente clamaba entre el fragor:

106. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 297.

-- ¡Si son árboles, Balón! ¡No son hombres!
¡Son árboles! ¡Arboles!

Don Balón se detuvo de improviso. Bajó las manos, tendió las miradas como flechas. Se iluminó, y fué radiante. Lo vió todo. Lo entendió todo, lo supo todo. Un inmenso bienestar lo acariciaba. Y quedó rígido, vaporoso, brillante la cabeza, las manos paralizadas como de garrote, y la voz, que era de llanto, en el gemido y en la angustia más intensos de su vida!

-- ¡Arboles! ¡Arboles!

Lanzó un grito formidable. Estiró hacia atrás la frente, conmovió su cuerpo entero en horribles contorsiones, y cayó.

-- ¡Ja, ja, ja, ja!

Y reía, revolcándose en la tierra, dando vueltas como disco ensangrentado, con la espuma en asquerosa agitación entre los labios.

-- ¡Ja, ja, ja, ja!

Un golpe seco de su cráneo en los nudos de los árboles malditos lo calló. Silencio. Don Inocente lo miró sin una idea, sin una luz, sin una solución. Rompió a llorar despavorido y corrió entre los árboles, gritando:

-- ¡Socorro! ¡Socorro!

Y corría, y la niebla y la lluvia le seguían las pisadas con sus burlas y sus ecos.

Silencio, silencio, silencio."¹⁰⁷

Thus Don Balón de Baba ends his noble career: in undignified flight, totally disillusioned, briefly comprehensive of his madness, and finally met with an ignoble death. When Inocente returns with Micaela to the manglares to attend to their friend's body, Pareja has them presented with the singularly grotesque scene of finding Balón's remains partially eaten by the dogs.

In a certain sense, Don Balón de Baba is a novel that demonstrates a tour de force on the part of its author to write a modern work harking back to Quixotic reminiscences. Balón's idealism in matters of love, his concern with noble and manly

107. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, pp. 304-305.

combat, his making Inocente his "squire" of sorts, and his transferring his noble sentiments to his incomprehending friend do indeed remind us of the protagonist of Don Quijote. The richness of the language and the humorous elements prevalent throughout the novel also offer an affinity with Cervantes' masterwork.

As we recall, however, Don Quijote was never totally disillusioned. His final transference to Alonso Quijano "el bueno" was not a true disillusionment, but a gentle awakening from a mental illness. Don Balón, on the other hand, is disillusioned and partially shattered every step of the way. He dies disenchanted, and except for a brief moment of enlightenment, completely mad. Don Balón de Baba is by no means an imitation, but it does put modern trappings on a type of hopeless idealism that may indeed find roots of tradition dating back to cervantine times, and even earlier.

Pareja has in this novel undertaken a psychological study of the protagonist in a manner considerably more penetrating than in any of his previous novels. He has given us the picture of an individual whose nature is too sensitive to withstand the extraordinary experiences that it undergoes, and who gradually becomes a classic paranoid schizophrenic, fancying himself to be the political and spiritual savior of mankind--a messiah. This intense exercise in psychological study is in itself enough to indicate that Don Balón de Baba is the evolutionary superior of the novels preceeding it.

Although Balón himself is the chief object of Pareja's psychological study, Inocente is by no means ignored. When the author unites the two friends through the dream, the combining of

their spirits symbolizes the creation of a new species of man, with a new psychology that is the result of that union. Kessel Schwartz sees in this fusion an important message: "The dreamer and the materialist fuse, and in this fusion is one hope for the future."¹⁰⁸

In some ways, there are parallels between Don Balón and his creator. Balón, like Pareja, would like to aid in bettering the lot of his less fortunate countrymen, but neither is of the social background that would allow him to directly identify with the lower classes; both are able only to sympathize with them. Balón tries his hand at politics, and so does Alfredo Pareja. While Balón is met with a devastating spiritual downfall, Pareja is also met with discouragement. Let us observe Pareja's closing comment in this novel:

"Guayaquil. -- Destierro de Santiago de Chile.
-- Quito. -- Terminado en la prisión, en el penal
'García Moreno', encarcelado por la oprobiosa
dictadura reaccionaria de Mosquera Narváez. -- N. del A.
Diciembre 31 de 1938."¹⁰⁹

We should remember that during his 34 days in prison Pareja resolved to not again directly participate in his country's political struggles. From a biographical point of view, Don Balón de Baba is a novel that shows a good deal of introspection on the part of its author. Running the risk of walking on unfirm ground, we might form the conjecture that Pareja shows us through the character of Balón something that he himself had learned, that sympathy with a social cause does not necessarily imply a

108. Schwartz, p. 224.

109. Pareja, Don Balón de Baba, p. 306.

successful person to person communication with the human elements of that cause. Perhaps it is partially due to this realization that Pareja seldom becomes personally involved in his characters, and customarily maintains an objective detachment.

As in his previous novels, Pareja again puts the action of Don Balón de Baba in a definite historical perspective. We are aware that while Ecuador is grappling with its own problems, Spain is having its Civil War and Mussolini and Hitler are dominating the political scene in the rest of Europe.

More important, however, is the fact that Pareja has in this novel totally extracted himself from the portrayal of the usual "types" found in novels oriented toward social reform, although his own "types" have always been possessive of strong human qualities as individuals. Of course, we do see characters representative of many social levels. Micaela is a chola whose life before working for Balón was filled with the unpleasantries that we generally associate with her class, Inocente is a landholder who exploits both agricultural and human resources, Balón himself is of Inocente's class, but the nature of his madness makes him seek spiritual rather than material rewards from "the masses", and the secondary characters, such as shopkeepers, butchers, doctors, laborers, etc., round out a colorful composite of social elements. Nonetheless, these characters are not important as social types, but as ingredients blending into a successful artistic creation.

In fact, this is Pareja's first novel in which members of the lower classes are not used as instruments for social reform;

he has taken a departure from his usual practice of painting intensely human beings of humble station in order to evoke our first liking them as people, and then our deploring the society that makes their situations so wretched.

All in all, Don Balón de Baba is a novel clearly demonstrating Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco's awareness of his own novelistic evolution. Here he is taking a step toward writing novels of true artistic merit that will let them endure forever, while still dealing with contemporary problems. Pareja never limits himself to fit within a specified framework, but constantly adjusts to fit within a framework that is continually changing. Taken by itself, the novel deserves a new reading by the Latin American public. Don Balón is still a contemporary figure.

CHAPTER V

BEHIND THE BARS AND INTO THE MIND

As we shall recall, in the final pages of Baldomera Pareja gives us a fleeting glimpse of prison life. In Hombres Sin Tiempo (1941) that glimpse becomes a long and hard look. More important than its examination of life in Ecuador's principal penal institution, however, is the novel's admirable study of human psychology. Although it has been noted that here Pareja's work is somewhat "influida de Thomas Mann",¹¹⁰ he at last writes a novel relatively free of regionalism and local politics. With the interior of the protagonist's mind as the true milieu, Hombres Sin Tiempo may be equally understood by all men. Here we have an undeniably universal novel by Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco.

In our closing comments to Don Balón de Baba we noted that Alfredo Pareja finished that novel while he was temporarily imprisoned for political reasons. His experiences behind bars gave him the inspiration for his next novel, which possesses, as do many of his other novels, a certain amount of auto-biographical elements. Lilo Linke notes that "The schoolteacher who tells the story...withdrew in prison, like Pareja, from violence into reflection."¹¹¹ His short stay in the "Penal García Moreno" must have had tremendous emotional impact on Pareja, for we know that after that time he withdrew to a

110. Diccionario de la Literatura Latinoamericana, "Ecuador", (Washington: Pan American Union, 1962), p. 145.

111. Linke, p. 10.

more passive participation in his country's politics.

The enforced solitude of prison probably allowed our author as never before to study the workings of his mind, and from there, those of every mind. The many well-drawn secondary characters that appear in Hombres Sin Tiempo offer a faithful panorama of the various types encountered in prison. These characters are based on factual cases, and Pareja confesses that he owes much to the kindness of the Prison Director (Warden), who allowed him to continue and gather material for literary purposes:

"... era entonces Director del Penal un hombre digno, el doctor Neptalí Oleas Zambrano. Casi no tienen otro objeto estas líneas que hacer público mi sentimiento de gratitud. No sólo procuró hacernos menos dura la prisión, sino que se afanó en salvar y proteger nuestras vidas cuando la pasión degenerada hacía lo posible por eliminarnos aún ya encarcelados.

Yo, de modo especial, quedé obligado al doctor Oleas Zambrano. Permitió, incomunicado como estaba, que me enviaran mi máquina de escribir para terminar mi novela DON BALÓN DE BABA. Y luego, consintió en dejarme estudiar el archivo del Penal para documentarme en algunas cosas que doy en este libro..."¹¹²

As is his custom, Pareja adds his artistic talent to what he has documented, and presents us a believable world peopled by real men and women, albeit a world that only exists within the walls of the "Penal García Moreno", and having little to do with purely Ecuadorian problems. Two of Pareja's countrymen, however, feel that Pareja should have demonstrated a more overt social consciousness in this novel. Angel F. Rojas declares that "no hay la trascendencia

112. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, Hombres Sin Tiempo (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1941). p. 8.

social que el relato ecuatoriano contemporáneo busca tener...",¹¹³ although the same critic feels that the novel is a worthy effort at psychological penetration. In a similar vein, Edmundo Ribadeneira feels that:

"No cabe duda que el drama psicológico de la cárcel constituye un tema muy interesante, pero mucho más si se lo mira por el lado de la injusticia. Hubiera sido mejor, pues, si Alfredo Pareja, con visión más realista, no hubiera ahondado tanto en el submundo de su personaje, equilibrando su valor con el de otros."¹¹⁴

Nonetheless, both Rojas and Ribadeneira agree that the characters are constructed in a truly praiseworthy manner. In order to become acquainted with the characters of Hombres Sin Tiempo, a brief review of the novel is in order.

The protagonist of this novel is a quiet schoolteacher called Nicolás Ramírez, who tells us his story in the form of a diary. He tells us that before going to prison he was a sensitive fellow, and quite unadventuresome. As a young man he was fond of his mother and sister but they both died somewhat prematurely. His Father died before he was born. Although he still had the occasional company of his friends, his life became generally one of loneliness and reflection, devoted mostly to preparing his classes and reading. While he tells us that from time to time "iba a cualquier casa de lenocinio, donde arrendaba, a poco precio, una noche de amor",¹¹⁵ he longed for the enduring and meaningful relationship with a woman that he was incapable of undertaking; he futilely compensated by

113. Rojas, p. 196.

114. Ribadeneira, p. 88.

115. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 16.

proclaiming that romantic love was only for the unmanly.

