

HISTORICAL VISION AND MAGIC-REALISM IN THE
WORKS OF MANUEL MUJICA LAINEZ

Dissertation for the Degree of Ph. D.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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1977



This is to certify that the
thesis entitled
HISTORICAL VISION AND MAGIC-REALISM IN THE
WORKS OF MANUEL MUJICA LAINEZ

presented by
ANITA WAGMAN

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

PH. D. degree in ROMANCE LANGUAGES


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ABSTRACT

HISTORICAL VISION AND MAGIC- REALISM IN THE WORKS OF MANUEL MUJICA LAINEZ

By

Anita Wagman

The literary perspective known as magic-realism marks a revival, notable in contemporary Latin American literature, of the magical, mythical, and fantastic aspects of life and nature. It is a return to a perception of reality which had been denied validity and dismissed from the realm of human experience as a result of Enlightenment ideology. That ideology, which reflected the spirit of bourgeois civilization, had emphasized materialism, rationality, and historical progress. Its literary reflections had been the genres of the novel and the historical novel. Under the impact of changes in twentieth-century societies, and of a deeper understanding of human psychology, the themes of myth and magic have been introduced into art with a new degree of sophistication.

In the work of Manuel Mujica Láinez, one can trace an evolution from the composition of conventional historical fiction to the creation of magic-realist and fantastic

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narrative. Since he has maintained an interest in historical themes, one can perceive the changes in his historical vision which the magic-realist perspective has produced. This dissertation analyzes his magic-historical vision through a study of five representative works written over a period of two decades: two early collections of short stories, Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires, and the novels Bomarzo, El Unicornio, and De milagros y de melancolías.

While the collections of short stories grow out of his initial interest in Argentine history and his attempt to faithfully depict the social and historical roots of Argentine society, Bomarzo represents a fusion of the historical and magic-realist visions. It is conceived as a historical novel of the Italian Renaissance, but the need to capture the soul of the age which gave birth to modern civilization leads to a concern with the occult. The novel partakes of the magic-realist vision by unfolding the existence of a magical univers imaginaire, a spiritual inner dimension deeply rooted in the material world of historical necessity. El Unicornio, the author's novel about the French Middle Ages and the Crusades, confirms Manuel Mujica Láinez as a writer of magic-realist narrative. His interest in historical accuracy involves the psychological description of the men and women of the age. This occurs on two levels: the Freudian perspective

of modern man and the self-understanding of medieval man, the latter symbolized by the presence of a fairy as the work's narrator. Thus, the limitations of modern historiography lead to the inclusion of what Mario Vargas Llosa has called the four necessary elements of the "real-imaginary": the mythical-legendary, the miraculous, the prodigious and the fantastic.

In the final novel treated, De milagros y de melancolías, the author confirms his skepticism of "objective" historiography by parodying historical treatments of Latin American civilization, within the setting of a mythical and archetypical city. He creates a unique parody of literary styles and satire of social institutions within which the mythical-magical dimension appears of greater validity than objective description. In this work, the author's literary evolution culminates by bringing him to the realm of fantasy.

HISTORICAL VISION AND MAGIC-
REALISM IN THE WORKS OF
MANUEL MUJICA LAINEZ

By

Anita Wagman

A DISSERTATION

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Romance Languages

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe many thanks to those who willingly shared part of their life and knowledge with me. I gratefully acknowledge the guidance of Professor Donald Yates, who first taught me to appreciate Argentine literature and who directed the research and writing of this dissertation. The critical reading and suggestions of Professors Kenneth Scholberg and Robert Fiore were most helpful. I am forever grateful to my husband, who proofread all the English sections, and to my daughter: their unfailing charm, good humor, and patience made the completion of my work possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze, through an examination of representative works of fiction, the changing historical vision of Manuel Mujica Láinez and its fusion with contemporary currents of Latin American magic-realism.

Among the problems encountered in the study has been the lack of biographical data on the author as well as of literary criticism devoted to his works. Despite the fact that he can claim authorship of twenty works of prose various collections of poetry including the masterful epic poem Canto a Buenos Aires, and numerous short essays on art history or literary criticism, he is little known outside his native Argentina. In fact, until recently, the only available study of his work was that of Emma Maria Carsuzán, Manuel Mujica Láinez, which appeared in 1962, prior to the publication of his best historical fiction. The only subsequent work devoted to the author, Eduardo Font's Realidad y fantasía en la narrativa de Manuel Mujica Láinez, which was published in 1976, updates Mujica Láinez' literary contributions as far as 1974 but does not deal systematically with any of his novels after Bomarzo (1962).

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The majority of literary critics have not treated Manuel Mujica Láinez in conjunction with those writers who have formed the so-called "mainstream" of Latin American literature in the last quarter century. The term, used by Luis Harss,¹ has been employed to categorize the contemporary literary trends which have won universal recognition and a privileged position for the Latin American novel within world literature.² The "mainstream" has included writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luís Borges, Julio Cortázar, and several others. Most of these have introduced or dealt with the fantastic dimension of human life in connection with their fictional representations of Latin American civilization. It is a perspective which fuses magic and reality, and is accordingly styled magic-realism; perhaps the apex of this genre was reached--if critical and popular acclaim is the criterion--in Gabriel García Márquez' Cien años de soledad (1967).

Eduardo Font argues that the very number of brilliant Latin American novelists has caused critics to neglect

¹It appears in the original title in the English edition of Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann's Los Nuestros (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1966), which was published as Into the Mainstream.

²Jorge Lafforgue, cited in Eduardo Font, Realidad y fantasía en la narrativa de Manuel Mujica Láinez [1949-1962] (Madrid: Ediciones Porrúa, 1976), p. 2.

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some capable and original authors whose initial output seemed to lie outside the "mainstream," in favor of attention to and anticipation of the novels produced by mainstream figures.¹ It is, of course, quite clear that Manuel Mujica Láinez' earlier works were definitely within the genre of the historical novel; he is, in fact, regularly typed as a writer of historical fiction. This classification has prevented, until very recently, the recognition that there is a strong affinity between Mujica Láinez and major figures of Latin American magic-realism.

An appreciation of the latter side of Mujica Láinez' literary vision, which unites him with the foremost currents of Latin American fiction today, has been slow to emerge. However, critics such as Pablo Rojas Guardia have recently pointed out that Mujica Láinez' important historical novel of the Italian Renaissance, Bomarzo, prefigures "el ambiente mágico-mítico de Cien años de soledad," which it antedated by six years.² Similarly, George Schanzer has documented several stylistic and thematic comparisons between Mujica Láinez' De milagros y de melancolías, published in 1968, and García Márquez' Cien

¹Font, p. 2.

²Pablo Rojas Guardia, quoted in Font, p. 20.

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años de soledad, which had appeared only nine months previously.¹

This dissertation undertakes to show that Manuel Mujica Láinez' evolution from author of straightforward historical fiction to cultivator of narrative techniques of magic-realism and fantasy, still within the framework of the historical novel, reflects his progressive understanding of the nature of man, of society, and of the cosmos.

It is likely that Manuel Mujica Láinez' background and education may have led him to begin writing historical fiction. Among his forebears are included some of the most important historical and literary figures of Argentine society. María Emma Carsuzán, in her biography, tells us of the author's genealogy and of his own predilection for this glorious past:

Entre sus ascendientes se hallan un fundador de Buenos Aires, don Juan de Garay, un virrey del Perú, soldados de la lucha contra las invasiones inglesas y de las guerras de la independencia, un periodista asesinado por orden del tirano Rosas, ministros del estado, poetas, hombres que conocieron hondamente el ajetreo de las imprentas²

¹George O. Schanzer, "The Four Hundred Years of Myths and Melancholies of Mujica Láinez," Latin American Literary Review, I (Spring, 1973), No. 2, pp. 65-71.

²María Emma Carsuzán, Manuel Mujica Láinez (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1962), p. 146.

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La rama materna--su madre es Lucía Láinez Varela, escritora-- que cuenta entre sus antepasados a los Láinez Cané, Bernabé y Manuel, fundadores de El Diario, lo vincula con Miguel Cané, padre, cuya biografía ha escrito, con Florencio Varela, el periodista asesinado, y con Luis L. Domínguez, diplomático, poeta y periodista.¹

It is little wonder then that Manuel Mujica Láinez was to devote much of his literary career to exploring his affinities with his ancestors, those men of arms and of letters so closely linked to the political and artistic development of his country.

Manuel Mujica Láinez was born in Buenos Aires on September 11, 1910. From an early age the author admits to a fascination with history and geography, as well as with literary masterpieces which included the traditional classics of Homer and Virgil, Cervantes, Dickens, and works such as Gulliver's Travels, Lazarillo de Tormes, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. At the age of fourteen, he embarked for Paris in order to study, as did many of his contemporaries in the affluent classes of Argentina. He remained in Paris for three years during the turbulent and creative twenties, and it is there that he developed his literary talents. He learned to write fluently in French and conceived the plan of a first novel, to be entitled Louis XVII (based on a hypothetical life of the dauphin, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who never reached the throne of France).

¹Ibid., p. 145.

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Thus, the interest in history is clearly apparent in the ancestry, education, and early literary ambitions of Manuel Mujica Láinez. His subsequent literary career, however, is far broader in scope. His works could be classified under the following general categories. First, he has written poetry, primarily in his youth, of which the foremost example is Canto a Buenos Aires. Secondly, he has been a prominent art critic, appearing frequently in the pages of the Argentine newspaper La Nación. Thirdly, he is known as a historical chronicler and biographer of outstanding figures in the political and literary past of Argentina. Representative of this facet of his life are the works Miguel Cané (padre), un romántico porteño (1942), Vida de Aniceto el Gallo (Hilario Ascasubi) [1943], and Vida de Anastasio el Pollo (Estanislao del Campo) [1948].¹ It is these and similar but shorter historical vignettes which have earned him the label of "Cronista de la América Meridional."²

As we move into the category of prose fiction, we can detect two more basic orientations in the literary work of Mujica Láinez. First, a number of his novels lack

¹For a complete bibliography, see the Appendix to this thesis. Brief descriptions of these works according to subject matter and style may be found in Carsuzán, op. cit., and Font, op. cit.

²Juan Carlos Ghiano, "Mujica Láinez cronista de la América Meridional," Sur, no. 316-317 (Jan.-Feb. 1969).

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the historical dimension. They are, instead, purely fictional works with either a sociological perspective, documenting the dilemmas of the Argentine oligarchy in the twentieth century environment in which Mujica Láinez grew up, or else they are novels of reminiscence which treat, in a Proustian manner, that same era in Argentine history which the author remembered from his youth, and whose personages and types he describes in his fiction.

The major examples of this dimension in Mujica Láinez' work are Los ídolos (1953), La casa (1954), Los viajeros (1955), Invitados en el paraíso (1957), and various short stories.

Lastly, and most significantly, Manuel Mujica Láinez is known as a writer of historical fiction. This dimension of his career is foreshadowed in the pseudo-picaresque Don Galaz de Buenos Aires (1938), and is the undoubted focal point of the stories contained in the two collections, Aquí vivieron (1949) and Misteriosa Buenos Aires (1951). It is represented in the sixties by a major novel on the Italian Renaissance, Bomarzo (1962), by a novel on the Middle Ages and the period of the Crusades, El unicornio (1965), by two novels in which the fantastic element clearly overshadows the historical themes discussed, namely Crónicas reales (1967) and De milagros y de melancolías (1968), and by a historical novel which retraces the themes of Don Galaz, namely El laberinto (1974).

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A study of Manuel Mujica Láinez' historical fiction reveals that, as we move from his earlier stories to the novels of his mature period of literary craftsmanship, the element of history is more and more modified by elements of the fantastic, the magical, and the mythical. In Bomarzo, the perspectives of history and magic-realism are still evenly balanced and fused. In the later works, the dimension of the magical enters directly into the history of the periods treated, as well as into the psychologies of the men and women represented. It is this transition, symptomatic of the author's changing historical vision, which this dissertation intends to explore.