One afternoon his friend Lorenzo Salazar invited Nicolás to his home for a small party in celebration of his wife's Saint's Day. At the party, Nicolás meets Clemencia, Lorenzo's pretty fifteen year old daughter. Lorenzo becomes totally drunk, and Nicolás helps Clemencia put him to bed. While still in Lorenzo's bedroom, the thirty-five year old Nicolás begins to talk and drink with Clemencia, who appears enchanted by his flowery words. Aided by a considerable amount of alcohol, Nicolás becomes ever bolder until he believes that he is seducing the girl, finally clumsily attempting to force his attentions on her. The girl's screams awaken her father, who throws himself on Ramírez. In the resulting struggle, Nicolás unwillingly kills his friend. Once apprehended, he is sentenced to sixteen years in prison. Upon entering his cell he states, "Tuve la sensación escalofriante de que me habían sepultado vivo."¹¹⁶

Ramírez' first feelings of being buried alive soon change to feelings of security, however. For the next decade and a half the prison walls become more symbols of refuge than enclosure for him, they even become symbols of friendship: "...tengo un amigo más íntimo que todos: el propio Penal."¹¹⁷

It is not surprising that Nicolás would feel so attached to his prison, for Pareja has made it clear that life in the outside world offered no more, if even as much, spiritual fulfillment

116. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 23.

117. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 218.

for the sensitive Ramírez than does life in enforced seclusion. As he himself declares, liberty is a state of mind to Nicolás: "Me probé a mi mismo que la libertad no radica en las calles sino en el propio ánimo y en el propio dolor."¹¹⁸

In addition to his feeling of affection toward the Penal, the second dominating factor is the memory of Lorenzo and Clemencia. He feels a grieving remorse for Lorenzo, and an idealized and imagined love relationship with Clemencia. As well as experiencing what he believes to be a spiritual communication with Clemencia, Nicolás feels that the memory of Clemencia gives him strength in overcoming physical weaknesses:

"Muchas batallas ha ganado...mi espíritu y muchas aún le quedan por librar. La preocupación del sexo ha sido una de las tremendas. Pero en esto he tenido el auxilio maravilloso de mi amor a Clemencia. Es decir, el sentido de mi amor a Clemencia, su presencia casi real, su vivo recuerdo, han sido y son el impulso de todo, de este todo que es mi liberación. Lo comprendo así, y debo decirlo."¹¹⁹

Yet, we know that Nicolás could find solace only in the memory of Clemencia, for his brief encounter with her in real life was nothing less than disastrous. Nicolás Ramírez is a man who is most happy in a gentle world created by his own imagination. We know him for what he is, and accept him as such; Pareja makes no attempt at idealizing him.

One day Nicolás meets a new female prisoner with whom he has much in common. Margarita Dávalos is an ex-prostitute who attempted to kill her lover due to his impending marriage to someone else. Like

118. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 58.

119. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 60.

Ramírez, her act of violence was out of character with her basically gentle nature, and like him, her love was directed toward an unreal and unattainable goal (in this case, a member of the aristocracy); she, too, now feels incapable of romantic love on a person to person basis.

Seeing a good deal of each other during the recreation periods, Nicolás and Margarita become sincere friends. At first Nicolás views Margarita from a purely platonic standpoint, telling her of his resignation to imprisonment, his interest in philosophically studying the lives of his fellow prisoners, and his idealized love for Clemencia. Little by little, however, the genuine Margarita becomes the object of Nicolás' love, rather than the imagined figure of Clemencia. Once, during a period of depression, Nicolás consumes a bottle of liquor*, and in the resulting period of drunken semi-slumber admits to himself the new importance of Margarita:

"Invoqué, supliqué. No sé si con lágrimas, pero el llanto era de corazón, adentro hacia adentro. ¡Clemencia! Otra vez, como desde hacía algún tiempo, cuando pude contemplar la imagen medio borrosa de la hija de mi amigo Lorenzo, los ojos verdes de Margarita substituyeron a los suyos... Después vino la boca, la nariz, el pelo encima de la frente... Cerré los ojos... Es decir, pensé que los cerraba, o los ajustaba, porque debo haberlos tenido ya cerrados... Las figuras, luego, tomaron actitud: Clemencia, de pie, triste, me fijaba los ojos... Y de entre las sombras húmedas, se fué dibujando una figura, un contorno... Comenzó a pasarse por encima de la otra, borrando a mi Clemencia... Primero un lado... Los brazos, la

*The penal system Pareja describes us here is a relatively liberal one, for the prisoners are allowed liquor, time with wives or prostitutes, and other passtimes uncommon to a North American institution.

cintura, el rostro... Se colocaba la nueva muy despacito encima de la otra... Era Margarita... Siempre con su risa... Con el uniforme azul desteñado, tan dulce..."¹²⁰

As well as his happy relationship with Margarita, Nicolás enjoys the company of another prisoner, Rosendo ("Gusano") Barcía. "Gusano" is from a rural family that moved to the city in order to open a store. Since he was a cholo attending a school full of middle and upper class children, he suffered the ridicule of his classmates. Finding that his interests tended more toward a professional life than that of a businessman, he also suffered the abuse of his father. When his father died, he was free to set up business with a trusted friend and marry a lovely girl of relatively high station. His happiness was rather brief, however, for his friend soon died and the friend's family accused "Gusano" of misusing funds. Furthermore, his wife, Lucía, was unfaithful to him. When he consequently killed his wife's lover, he was sent to prison, where he meets and becomes friends with Ramírez. Like Nicolás, his life in prison is more enjoyable than was his life outside of prison; he is able to have a successful love affair with Luisa Maldonada, a type of "recreational therapist" and a friend of Margarita's.

Although within the confines of the penitentiary, Nicolás, Margarita, "Gusano", and Luisa enjoy an almost conventional friendship. The prisoners' relatively happy and productive life is due to the

120. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 172.

generosity of their liberal and progressive Prison Director (undoubtedly a novelization of Oleas Zambrano). This same Prison Director allows Nicolás to function again as a teacher and to enjoy periods of liberty within the prison in order to talk with and learn the stories of other prisoners.

Among the other prisoners we meet through Ramírez are "el Chino" Romero, a hardened killer who began his career by killing an unfaithful girlfriend, and Sebastián Casal, who is concerned in life only for his own welfare--the total materialist, presented as the antithesis of Ramírez, the idealist.

Other characters who appear in the novel are Gabriel Pérez Portilla, a confirmed criminal who forces Nicolás to join him in an escape attempt shortly after Nicolás first arrives, causing our protagonist to be brutally punished for the attempt; a young homosexual whose advanced Nicolás rejects, and who finally kills another prisoner out of jealousy; Ana Chiliza, who is sent to prison with her lover for conspiring against and killing her drunkard husband, and who is allowed to marry her lover and rear her child in prison; a certain Frenchman, who commits suicide because he cannot stand the prospect of years of imprisonment; a pair of Indians, who refuse Nicolás' offers to help them because they can trust no white man; and Jaramillo, a negro who dislikes Ramírez' obvious superior culture, and finally provokes him to fight with him. Although these many characters taken at a glance may seem superfluous, they all add to the kaleidoscopic view of Nicolás' fellow inmates, and thereby give us an accurate account of the types one might encounter in prison anywhere. Some of

them might be viewed as instruments Pareja uses to demonstrate defects in Ecuadorian society, such as "Gusano", and his problems which stem in part from his being a cholo, which shows that it is impossible for Pareja to completely put aside his social consciousness. These many characters' prime functions, however, are to aid in presenting a panorama of the world behind bars and to complement the author's study of the principal character.

Returning to the story line, we see that Nicolás' contented life with his friends comes to an abrupt halt. "Gusano" goes completely mad, to the point of no longer even recognizing Ramírez, and Margarita is discharged. To make matters worse, a new Prison Director of traditional and conservative inclinations replaces the liberal one, and Nicolás is no longer allowed to function as a teacher, but must become a carpenter.

Totally alone now, Nicolás withdraws more than ever to the confines of his mind. He has never left the Penal during the duration of his imprisonment. Even when his good behavior once earned him the opportunity to leave for short periods of time, he preferred to merely roam about the prison talking with the prisoners. Ramírez looks with apprehension at the prospect of leaving his home of sixteen years: "¡Salir yo del Penal! ¡Dejar mi bella casa de piedra! ¿Sería capaz de soportar la presencia de las calles? ¿No haría daño a mi corazón esta salida?"¹²¹

121. Pareja, Hombres Sin Tiempo, p. 184.

Other than his recurring memory of Clemencia, the only happiness Nicolás now has are his occasional letters from Margarita. Although he realizes through her veiled comments that Margarita has been unable to find a "decent" way of earning a living, and has had to return to prostitution (although now as a "madame"), Nicolás declares his love for her. While her response is more a declaration of affection than of love, its overall effect is that of encouragement. They agree that Nicolás will stay with her when his sentence expires.

When Nicolás is discharged, he goes directly to Margarita. To his sudden amazement, he realizes that both he and Margarita have grown a great deal older. Tragically, the years away from conventional society have made it impossible for either of them to again truly become integrated into the "normal" scheme of life.

In the final scene Nicolás goes alone into Margarita's garden, torn by the realization that all of his illusions have come to an end. Clemencia, whose memory had always given him a certain peace of mind, is now dead to him. His final act in the novel is the burial of his diary, and with it, everything that had been life to him.

Until this final point, which is witnessed by a third party (presumably the author), Pareja's technique has been that of using a constant stream of consciousness, as one would expect when reading a diary. We are unaware of the presence of the third party until the diary is buried. In technique as well as theme, Hombres Sin Tiempo is truly a modern novel.

Regardless of its basically universal orientation, local social problems and politics are not entirely extracted from this novel. Pareja does touch the situation of the indian and the cholo, and we plainly see that he is on the side of a more progressive penal system. He also lets us know that the assassination of political prisoners is not unheard of in Ecuador, and with his customary historical awareness, he reminds us that in cell 276 of the Penal "García Moreno" the renowned liberal general, Eloy Alfaro, was imprisoned. However, none of these elements detract from the main purpose of the novel, which is the study of the workings of a human mind. To the contrary, Alfredo Pareja skillfully uses these elements to complement his study of Nicolás Ramírez.

Although it is true that there have been other psychological novels about men in cells, it has been noted that in Hombres Sin Tiempo "no hay influencias de Wasserman ni de la tragedia de Maurizius. Pareja trata su tema con sus propias fuerzas y logra plenamente su propósito."¹²² We must in the end be in agreement with Kessel Schwartz' opinion of the novel when he affirms that "in spite of political innuendos, it concentrates also on the spiritual needs of its characters and reflects the growing maturity of the Ecuadorian novelist."¹²³

122. Diccionario de la Literatura Latinoamericana, "Ecuador," p. 145.

123. Schwartz, p. 225.

CHAPTER VI

THE BALANCED NOVEL

Las Tres Ratas (1944)¹²⁴ has received a generally warm acceptance from the critics and has enjoyed a great deal of popularity with the public at large. Shortly after its appearance the novel was made into a movie (with the same title) in Argentina, and has thereby probably made Pareja's name more known to the hispanic world than did all of his previous literary endeavors. Demand for the novel evidently exceeded the supply, for it was offered in a second edition in 1950, just a few years after its first appearance.

It is not surprising that Las Tres Ratas was used as material for a film, for the work has elements of action, sex, strong characters, and local color that lend themselves well to the cinema. In fact, one reviewer feels that this novel is overly cinematographic:

"...this book...is not polished. The haste with which it was written is obvious to the reader, urging him to employ a like haste in reading if he wants to grasp the book. Otherwise he will find himself resenting the disappearance of characters who appear briefly, cinematographically, to assume a momentary and entirely disproportionate importance."¹²⁵

The above commentary by Mr. Franklin is undoubtedly the most severe that we have encountered. However, we are in personal agreement with most other critics, who feel that here Pareja has created a novel possessing an extraordinary balance between plot, character development, and thesis. Kessel Schwartz affirms that:

124. Alfredo Pareja Diezecaneco, Las Tres Ratas (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1944).

125. Albert B. Franklin, "Las Tres Ratas," The Inter-American Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 3, (July, 1941), p. 104.

"Structurally it is probably the best of his works though it lacks the force of La Baldomera or El muelle. ...the author abandons direct denunciation of the social structure in order to tell a good story."¹²⁶

In direct disagreement with Mr. Franklin, Edmundo Ribadeneira feels that:

"...Nunca como en 'Las tres ratas', Alfredo Pareja se había manifestado con tanta desenvoltura, con ojo tan penetrante y con sentido humano tan vigoroso. Lo que hallamos de discutible en sus anteriores novelas, la tendencia cinematográfica, su afán por crear personajes dudosos a fuerza de ser puros, como María del Socorro, de la novela 'El Muelle', todo esto ha desaparecido casi por completo, ... ocupando su lugar una visión profunda que se hunde en la vida y el ambiente, con calma y estudio; una técnica novelística que ya no se prodiga, un deseo de elaborar a conciencia."¹²⁷

Finally, Angel F. Rojas states that Las Tres Ratas is "acaso la novela mejor escrita del autor" and adds that the author:

"...Se revela en este libro como el novelista que, en el Ecuador, mejor domina el oficio. Sin tratar grandes temas ni trabajar con masas humanas o símbolos; sin la ambición de condensar, en una obra de ficción, el drama social de la clase inferior en la sociedad ecuatoriana; sin el prejuicio político..., este pequeño libro de Pareja no solamente nos cuenta... una historia interesante, sino que nos da...la visión realista de la sociedad en que ubica la narración. Cumple...este doble objetivo que...vienen buscando nuestros escritores, pasada la primera etapa de "denuncia y protesta": hacer de sus libros, al par que un documento social, una obra artística."¹²⁸

Here Rojas has put his finger on the real importance of Pareja not only in the Ecuadorian novel, but also in the entire scope

126. Schwartz, p. 225.

127. Ribadeneira, p. 89.

128. Rojas, p. 197.

of the Spanish-American novel--his undeniable ability to combine artistic creation with subject matter that is fairly frothing with realism. We know that since El Muelle Pareja has never been guilty of writing novels totally deficient in artistic finesse as the result of excessive attention to thesis. To the contrary, we have seen a steady progression toward a balance between the novelist's artistic ability and his need to cry for social justice in his country. This equilibrium between the universal and the regional has been appearing occasionally in the novel from Mexico to Chile (with authors of such varied natures as Juan Rulfo and Eduardo Barrios) since the second decade of this century, but it has been nearly non-existent in Ecuador, with the chief outstanding exception of Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco.

Already having the advantage of being high on the scale of a thorough process of novelistic evolution, it is no surprise that Las Tres Ratas, which was "Prepared for the Farrar and Rinehart contest... finished just below Gil Gilbert's Nuestro Pan which later finished second to El mundo es ancho y ajeno of Ciro Alegría."¹²⁹

The novel opens with a river scene, and we are reminded of the Alfredo Pareja we first met, even before El Muelle. We plainly see that our novelist is still most at home along the shores of the Guayas River. The scene is one of a launch carrying among its passengers three young women, Carmelina, Eugenia, and Ana Luisa Parrales--"las tres ratas" of our story. The girls are travelling from Daule to Guayaquil.

129. Schwartz, p. 225.

When they reach the port city, the girls go directly to their Aunt Aurora's home. Although their arrival is unexpected, Tía Aurora welcomes them. From the great portrait of Eloy Alfaro on one of the walls, we know that we are dealing with a blatantly Liberal family. The picture of family reunion is suddenly broken by the arrival of the police, who have come for Eugenia. She is charged with a jewel theft.

In the manner we by now know to be so often characteristic of his style, Pareja presents us first with a picture filled with color and intrigue. Our interest is thoroughly aroused. Now he retreats in time and space to fill us in on the background.

We learn that the girls' father was "el Comandante" Antonio Parrales, a stout old Liberal fighter, close friend of Eloy Alfaro, good husband and father, flirtatious and popular with the ladies, in short, a real man's man. Don Antonio was a great patriot, and remembered his daughters' births by coincidental historical and political events. Through Don Antonio we are kept aware of Pareja's tendency to place his novels in a definite historical perspective.

When his wife died, Don Antonio kept working his lands with his customary vigor, and attended to the task of raising his daughters by himself. Already in his seventies, one day he was bitten by a poisonous snake. In spite of his nearly heroic efforts to reach his home and aid, he died. It seemed somehow appropriate that this man should die while still charged with vitality, rather than the withering death of a tired old man. Although we only meet him briefly, Don Antonio is an unforgettable character.

After their father's passing, the girls try valiantly to continue making their property a successful business venture. However, a disease strikes their livestock and their cattle are decimated. The resulting financial loss makes it impossible to invest money into their farm, and the girls begin to fail.

Carmelina, the oldest, feels the greatest responsibility for the maintenance of the family's wealth and honor. As their economic situation worsens, she and Eugenia (the next-oldest) call on an old acquaintance of their father, Don Horacio Valladares, for financial aid. Don Horacio makes them a sizeable loan (5,000 Sucres) at the stratospheric interest rate of eight percent per month. As much as Carmelina and her sisters try to manage with their new capital, they are unable to pay even the interest on the loan, and their family's lands soon fall into the hands of Don Horacio.

We must sympathize with Carmelina, for she must fight the battle nearly alone. Ana Luisa is too young to be of great assistance, and Eugenia is in love. Eugenia's sweetheart and lover is Ernesto Carbo, a local police official who used to write poetry. In fact, it is his capacity for lyrical expression that really wins the girl:

"--No te lo puedo explicar... Sé que te quiero porque me tiembla el corazón en tu presencia y me sube por la sangre como una música caliente... Eres como las noches de verano: despejada y luminosa, pero lejana. Y para mirarte, tengo que alzar la cabeza y adelgazar, como el filo de un segundo, el espíritu... Te hablo con los ojos, con las manos trémulas, con mi deseo encendido, quemante como una llaga... Y me duelen los dedos por tocarte...

En la tarde, el inmenso árbol de mangos se iluminaba con millares de faroles. Abajo, el tronco añoso se torcía en tendones y tumores de áspera

presencia. Arriba, sonaban los colores. Verde brillante, amarillo de oro encendido, rojo violento... Eran las hojas que se apretaban como racimos de luces. Los puntos negros de los mangos maduros moteaban el oro y el verde."¹³⁰

As has been the case throughout our study, we are at times taken by surprise at Pareja's ability for expression that is seldom exploited by him, such as the above segment, which is obviously endowed with genuine lyrical qualities. In this part of the novel, located in the countryside, we also see moments of rural description demonstrative of an intimate rapport between the novelist and the less populated areas of his land, much as we saw earlier in parts of La Beldaca and Baldomera. Had we a firmer basis for our conclusion, we might hypothesize that in spite of his thematic material classifying him as a "novelist of social reform," Alfredo Pareja has the heart of a romantic. Were our first conclusion correct, we might further suggest that this elemental sensitivity to the beauty of humanity and its natural surroundings somehow softens the rage brought about by his compassion for his less fortunate fellows, and never allows him to ignore art for thesis.

We learn that Eugenia's lover, Ernesto Carbo, has an understanding with Don Horacio to exploit the girls and take their land. When Eugenia realizes that Ernesto has aided in their family's ruin, her anger at the total picture of injustice leads her to seek vengeance and retribution by stealing some jewels from Don Horacio's home. It is by now clear that the most powerful figure in Las Tres Ratas is Eugenia.

130. Pareja, Las Tres Ratas, p. 30.

With an understanding of the events leading to Eugenia's arrest, we are now back in Guayaquil. Again the keyword is injustice, as Eugenia cries in the police station, "La ley... La ley para don Horacio y para mí la policia."¹³¹

Nonetheless, Tía Aurora's influence through her family's proud history in Liberal politics keeps her niece from going to jail. Once the jewels are returned, Eugenia is freed.

At this point, Eugenia's life assumes new aspects. Spiritually depressed after her release from the police, she attempts to poison herself. However, she is saved by the quick attention of a young Doctor who is Tía Aurora's physician and who lives in the neighborhood. After recovering from the effects of the poison, Eugenia assumes a positive attitude toward living, and resolves to make the best of her situation.

Undertaking a frontal assault on life, Eugenia leaves her aunt's house to seek work of any sort, even that of a domestic servant. Regardless of her vigor, her efforts are futile, she is too white to be a cholita and too pretty to be otherwise accepted without suspicion. Finally, after walking the streets for seemingly endless hours, she comes across a lower-class section of town where the negro population is singing and dancing to the music of marimbas. Exhausted, and nearly hypnotized by the music, she is approached by a young man of some apparent means, Carlos Alvarez. She allows herself to be picked up by him and taken to his apartment, where she is to stay as his mistress for a few weeks.

131. Pareja, Las Tres Ratas, p. 48.

Finding that Alvarez is basically a callous fellow, Eugenia looks forward to the times when he leaves, allowing her to relax.

One day while away from Alvarez' apartment for a stroll, Eugenia comes across the young Doctor, who informs her that her sisters have had a disagreement with Tía Aurora and have gone to live by themselves. Upon returning to Alvarez' part-time home (his "casa chica") Eugenia finds him there, angry at her absence. They have a heated argument, and she leaves him, as penniless as he found her. She goes directly to the Doctor, who takes her to her sisters.

Eugenia finds that the girls are working for a certain Doña Tarjelia in her dress shop. After lying to them that she has been working as a servant, she moves in with them, also taking employment with Doña Tarjelia. The girls earn very little money, but their income is increased by a small monthly government pension, which is given in honor of their father's military service to his country.

Through Doña Tarjelia, Eugenia meets another young man, Vicente Zavala. Doña Tarjelia has inherited some qualities of the historical trotaconventos, for she hopes that Vicente's relationship with Eugenia will somehow give economically fruitful results, thus allowing the girl means of paying her debts to her. However, Zavala is a man of an honorable nature, and he dates Eugenia as much for her personality as for her appearance. Vicente has a friend, Francisco Pereira, who begins to date Ana Luisa.