In the following study, only those historical short stories or novels written between 1949 and 1968 have been chosen for examination, since these are the works that demonstrate the evolution of the author's historical vision under the impact of magic-realism. I have excluded his non-fiction--the works of art criticism as well as the chronicles and biographies of Argentine figures--and fiction which lacks the historical dimension. To this latter category belong novels dealing, from a primarily sociological or biographical perspective, with Argentina around the turn of the century, a period which Mujica Láinez may have known first- or second-hand, and to which the talents of the observer rather than the historical vision of the novelist are most relevant. It

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is a category containing novels such as Los ídolos, La casa, Los viajeros, and Invitados en el paraíso. I have also omitted from discussion novels which are purely fantastic and non-historical (e.g., El viaje de los siete demonios, 1974), and one undisputable historical novel, El laberinto (1974), because it repeats themes treated in the author's early Don Galaz de Buenos Aires (1938), as well as in Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires. It is not a novel which breaks new ground, and the analysis of style and thematic leitmotifs contained in Chapter II of this dissertation, which deals with the early historical vision of Manuel Mujica Láinez, would be applicable to El laberinto as well.

I shall analyze closely five representative works which demonstrate Manuel Mujica Láinez' literary progression: the early collections of short stories (Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires), Bomarzo, El Unicornio, and De milagros y de melancolías. By common critical consent, the last three works represent the best historical fiction which Manuel Mujica Láinez has written. It is to them we must turn for an understanding of his historical vision and its evolution over the years.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I shall seek to portray the starting-point of Manuel Mujica Láinez

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as a writer of fiction and, specifically, historical fiction. I shall demonstrate that the novel and the historical novel are literary genres representative of the world view of modern Western civilization and of the rationalist middle-class perspective which created that civilization. This will be documented from the standpoint of both European and Latin American fiction, and related to the literary genesis of Manuel Mujica Láinez. I shall argue that twentieth-century departures from the classical structure of the novel, in the direction of fantasy, surrealism, and the occult, reflect the breakdown of the bourgeois and scientific world view. This breakdown provides the setting for the original contributions of Latin American writers to the genre of magic-realist narrative.

The subsequent four chapters trace this evolution within the literary career of Manuel Mujica Láinez. Chapter II treats two groups of short stories with a historical dimension. The first, Aquí vivieron, illustrates the techniques through which the author presents important geographic, historical, and sociological themes from Argentine history; the second, Misteriosa Buenos Aires, indicates his early attempts to portray the psychology of Latin American man by introducing elements of the supernatural into a historical framework.

Chapter III traces the fusion of these two perspectives in the novel Bomarzo, showing how the historical

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elements combine with the magic-realist elements to give us a deeper insight into the Italian Renaissance. Other studies, for example the work of Eduardo Font, have treated the stylistic aspects of Bomarzo. With respect to the political and social history of the period, it cannot be claimed that Mujica Láinez has made important discoveries. However, Bomarzo is unique in providing original insights into the spirit of the time, and it attains these insights by introducing elements of the occult. It paints a picture of the Renaissance with the skilful touch of the historical novelist and then shows that this portrait falls short of the reality. I shall focus specifically on the author's treatment of the esoteric sciences, of astrology, demonology, and alchemy, which enables the novel to transcend the conventional limits of historical fiction and to rise to a truer, more faithful, depiction of Renaissance man. Chapter III will argue that the fusion of the two elements of history and fantasy, which Bomarzo embodies, is characteristic of the new vision of man and history which Latin American magic-realism has discovered.

Chapter IV discussed El unicornio, a most unconventional historical treatment of the French Middle Ages and the Crusades, in which the ascendancy of the magical is signified in the very personage of the narrator, a mythical fairy. I shall try to show how Mujica Láinez is able to evoke the psychology of medieval man in a

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convincing manner precisely because he synthesizes the supernatural, in which the men of the time so fervently believed, with the historical. In El unicornio, the magical dimension is even more prominent than it had been in Bomarzo, entering into the very structure of the novel.

The fifth chapter deals with De milagros y de melancolías. In that work the historical vision has been almost submerged by the fantastic. In fact, Mujica Láinez even uses this work to parody the attempts of chroniclers, historians, and novelists at writing "objective" historical accounts. His parody is linked to a satirical treatment of the major institutions of Latin American society, and to a pessimistic historical vision of eternal recurrence. In this work, history recedes to the background, and this despite all the claims of the fictional narrators and scholars of De milagros that they are tracing the rise and fall of a Latin American society, a society, moreover, with strong resemblances to the history of Mujica Láinez' own Argentina. In the place of historical verisimilitude there enters myth: myth both in the sense of delusion that ensnares the masses, which is mercilessly satirized, and myth in the sense of a deeper spiritual reality which is related to some over-riding cosmic order which human civilization cannot modify. De milagros y de melancolías completes the author's pilgrimage from conventional historical fiction to magic-realism and fantasy.

The dissertation hopes to show that Manuel Mujica Láinez' writings and progression place him well within the mainstream of Latin American fiction in the twentieth century, and that he has anticipated or shared in developing many of the themes which have won Latin America a respected place in world literature.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND MYTH: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN EUROPEAN AND LATIN AMERICAN FICTION

European Fiction

Modern western civilization is distinguished from all previous cultures by the unique place it accords to the search for truth. Undeniably, this central value is a product of the scientific revolution. But its ramifications have extended beyond science to the farthest shores of politics, ethical standards, art, and literature.

Some have argued that our entire approach to understanding nature and man has been colored by the "habit of truth" inculcated by the scientific community.¹ Through it, reason and the evidence of the senses became windows opening upon new vistas of human experience. In some respects, we can scarcely comprehend the change in perspective. We are, for example, brought up short by the realization that the simple everyday word fact--our term for information derived from empirical observation or

¹Jacob Bronowski, Science and Human Values (New York: Harper and Row, rev. ed., 1965), Chapter II.

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experimentation--does not appear once in the King James Version of the Bible.¹ Surely our experience of life must be very different from that of the Elizabethans and their predecessors. According to Jacob Bronowski, however, the impact of the truth culture went much further than defining what counts for reliable knowledge. Transforming the social and political realms, it deprived institutions hoary with venerable age, monarchies and religious establishments, of their legitimacy. It created a new fidelity in representative art, pioneered by modern individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci.² And, in the realm of literature, it produced a number of new genres, most notably the novel and (later) the historical novel.

Recent decades have weakened the primacy of these literary forms, and the literary landscape has become more confused under the impact of trends associated with surrealism, symbolism, fantasy, magic-realism, and even science fiction. It would be superficial to see the changes in twentieth century literature as purely literary trends. Rather, we should view these changes, especially insofar as they affect our understanding of man and his essence, as reflections and premonitions of growing doubts about the basic verities of our scientific culture. Artists and

¹Richard Weaver, The Ethics of Rhetoric (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), p. 214.

²Bronowski, p. 46.

writers have frequently anticipated the changing perspectives of their societies, charting a map of reality which would only become apparent to the mass of mankind a decade or even a generation later. Readers have learned to recognize their experience of life in literature which was avant-garde and shocking when first introduced; this indicates that they are living in a cultural milieu quite unlike that which produced the romantic, realist and naturalist novels of the nineteenth century.

These changes in perception can be observed in the literary development both of Europe and of Latin America. Specifically, they can be followed in the literary evolution of the prominent Argentine writer, Manuel Mujica Láinez. Beginning his career as a chronicler of Argentine life and history, he wrote stories faithfully depicting the society of his native land and its roots. In his middle period, he composed a number of powerful historical novels which sought to capture the spirit of the heroic ages of western civilization. However, the more faithfully he depicted periods such as the Renaissance and the Crusades, the more he realized that his subjects transcended the objective brush of the social historian, and that traditional historical fiction could not grasp the spirit of the times. He was led to the genre of magic-realism, as were other contemporary Latin American writers, and ultimately he came to the purely fantastic. This

evolution can be seen as an ever deeper understanding of reality, and not as an escape from reality. This thesis seeks to explain the progression in Mujica Láinez' understanding of man, society, and nature through his writings.

Manuel Mujica Láinez' journey from historical fiction to the genres of magic-realism and fantasy is related to a long-standing literary debate about the nature of the reality portrayed by art. His writing, contemporary Latin American fiction, and western literature of the twentieth century, in general, have all undergone a metamorphosis in their view of the metaphysical reality underlying life and literature. Thus, Mujica Láinez has gradually changed his answer to the fundamental question, "What is?" and his adoption of new literary forms reflects, for him, an exhaustion of the philosophical possibilities inherent in the old.

Eric Heller has perceptively described the "realistic fallacy" which underlies the great nineteenth century novel. Its practitioners believed that they were offering a new and more accurate portrayal of man and nature. They believed that the art of a Zola or a Balzac had succeeded in capturing the essence of man more fully than the mythical tapestry woven by, say, Homer.¹ Unconsciously, they were portraying the Weltanschauung developed by modern science,

¹Eric Heller, The Artist's Journey into the Interior and other Essays (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 89-90.

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with its removal of occult forces, mystery, and super-human heroism in favor of an empirical description of the unheroic, everyday dimensions of human life. Addressing these writers, Friedrich Nietzsche asserted that "realism in art is an illusion," and that "all good artists imagined they were realistic." And correlating every artistic vision with some specific vision of happiness, Nietzsche argued: "What, then, is it that the so-called Realism of our writers tells us about the happiness of our time? . . . One is indeed led to believe that our particular happiness does not spring from what really is, but from our understanding of reality The artists of our century willy-nilly glorify the scientific 'beatitudes.'"¹

The depiction of human existence by the social and historical novelists of the nineteenth century led gradually to a loss of certainty about this scientific vision. Stylistic perception of the craft only brought to the foreground the question of the meaninglessness of life lived on this plane. It produced a pessimism of outlook and a search for new philosophical and literary perspectives. Already Flaubert, having plumbed literary realism to its depths, wondered whether it would not be more appropriate to write "a book about nothing at all, a book without any external connection, and which would support itself entirely by the internal force of style."² We see

¹Ibid., p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 97.

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here the germs of surrealism, of James Joyce and Marcel Proust, of Latin-American magic-realism, of a recovery of the fantastic--in short, of writers' journey into the interior of the human psyche in order to discover a reality deeper than that provided by objective description.¹

Manuel Mujica Láinez' literary evolution is part of this journey. However, in order to grasp the nature of his development, we must understand his starting point. His early works in historical fiction and his historical novels of the middle period represent a perspective by no means traditional in the history of literature. The genre of the novel and the historical novel was, in itself, a major departure from the pre-scientific and pre-modern vision of reality developed by Aristotle and the Greeks, by Christianity, and by Romanticism.

It is one of the arguments of this thesis that the novel, and even more so the historical novel which represents the starting-point of the literary evolution of Manuel Mujica Láinez, exemplifies a distinctively modern approach to reality. It is, in other words, not merely any prose work longer than 50,000 words, as some recent critics have surmised. Rather, it reflects the attitude towards social and individual phenomena which came to be accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is, in fact, the discovery of that period in European

¹Ibid., p. 98.

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history. Of course, the telling of fictitious stories is as old as human imagination. But

the modern novel is a special form of story-telling. It may be defined as a long fictitious narrative in prose, in which the portrayal of clearly realized characters and the vivid presentment of social manners and customs are given an emphasis at least equal to that given to plot and situation. If the reader's interest is overwhelmingly concerned with plot, with what is going to happen next, as in the detective-story, the spy-story, and other yarns of breath-taking adventure, what we have is a form of romance rather than a novel.¹

Previous ages had their romances, whether of chivalrous adventure or of courtly love, sometimes in verse and sometimes in prose. The novel, in contrast to those literary genres, "gives us persons whom we recognize as unmistakably human beings living in a world which is to our imagination vividly real. We expect of a novel, first of all, that it shall be 'true to life.'"² The modern novel, in short, was developed by authors and accepted by readers for whom an interest in human nature and in social behavior was primary. And the historical novel is a sub-species of this genre, with a particular historical focus.