Pereira is one of the more interesting characters in the novel, for through him Pareja exposes his views about social injustice in his country. An avowed socialist, Pereira notes that rule under the grand old Liberal party has in reality accomplished little more to aid the lower classes than has the Conservative party:

"--¡Qué reformas! Con Alfaro mismo empezaron... Recuerda sólo el Congreso de 1905. ¿Para qué sirven reformas de ley, sin aplicación ninguna a la realidad? Es la mayor insinceridad que conozco. La ley, la ley, una gran Celestina para no hacer nada. Los privilegios han seguido, las leyes se han escrito en el aire sin consulta alguna con la verdad ecuatoriana. El indio y el montuvio continúan esclavos, bestias productoras, sin capacidad de consumo. Aún heredan las deudas y se venden como objetos. ¿Es esto la ley? ¿Liberalismo, eso? Eso se llama disolución de un partido que no ha cumplido sus programas. En el fondo, los liberales son tan reaccionarios como los conservadores, sus enemigos ultramontanos. Simplemente, se han disputado el poder por el poder en sí. La prueba es que no hay un solo liberal de los que mandan, hombres de club, y de iglesia casi siempre, que no tenga sus simpatías y decisión por el fascismo. ¿Quieres más contradicción?"¹³²

It is notable that in Las Tres Ratas this chief exponent of social reform is not a foreigner, as was the case in some of Pareja's earlier novels, but is now a home-grown product. Edmundo Ribadeneira notes that:

"... En 'Las tres ratas,' en lugar del conocido comunista de importación, el socialista Pereyra puede indicarnos un adelanto en Alfredo Pareja, en el sentido de acercarse con mayor convencimiento a las fuentes ideológicas de izquierda de nuestro país. Pereyra es un socialista ecuatoriano, algo utópico, pero en todo caso, un hombre noble, inteligente y sincero."¹³³

132. Pareja, Las Tres Ratas, pp. 72-73.

133. Ribadeneira, p. 90.

We should note that of all the characters appearing in Pareja's work up to this point, Pereira is the one who is probably the closest in reflecting the author's true self. Through Pereira our earlier questions as to why Pareja had to use foreigners to solve Ecuadorian problems are partially answered. It is not unlikely that when he wrote those earlier novels (such as El Muelle and Baldomera) Alfredo Pareja, then still in his twenties, was much more enchanted with new ideas from abroad than when he reached his mid-thirties. Still dissatisfied with the accomplishments of earlier generations and no longer enchanted with directly imported ideas, Pareja shows us through Pereira a change--an evolution--in attitude. The author now suggests that any real hope for social progress in his homeland must come primarily from the efforts of his own society. We see here not a lessening of dedication on the part of our author, but a more mature recognition of the need for practical and honorable means of solving national problems. However, we must be careful not to view Pereira as merely a mouth-piece for the author; the character's appearance is too brief and too well complemented by the other characters for that sort of categorical qualification.

While the action of the novel has moved swiftly from the start, it now seems to gain even more momentum. By now we witness definite delineations between the three sisters.

Zavala and Pereira take Eugenia and Ana Luisa with them to parties, picnics, and other social gatherings, allowing them to be quite well-known in the circle of the jarana. Even Carmelina

accompanies them, and soon the three develop the reputation of being "party girls". During the high point of one gay evening Alvarez appears. Surprised at seeing his ex-mistress Eugenia, he exclaims: "--¿Qué haces tú aquí? ¡Rata! ¿Éstas son tus hermanas? ¿Las buenas hermanitas formales? ¡Las tres ratas juntas! ¡A ver! ¡A ver, compañeros! ¡Vengan a bailar con las tres ratas! ¡Yo se las presento! ¡Yo!"¹³⁴ Thus the three sisters acquire their nickname of "las tres ratas". The title really only applies to them as a physical unit, however, for spiritually they are quite far apart.

When Tía Aurora dies, leaving her nieces absolutely no inheritance, it is more than ever apparent to the girls that they must be self-reliant. The necessity of relying on themselves singularly as much as collectively allows their individual natures to become rather well defined.

Ana Luisa is the least well-drawn of the sisters; her importance is more to complement Pereira than her sisters, and in the latter part of the novel we must view her more as a unit with him than with Carmelina and Eugenia. Francisco Pereira had always been a romantic in search of the "perfect girl", writing poetry and developing affection for certain prostitutes who would lend him a sympathetic ear during his youthful years, but becoming disenchanted with poetry when he realized the grim realities of his native society. Upon meeting Ana Luisa, he finds in her a willing

134. Alfredo Pareja, Las Tres Ratas, p. 79.

vessel for his emotion and a compassionate partner for his life's still nebulous road. When Pereira becomes disillusioned with imported communism at the Soviet Union's idleness during the German invasion of Poland (again we are aware of history as it happens), it is Ana Luisa who is present to lend him moral support. The young idealist decides to marry the daughter of a great traditional family and together they will work for their country's future. The new is thus united with the best of the old as a means for progress.

While Ana Luisa is becoming involved with Pereira, her oldest sister, Carmelina, is going mad. Always a lonely person, Carmelina envies Eugenia's ability to reject fine suitors while she herself feels that she is on the path to becoming an old maid. She would like to be courted by Zavala herself, and on one occasion confesses her loneliness to him, but he is only interested in the indifferent Eugenia. Feeling that everyone is only out to do her harm, Carmelina suffers a nervous breakdown, and is taken by Dr. Ramírez (the same one who earlier treated Eugenia) to the hospital. Upon regaining emotion stability and leaving the hospital, Carmelina unhappily resigns herself to her life, reflecting on her misfortunes and the glory of her family's past. When in the end her sisters leave her alone she decides to live with and work for Doña Tarjelia and make the best of her situation. As she is about to leave her apartment in the final scene of the novel, she notices that some boys had drawn three large rats on the sidewalk under the windows; the drawings were

accompanied by some obscene words. "Carmelina se adelantó, tomó su pañuelo y frotando, frotando, comenzó a borrar."¹³⁵ Thus ends Carmelina's story--an attempt to clean her family's name.

As earlier affirmed, however, Eugenia is the most completely drawn of the three sisters. Never having fully recovered from her emotional involvement with Ernesto Carbo back in Daule, she is unable to become more than passively interested in Vicente Zavala or any other man. When Zavala realizes the futility of his relationship with Eugenia and finally bids her goodbye, she gives herself over briefly but vigorously to a libertine life of parties and liquor.

Meanwhile, Carbo's underhanded financial ventures have paid off for him, and he gives up his post in Daule in order to live more leisurely in Guayaquil. When one day he comes across Eugenia, she is like the proverbial "putty in his hands", and again becomes his mistress. Eugenia soon learns, however, the Carbo is only interested in her for temporary diversion. Upon finding out that her lover is engaged to another girl, Eugenia's jealousy drives her to the point of shooting Carbo. However, Carbo is only wounded, and he does not press charges against Eugenia; in fact, he rather enjoys bragging to his friends about his power over women that drives them to such violent ends. As is to be expected, Eugenia finds little humor in the whole situation, for she suffers greatly from her unrewarded love for Carbo. In a commentary also alluded to by Lilo Linke, Benjamín Carrión feels that the social injustice

135. Pareja, Las Tres Ratas, p. 198.

related to matters of love in this novel is one of its most outstanding qualities:

"Y es aquí donde hemos de hacer la remarca central sobre esta línea novelística de Alfredo Pareja: su reclamo sobre la injusticia social frente al amor. Frente al amor de hombre y mujer, estímulo supremo de la especie. Otros dirán la voz que reclama la injusticia frente al pan, substancia y esencia de la injusticia humana. Pareja dirá la voz contra la injusticia y la desigualdad social ante el amor, ante la unión electiva de hombre y mujer, en cumplimiento de los mandatos de la especie."¹³⁶

Once again Eugenia realizes that she must be completely self-reliant. She again becomes involved with Alvarez, but she now rents her house to him rather than her body. We now learn that he is a smuggler of expensive fabrics, and he needs the house of Eugenia and her sisters as an inconspicuous caché for his contraband. Eugenia finally reports Alvarez' activities to a friend in Customs, and in a violent scene including a gun battle, Alvarez is taken prisoner. These scenes of smuggling and violence recall similar scenes in El Muelle, and it is notable that Las Tres Ratas closes a cycle that began with the former novel, for Pareja would not again produce a novel for a number of years. We shall talk more about this cycle shortly.

Although freed of Alvarez, who had blackmailed her into becoming an accomplice to his contraband activities by threatening to report her attempt on Carbo's life, Eugenia is still in difficult straits. She is carrying Carbo's child. Eugenia's situation is doubly sad, for earlier she did have one possible solution to her

136. B. Carrión, p. 182.

problems through Dr. Ramírez, whose kindness toward her had grown into love and who offered to marry her. Although she then gently rejected Dr. Ramírez on the noble grounds that marrying "la rata" Parrales would harm his professional future, she dreams of how happy her life could be were she his wife. Nonetheless, Eugenia is a person of action as much as she is a dreamer. In spite of her position in her society of being a slightly tarnished member of an aristocratic family fallen into disintegration and decay keeping her from finding work in either high or low positions, she is not without her charm and good looks, her final instruments for support. When an old "Celestinesque" woman offers her the opportunity to become the mistress of Don Gregorio, a rich and aging landowner, Eugenia accepts; by now she is obsessed with the future welfare of her yet unborn child. She is first kept in Guayaquil by Don Gregorio, until he finds out about her pregnancy and becomes violently jealous and asks her to have an abortion. When she refuses he slips some medicine, or poison, into her food that nearly causes her to lose her child. It is now Eugenia's turn for blackmail; Ana Luisa goes to Don Gregorio and accuses him of nearly killing her sister and threatens scandal. Shaken, Don Gregorio gives Ana Luisa a sizeable check for Eugenia and agrees to support her and her child, under the condition that she leave Guayaquil. We last see Eugenia heading up the river on a boat, reflecting on her life and her future.

Thus ends the story of the three "ratas", the three surviving members of the proud family of "el Comandante" Antonio Parrales;

each going their separate ways, probably never again to be united as a family group. Each of these three sisters, especially Eugenia, deserve much more study than our purpose has allowed us here. There is a great deal of distance between the submissive María del Socorro of El Muelle and the aggressive Eugenia of Las Tres Ratas, and a discussion of only Pareja's feminine protagonists in an evolutionary perspective is in itself worthy of a separate study.

We have suggested that this novel completes a cycle for Pareja. We have seen since El Muelle, La Beldaca, and the efforts preceeding those novels the gradual replacing of characters used primarily as instruments indicating the necessity of social reform--exploited, submissive members of the lower classes (although never presented merely as "types")--with characters from later novels (Baldomera), although from the same social classes, no longer content with meekness and endurance. Those novels take place primarily in Guayaquil, as does the next novel, Don Balón de Baba, but now the characters are chiefly from the upper and the middle classes, with the protagonist representing an idealistic, paternalistic, unrealistic fringe element of the upper classes that futilely hopes to solve the country's social ills by awakening humanitarian interest. In Hombres Sin Tiempo the geographic location is Quito, but the substance of the novel takes place within the mind of the schoolteacher protagonist, a representative of the middle classes. Here, however, social problems only appear in the background, and this novel is important to us as a demonstration of the author's ability to write on a universal plane while keeping the concrete

situation of the novel within national boundaries. In Las Tres Ratas we again return to Guayaquil. Now, however, we view the social situation on a plane that encompasses all of the classes and many of the problems of Ecuador, while it also deals with problems basic to all human beings (the needs for love, recognition, security, survival, etc.). In Alfredo Pareja's novelistic evolution up to this point, Las Tres Ratas must occupy the top of the scale for qualitative as well as chronological reasons. We say that it closes a cycle because it will be twelve years before the author publishes his next novel. We consider Pareja a mature novelist since 1933, when El Muelle was published, but in the final analysis the publication of Las Tres Ratas in 1944 (the novel was actually written in 1942, when it was submitted for the Farrar and Rinehart contest) marks Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco's most mature novelistic expression of what we may call his first period.