If recent critics diverge from this definition of the novel, and include within its framework prose tales containing fantastic or magical elements, this does not

¹Paul Robert Lieder, Robert Morss Lovett, and Robert Kilburn Root, British Poetry and Prose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, third edition, 1950), Volume I, p. 692.

²Ibid., p. 692.

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mean that they have discovered a new and better definition as a result of more careful research. To be sure, modern prose tales--"novels"--do include fantastic, magical, and mythical elements. In fact, the development of Manuel Mujica Láinez has led in the direction of magic-realism and fantasy also. What seems to be involved here is the rediscovery of the irrational by modern novelists, including Mujica Láinez and other prominent Latin American authors. This rediscovery parallels the growing "irrationality" of modern life in general. As a result, themes which had been banished from the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have re-emerged, and superficial resemblances can be detected between the medieval romances, for example, and recent "novels." It is possible, of course, to speak of "novelistic" elements in late medieval literature, or in the early prose literature of colonial Spanish America, if what one means is the resemblance between the "fantastic" or "unrealistic" in the literature of those periods and similar themes in contemporary literature. But this is to conduct literary criticism on the semantic level. What we need to grasp is that the "reality" perceived by pre-modern prose writers did contain important irrational or mythical elements; that the social reality perceived by the great novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries excluded these elements, just as middle-class civilization excluded them from its

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consciousness; and that these same elements have begun to pervade twentieth-century "reality" and also twentieth-century literature. It is, in fact, an important cause of the evolution of Mujica Láinez from historical fiction to magic-realism and fantasy that he has perceived this changing dimension of life.

Mujica Láinez began as a historical novelist. In order to understand his starting point, we have to realize that in any century previous to the nineteenth, the historical novel would have been regarded as inferior literature and inferior history. Only against these earlier standards can we appreciate its achievement, its literary vision, and its limitations.

The Poetics of Aristotle:
Fiction and History

No work of literary criticism has been as influential as The Poetics of Aristotle. Embodying the classical canons of Greek theory and practice, it had a renewed impact on the development of modern literature after it was rediscovered in the seventeenth century.¹ Of course, Aristotle was unfamiliar with the novel as such, nor could his time point to examples of the historical novel genre. Still, his clear grasp of the craft of fiction and its effects upon the audience enabled him to develop a set of

¹John Herman Randall, Jr., Aristotle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 272.

criteria under which we can subsume the evaluation of historical writing. Speaking of "poetry," under which category we would properly include "fiction" in general, Aristotle wrote:

A poet differs from a historian, not because one writes verse and the other prose--the work of Herodotus could be put into verse, but it would still remain a history, whether in verse or prose--but because the historian relates what happened, the poet what might happen That is why the writing of poetry is a more philosophical activity and one to be taken more seriously, than the writing of history; for poetry tells us rather the universals, history the particulars.¹

It is apparent that Aristotle's standard for assigning a lower place to history as opposed to poetry is not moral-didactic (as in Plato), or scientific-objective (as it might be in a modern empiricist), but rather aesthetic. He judges a work of literature, a poem or a song, and we would add a work of fiction in general, as good if it is able to arouse in us spectators the same feelings and emotions as would the comparable actions of a man.² By this criterion, Aristotle assigned the highest place among literary forms to epic poetry and dramatic poetry--because they are the most "imitative" (mimetic) of men's actions. That is, they imitate men's actions in such a living and functional way that they arouse pity and

¹Aristotle's Poetics, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, Tragedy and Philosophy (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1969), p. 47.

²Randall, p. 289.

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fear most effectively, prior to purging, healing, lightening, and thereby delighting the soul of the spectator.¹

However, our actual lives and actions are often complicated by chance and accident. The potential which our character embodies is often not realized, and the dependence of our destiny on our character is often obscured or prevented from fulfillment. For this reason, the observation of real life is not as effective in mobilizing our emotions of pity and fear as is a work of art created by a poet who understands the universal and is able to abstract from the individual, accidental, chance elements which are unavoidable in life. (An ideal acorn should always fulfill its potential of becoming an oak, but many real acorns fall prey to squirrels, storms and corruption. Poetic justice should always apportion reward and punishment more fittingly than the contingencies of human justice and mortality are able to do.) Thus, whereas life is filled with the accidental and contingent, art is able to correct the "trembling hand of nature" by showing us the probable, the necessary and universal. It follows that history, being a record of actual events, can never portray the deeper reality as effectively as fiction. Its fidelity to "what is" prevents it from presenting "what might have been"; the price it pays for accurate description of events is a lessened ability to move the emotion

¹Ibid.



of those who read it. History, in short, is inferior as a form of literature. We can therefore deduce what Aristotle would have said of the realistic social novel of the 19th century and of the historical novel which followed it.

Reality in History, Myth
and Fiction

Although it stands at the beginnings of European literary criticism, Aristotle's interpretation of fiction (poetry) is a highly sophisticated understanding of literature which consciously rejects the truth-claims of two other literary modes¹ already well established in his time, namely history and myth. First, Aristotle reflects the rational temper of the Greek mind which could not conceive that history could become an object of human knowledge,² the reason being that history dwelt in the realm of contingency rather than in that of general principles, of which alone knowledge is possible. Secondly, the same Greek rationalists rejected the traditional mythologies as permeated with hateful falsehoods. In effect, both Herodotus and much of Homer and Hesiod were demoted from the highest plane of the literary art. And in their place, Aristotle placed the

¹Northrop Frye refers to mythology as a "literary mode which projects itself as theology." Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 64-5. This is part of a chapter dealing with the "Theory of Modes."

²Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 112.

free creations of the master artist whose fiction portrays men as they ought to be, that is, as realizing the potential inherent in their characters on the field of action.

With respect to the denigration of historical writing, we would have to acknowledge that pre-modern histories fell short of achieving a creative reconstruction of a living past. According to Edmund Wilson, these histories were either biographies of great men, chronicles of unconnected events, or sacred histories tracing the providence of God in shaping the destinies of his chosen people.¹ With respect to such documentary records, the attitude of Aristotle is not so far removed from that of modern philosophers of history. Benedetto Croce, for example, who exemplifies the Hegelian attitude that elevated historical writing to a high status, stresses that chronicle as such is "dead history," a history which is not understood even by the man who records it.² History can come to life only if it is "unified with an interest of the present life."³ Only our contemporary interests can justify the exploration of the past, and only those

¹Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Company, 1940), p. 2.

²Benedetto Croce, "History and Chronicle" in Hans Meyerhoff, The Philosophy of History in Our Time (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), pp. 44, 51.

³Ibid., p. 47.

interests can make it come to life for us. Arnold Toynbee, a distinguished twentieth century historian, is as severe as Aristotle in giving the lowest place to the "ascertainment and recording of 'facts.'" The historical perspective on human life must proceed from such records to the "elucidation of . . . general 'laws,'" and ultimately to the "artistic recreation of the facts in the form of 'fiction.'"¹ Toynbee regards the novelist Sir Walter Scott as a greater historian than some of the "Dryasdusts" whose chronicles he may have employed, but whom he transcended in making the past come to life for the contemporary audience.² In this respect, our modern evaluation is not far removed from Aristotle's strictures against Herodotus.

Of course, the problem is not the lack of creative writers among past historians. It is rather that the status of history as literature remained questionable. Aristotle lived before the "awakening of the historical consciousness" in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, more importantly, prior to the propagation by Hegel and his successors of the new mode of viewing reality and its pattern.³ The historical novel as a literary genre draws

¹Arnold Toynbee, "History, Science and Fiction," in Meyerhoff, p. 114.

²Ibid., p. 115.

³Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 113.

on the new understanding of human reality which came with the nineteenth century, and not upon Herodotus, to whom Aristotle's aesthetic criticisms can continue in force.

The second form of literature which was repudiated by Greek rationalism was the myth. (It should be added that the Testaments of Judaism and Christianity, however much they stressed the intervention of God in human history, would have come under the general heading of myth for Aristotle.) Eliade contends that the word "myth" connotes a "fiction" in every European language precisely because the Greeks declared their own "myths" to be fictitious 25 centuries ago.¹ The critique of the Greek rationalists began with Plato's insistence on taking the poets literally, in much the same way as biblical fundamentalists approach the Holy Scriptures today. By this standard, it appeared that the Greek myths could not be true, even that they insulted the conception of the divine and sacred. The stories of the Greek gods and goddesses thereupon became human inventions, and repugnant inventions to boot. Already Xenophanes had written:

Homer and Hesiod ascribed to the gods whatever is infamy and reproach among men: theft and adultery and deceiving each other.

Mortals suppose that the gods are born and have clothes and voices and shapes like their own.

¹Ibid., pp. 148-9.

But if oxen, horses, and lions had hands or could paint with their hands and fashion works as men do, horses would paint horse-like images of gods, and oxen oxenlike ones, and each would fashion bodies like their own.¹

This criticism was developed by Plato and Aristotle and it became so effective throughout the pagan world that, by the time Christianity became the religion of the Roman empire, neither the elites nor the masses believed in the ancient stories. According to Eliade, the Greek mythological heritage "could be accepted and assimilated by Christianity because it no longer carried living religious values. It had become a 'cultural treasure.'"² These mythological traditions could be passed on to the Renaissance and so to the modern world precisely because they were only works of art, and appeared to contain no truth value.

At the time of Aristotle, however, these mythological stories were still living religious dogmas, connected with mysterious and state-supported rituals. It is against them that Aristotle exalted an aesthetic which gave the highest place to consciously created fiction, fiction which emphasized the "probable" as opposed to the "improbable," the "necessary" as opposed to the "accidental," the "universal" as opposed to the "particular."

¹Kaufmann, p. 3.

²Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 156.

The dramatic unities were designed in the service of a new, and more "real" fiction, which would be able to move the souls of the audience better than the old religious heritage.

Christianity replaced the old mythological pantheon with a new one. Retaining the Greek myths since no one believed in their literal truth any more, it insisted on condemning as false any other beliefs which were not justified or validated by the Old and New Testaments. Thus it occurred, for example, that the mythologies of the Aztecs and Mayans were perceived by the Spanish conquistadores as pernicious forms of "devil worship." With every effort made to extirpate them from the minds of their believers and to expunge the records in which they appeared, most of the sacred books of the peoples of Central America were destroyed, and only a few copies survive in European museums. A similar fate befell the primarily oral traditions of the pagans in Northern and Western Europe.

In Latin America after the Conquest, the Spanish kings were fearful of false stories deluding the natives into questioning the literal truth of the Christian religion. Fiction was therefore banned, and the glorious age of the Spanish prose masters found no echo in Latin America until after independence. Literary critics and historians have shown that this is not the whole story, that the royal edicts were circumvented, and that some

"seeds of the novel" antedate the independence period. However, the general intention of the ban on fiction is apparent, and its relation to a particular view of religion and truth cannot be denied.

Thus, we can conclude that two of the most important elements in modern literature were not present until relatively recent times. First, history was relegated to a lower plane of reality because it consisted primarily of chronicle and biography, and therefore lacked the awareness of pattern and meaning which alone can give it a universal interest, but which did not enter historical writing until the modern period. Secondly, myth was condemned as false and illusory by the Greek rationalists in whatever form they encountered it, and by the Christian societies if contained in any form but that sanctioned by the divinely revealed Scriptures. It is clear that myth was understood in its literal form, and rejected when that form could not be squared with the socially accepted beliefs and values. Myths understood as symbolic expressions of perennial human concerns, of internal rather than external realities, were beyond the awareness of these earlier cultures.