CHAPTER VII

A BOLD EFFORT

After Las Tres Ratas Alfredo Pareja did not publish another novel for more than a decade. Diplomatic assignments and business matters occupied much of his time, while he turned to writing primarily non-fiction. During that time, however, he conceived the idea for a series of novels that would attempt to chronicle Ecuadorian events beginning with the revolution (or military coup) of July 9, 1925, and carrying on to the present. His original plan was to write some six volumes in this series; up to now he has completed three: La Advertencia; El Aire y los Recue-dros; and Los Poderes Omnímodos. He calls this series Los Nuevos Años.*

These novels truly do deal with the "new years"; interestingly, they are Alfredo Pareja's own years. The novels are linked chiefly by one key character, Pablo Canelos. Pablo is seventeen years old in 1925, which would make the year of his birth 1908--the year of our author's birth. Los Nuevos Años are not so much the autobiography of the author, however, as they are the "biography" of Ecuador, which is personified by the many characters who flow through its pages. As Edmundo Ribadeneira states, "...el personaje principal...es el país, el movimiento masivo del pueblo, pero individualizado en los personajes típicos que actúan en la gran

*La Advertencia (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1956).

El Aire y los Recuerdos (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1959).

Los Poderes Omnímodos (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1964).

escena nacional."¹³⁷

This series of novels is often referred to collectively as a "novela-río" (roman fleuve). It is a type of Ecuadorian comédie humaine, but with as much emphasis on events as on characters. Nonetheless, we do not have to look to France, and Balzac, but to Chile, and Alberto Blest Gana for a predecessor to Pareja in these latest novels. Blest Gana's well-known trilogy (Durante la Reconquista, Martín Rivas, and Los Transplantados) does for Chilean literature of the nineteenth century very much what Pareja does for Ecuadorian literature in the twentieth century. We should note, however, that there is no direct tie between Pareja and Blest Gana; we are merely drawing parallels. Pareja accomplishes Los Nuevos Años as an original effort; stylistic and thematic similarities with the earlier novelist from Chile are absent.

While these latest novels often show our author at his stylistic best, they are undoubtedly of limited interest outside of Ecuador, other than to students of literature, history, and political and social science. Nonetheless, some of the characters created here stand among Pareja's best. Alejandro Carrión, speaking of the latest novel in the series, Los Poderes Omnímodos, states that "en ella el novelista y el historiador se van acoplando cada vez mejor."¹³⁸ There has been nothing quite like Los Nuevos Años previously in Ecuadorian literature, if indeed not in Spanish American literature. Benjamín Carrión effusively puts it in the following manner:

137. Ribadeneira, p. 92

138. Alejandro Carrión, "Los Poderes Omnímodos," Letras del Ecuador (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana), Mayo-Agosto de 1965, Número 131, p. 18.

"...tenemos en camino uno de los esfuerzos espirituales más serios, una de las aventuras y pensamientos de la ficción, más audaces y bien concebidas de nuestra historia literaria."¹³⁹

Although social complaints and left-wing ideologies are expounded by some of the characters in these novels, other characters express just the opposite views. It is a combative epoch for Ecuador, when ideas, words, and bullets fly in all directions. Pareja chooses not to stand on one side or the other here, but attempts to stand in the middle. By doing so, he gives us an accurate and objective picture of the times and the kinds of people who lived in those times. At the same time, he re-examines his own values and ideas about literature, politics, and his relation to both--a type of soul-searching and self-inflected purge. Our impression is that he keeps the promise he makes us in the prologue to the first volume, La Advertencia: "Espero ser justo con la época y los hombres de mi generación."¹⁴⁰

Stereotypes and verbal flag-waving on the part of the author are not present in these novels, although we know that Alfredo Pareja has never gone to the extreme of those tendencies in any of his mature novels. Any political ideologies are expressed by the characters as their own, and many different ideologies are expressed. To a finer degree than ever before in his novels, we not only know how Pareja's principle characters act, but we also know why. As is his custom, our author gives enough attention to details of background in his characters that they are never

139. B. Carrión, El Nuevo Relato Ecuatoriano, p. 191.

140. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, La Advertencia (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1956). p. 8.

just "types". In fact, as artistic creations the Los Nuevos Años series would appear to reach for the zenith of Pareja's novelistic development. As is stated in the Diccionario de la Literatura Latinoamericana:

"...La obra emprendida es peligrosa y enorme y va siendo realizada en plena madurez de su autor. Un conocimiento profundo del existir ecuatoriano hace que sus páginas sean extrañamente veraces y apasionantes. Personajes reales, ocultos bajo el frágil velo de nombres inventados, se entremezclan con creaciones indispensables para mantener la estructura de la novela."¹⁴¹

A deep knowledge of his country, a mixture of real and fictitious characters, and an effort undertaken during the novelist's full maturity are indeed elements composing Los Nuevos Años. However, the key word in the above commentary is "peligrosa", for the outstanding feature of these novels is that they chronicle Ecuador. Therefore, as attempts at which might be called "purely artistic" creations, in which what occurs inside the characters is far more important than what occurs outside of them and which thereby hold universal appeal, Alfredo Pareja is truly treading on dangerous ground. In addition, the relatively objective presentation of the facts surrounding social upheavals in Ecuador may well bring about political repercussions for the author; the work is therefore dangerous in a concrete as well as an esthetic sense.

Since our purpose here is to attempt to understand Alfredo Pareja's evolution more as a novelist--an artist--than as an historian or a political commentator, we shall undertake to limit our discussion to primarily those elements which demonstrate

141. Dicc. de la Lit. Latinoamericana, "Ecuador", p. 146.

artistic links with Pareja's earlier novels. Of course, since the milieu of the novels is one of social "storm and stress" which directly affects all of the characters, it is impossible to ignore completely the social phenomena.

In La Advertencia (1956), the first of the Los Nuevos Años series, we are introduced to the Ecuador of 1925, with most of the action taking place in Quito. With the exception of Hombres Sin Tiempo, all of Pareja's earlier novels have as their main focal point the area in and around Guayaquil. Although this is one of the author's longest novels, it deals with the relatively short span of time immediately before and after the revolution of July 9, 1925, known in Ecuador as "la Juliana".

We meet a group of left-wing intellectuals, artists, and workers who have as their spiritual leader a masculine painter called Luis Salgado. Salgado lives with a beautiful woman who is surrounded by an aura of sensuality and mystery, Clara del Monte. The other members of the group are: Tomás Briones, a Master Carpenter from Guayaquil, about forty-five years old, who is more interested in action than words to solve Ecuador's social ills; Ernesto Ruiz, the most verbally radical of the group, who lives with his poor parents but is ashamed of their social position, and who is the lover of Briones' daughter, Berta; Fabián Ordóñez, a young socialist law student leaning toward Marxism, who wishes to dedicate himself to defending the indians; and Ramiro Alomía, an "escribiente del juzgado" whose inclinations range between

socialism and poetry and who lives with his widowed mother. This small group often meets in Salgado's apartment, which he rents from "el Comandante" Alfonso Canelos, who is a stern old Liberal veteran of Alfaro's campaigns, but who confines his liberality to party affiliation.

"El Comandante" Canelos has an illegitimate mestizo son, Pablo, who is not interested in a military or a commercial career, but would rather dream, read, write, or listen to the discussions of Salgado's group. Unable to communicate with his father, and since his mother is dead, Pablo looks to Salgado for spiritual guidance, and to Clara for the complete image and concept of woman, which for him includes physical desire, motherhood, idolatry, and compassion. Pablo is Pareja's most complex character to date, and he is of more transcendental significance to Ecuador than have been any of the author's previous creations. We take the liberty of citing Alfredo Pareja's answer to our questions concerning Pablo Canelos, which he gives us in a personal letter dated March 3, 1966:

"¿Quién es Pablo Canelos? En parte es un testigo inventado, en parte es hecho de distintas porciones de gentes y amigos que he conocido, en parte, acaso, hay el él inevitablemente algo de mi mismo. Sobre todo, acaso él es "los nuevos años", la transición, el crecimiento de una era en la cual empezaron a advertirse los rápidos cambios sociales de nuestro tiempo, un intelectual, vamos, con ciertas audaces pretensiones de ser per se una casi tipología psico-social de una generación incierta y todavía con huellas románticas. Es testigo y parte, es, claro está, un ente de ficción y hasta un pretexto para organizar un semi-mensaje extraído de tan varias y hasta opuestas corrientes de un pensamiento en formación. Un poco de pedagogía y otro de abstracción, de racionalización y de choques emocionales. No lo sé explicar mejor. Una explicación

sería, por ejemplo, llamarlo hilo conductor, pero esto tiene un sentido restringido de técnica, y no sería bastante."¹⁴²

Pablo is painfully aware of his father's indifference toward his dead mother, and disapproves of "el Comandante's" frequenting houses of prostitution, mistreatment of his tenant, Salgado, and constant overtures to Salgado's mistress, Clara. In fact, Pablo is so concerned for his friends' welfare that at one point he steals money from his father in order to pay their rent, which is a courageous act for a boy who has always been somewhat afraid of his austere father. "El Comandante's" and Pablo's mutual interest in Clara further complicates their relationship, although Pablo's interest is principally spiritual, while his father's is principally carnal.

As the action of the first part of La Advertencia progresses, we learn that Clara is the illegitimate offspring of a sort of small-town "witch" (bruja) and an Italian travelling salesman; the mysterious life of potions and strange remedies lead by her mother makes Clara a bit of a mystery herself, and she is affected to the point of fearing maternity in the event that her mother's witchcraft might be hereditary. Always a beautiful girl, at the age of thirteen she was violated by the mayoral from a neighboring farm. At fifteen the local schoolmaster took her to Quito and made her his mistress. She finally turns up in Colombia, where she boards with Felipe Bonilla and his wife, Sofía. All is well at the Bonillas' until the lovely Clara inspires a smoldering but undeclared love for her in Felipe, which is sensed by Sofía, who becomes insanely jealous. Sofía accuses Clara of starting a fire, and Clara is about to be man-

¹⁴². Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, letter of March 3, 1966.

handled by a mob when Luis Salgado appears. Salgado rescues her, then takes her to Quito with him to become involved in the revolutionary spirit with Ruiz, Alomía, and the others. Clara possesses a universal attraction, for nearly every male who comes into contact with her is plagued by dreams and fantasies that she inspires.