In tracing the development of the novel form and of the historical novel, and its invasion by fantastic and surrealist themes in our own century, we are tracing a changing orientation to the understanding of human life. We must record first the birth of the modern historical

consciousness, which outgrew the stylistic restrictions of Aristotelian criticism, and gave rise to the realistic social novel and, in the nineteenth century, the historical novel. We must then show how social changes made questionable the "realistic" assumptions on which these genres were based, and how, under the impact of literary experiment and psychological theory, a new terrain was won for the utilization of myth, fantasy, magic, and the occult. These developments are reflected in the evolution of contemporary Latin American fiction and in the work of Manuel Mujica Láinez.

Modern Historical Consciousness
and the Development of the
Novel

The historical novel could not develop as a literary genre prior to two changes in man's understanding of himself and his environment. First, the social reality had to be perceived in the same realistic manner as our natural environment: occult purposes, improbable miracles, and the notion of will as the decisive force molding our destiny had to be abandoned. Secondly, the idea of man as constituted by his history, and of history as the progress of men and institutions, had to be accepted. The first change in perspective was the result of the scientific revolution. The second, while indirectly indebted to the same revolution, was also a product of the romantic reaction to science and enlightenment. It was the

synthesis of these two currents in Hegel at the turn of the nineteenth century that led to the great flowering of historical literature that followed.

The first change, the new realistic approach to social phenomena, was reflected in the birth of a distinctively modern literary genre, namely the novel. The second change, the notion of progress in history, led to a modification of the novel in the form of historical fiction. Ultimately, however, the release of powerful uncontrolled forces in nature and in human life led to increasing doubts about both of the basic ideas mentioned. In some cases, creative artists even foresaw prophetically the breakdown of modern culture and the restoration of mythical, fantastic, irrational elements in life. They reflected this insight by the modification of the novel form into a variety of genres that embodied these irrational elements. This, in fact, can be perceived in the literary evolution of Manuel Mujica Láinez, whose literary odyssey is representative of western literature in general as it confronts the dilemma of modern culture and human nature.

As indicated previously, neither the classical nor the Christian literary traditions assigned much importance to the genre of history. Christianity, it is true, did claim exception for one privileged series of events to which it attributed historicity, namely that beginning with Adam and ending with the life and death of Christ.

Aside from that, Christianity had agreed with the ancients that no fundamental truth could ever be revealed by mundane events, that history was useful simply as a storehouse of examples. Both saw human nature as everywhere and always fundamentally the same, and the rise and fall of states as a cyclical process from which neither pattern nor higher meaning could be deduced.¹

This attitude is apparent as late as the sixteenth-century Florentine Machiavelli, who in so many other respects strikes us as a precursor of modern thought. Machiavelli's writings emphasize the recurrent themes in history and are not concerned with those particular features which distinguish one epoch from another. Thus, he lumps together examples drawn from the history of Greece or Rome and those taken from contemporary Europe. In one chapter of The Prince, discussing the foundation of new principalities, he manages to combine descriptions of Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Romulus.² While it seems strange to the modern reader to see legend, religious tradition, and history commingled in this way, Machiavelli asserts that

¹Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern," in Between Past and Future (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963), p. 66.

²Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), p. 125.

anyone comparing the present with the past will soon perceive that in all cities and in all nations there prevail the same desires and passions as always have prevailed; for which reason it should be an easy matter for him who carefully examines past events, to foresee those which are about to happen in any republic, and to apply such remedies as the ancients used in like cases But these lessons being neglected or not understood by readers, or if understood by them, being unknown to rulers, it follows that the same disorders are common to all times.¹

This is obviously a distinctively pre-modern attitude. However, it would be going too far to assert that such conceptions of social and historical phenomena have ever been entirely abandoned. In every age some writers, whether of fiction or of history, continued to seek the "eternal" traits of human nature. Their explanations might focus on the influence of great leaders, or of chance events, or of truths suddenly discovered, to account for such social change as was observed against the perennially constant background. From a "modern" standpoint, such conceptions are simpleminded. Marx, a typical representative of the modern historical consciousness, mocked such simplemindedness when he polemicized against those economists who wrote as if they had just laid bare the secret springs of all human motivation--almost assuming that, had one of them been providentially at the side of Richard the Lion-Hearted, that monarch would not have wasted his time on Crusades in the Holy Land, but would instead have forthwith introduced the principles of free trade, thereby enabling Europe to

¹The Discourses, quoted in Cassirer, p. 125.

avoid some centuries of misery, backwardness, war and superstition.¹

The "modern" attitude to social phenomena and to history developed only in the wake of the scientific revolution. The prophet of that revolution, Francis Bacon, had inaugurated a perception of nature dispensed with monsters, demigods, divine miracles, or unique events; instead, it sought for the general laws of natural phenomena, now and in the past, and in both the terrestrial and the celestial spheres. When the progress of science and technology in the next century demonstrated the success of the Baconian approach, it struck some minds that the procedures of observation and induction might be fruitfully applied to the study of human history as well. This connection, which was to become characteristic of Enlightenment thought, was first explicitly made by the Italian Giovanni Batista Vico, and creative writers of fiction were not far behind in introducing its presuppositions into their work. Demythologizing the social landscape, much as his model Bacon had transformed the natural, Vico introduced a new perspective into our understanding of man and society. Edmund Wilson describes how, in the pages of Vico, for the first time

the heroes and gods float away. What we see now are men as we know them, alone on the earth we know. The myths that have made us wonder are projections of a

¹Wilson, pp. 184-5.

human imagination like our own and, if we look for the key inside ourselves and learn how to read them correctly, they will supply us with a record, inaccessible up to now, of the adventures of men like ourselves.¹

In Vico, we have the beginnings of re-created social history, which was to transform both the historical and the literary genres. In this perspective, the development of societies is not the work of single great men or a pattern laid up in heaven, but a process affected by its sources and environment. "The social world," writes Vico, is certainly the work of men."² And the facts of known history are to be "referred to their primitive origins, divorced from which they have seemed hitherto to possess neither a common basis, nor continuity nor coherence."³

The form of literature which developed in recognition of the new understanding of man and society--the most important and influential innovation of modern times--is the novel. It is the genre which speaks to the great majority of men and women in the modern world, and it reflects their lives, hopes, and dilemmas most closely. According to Walter Kaufmann, the novel is qualitatively, and not merely quantitatively, different from earlier prose works such as the romance, the short story, and the novella.⁴ That difference is ultimately rooted in the new

¹Ibid., p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid.

⁴Kaufmann, p. 96.

understanding of man and man's social background which arose out of the scientific revolution.

According to Kaufmann, the novelist, though he appears to be creating fiction like the tragic poet rather than recording actual events like the historian, is closer to the historian than to the tragic poet. The historian "tries to add to our knowledge and has time and space and means to build up characters, situations, and experiences remote from our own. He can bring to life lost ages."¹ Similarly, the novelist creates a "huge epic that involves a whole social structure, a huge cast, and a great many incidents and interruptions."² The emotional impact of a novel is therefore very similar to that of a great history, and qualitatively different from that of a tragedy, a short story, or a novella, all of which deal with some single, brief, climactic action or present some single character portrait or dramatic incident.

Kaufmann goes on to argue that the broad scope of the novel gives it an emotional impact resembling that of the epic, with its wide cast of characters and broad range over time and space. The novel affects us emotionally in the way in which the obsolete epic form affected the ancients and medieval man.³ Again, while a superficial

¹Ibid., p. 96.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 374.

reading would find the external difference between prose and verse as the distinguishing mark of the two genres, the more fundamental one is in the intellectual attitudes which characterize novel and epic. Both genres portray whole societies, but with a perspective drawn, on the one hand, from history, and, on the other, from myth. The epic assigns a high place to myth: the divine is ever-present in The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Aeneid, or the Arthurian legends, both as a motivating and a directing element in the action. The novel, on the other hand, clearly reflects the background of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. The "habit of truth" is an important criterion, and a measure of the extent to which we moderns can "identify" with the characters in the story. It is, of course, characteristic of the Enlightenment attitude that it assigns the lowest rank among literary genres to myth. Secondly, the novel is a far more democratic genre than the epic, portraying a wider range of social types. And thirdly, conforming to Hegel's insight that no man is a hero to his valet, the presence of so many ordinary human types tends to reduce the heroic possibilities of the novel.

To what extent does the "habit of truth" reduce the universal artistic possibilities of the novel form? In other words, if the novel resembles history, do Aristotle's strictures on the inferiority of a form that

accentuates the factual at the expense of the universal retain their validity? Does the novel lose in emotional force what it gains in social and historical verisimilitude?

This criticism is probably rooted in a misunderstanding, but one which was shared by both the proponents and the critics of the new "realistic" approach to human phenomena. Of course, the novelist, like any artist, does not merely depict a "slice of life"; nor does he tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." In effect, he stylizes reality: that is, he selects those aspects of existence which he regards as metaphysically important.¹ Saying to the reader that this is the essence of life as he sees it, concretized in images such as Don Quixote, Tom Jones, Jean Valjean, or Nana, the author asks the reader to agree with his judgment of the nature of human life. But the literatures of the Greeks, of the Middle Ages, and of the modern period represent contrasting visions of man and nature, as captured by the creative talents of different artists and echoed by the assenting judgments of their contemporaries. They are, in effect, literary images of contrasting social realities.

In particular, the novel's depiction of man and society, emerging from the picaresque tale and growing to maturity in the nineteenth century, reflects the world of

¹Ayn Rand, The Romantic Manifesto (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 19-21.

the middle classes, of urban civilization, or bourgeois aspirations, of rationalism and science. Correspondingly, it is a world in which the place of myth, of the improbable and miraculous, the unforeseeable, is reduced.

As a genre, the novel precedes the historical novel. The latter is a modification of the former in the light of two conceptions: that man's present can be understood only if we understand man's origins, and that the transition from the past to the present is a progress. Both conceptions are found in Hegel's enormously influential Philosophy of History, written in the early nineteenth century. According to Hegel, we cannot understand contemporary European civilization unless we view it as the culmination of a long historical process, whose roots lie in the ancient world, and which embodies an ever more perfect realization of the concept of freedom. The Orient, Greece, medieval Christianity, and modern Europe represent progressive actualizations of freedom and self-consciousness in the history of man. Thus, secular history has meaning and pattern, and we can understand both if we study the development of our institutions from their origins.

Hegel's idea of progress in history was, in one sense, already familiar to the eighteenth century Enlightenment, for which it was the logical extension to the social realm of the undeniable progress in scientific

discovery and technological innovation. Enlightenment thinkers from Montesquieu to Condorcet were surprised at the variety of cultures which a study of history and anthropology opened to them. But the eighteenth century did not produce the historical novel, that is, fictional depiction of previous societies with the fidelity of the historian's brush. The probable reason is that the eighteenth century considered itself unquestionably superior to all previous civilizations. And it is doubtful that anyone can be seriously interested in the past if he is sure that the present is superior, in the decisive respects, to everything that went before. It was the Romanticists, who really questioned the superiority of the present, who made the greatest contribution to the study of the past, and thereby to the historical novel. And it was Hegel who synthesized the insights of the Enlightenment and the Romanticists.