Other characters of interest who appear in this part are Don Froilán del Pozo, and his wife, Lola. Don Froilán expresses the staunchly conservative side of Ecuadorian political thought:

"Don Froilán permaneció unos minutos inmóvil, sentado a su escritorio, meditando. ¡Cómo han dañado los agitadores el corazón de los jóvenes! ¡Atrasado país de cholos y de indios! No era posible vivir en él en paz; que ya una cosa, que ya otra. ¿Cómo progresar en semejantes condiciones? Desde 1912, cuando el arrastre, linchamiento y quema de los Alfaro, el pueblo era más insolente. No, señor, desde antes, desde que el viejo Alfaro quiso dar libertad a esos brutos; él crió los cuervos que le sacaron los ojos, pero nos ha dejado fritos."¹⁴³

Even Don Froilán is not a "type", for in spite of his high social and economic status and conservative leanings, even he shows compassion for the indians who live on the lands owned by him, but which he only occasionally visits. A man over fifty, Don Froilán is married to Lola, who is still in her early twenties. Lola lives in a world of social graces and clichés, and finds her businessman husband quite boring. Lola finds diversion, however, through Ramiro Alomía, who has impressed Don Froilán with his qualities of working hard and has become entrusted with the management of some of Froilán's business interests, as well as becoming accepted

143. Pareja, La Advertencia, p. 61.

as a steady guest of the Del Pozo household.

A love affair develops between Lola and Ramiro, and Ramiro steadily becomes aware of the financial advantages his relationship with Lola could afford him. The glitter of socialism begins to become outshone for him by the glimmer of gold at the top of the social ladder that he begins to climb.

The final characters worthy of note in this first part are Teresa, Ofelia, and Margarita, "las tres pardas", who are three prostitutes from the coast. Their business establishment is truly a democratic one, for it is frequented by both the rich and the poor; the Right and the Left. The "pardas" owe their name to their mixture of white, indian, and negro bloods. As a type of handyman, they employ Felipe Bonilla, who left his wife when he began to feel homicidal desires toward her and came to Quito, in order to be close to Clara and somehow protect her. All three of the "pardas" are in love with Salgado. When one of the "pardas", Teresa Quiñonez, is about to sing a song, Pareja lets us know that his heart is still in his native coastal section:

"Su tierra verde, su tierra negra, junto al mar, de voz de tambor, de marimba, de la chicharra encendida, la tunda, el batuque, el candombe, la culebra, la culebra del agua y del árbol, ondulada y prieta, la voz desafiante y dulce."¹⁴⁴

The military takeover has gone into effect by the time the first part of La Advertencia draws to an end. Most of the left-wing elements in the country are on the side of the takeover, for the young officers heading it are pledged to put into action the ideals of

144. Pareja, La Advertencia, p. 91.

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Alfaro's revolution of 1895, which heretofore had remained just ideals. Pablo has by now become a part of Salgado's group, although his role in the discussions is still passive.

Salgado, however, has become disillusioned with himself for his inability to fathom the real meaning of the revolutionary movement and for his inability to spiritually reach the mysteriously distant Clara del Monte. He suddenly borrows money from Ramiro Alomía, who would like to see Clara free of the painter's influence, and takes a trip to the Eastern wilderness of Ecuador. After a harrowing trip through the jungle during which he goes mad, he allows himself to fall into the river at the bottom of an abyss, and dies. Pareja accomplishes in this episode of man against the savage forces of nature an effect that rivals the ending of the Colombian Rivera's classic novel, La Vorágine, for in a manner of speaking, Salgado is also "devoured" by the wilderness.

There is little time lapse between the first and second parts, but a continuation of the action of the days just after the military takeover. Salgado's sudden disappearance causes bewilderment to his friends. Ramiro Alomía feels somewhat guilty for having loaned Salgado money for his trip, because he knows that his motivations of having unobstructed access to Clara were foolish, for Clara is inaccessible. Felipe Bonilla decides to look for Salgado himself, and leaves for the jungle.

Now we meet another character who is interested in Salgado's disappearance, Don Héctor Molina. Don Héctor would like to blame the "Comandante" Canelos for the painter's absence, for he knows of the "Comandante's" attempts to evict the painter through Clara, who

has brought items to his shop to be pawned. By exposing the "Comandante" as Salgado's murderer, Molina hopes that he could win Clara for himself, but she is as distant from him as she is from all of the others. Molina is a rather pitiful man; a lonely, overweight hypochondriac who is preoccupied with sex and only able to give vent to his desires by hiring prostitutes.

Meanwhile, an employee of Don Froilán, Maturino Carvajal, is caught embezzling money, which he uses to supplement his meager salary in order to support his children. Don Froilán has him jailed, and his children, whose mother is dead, are without support. Lucía, the oldest, goes to Don Héctor Molina for money, and he takes advantage of her, quite proud of himself for having a woman for the first time in his life who was not a professional prostitute.

Since Salgado is gone, and not wishing to stay in his old apartment where "el Comandante" makes constant advances to her, Clara at first accepts the "maestro" Briones offer to stay at his house. When she realizes that her presence in the Briones household is not welcomed by the carpenter's daughter, Berta, who wants her room free in order to entertain Ernesto Ruiz, Clara takes residence in a small hotel and goes to work with a theatre group. From her hotel she sends for Pablo, for whom she feels deep compassion and whose honest innocence attracts her. She makes Pablo her lover, and thus introduces him to manhood.

When Felipe Bonilla returns from his grueling trip, he clarifies Salgado's disappearance as suicide, thereby destroying all speculations of murder. Héctor Molina is now without a reason

to bring punishment on the "Comandante" Canelos.

However, Don Héctor is not the only one who would like to see the "Comandante" punished. The "parda" Teresa Quiñonez has her own motivations. As a result of publicly insulting the "Comandante", he had her taken away by three soldiers, who beat and raped her. Invoking all the brujería of her native Esmeraldas, Teresa makes a voodoo doll of the "Comandante", then sticks a pin in its chest. She then begins an erotic dance, which is soon joined by the other "pargas", Don Héctor, Ernesto Ruiz, and Fabián Ordóñez, who are also present. A drunken orgy follows, which lasts until the dawn.

The scene of revelry with the "pargas" is effectively contrasted by a delicate scene in which Pablo, after making love to Clara, begins to decide his destiny. Clara's affection has helped him gain confidence in himself, and he resolves to dedicate himself to bettering his fellow man:

"...Pablo velaba. La hoguera de su sangre estaba en paz, porque había vuelto de la tibieza de Clara. Sabíase apto para pensar y decidir.... Sobre todo, ella estaba con él, en él se había aposentado, en su tienda, en su fuego. Insomne, pero radiante, alimentado por el placer, odió todo camino falso, tuvo delante el destino mejor, creyó en la bondad, en el hermano hombre y en que a su época le estaba señalado el cambio que trajese pan y amor para todos."¹⁴⁵

Thus ends the second part of La Advertencia.

Six months have passed since the military takeover, and we are now in the final part of the novel. The revolution degenerated

145. Pareja, La Advertencia, p. 275.

to individual power struggles and regional rivalries--the old competition between Quito and Guayaquil--and the ideals of the revolution are still only ideals.

Pablo is now quite sure of himself, and takes an active part in his friends' political discussions. Clara has gone to Peru with her theatre group, and she never again will take an active part in Pablo's life, but will always occupy a primary spot in his memory. At this point, Pablo has become quite close to "el maestro" Briones, who offers him a paternal image adequate to replace the tarnished one of his own father. Briones wishes to return to Guayaquil, and Pablo decides to accompany him.

"El Comandante" Canelos has begun to decline. He was dismissed from the army, and replaced by a younger man, Modesto Jarrín, an officer who by the end of the novel becomes a socialist. Futilely, he attempt to buy Pablo's love by offering him legal recognition and an inheritance. Although Pablo feels pity for his father, he feels little affection, and refuses the offer. Having sold his home to Don Froilán del Pozo, and lonely in his apartment, he solicits the aid of an alcahueta. The alcahueta arranges a meeting between him and Berta Briones who has left home and decided to make her own way in the world. Berta becomes his mistress. In addition, the "Comandante" learns that his heart is beginning to fail; it is as though Teresa Quiñonez' voodoo magic had worked.

One evening Teresa and the other "pardas" come across the "Comandante" with Berta in a small hotel. All three attack him, and the fight is carried through the streets to the river. In

the heat of the battle the "Comandante" has a heart attack and falls dead. Felipe Bonilla hangs the corpse in a tree, and claims that he killed the "Comandante" himself.

Ramiro Alomía is now firmly entrenched with the Del Pozos. His interest in socialism is now limited to keeping Don Froilán informed of the political happenings so that his employer might plan his economic moves to coincide with whichever side happens to be in power.

In the meantime, the difficulty presented by her father being jailed and the responsibility for the maintenance of her brothers and sisters resting solely on her begins to drive Lucía Carvajal mad. One day when Héctor Molina returns to his shop he finds a crowd milling around and a number of policemen present; they are taking Lucía away, who had been seen running naked from Molina's shop.

One other character appears in this final part who is worthy of note, a handsome young priest named Father Carlos. Much of Father Carlos' time is occupied with planning political strategy with Héctor Molina and other important members of the Conservative party, thereby demonstrating the important role played by the clergy in the political structure of Ecuador. Socially, Father Carlos seeks the company of Ofelia Ramírez, one of the "paldas". He is able to meet Ofelia through Felipe Bonilla, who has become active in the church since Clara's absence. A love affair develops, until Ofelia becomes pregnant. At that point Father Carlos decides that his marriage to the Church is more important than his obligation to

Ofelia, and he abandons her. Ofelia has an abortion, and bitterly deposits a package containing the organic remains of her relationship with Father Carlos in his confessional. This episode is not really as anti-clerical as its retelling would make it seem, however, and we must not interpret it as such. Pareja presents Father Carlos as an individual, and not as an arch-type representing Catholicism in Ecuador.

Shortly before the end of the novel Pareja inserts a chapter in which Clara's mother, Doña Estela, Luis Salgado, and many of the other principle characters appear and converse in a kind of surrealist nightmare. In the context of the rest of the novel, which has been pretty much in the form of conventional narration, this stylistic change is surprising, even incongruous. The characters who appear "state their cases" in their conversations, and the chapter does serve to clarify their relations to each other. In addition, by this device the author makes us aware of the considerable amount of mystery and mysticism still present in Ecuadorian thought.

La Advertencia ends with Pablo accompanying Briones to Guayaquil. Pablo is a free man marching off to meet his destiny to become an active part of "the new years":

" ¡Cuánto había por hacer en los nuevos años...! Crear, luchar, mantenerse firme, fabricando sueños todos los días. Ahora tenía el tiempo libre, suyo, ancho para toda la vida. Una sonrisa le cruzó el rostro. Era fuerte, lo sentía en la velocidad de la sangre. Estaba pronto a cumplir su destino, infatigablemente laborando, descubriendo, ofreciéndose. Crecía aire sano en los pulmones y su pensamiento se aligeraba de todo obstáculo de terror. Estaba en él la

mañana, trayéndole un emanar de frutas, un tacto nuevo, una elección. Y sintióse, realmente sintióse tocado, señalado por una mano errante y pródiga, que le daba clarividencia."¹⁴⁶

In the second volume of Los Nuevos Años, El Aire y los Recuerdos (1959), we find Pablo Canelos in his mid-twenties and living in Guayaquil. He has finished high school and is enrolled in law school, through the influence of Dr. Santiago Pereda, a physician and university professor of physiology who has been recently divorced and who has befriended Pablo. Here Pablo again associates with a group of writers, artists, and intellectuals. The writers are of special interest to us for they include the "Grupo de Guayaquil" of which our author is a part. "El maestro" Briones still exerts considerable influence on Pablo, but it is really Dr. Pereda with whom Pablo passes most of his time.

We are now in the latter part of 1932. The epoch is still one of turbulence, but now there is an uneasiness in the air that reaches around the world. In Ecuador the failure of the short-lived Bonifaz government provokes a brief but bloody civil war.* In North America the United States under Roosevelt is beginning to recover from the Great Depression, while in Europe Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco are making Fascism more than just a word. It is in this throbbing atmosphere of the early thirties that Pareja sets

146. Pareja, La Advertencia, p. 422.

*Neptalí Bonifaz was elected by popular vote to the Presidency of Ecuador, but due to a question of eligibility because of his Peruvian birth, the Ecuadorian Congress declared the election invalid. A Civil War broke out as a result of the confusion, and for four days Quito was a battleground. This was the episode of "los cuatro días".

El Aire y los Recuerdos, simultaneously making us aware of world as well as local events.

"El Maestro" Briones dies rather early in the first part of the novel, leaving Pereda as Pablo's only father-friend image. Both of them are having affairs with two sisters by the name of Garaicoa; Pereda with the older, politically aggressive and somewhat masculine Aurelia, and Pablo with the younger María Luz. María Luz is an uncomplicated and gentle girl, who is reminiscent of the far ~~less~~ sophisticated María del Socorro of El Muelle and who loves Pablo but asks little in return. However, she does not succeed in erasing his memory of Clara del Monte.

In Quito, meanwhile, Don Froilán del Pozo has died, leaving Ramiro Alomía in a financially and recreationally advantageous position as his business manager and as Lola's full-time lover. Ramiro's handsome mestizo features make him an exotic attraction to Lola's lady friends, and he has learned enough social graces to be acceptable to the men. Alomía is well on the way to becoming a conservative.

Ernesto Ruiz continues to be an outspoken socialist. Since his mother has died he has moved out of his father's house, more ashamed than ever of the poor old tailor's social position. He rents a room from the Rincón family, which is composed of Manuel, a retired Captain given to heavy drinking, Emilia, the mother, a number of small children, and Juanita, the pretty fourteen year old daughter. Juanita is enchanted by Ruiz, who seems so eloquent in this conversations with his friends. One evening she simply comes to

his room and offers herself to him; he accepts.

Fabián Ordóñez is now a lawyer who spends much of his time defending the indians, often without remuneration. He is married to Clotilde, a schoolteacher, and they both work hard to make a living.

For our purposes, the most important elements of the first part of El Aire y los Recuerdos are the literary discussions in Guayaquil in which Pablo participates, usually accompanied by Dr. Pereda. Pereda offers an interesting criticism of the new Ecuadorian novel when he says to Pablo:

"--Pues sí, Pablo, los escritores están fotografiando a sus personajes solamente por los perfiles. Claro que se está haciendo de todos modos una nueva época. Hay un renacimiento estupendo, después de la fuga a lo frívolamente sentimental, no lo niego. Pero la novela realista de estos días, por fuerte, por magnífica que sea, parece una eyaculación de machos apurados. ¡Ja! Es la limitación del goce, la mutilación del placer estético."147

On the other hand, Joaquín Gallegos Lara offers a defense for the brutal literature which was beginning to make itself pre-dominant in Ecuador in those days. The scene is one in which the now-famous Peruvian critic, Luis Alberto Sánchez, who is also present at some of the groups tertulias, has just criticized the excessively realistic side of Ecuadorian literature:

"--Hombre muy capaz, buen crítico, estupenda inteligencia, pero qué lástima que esté del lado aprista. ¡Y que piense que lo que llama 'feísmo' de nuestra literatura es lo malo, cuando justamente es lo bueno! Nuestra literatura, compañeros, debe decirlo con las palabras del pueblo lo que es nuestro país: una tierra

147. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, El Aire Y los Recuerdos (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1959). p. 35.

donde reinan el hambre y la muerte y donde aspirar
a ser feliz es una canallada; pero qué fuerza saber
que nuestro destino es nuestro mundo y que ni queremos
no podemos salir de él.¹⁴⁸

While these elements of El Aire y los Recuerdos do not give us direct autobiographical material on Pareja, they do give us insight into the literary generation of which he was a part. Here Alfredo Pareja attempts to paint for us on an intellectual plane the raison d'être of a whole literary genre, with its strengths and its weaknesses.

As the first part of the novel nears its end the manifestations of the political differences have changed from words to bullets. Quito is in a confused state of civil war, with elements of the same army warring against each other, and each side convinced that it is defending the Ecuadorian Constitution.

Fabián Ordóñez rushes to fight for the Liberal side, and Ernesto Ruiz shows us that he does not wish to back his radical words with deeds by hurrying to hide in his father's home, afraid that he will be killed by the Conservative forces.

In Guayaquil, Pablo, Pereda, and an old veteran of Alfaro's campaigns, Don Hermenegildo Carcelén, undertake a trip to Quito in order to join the fighting with the Liberals. Just before leaving, Dr. Pereda receives word that he has been relieved of his chair at the university.

Just before the end of this first part there is a tragic episode at the Rincón household. Juanita, who is by now Ruiz' steady lover, goes to his room to await him one evening. Her father, after a night

148. Pareja, El Aire y los Recuerdos, p. 68.

of heavy drinking, comes home. Juanita thinks that it is Ruiz who is climbing the stairs, and comes out of his room to greet him. When her father sees his scantily clad daughter coming out of his boarder's room he flies into a rage, which is amplified by his drunkenness. He begins to beat Juanita, ripping her clothes off in the process, until his wife intervenes. By now he is nearly insane, and he begins to beat and kick his wife. Juanita, in a bit of a daze herself, brings her father's old shotgun and shoots him dead, just as an artillery barrage begins on Quito. The retired Captain's family and friends later put his body among the thousands who are killed during the civil strife, and the incident has no legal after-effects for Juanita.

The second part of El Aire y los Recuerdos deals with the violent episode of "los cuatro días", in which thousands of lives were lost during the fighting in Quito among the populace as well as among the military. Pareja succeeds in capturing the mass confusion and the horror of these days, the successive hunger, and the misery. Witness the following scene in which an innocent foreigner is killed during one of the artillery barrages:

"...Mr. Royal venía caminando bajo la luna, sin apresurarse, con la botella en la mano. Todo fue como una jugarreta de títeres, un juego espectral, relampagueante, una jugarreta alucinada; el estallido, el golpe raudo, la cabeza de Mr. Royal que se voló del tronco y el cuerpo flaco, bajo la luna, por un instante increíble mantenido en pie, sin cabeza, con el equilibrio fugaz de los títeres, la botella todavía en el aire como si el brazo y ella se hubieran fijado eternamente, el chorro oscuro que brotó hacia arriba del cuello, y luego la desaparición, la caída blanda en la tierra,

donde Mr. Royal quedó envuelto en la oscuridad, inexistente."¹⁴⁹

Don Héctor Molina is still with us, older now, a little more obese and less well-dressed. He is sought by the Liberal soldiers during the fighting, who wish to kill him, but he has the prudence to go into hiding. His store is sacked, and when a young songwriter appears in the store the soldiers mistake him for Molina, and he is killed, just another innocent victim insignificantly added to a long list.

Fabián Ordóñez learns to fight quickly, and fights well. Ernesto Ruiz, out foraging for food, temporarily becomes a Conservative when he comes across some Conservative soldiers. When a group of Liberal soldiers under Ordóñez' command capture the Conservatives, whom Ruiz is now accompanying, Ruiz again becomes a Liberal. No sooner do Pablo and his friends reach Quito when they, too, are caught up in the fighting. The violence spares no one.

No one, that is, except Ramiro and Lola, who happen to be having a party with some of Lola's friends when the shooting begins. They all spend the four days relatively comfortably with plenty to eat and drink; the only fighting they endure is confined to personality clashes among themselves, with the exception of a brief episode in which a wounded man is brought to Lola's door and Ramiro and another man brave the streets to take him to a hospital, thereby making Ramiro something of a hero for the small group. Lola is

149. Pareja, El Aire y los Recuerdos, p. 158.

by now becoming tired of Ramiro, and she gives a great deal of attention to a handsome young man who is one of her other guests. Partly in retaliation, and partly because he realizes that he has just about reached the peak of his opportunities for social mobility through Lola, Ramiro charms, easily seduces, and proposes matrimony to Sofía, a beautiful, rich, but somewhat dim-witted divorcée who is up to now a friend of Lola's. Sofía accepts Ramiro's proposal, thereby assuring him of a financially bright future.

This novel ends just as the fighting stops. Dr. Pereda has been working strenuously to treat the wounded, giving himself injections of morphine, to which he has been long addicted, to combat the fatigue. Finally, having lost his chair at the university, tired of the daily struggle, disillusioned with life and the dim hopes for the future, and suddenly curious about death itself, he shoots himself through the head. His death signals the end of one sphere of influence for Pablo, and the beginning of another era.

After "los cuatro días" Pablo remains in Quito, where he goes to work in a drug store. We are now in the latest volume of the Los Nuevos Años series, Los Poderes Omnímodos (1964). Here we progress through the middle and late thirties and into the early forties. Ecuador continues to seek its social revolution during the throes of political instability, Spain has its civil war, and the rest of the world seethes with World War Two. As is to be expected, Pareja again places the world perspective beside the local.

The old Liberal fighter whom we met in the previous novel, Don Hermenegildo Carcelén, now serves as Pablo's chief confidant. At this point in this life Pablo is experiencing the succession of love affairs which is understandable for an unattached young man approaching thirty. Petra la Candelas, a prostitute with whom he develops a friendship, heads the list of the women in his life in this novel. Through Petra Pablo meets Juanita Rincón, who is no longer the thin little girl of fourteen who was in a state of emotional shock from having killed her father, when we met her in the previous novel. Juanita has grown up to be a lovely young woman, coquettish, popular, politically active and aggressive, and independent. She earns money as a hairdresser and has a small income from her now dead mother's home, which she rents out. She also becomes a good friend of Lola del Pozo, who likes the way Juanita sets her hair. Pablo becomes quite obsessed with Juanita, to the point of striking Ernesto Ruiz when he publicly suggests that her moral deportment is less than scrupulous.