The Romantic protest against bourgeois civilization and rationalism sought an alternative in the study of the past. Within the past, the Romanticists found something missing in the normality of the bourgeois present: the adventures, the heroic deeds, the sentiments of an age that lived upon a plane different than that of enlightened self-interest. From Hegel, Michelet, Savigny, and other historians, the Romanticists learned the importance of a close and accurate observation of previous societies as

reflected in their records and traditions. Thus, the fruit of the Romantic opposition to the banality of modern life, combined with the thoroughly modern understanding of what constitutes the social reality, led to the historical novel, exemplified in the great works of Scott, Dumas, Hugo, Manzoni, the German Romanticists, and their progeny in the New World.¹

Whatever one may think of the romantic view of life, its spokesmen did open new vistas of emotional experience to readers stultified by the drabness and regularity of the industrial civilization. Since such experiences were absent from the everyday lives of both novelists and readers, and yet represented a repressed longing in their psyches, they could be located only in a distant (sometimes imaginary) past. To have deliberately created mythical regions where such experiences could be located would have violated the historical consciousness of both writers and readers. To locate them in the past was to legitimize them, albeit as the emotions and experiences of past societies. Arthur Koestler argues that the modern industrial World had created a vacuum in the "self-transcending" emotions of man, producing a taboo on expressions of tenderness and a loss of participatory

¹Erich Kahler, Man the Measure: A New Approach to History (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967), p. 486.

communion with one's fellow men.¹ The historical novel, utilizing the projective empathy of its readers, filled that vacuum. In effect, it accomplished for a modern audience what every great writer has sought to do. Whoever can enter the streets of sixteenth century Verona in his imagination, can also weep tears at the death of Juliet.² Whoever can imagine the Paris of the Middle Ages, can experience the sorrow, the longings, the ideals of Quasimodo and Esmeralda. And the reader who is able to re-create the atmosphere of Renaissance Italy or of the Crusades is able to share the emotions of the men who lived in those times. Thus, the historical novel restored, with an unparalleled richness, the world of myth and heroism which had been almost suffocated by modern civilization.

The Decline of Modern Historical
Consciousness and the Revival of
the Mythical and Fantastic

The creators of the historical novel perceived elements of the human psyche which had been repressed by industrial civilization. But the elements which they correctly perceived in the past did not have a merely antiquarian interest. If modern man could respond to the themes of the historical novel, then the demonic, heroic,

¹Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1967), p. 295.

²Ibid., p. 305.

aggressive, and, in general, mythical forces depicted therein still lingered in the depths of his soul. This is what events of the twentieth century have shown with respect to the political and social realm, and what the literature of the century has foreshadowed and reflected.

Ernst Cassirer has described the process whereby myths have reappeared in politics and reconquered the rational fabric of social life.¹ The particular dangers which have led to a resurgence of mythical thought in our times are the dangers which have afflicted western civilization: devastating wars, uncontrollable economic crises, the Faustian forces of science and technology, in short, all those social processes which have thrown our rational plans and life-long ambitions into the chaos of uncertainty and unpredictability. Of course, modern man understands these forces in a secularized form. He is hardly aware of the role of myth--if he were it would not be myth for him--in the phenomena of social life. But when he turns, inexplicably, to fanatical leaders, when he demands "charisma" (the divine gift of grace) from his politicians, when he submerges his identity in a mass movement, when he understands economic conflict as a pageant of classes struggling for retribution and redemption, he is acting in ways which would have been interpreted as "mythical" by pre-modern man. This is why Cassirer

¹Cassirer, pp. 277-78.

concludes that the mythical elements which lurk in the dark of man's soul had never been completely vanquished, but merely awaited the loosening of the binding forces of bourgeois social life in order to emerge once more.¹

The twentieth century discovered the mythical or the irrational in more areas than the socio-political. Freud perceived it in the spiritual life of the individual, and this caused him to question the primacy of reason in man's self-understanding.² Within the individual, Freud asserted the importance of the irrational--the sexual drive, the forces of the id--and he also saw history as propelled more by will than by "the cunning of reason," and subject to cyclical patterns of growth and decline rather than unilinear progress. Freud's discoveries led him to assign a new interpretation to the myths of antiquity, to the dreams of man, and to the numerous fantastic elements that peopled literature. In particular, he concluded that the key to the understanding of myth must be sought in the emotional life of man.³ This theme was to become enormously influential in modern literature, and to justify innumerable departures from the realistic conventions of the novel.

¹Ibid., p. 280.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Ibid., p. 30.

Others, such as the anthropologists Tylor and Frazier, also sought the key to the understanding of myth, whether in its ancient or modern incarnations, and they concluded that the basic problem at the root of mythology, religion and animism was that of death.¹ This was revealed as the perennial human concern which modern civilization, with its Faustian dream of immortality, had hidden from the human eye. In previous civilizations it had been, they argued, the function of myth to reconcile man with the inescapable fact of death. Whether modern man could dispense with the consolations of myth or religion was an open question which they did not address.

Finally, some students of myth and religion concluded that it was an objectification of man's social, and not his individual, experiences. Among this school of thought was Cassirer,² who, like the others, gave a new dignity to the study of the mythical elements in human life and thought. Following in the tradition of Jung, he argued that man's social experiences were reflected in certain archetypes--age-old patterns of central human experience which lie at the root of religion, poetry, and art, and which possess special emotional significance. Not many accepted Jung's hypothesis that these unconscious primordial images, which transcend culture, time and space, are a genetic heritage of the entire human race.

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 47.

But it was generally accepted that the archetypes or symbols, however transmitted, represented certain basic human experiences and carried meaning to a very wide audience. If they were present in literature, they exist in the writer and are echoed by the reader. For ancient man, they generated the heroes and gods of mythology; for modern man they produce, on the one hand, private fantasies, and, on the other, the symbolism of literature. In fact, it could be argued that, in our times, literature is the most potent disseminator of archetypes in our culture. Through it, mythological or religious concerns, such as those expressed in the archetypes of rebirth or immortality, of heaven and hell, of devil, hero and god, have entered the consciousness of readers who possess little contact with formal religion or classical literature.¹

While these themes are perennial, they are not equally conscious to every historical period. Specifically, the long period of industrial civilization and the reign of the middle classes obscured the mythical aspirations and terrors of man. Within the realistic conventions of the social novel or the novel of manners, they were inappropriate subjects. To some degree, the historical novel reintroduced this dimension. To a much greater degree, the evolution of literature in the direction of surrealism,

¹Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism (New York: Vintage Books, rev. ed., 1955), pp. 133, 136-37.

symbolism, magic-realism, the fantastic, and science fiction has brought them to the foreground. And that evolution is partly attributable to the decline of the bourgeois social order, with its certainties and this-worldly aspirations.

It is interesting to follow this literary development in general, and in modern Latin American writing, in particular. We know, for example, that the earliest Latin American writers were not able to record the Aztec and Mayan legends, nor to create anything consciously fictional for their readers. Only the historical record and the truth of Christianity could be disseminated in the first period of Latin American civilization.¹ In the second period, following the wars of independence, we see the emotional experiences of the Latin American cultures giving rise to the picaresque tale and the novel. Later in the nineteenth century, the various major forms of the novel developed in Europe were copied in Latin America, but there was also a strong emphasis on elements of folklore and regional culture. Subsequently, in the twentieth century, writers imbued with the Marxist ethos, as well as nationalists, sought to describe the conflict between their cultures and the North American colossus. In other words,

¹Kessel Schwartz, A New History of Spanish American Fiction (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1972), Volume I, pp. 3-14.

the development appears to move steadily in the direction of greater social realism.

However, most recently, writers of various political persuasions have begun to see their people's aspirations and their own self-understanding most closely mirrored in the genres of magic-realism and the fantastic. Sometimes, these emerge out of a tradition of the social or the historical novel, as in the case of Vargas Llosa, García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Manuel Mujica Láinez. If this genre of literature is becoming increasingly prevalent in Latin America, it certainly does not mean that the roots of the Indian past are still alive and conscious to the reading public, and at long last being given the expression denied them in the colonial period. Surely, the literate classes of Latin America have few direct ties with the pre-Colombian civilizations. The work of the Church was far too effective in destroying the native religions, that of rationalism in undermining any religious beliefs, at least among the literate classes of the continent. In fact, the literary rediscovery of the past is often a painful work of research, as in the writings of Carpentier or Asturias.

What we have, rather, is a quest within the soul of contemporary Latin American man for the mythical, demonic, spiritual elements which are part, however

repressed, of the human psyche. The literature of magic-realism is a reflection of this search.

Manuel Mujica Láinez is a writer uniquely appropriate for the study of this trend. His literary career has involved substantial contributions to the genres of the historical novel, as well as to the literature of magic-realism and the fantastic. His evolution, in fact, has taken him from the first of these forms to the second, and finally to the last. Thus, we can observe the creative process at work in the individual whose perceptions of the human condition are in a process of change and flux. That change, moreover, is one characteristic of the major trends of Latin American literature in this century, some of which Mujica Láinez parallels and others which he fore-shadows.

In the next part of this chapter, we propose to examine the evolution of the Latin American novel, in order to indicate the social climate in which it arose and its distinctive features. Subsequently, we shall examine the place of Manuel Mujica Láinez within this tradition and his role in its evolution.

Latin American Fiction

The Development of the Novel and the Historical Novel

There have been many explanations for the late development of the novel form in Latin America. In fact,

few critics agree as to the reason for its late appearance. If, in recent years, as a result of more research in the field of literary history, some writers have proposed that works of fiction with "novelistic elements" were written prior to the nineteenth century, it is central to our argument that most critics still settle on one particular work, Jose Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's El periquillo sarniento, published in 1816, as the first "truly American" novel.

Several suggestions have been advanced for this late appearance. We shall examine only some of the basic theories, briefly, in an attempt to formulate a more general perspective regarding the development of historical fiction in Latin America. Broadly speaking, the theories fall into four categories. The first, and oldest, explained the late development of the novel by pointing to royal Spanish edicts which sought to ban the export and writing of fictional works in the first centuries of the colonial empire, a restriction applied to Latin America but not to the mother country. This theory has been challenged in recent years. A second group of theories attributed the lag between the literary evolution of Spain and Latin America to the new and unexpected features which the continent presented to the Spanish explorers and colonists. The European mind had first to come to terms with the reality of the new lands before it could create imaginative

literature about them, before it could utilize the genres developed in Spain to reflect the life in Latin America. In other words, Latin American writers had first to ascertain what was fact before they could venture to embellish it in fiction. A third group of theories could be labelled socio-psychological or historicist. According to this perspective, the novel could not develop in Latin America until the social, economic, and political conditions of Latin American society had matured to the point of providing a wide diversity of human types, and a collection of historical traditions, which could form the subject-matter for the writer of fiction. Finally, there is a fourth group of explanations. Critics of this school tend to emphasize European literary influences, the ideological currents of the Enlightenment, and the fusion of European fictional models with Latin American experiences in the era of national independence as the background for the emergence of the Latin American novel.

The first of these perspectives is associated with writers of the school of Menéndez y Pelayo and Pedro Henríquez Ureña. It explains the dearth of fictional narrative in the first centuries of the New World as the direct effect of certain laws promulgated by the Spanish Crown between the years 1532 and 1543, which prohibited the shipment of any fictional prose to the colonies, on

the grounds that such works were "detrimental to the moral health of the natives":

No hay razones 'psicológicas,' ni 'sociológicas' para que en América no hayamos escrito novelas durante tres siglos en que escribíamos profusamente versos, historia, libros de religión. La razón es de hecho, aunque raras veces se recuerde; en disposiciones legales de 1532 y 1543 se prohibió para todas las colonias, la circulación de obras de imaginación pura, en prosa y en verso [que ningún español o indio lea . . . libros de romances, que tratan materias profanas y fabulosas, e historias fingidas, porque se siguen muchos inconvenientes] y se ordenó que autoridades no permitiesen que se imprimiesen o trajesen de Europa.¹

Opposing this theory, the eminent critics Fernando Alegría, Irving Leonard and Rodríguez Marín maintain that, even though works of fiction were forbidden by royal decree, a fair number of fictional narratives were smuggled into the Spanish colonies. To support this point, Fernando Alegría gives the example that, of Cervantes' first edition of Don Quijote, published in 1605 and printed in 750 copies, 184 were accounted for as having been sent to America. Similarly, there is evidence that the reading of chivalresque novels was widespread on the new continent. Particularly, works such as Amadís de Gaula and its sequel, Las sergas de Esplandián, were thought to have influenced some of the "earlier" chroniclers of the New World. According to Kessel Schwartz, in his A New History of Spanish American Fiction, it was Gonzalo Fernandez de

¹Pedro Henríquez Ureña, "Apuntaciones sobre la novela en América," in Juan Loveluck, La novela hispano-americana (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1972), p. 35.