When the government shifts from Liberal to Conservative under Alarico Zaragata, Pablo prudently moves back to Guayaquil. There he becomes re-involved with basically the same group of writers, artists, and intellectuals who he knew earlier. In their discussions he ventures opinions more self-assuredly than he ever did, and he now has his own theories on the proper relationships between art and thesis in literature:

"...creo que se puede clamar por la justicia social, creo que se puede y se debe poner el arte, como todo, al servicio del hombre, pero no es necesario para eso recurrir sólo al lado feo de la vida, al descuido de lo artístico, que es el descuido de lo trascendente mismo, de la intuición futura, de la ordenación del mundo y la naturaleza, del juicio a que se atreve el hombre frente a lo desconocido.... El realismo que se limita a sí mismo con palabras gruesas y exclamaciones, deja de ser realismo.... ¿Por qué razón ha de consistir en el paisaje violento, en el sexo violento, en la maldad violenta, en el negro y el blanco de los ángeles y los demonios sin posibilidad alguna de comunicacion? ¿No es cierto, compañeros, que la felicidad moral y el patetismo necesario a ella no son completos sino en el revés y el derecho, con toda la complejidad de la vida activa y de la vida íntima? ¿Acaso no hay realidades reales que pertenezcan a la vida del espíritu con el mismo derecho que a la conducta exterior y esquematizada de los hombres?"¹⁵⁰

Although the above commentary is Pablo's, it may well be Pareja's own, for it follows what we have seen our author to practice during the course of our study.

In Guayaquil Pablo renews his affair with María Luz, although he occasionally continues to visit prostitutes. He also has a short affair with Felisa Recalde, an exciting semi-professional a few years his senior, and another affair with Carmen Gottsched, who is short, blond, half-German, rabidly Communist, and distinctly anti-American. None of these girls make him completely forget Juanita Rincón, however, to whom he writes declaring his love, and who sends him a non-committal but encouraging note in return.

Meanwhile, Juanita has become on occasion a guest of Doña Lola, who is by now quite bored with the conventionalities afforded by even her hyper-sophisticated life and feels latent-homosexual attraction to Juanita. Through Lola, Juanita meets the aging Modesto

150. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, Los Poderes Omnímodos (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1964), p. 30.

Jarrín, the officer who replaced Pablo's father in La Advertencia. Attracted by Jarrín's military manner, Juanita temporarily becomes his mistress.

Back in Guayaquil, Pablo meets the most interesting woman he has known since Clara del Monte. She is the niece of Don Hermenegildo, Balbina Carrillo. Balbina is an excitingly exotic esmeraldeña who has the blood of three races pulsing through her veins. All of the sensuality, mystery, voodoo, witchcraft, and folklore of the Ecuadorian coast seem to take human form in Balbina. Here we have her description:

"De progenie esmeraldeña, procreada de aquellos valientes negros, que hicieron un imperio de su esclavitud sublevada en los primeros tiempos coloniales, la mezcla había hecho de esa muchacha una obra primorosa de la naturaleza. No era voluminosa, como la madre, pero había de verse su derechura de cuerpo, ceñido en algodón floreado. No era zamba, como don Autónomo, pues sus cabellos, debido al milagro de la sangre multiple, ondeaban con brillos azulinos y se derribaban en cascada suelta sobre la nuca temblorosa. No era blanca, como el pulpejo de las manos de doña Neura, pero su color acanelado era más suave, cálido y transparente que la frágil blancura. No era gorda ni flaca, sino de una ecuánime y escrupulosa proporción carnal. Y manos y brazos, y pechos y caderas, y la risa pronta, y los dientes blanquísimos y bien cortados, y el lóbulo de las orejas deliciosamente redondeado, y los ojos negrísimos de pupilas inquietas, aunque mansas, y la naricilla trepada y aleteante, y el olor de agua florida y jabón extranjero de a sucre el pan... Bueno; sépase de una vez que Pablo quedó fascinado."¹⁵¹

Although Balbina Carrillo only appears in this latest novel of the Los Nuevos Años series, and then in competition with other

151. Pareja, Los Poderes Omnímodos, pp. 88-89.

strong female characters, she is one of Pareja's finest creations. Balbina has that quality of lingering with the reader long after he has finished the reading. It is to be hoped that if and when Pareja continues his series, Balbina will reappear in a role of more primary importance.

The political situation continues to flux in Ecuador, and heads of state change too quickly for us to enumerate here. Pablo enjoys times of relative personal security, while at other times he is in danger of being jailed or even shot at. Pablo, like everyone else during these desparately changing times, is like a leaf blown about by the winds of "los poderes omnímodos"--the great power struggles that decide the fates of nations.

On his return to Quito, Pablo sees Juanita. Although he has had an affair with Balbina and she has left a deep impression on him, his thoughts are now torn between her and Juanita. At last he has an affair with Juanita, which is further complicated by Doña Lola, who is attracted to them both; for a time Pablo is having a simultaneous affair with Lola and Juanita.

The first part of Los Poderes Omnímodos ends with all of the diputados to the government being jailed by the dictatorship.

A few years have passed now, and we are in the second part of the novel. Strife is still the way of life, but now it takes the form of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian War. Again "los poderes omnímodos" are in disagreement, and the result is violence in which the innocent are the greatest victims of horror, injustice, and death. Pablo confesses his disillusionment with politics to

Don Hermenegildo:

"...Me he equivocado, fundamentalmente me he equivocado, y no puedo salvarme de la equivocación. Después de todo, ¿sabe usted lo único que importa? Esto: que la mujer con la que uno se acueste respire al mismo tiempo. Entonces, adiós la política y adiós la literatura. A los caballos tampoco les interesa la política o la literatura: se remozan, relinchan, de acuerdo a la ley que los civilizados nos hemos atrevido a desconocer. Tiene usted que elegir, don Hermenegildo: viva la política o viva la eyaculación gozosa."¹⁵²

The fragility of human conviction is well exemplified by Ernesto Ruiz, who is in the end merely a conspirator who betrays even his oldest friends for the sake of his personal welfare.

We meet one final interesting character well toward the end of the novel, when Pablo is about to be jailed merely for waving a greeting to a person who happens to be on the wrong political side at the wrong time. As Pablo is being escorted through the streets on the way to the police station, a man called Ulpiano Barrantes saves Pablo by knocking out the policeman escorting him. Barrantes is a type of "poor man's" philosopher, who reads what he can, forms his own ideas about politics, and works hard enough to maintain a respectable standard of living. We might consider Barrantes the embodiment of a new spirit in the lower classes--self reliance, boldness, openness to learning--which will aid them in the mobility they need to merge with the growing middle class. Unfortunately, Barrantes appears only for a short time, and far too near the end of the novel, almost as an afterthought. We venture to hope that like Balbina, Barrantes might appear in the next volume of Los Nuevos Años.

152. Pareja, Los Poderes Omnímodos, pp. 161-62.

By the end of Los Poderes Omnímodos Pablo sees no future with Juanita, and his thoughts are directed to Balbina. Curiously, Juanita and Balbina become friends and they both work together for a revolutionary cause.

The novel ends with a long interior monologue on the part of Pablo, through which we learn that Ecuadorian politics have provoked street fighting in Guayaquil, that Balbina has disappeared, and that Don Hermenegildo has died. The last pages are concerned with Pablo's frantically searching for Balbina, wishing no part of politics, perhaps seeking peace through companionship with woman. Although Pablo searches everywhere, he is unable to locate Balbina; she seems to have vanished into the air. Pablo's final words reflect the extreme loneliness that he feels:

"Me parece que he sentido a Balbina. Sí, la he alcanzado, solo por un instante, pero sé que volverá a ocurrir, gracias a mi soledad. No ignoraba yo que a los misterios se entra desnudo. Y el amor es un arte solitario. La literatura, que a ella le doy, también lo es."¹⁵³

If the Los Nuevos Años series seems involved, confusing, and leaving no definitive message, it is only because it is a reflection of the times which Alfredo Pareja depicts for us. In the final analysis, we are in agreement with Kessel Schwartz' reaction to the first volume (the only one published when Schwartz wrote his article), only we would apply his words to the entire series:

153. Pareja, Los Poderes Omnímodos, p. 235.

"...he lets the novel flow naturally as the character and the theme lead him. He does not attempt to twist that background to fit any preconceived notions of a group or theory, and in the first volume of the story of the birth of a nation, Pareja has shown that he is a mature novelist."¹⁵⁴

The "blow by blow" description of Ecuadorian political and social events may make Los Nuevos Años less popular than some of Pareja's previous novels. Indeed, from a strictly artistic standpoint, the gallery of political entities and non-entities that appear in this series must be considered detractions from the other characters. Nonetheless, it is certain that here Pareja is truly a mature novelist.

We have examined Alfredo Pareja's work since his first novelistic gropings, which we found to be heavily polemic and certainly unpolished. We then saw that with El Muelle and La Beldaca he joined the ranks of the hemisphere's important novelists. Although in these works thesis was still of great importance, Pareja rounded his characters with enough human qualities that they could not be categorically classified as stereotypes. In Baldomera he continued and improved basically the same technique of the earlier novels, but now the creation of a powerful and unforgettable character far overshadowed the "denuncia y protesta" at the base of the novel. Don Balón de Baba also showed the novelists' ability and inclination to put art before thesis, but here he also demonstrated a capacity for looking at social problems through the idealistically clouded eyes of an ill-fated, paternalistic, and slightly insane member of the upper classes--in some ways, an introspective effort. With

154. Schwartz, p. 227.

Hombres Sin Tiempo Pareja produced a novel with almost no thesis overtones, but a truly universal novel that masterfully explores the workings of a man's mind. While Las Tres Ratas again turned to social problems and phenomena, it was again the creation of characters--distant from being stereotypes, but characters who decided their own destinies--and the telling of a good story that was most important. Now, in Los Nuevos Años, any political or social theories are presented by individual characters as their own, and not as the author's. Here, too, the principal characters decide their destinies for themselves. Los Nuevos Años signals an artistic stand for their author, in which he departs from the techniques which were prevalent in the Ecuadorian novel of the thirties, of the "generación del treinta," and seeks an artistic rebirth while still keeping his feet on his native soil. In these latest steps of Pareja's novelistic evolution rage gives way to reason, and indignation to measured evaluation. In a published letter to another Ecuadorian novelist, Othón Castillo, concerning his novel "Sed en el Puerto", Pareja diplomatically criticizes him for still writing in the manner of the thirties, which:

"...para esos años y esas edades, no estaba mal; pero también te agregaría que la literatura es mucho más que potencia y vigor, o denuncia y protesta."¹⁵⁵

These few words fairly well sum up the latest steps in Pareja's novelistic evolution; literature is for him now much more

155. Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, "A Propósito de la Novela 'Sed en el Puerto', " Letras del Ecuador (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1965), Número 129, p. 25.

than "potencia y vigor, o denuncia y protesta". Our study of our author's work has ended for the present, but we certainly hope that our author's work has not ended. More than ever before, we expect a great deal yet from Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco.

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