Oviedo, author of the semi-fictional Historia general y natural de las Indias (1535), who--with the publication of Claribalte (1514-1519)--"may have produced the earliest novel of chivalry in America."¹

It is all the more paradoxical that, while Spain was experiencing a literary and artistic renaissance despite the presence of the (quite) prohibitory establishment of the Inquisition, the Spanish colonies did not come into contact with much of this intellectual revival. However strong the moral, cultural, political, and economic bonds between the mother country and the colonies, the latter were restricted insofar as the publication and distribution of any "profane" reading matter was concerned. In fact, economic restrictions were placed on whatever printing presses were established in the New World, and this, coupled with the fact that such presses were usually in the hands of religious orders, served to insure that works which saw the light of day in the colonies were mostly of a serious, didactic, moral, or sacred nature.

However effective these restrictions were, it is not difficult to see that they were imposed in order to favor the evangelizing task of the Spanish missionaries. The Spaniards came to the New World assured of both religious and cultural superiority over the native inhabitants of the New World. They saw the various

¹Schwartz, p. 4.

manifestations of indigenous culture and cosmogony as a threat to the propagation of the Christian faith. It was through this intolerant attitude that a sizable body of recorded pre-Colombian literature was destroyed, to the detriment of posterity.

Concomitantly with the missionaries' zeal, conqueror and colonizer alike found it necessary to forsake and to condemn the newly discovered pleasures of their brethren in Spain's great renaissance. While in Spain itself religious mysticism and asceticism had given way to humanism and its anthropocentric view of reality, the asceticism of medieval Spain was transferred to the colonies. For this reason, the spirit of medieval Spain flourished in the sacred drama and the epic poetry of sixteenth and seventeenth century Latin America. In the context of a religious and cultural climate so totally out of step with the Spanish renaissance, a recognizable body of "profane" literature could not be written in the New World as it was in Spain. Furthermore, one cannot say that the colonies lacked knowledge and models of the literary masterpieces produced during Spain's Golden Age. Rather, the production of so insignificant a body of fiction prior to the nineteenth century was due to restrictions placed upon the colonies and to the evangelizing task of the conquerors of the New World.

While very few works of fiction were produced in the colonies prior to the nineteenth century, there is a variety of fictional (or "novelistic") elements to be found in many of the New World's histories and chronicles. Seen from the vantage point of our century, this may be the source of the claim that prose fiction in Latin America appeared much before the nineteenth century. To contemporaries, however, it may have appeared in a different light. One aspect of the fictional ("novelistic") intrusions into historical accounts is understandable in the light of the chroniclers' attempts to record a world totally different from that of Western Europe. To the Spaniard in America,

si todo era, en aquellos días, sorpresa, revelación, deslumbramiento, prodigio, ¿a qué apelar a fábulas si la fábula era la atmósfera misma que respiraban, si lo maravilloso estaba en narrar lo acaeciente, en referir lo acaecido?¹

The New World is an exotic "tabula rasa," the truths it displays seem as strange if not stranger than fiction itself to the inexperienced eyes of the Spanish conquerors. One well-known example of the impact of the histories of the New World had upon European man is reflected in the disbelief which greeted Garcilaso de la Vega Inca's Comentarios reales in Spain. However realistic this work may have been in exposing the history, habits

¹Luis Alberto Sánchez, Proceso y contenido de la novela hispanoamericana (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1953), p. 81.

and customs of the last Incas, the Spaniards mistook the work for an example of fictional narrative.¹

Fictional elements are frequently found in Latin American historical chronicles. The supernatural and the fantastic appear interlaced with the more serious plot line provided by the Conquest itself. There are superficially novel-like adventure stories such as Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's Los infortunios que Alonso Ramírez padeció en poder de ingleses piratas (1690), the story of an early Latin American Robinson Crusoe. Travelogues abound in Concolocorvo's (Don Calixto Bustamante Carlos Inga) El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes; there are humorous as well as novelistic elements in Bernal Díaz del Castillo's La verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España; and Bartolomé de las Casas' indictment of Spanish exploitation is his Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias (1552) does not lack such literary appeals. Finally, it is still difficult to assess the great importance of the two great "golden" myths which are central to both the historian's and the fictional narrator's account. For the themes of the man of gold, "el hombre de oro," and the legendary city of gold, "el dorado," appear equally as truth and as fantasy throughout the narrative of the New World.

¹Enríquez Ureña, "Apuntaciones," in Loveluck, op. cit., p. 38.

Of the various fictional prose genres that were smuggled into the New World, two have been mentioned so far: the chivalresque, with its multiple reproductions of Amadís de Gaula, and the early precursors of the realistic Spanish novel, as exemplified by Cervantes' Don Quijote and the Novelas ejemplares. However, there is a third type of narrative that also circulated in the colonies but was not assimilated into the mainstream of Latin American narrative until the nineteenth century. It is the picaresque novel, so popular in seventeenth century Spain, so strangely in tune with the decaying social fabric of the Spanish Golden Age, and by the same token a genre that could not reflect the heroic exploits and self-understanding of the Spaniards in the New World. Thus, while the picaresque tale flourished in Spain at a time when Spanish life was undergoing a social restructuring, the genres that were more appropriate to the exploits of the colonies were the sacred drama and epic poetry. To this effect, Fernando Alegría tells us that:

El sello misionero de la conquista española está patente en la literatura a que ella dió origen: una literatura cuyo objetivo no era divertir, sino informar a Europa de lo que acaecía en América y defender el derecho de la gran empresa de ultramar. La tradición novelística europea se forjó en el ocio y el lujo de refinadas culturas. La América hispana de los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII era un campo de batalla en el terreno político como en el terreno moral y sus escritores determinaron, con razón o sin ella, que el mejor vehículo literario para el mensaje que propagaban no estaba en la narración de picarescas o pastoriles aventuras, sino en una prosa didáctica o en una

poesía humanística. Por necesidad política e intelectual, entonces, desdeñaron la novela.¹

With the picaresque tale, developed in Spain but not echoed in the Americas until two centuries later, we are at a midpoint in the discussion of factors behind the late emergence of the Latin American novel. We have reviewed the factors stemming from the legal prohibitions of the Spanish Crown, as well as those deriving from the unprecedented features which the New Continent presented to the imaginations of its first conquerors and colonizers, and which prevented a clear demarcation between the frontiers of factual description and fantastic imagination. The mention of the picaresque tale brings to our attention the importance of social and economic factors, as well as political themes, in the genesis of modern literature. For, just as in Spain, so in Latin America, when social, economic and political conditions akin to the period of the Golden Age made their appearance in the struggling nations of the New World, we find the novel emerging as a fictional document of a social, political and historical transformation. As in Spain's Golden Age, the picaresque was the first genre to document the waning of rigidly structured institutions and the breakdown of society, so we observe the first Latin American picaresque, Lizardi's El periquillo

¹Fernando Alegría, "Orígenes de la novela hispano-americana," in Loveluck, op. cit., p. 65.

sarniento arising out of the author's need to document and to combat the vices and follies of Mexican society.

This first of Latin American novels points to a social-psychological and historical factor underlying the late arrival of the novel in Latin America. Emphasizing this theme, Pedro Grases argues that for the genre of the novel to appear, the novelist must be able to draw his subjects out of a vast number of existing human and social types:

El género novelístico es exponente de afinado sentido crítico en todas las culturas. A mi entender, podría trazarse un paralelo de equivalencia, en lo que a este punto concierne, con el teatro. Las formas dramáticas y las narrativas extensas en prosa se nos dan en obras literarias que observamos únicamente en civilizaciones ya elaboradas a lo largo del tiempo, que han seguido extenso e intenso proceso evolutivo en su propia formación En la novela, el motivo central radica en el tipo humano, en la riquísima y variada gama de sus sentimientos La novela, ya sea evasión de un mundo pluriforme, ya como especulación de la realidad, necesita siempre un antecedente complejo y denso en la historia anterior, que justifica, a mi modo de ver, su constante aparición en épocas de rico contenido pretérito.¹

We can agree with Grases' viewpoint, which, incidentally, conforms to the development of the novel in European literature, that the absence of a large number of human and social types in colonial Latin America--or at least of types which could plausibly interact with each other on a regular social basis--delayed the appearance of the novel by withholding the requisite tools of the

¹Pedro Grases, "De la novela en América," in Loveluck, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

novelist. There is an additional and closely related factor peculiar to Latin America, namely that there was no sizable recognized body of historical data in the new continent which could have served as a springboard in the development of prose fiction.

There is, therefore, a historical reason which may explain the obvious anachronism of El periquillo's appearance in 1816, almost two centuries after the picaresque had ceased to be a novelty to Spanish readers. In the New World, the Spanish conquistador and, later, the settler had yet to live and write their history. The American settler had to create his own traditions, produce his own heroes and villains, before the modern bard could draw on such themes and revive ghosts from his own past, infusing them with life. A rich historical background and a consciousness of separate identity was lacking in those first two or three centuries after the discovery of the American continent, and it is the lack of this particular form of self-knowledge as much as the lack of literary models which accounts for the dearth of creative prose in the colonies.

A strong literary tradition often arises out of a strong historical tradition. The example of the birth of the Latin American novel is not an isolated one. Similar periods of literary creativity were apparent in Periclean Athens (after the Persian Wars), or, more recently, in the

Romantic German period of the Sturm und Drang and in the great period of the Russian novel which we associate with the names of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. All these periods of literary creativity followed periods of national struggle and rebirth.

In the case of the Latin American novel, the direct literary antecedents which preceded the wars of independence were the historical chronicle and the epic, rather than the romances or other fictional writings. This, as explained earlier, was in part due to the restrictive attitude on the part of Spain towards literary expression in and for the colonies. Consequently, a strong historical element was inherent in the self-understanding of Latin American readers. The great events of the wars of independence and the emergence of new national societies reinforced this historical element in the consciousness of writers as well as readers. That the first form of prose fiction which developed on a large scale in Latin America was the historical novel is due, however, to one further vital influence. This is the ideological and literary influence of Europe in the nineteenth century. Thus the Latin American historical novel, which forms the literary mainstream exemplified by Manuel Mujica Láinez, emerges as a synthesis of Latin American content and tradition and European form.

It is Latin America's receptiveness to the ideological currents of the Enlightenment which is largely

responsible for the colonies' movement towards independence. Just as the French Encyclopedists' writings of the eighteenth century paved the way, ideologically speaking, for the French Revolution, so did works such as Rousseau's Du Contrat Social serve as the rhetorical tools in the Latin American wars of independence.

With the wars of independence successfully concluded, the emerging national societies of the new continent had to be discovered and represented in imagination. Writers adopted the European genre of the novel as a positive vehicle for the aesthetic propagation of social and political viewpoints. They saw themselves as the bastion of moral and social standards. They believed in the effectiveness of the literary "weapon" as a means of shaping the consciousness and future direction of the new nations. For this reason, the novel as we see it in the period immediately following the wars of independence is social realist in form, while retaining a romanticized (or idealized) vision of man as portrayed against the naturally exotic settings of the New World. The novel as a didactic and aesthetic tool conforms to the standards set by its European literary models, particularly the literary currents of England and France, and it follows that our previous description of the European novel of the period would be likewise applicable to the nineteenth century Latin American novel.

The historical novel is an offshoot of the nineteenth century novel; its singularity lies in a perception of past, often heroic, events, which it recollects in a fictionalized form but one which conforms to our canons of probability, verisimilitude, and causation. In Latin America, however, the historical novel was not perceived in isolation from other types of novel during the nineteenth century. Novels were generally "historical," and the term was loosely applied to encompass a variety of works, some of which dealt only tangentially with a historical reconstruction of past and present trends. Kessel Schwartz tells us of the divergent classification of some nineteenth century novels by critics, offering José Mármol's Amalia as an example. This is a work which Schwartz identifies as a romantic historical novel, but he notes that Enrique Anderson Imbert insists on classifying it as a political and autobiographical novel.¹ It is apparent that Latin American writers displayed greater eclecticism in the historical genre, in their choice of subject matter and style, than did their European counterparts.

Latin American novels of this period did generally include elements either of the historical past or of past trends which were working themselves out in the historical

¹Schwartz, pp. 45-6.

present. Insofar as historical novels dealt with past history--and in Latin America this might well be the recent past, still fresh in the memory of the descendants of the colonizers, or the seething drama of the national birth--they often entailed a particular world view which, while resembling the perspective of the historian, yet transcended it in its romanticization of the past. According to Herbert Butterfield, the European historical novel portrays a

love for the past for its own sake, and the fondness for lingering over those things that endure as relics or as symbols of the past, and the regret for the things that are lost forever.¹

In Latin America, as in Europe, the main exponent and model of this genre was the widely translated Walter Scott.

Butterfield contends that Scott did not have a didactic purpose in writing his novels, that he

did not write historical novels because he wished to teach history in an easy way or to get at a moral indirectly, but because his mind was full of the past, just as the mind of the musician is full of tunes; he made for himself a world out of the past, and lived in it much; and he painted² that world for his readers, and turned it into a tale.

If this is the case, the Latin American novel certainly diverged from its European counterpart, since moral,

¹Herbert Butterfield, The Historical Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 9. Originally published 1924.

²Ibid., p. 2.

didactic, political, and social themes were consciously intended by historical novelists who aspired to shape the new societies through these "ideological weapons." The difference may stem from the relatively recent past which came to life in the Latin American historical novel, a past which had not yet receded into the shadows as had the heroic events of much of European history. On the other hand, one should not underestimate the political and didactic elements present in the writings of Walter Scott. It is not farfetched to portray Scott as the popularizer of the political doctrines of the English conservative Edmund Burke: according to Russell Kirk, the Waverley novels carried Burke's ideas to an audience which might have never read Burke's orations or pamphlets. They showed "by concrete instances, most vividly depicted, the value and interest of a natural body of traditions."¹ In other words, the political and social theme was also present in the European models on which Latin American writers drew; if it strikes us much more forcefully in nineteenth century Latin American novels than in Scott, this may simply indicate the greater urgency of such issues in the new nations of Latin America, or alternately, the greater ability of masters such as Scott to dissimulate their intentions in the guise of historical tradition.

¹Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind (Chicago: Gateway Editions, rev. ed. 1960), pp. 135-36.

A survey of Latin American historical novels would probably commence with Jicotencal, a work of unknown authorship published in Philadelphia in 1826. Many of its successors presented social-political commentary in the context of a historical vision. Such is the case with Cirilo Villaverde's Cecilia Valdés (published serially beginning in 1839 and in final form in 1879) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Sab (1841), both examples of abolitionist literature. The previously mentioned work of José Mármol, Amalia (1851), and Estéban Echeverría's El Matadero (1871) are contemporary chronicles of the Rosas dictatorship in Argentina. Still another theme is illustrated in Manuel de Jesús Galván's Enriquillo, which Schwartz considers "the best combination of historical novel, indianista and indigenista themes," which dramatizes a thirty-year struggle between Indians and colonists that shook the island of Santo Domingo in the early sixteenth century.¹

Just as in Europe, the Latin American historical novel often served to document the movement of national independence. It should not be forgotten that the historical novel arose in a Europe that had just experienced the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, and the subsequent national reactions in countries such as Germany, Italy, Poland and Russia. Georg Lukács has argued that the historical novel registers in literature a parallel

¹Schwartz, p. 67.

rise in the social and political consciousness of the European nations. This is just as apparent in Latin America, where the genre became popular in the period following the wars of independence. The historical novelists of Latin America fulfilled the need for an "appeal to national independence and national character . . . necessarily connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national dishonour, whether this results in a progressive or reactionary ideology."¹

In subject matter, the historical novel of nineteenth century Latin America appears as an amalgamation of several themes important to the new societies. The portrayal of the recent historical events, the glorification of a romanticized past, the depiction of folklore and regional customs of the new societies, the analysis of relationships between social classes and of individuals thrust into a new environment--all these converged in nineteenth century Latin America. Therefore, the historical novel can often be classified under related genres such as the romantic novel, the costumbrista novel, the realistic novel and the naturalistic novel.

For aesthetic ideas and inspiration, however, Latin American writers looked to Europe. Thus, the novel was

¹Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel (London: Merlin Press, Penguin Books, 1962), p. 25. Translated from the German by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell.

American in its documentation of New World values and society; in all other respects it was as much a product of European thought and ideology as was the French, German and English novel. It was Latin American in content, European in form. This is the two-fold tradition within which Manuel Mujica Láinez begins his career as a historical novelist.

The novel is the specifically modern literary form which was designed to mirror the physical and moral fabric of Western society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the twentieth century its themes and narrative techniques began to document the failures of western civilization's search for truth and progress. The appeal for a rational solution of humanity's varied injustices and evils lost ground and gave way to skepticism and nihilism. Within the social and political realm, order gave way to war, unpredictable chaos and an irrational quest for power. Waning faith in providence, and in that secularized version of providence which saw man's progress towards freedom guaranteed by the dialectic of history, led philosophers and writers to search for the unchanging verities of human existence, as for example in existentialism. These general western trends were echoed as well in Latin America, whose literate classes were aware of their cultural ties with European movements and receptive to the malaise of war-torn Europe. Latin American writers

now began an inward journey, seeking to discover the deeper roots of their lives and to create or recover a lost identity. The formulas offered by costumbrismo, by romanticism, and by social realism had been exhausted. In their stead a new narrative form took over sometime in the mid-1940s, when writers finally "begin to explore new techniques with great freedom and to allow their 'balloons of fantasy' to slip further away from the ground."¹

Realism had rarely produced the greatest novels in Latin America. The treatment of the exploitation of the Indians, the contrapuntal descriptions of civilization versus barbarism in which the author maintained an external verisimilitude, had long been exhausted. This thematic exhaustion led a new generation of writers to turn in other directions: they began to re-interpret the world of empirical reality from the perspective of the less tangible universe of spiritual experience.

The factors which contributed to the rise of the literary phenomenon of magic-realism as it emerged in Latin America in the mid-1940s are both existential and stylistic. First of all, and this is a point not always made in conjunction with the study of magic-realist narrative, the writer tries to evoke that quasi-religious experience which happens when man comes into contact with

¹Jean Franco, An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 254.

hidden, unforeseeable forces in nature. Seeking to portray this contact, magic-realism marks a return of the mythical, prodigious, and magical aspects of life and nature in the very midst of the twentieth century. As Alejo Carpentier indicated in his exposition of the aims of magic-realism, it involves an "act of faith."¹ It seeks to confront twentieth-century man with the poignant problems of uprootedness and loss of faith by reviving certain dimensions of human experience common to both pre-Colombian and European pre-Christian culture. It portrays nature as a theophany. Consequently, one of the distinguishing characteristics of this genre is the place it accords to myth. Authors such as Carpentier and Asturias give a prominent place to the pre-Colombian as well as to the myths of classical antiquity. This resurgence of myth has restored the dimension of the "epic" to Latin American fiction.²

¹Alejo Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias (Montevideo: Editorial Arca, 1967), p. 109.

²We may be witnessing a reversal of the process described by Scholes and Kellogg: "Epic poems are made in cultures which do not distinguish between myth and history. As soon as the distinction begins to be made--and this is a gradual process at first but gains momentum in time--it can be applied critically to the narrative of the past and will become established in the aesthetic and intellectual norms which influence current literary production. This distinction between fact and fiction, once it is clearly established, forces story telling to choose the rubric under which it will function: truth or beauty. The result is a separation of narrative streams into factual and fictional, producing forms we have learned to call history

Among the stylistic factors behind the birth of magic-realism are the literary influence of surrealism, the impact of the psychological theories of Freud and Jung, and the techniques and structures of modern narrative (which include the use of Joycean "stream of consciousness," flashback techniques, and the disruption of spatial and temporal unities). I shall be dealing specifically with these factors in the third chapter of this work.

The works of Manuel Mujica Láinez provide a basis for the study of many of the most interesting literary trends and techniques which have been produced in Latin America during the last three decades. Thus, the transition from social-realist narrative to magic-realism, and later from magic-realism to the fantastic, is particularly significant in this author's work. Beginning as a writer of conventional historical fiction, he has subsequently incorporated myth and psychohistory into the historical account itself. This fusion of the historical and the mythical modes is an aspect as well of the literary trend which we have learned to label, for lack of a better term, as magic-realism.

This dissertation intends to trace the literary development of Manuel Mujica Láinez by concentrating on

and romance. In western culture the two streams both spring from the fountainhead of Homeric epic and go their separate ways until they reunite in the novel." Quoted from Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 57-58.

five of his historical works. The next chapter analyzes two collections of short stories by Manuel Mujica Láinez, Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires. This will serve to delineate his starting point as a historical novelist, as well as pointing to thematic leitmotifs and structural or stylistic techniques which are developed in his subsequent novels. Chapter Three, basing itself on the novel Bomarzo, will demonstrate how Mujica Láinez employs the esoteric and occult sciences--a prominent aspect of magic-realist narrative--to heighten our perception of the historical events of the Italian Renaissance. The fourth chapter will continue the search for the mythical, magical and prodigious as it enters into his reconstruction of the French Middle Ages and the Crusades, in El Unicornio. And the fifth chapter will analyze one of his most recent works, De milagros y de melancolías, in which the author parodies conventional historical accounts. The last-named work signals the birth of the purely fantastic and imaginary account in the work of Manuel Mujica Láinez.

While these works do not exhaust the literary output of Manuel Mujica Láinez, they do represent the major genres and styles which he has employed during the course of his career. Secondly, they document the steady progression in his understanding of the nature of man and of the historical process. Finally, they parallel and

contribute to a general trend in Latin America and in western literature, a trend which has transformed our view of the relation between the real and the imaginary and which, in the process, has radically altered the genres of prose fiction.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND FICTION IN THE SHORT STORIES
OF MANUEL MUJICA LAINEZ

Aquí vivieron (1949) and Misteriosa Buenos Aires (1951) were written within three years of each other. They represent Manuel Mujica Láinez' most extensive collections of short stories. They have been included in this study insofar as they foreshadow the author's future development of historical framework, thematic motifs and stylistic elements. The framework of each short story and the combination of all the stories mirror the historical consciousness which is characteristic of most of Mujica Láinez' longer narrative. They also provide an embryonic setting for the author's cyclical vision of history which, in his later works, is reinforced by a constant allusion to the myth of eternal return.¹ It is this myth of eternal recurrence as it is formulated in the theme and structure

¹Explicit discussion of the myth of eternal return is postponed until Chapter Five, which deals with De milagros y de melancolías. In that work, Mujica Láinez very consciously proposes a theory of history which is cyclical and anti-evolutionist. In the short stories, the cyclical vision arises more out of a consideration of the tenuous framework linking the stories together than from the internal conflict.

of most of these short stories that will become a fundamental motif in the novels to be discussed in subsequent chapters, Bomarzo, El Unicornio, and De milagros y de melancolías. In addition, the short stories anticipate the author's interest in the fantastic and the grotesque. They predict his later concern with the esoteric sciences, as well as his quest for a "secondary reality" which has become a major consideration of magic-realist narrative in Latin America.

Literary Antecedents of the Short Stories

Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires are works of transition in the narrative of Manuel Mujica Láinez. With them, the author has evolved from the historical sketches, essays, biographies or "cuadros de costumbres" of his earlier years, to the short-story genre with its predominant vision of historical phenomena and touches of the fantastic. Practically all but one of the works written by Manuel Mujica Láinez prior to these two collections of short stories were non-fictional. The one major exception is a historical novel published in 1938, Don Galaz de Buenos Aires. As the title may suggest, this first novel deals with a pseudo-picaresque character, Don Galaz, as he traverses the labyrinthine social and political strata of seventeenth century Buenos Aires. As a first effort, it has been termed "una novela de iniciación" and

"fruto sazonado de uno de los ingenios mejor dotados de su generación."¹ Even if Don Galaz has not won many laurels for its author, it does forecast his later pursuit of this important and somewhat neglected historical period in his very recent novel El laberinto (1974).

Manuel Mujica Láinez' interest in history has remained a constant throughout his non-fictional and fictional narrative. However, his introduction of the fantastic or imaginary does not predate these two collections of short stories. Of the works that precede Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires, the most important, insofar as offering a historical background to be followed in both collections of short stories, are: (1) the masterful epic poem Canto a Buenos Aires (1943), a historical account of the birth and coming of age of Buenos Aires; and (2) Estampas de Buenos Aires (1946), a series of short prose sketches with an emphasis on the geographical and historical documentation of the city's glorious, but fast-vanishing, past.²

¹Carmelo Bonet, quoted in Eduardo Font, Realidad y fantasía en la narrativa de Manuel Mujica Láinez: 1949-1962 (Madrid: Ediciones José Porrúa Turanzas, 1976), p. 8.

²For a bibliography of the works published by Manuel Mujica Láinez prior to 1962, one can consult:
 (a) Emma María Carsuzán, Manuel Mujica Láinez (Buenos Aires: Ediciones culturales Argentinas, 1962).
 (b) Eduardo Font, Realidad y fantasía en la narrativa de Manuel Mujica Láinez: 1949-1962 (Madrid: Ediciones José Porrúa Turanzas, 1976).

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Both Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires are primarily fictional chronicles of Argentine history. They are masterful recollections of such historical eras as the conquest, colonization, independence struggle, and post-independence period. They are effective in describing Spanish rule and the transfer of Spanish institutions to the New World. In fact, the theme of Spain and the Spanish legacy to Latin America is well worth exploring through these short stories.

Manuel Mujica Láinez belongs to a generation of writers who, in anguish over their own sense of rootlessness, turned to Spain, not as the culprit, but rather as the originator of much of Latin American civilization. As the modernist poet Ruben Darío (1867-1916) had done earlier, Manuel Mujica Láinez introduces Spain as a positive symbol in the growth of his Latin American city. It is a search for hispanic sources which is mirrored in the works of some of his contemporaries. For example, Jorge Luís Borges has traced Spain's legacy in the streets of Buenos Aires, in his poem "España":

España de los Inquisidores,
que padecieron el destino de ser verdugos
y hubieron podido ser mártires,
España de la larga aventura
que descifró los mares y redujo crueles imperios
y que prosigue aquí, en Buenos Aires¹

¹Jorge Luís Borges, "España," in Obra poética (Buenos Aires: Editorial Emecé, 1967), p. 270.

Spain, the Spanish conquerors, and the values which were brought to the New World by soldier and missionary alike, as well as the various historical eras in the subsequent development of the New World, play an important part in the historical setting of both Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires.

A second fact which emerges upon a close reading of most of the short stories in these two collections is that Manuel Mujica Láinez' conception of the historical tale is an obvious descendant of the type of historical fiction conceived by the nineteenth-century Peruvian Ricardo Palma (1833-1919), which the latter termed "Tradiciones Peruanas." Similar elements can be found in a comparison of the two writers' shorter narrative, notwithstanding the fact that Ricardo Palma was very much a man of the nineteenth century. Palma's recipe for a successful short story, his mélange of truth, fiction and a faithful depiction of period traditions, is to be felt throughout Manuel Mujica Láinez' tales. He sees his task as that of a chronicler as well as a writer of short fictions, but what remains once the fictitious protagonists have gone their way is that bittersweet memory or recollection of things past. As the author reminded us in his previous work, Estampas de Buenos Aires, it is a writer's faithfulness to history that remains behind well after the completion of the fictional argument:

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Tenemos también la obligación de ser fieles a una tradición que nos honra, y que va del indio del desierto y el denodado capitán de la colonia, a la gesta de quienes nos dieron la libertad con su sangre, y a la de aquellos que forjaron con sus manos tenaces y con su inteligencia avizora, nuestro progreso de hoy. Una carreta detenida bajo un ombú, una sala con un mobiliario de jacarandá pulido, unas miniaturas, una proclama, algunas fotografías, bastan como punto de partida.¹

All the stories of Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires are chronicles of Argentine life. They are traditionally historical in the sense that they are not contemporary with, but rather predate, the author's own historical experience. In this sense, they are akin to archeological reconstructions of previous eras. Specifically, they represent the origin and development of Argentine society over a span of three centuries. Thus, the first story of Aquí vivieron is set in 1583, the last in 1924; and the first story of Misteriosa Buenos Aires is set in 1536, the last one in 1904. Each story includes, annexed to the title itself, the date of the year in which the action is supposed to have taken place. This gives yet another indication of the author's intention to be faithful to historical fact, to be accurate and truthful in his communication of Argentine life.

In this chapter, we shall trace the historical and geographical framework of the stories in order to

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, Estampas de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1946), p. 146.

illustrate the view of history which Mujica Láinez brought to his fiction. Once the importance of the historical framework is established, we shall indicate the various thematic motifs which anticipate the author's lengthier narrative; these include the various fantastic elements, the intrusion of myth, the marvelous and the prodigious, in accounts which otherwise--according to conventional literary classification--would have to be termed historical.

While Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires are both collections of short historical fiction, there are a number of significant differences between them. In Aquí vivieron, it is the geographic setting and the historical framework which affect the reader most vividly. The geographic setting, of course, involves both natural landscape and human transformations of the environment; the historical framework refers to the fictional portrayal of the men of the past, the depiction of conflicts involved in the development of Argentina, and the description of the changing society and class structure of the country. In Misteriosa Buenos Aires, on the other hand, the setting is less important than the portrayal of "supernatural" elements and the psychology of the inhabitants from which these emerge. While the stories are still written within a historical setting, the focus is more on the fictional element. However, the various mysterious or supernatural

elements which enter the narrative do not originate within the natural order as they do in the mature magic-realist novels of Mujica Láinez. Some are artificially appended to the elements of the stories; others strike us as the efflorescence of human fears and wishes--in short, of human psychology as understood within a realistic Freudian framework.

Mujica Láinez' later novels fuse these two dimensions: the geographical and historical which we find in Aquí vivieron, and the supernatural and psychological which predominates in Misteriosa Buenos Aires. Out of that fusion we get his mature historical novels with their magic-realist orientation.

Geographical Setting and Historical Framework in Aquí vivieron

The short stories of both collections are set as self-contained paintings within the larger framework of a particular environment as viewed through its various metamorphoses. The changing human types are shown evolving against a backdrop provided by the immutable forces of nature. Thus, Manuel Mujica Láinez contemplates San Isidro, suburb of Buenos Aires and location of all the stories of Aquí vivieron, first as a pure, virginal landscape, not yet subjected to the changes man usually extorts from his habitat; in the following vision, a hut is erected to meet the modest needs for shelter of the

poor peasants; next, a house is built and expanded by a succession of wealthy landowners; finally, the downfall of the aristocratic house signals the destruction of the old order and the emergence of a new one. As a final realistic touch of things to come, the lot is partitioned into nine equal parts, symbolically reminding us of the type of new class that is emerging from the ashes of the previous oligarchy.

Geographical location plays an important role in the development of all these stories. First, it provides the larger spatial framework within which all the stories are developed. Secondly, it allows the reader to perceive a certain unity and continuity throughout the collection of stories, even though the subject matter and the conflicts treated in the short stories are, more often than not, totally unrelated. Finally, the same setting, as viewed through three centuries of social and political change provides a clue to the author's own view of historical evolution.

In "Lumbi," the first story in Aquí vivieron, we are given a description of the geographical terrain which will become the permanent setting for all the stories of this collection. It is 1583 and the Spaniards are waging massive military campaigns against the native forces; it is the beginning of Spanish colonization. The historical focal point of the story is the decisive encounter between

the Indian "Querandíes" tribe and the forces of the founder of Buenos Aires, Don Juan de Garay. In the distance, the sails of the Spanish ships flicker in the waters, while the shores vibrate with the howls of ferocious Indian warriors:

Era que Juan de Garay, fundador de Buenos Aires, viajaba hacia Santa Fé, embarcado. Paralelamente le seguían por el antiguo camino de la costa, rumbo a la fortaleza de Gaboto en el Carcarañá, Don Luís de Sotomayor, hermano del gobernador de Chile, y el capitán Francisco de Cuevas, con sus hombres de armas. Los querandíes calculaban que había sonado la hora propicia para el golpe definitivo contra los invasores. Habían oído referir que Garay repartía los aborígenes de estas provincias entre sus conquistadores: tal cacique para éste, aquel para tal otro¹

We have here a very human historical conflict between native and conqueror. It is not reflected in the description of the geographical location; the environment is not exploited, as would have been the case in a naturalistic narrative, to sound a warning or a premonition of human failure. As described in "Lumbi," the setting is a gently rolling coast,

donde la tierra no penetraba en el agua en son de conquista armada de rocas, a modo de una amazona, sino, blandamente, como si se entregara a su abrazo. No había ni bosques inmensos, ni animales crueles²

From this moment on, the author makes constant references to this same setting, alluding sometimes to the "montes grandes," or to the "barranca," or to other

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, Aquí vivieron (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1962), pp. 16-17.

²Ibid., p. 13.

topographical peculiarities already presented in the first story. Thus, in the next story of the collection, "El lobisón," the protagonists encounter the same setting:

Ya van entrando en la zona de los Montes Grandes.
A la vera del camino avístase una choza de barro y
paja. Más allá, los talas grises, casi neblinosos
entrecortan la lamina fluvial con su ramaje de espinas.
Durazneros, algunos sauces, crecen en la barranca
. . . .¹

The steep ravine which had been introduced in the first two stories becomes the scenario of a stormy fratricide in the third story, "El cofre." Here, the geographical location barely contributes to the atmosphere of horror which ensues toward the end of the conflict depicted in the story:

Lucharon un instante, como dementes
Apagóse el alboroto de los loros en el ramaje del
tala, y de las ranas en las charcas del bajo²
Hasta que los dos rodaron por la barranca espinosa.

A similar descriptive passage reappears again in the next story, in which the protagonist, a deranged bull-fighter, relives in the hour of his death his life-long obsession with the bull (in its mythical form as "Isis" or the "Minotaur," symbolic of his destiny). The hut of the dying man is the same one which had figured in the previous story, one found

en la barranca de los Montes Grandes . . . donde
. . . se levantaba allí, al amparo de un tala robusto,
los rastros de una cabaña que nadie habitaba hacía

¹Ibid., p. 20.

²Ibid., p. 48.

más de media centuria, desde que dos pescadores se acuchillaron frente a su puerta¹

Whereas in the first four stories the geographical location is very much the same, with the passing of time certain perceptible changes begin to accumulate. Trees age and the landscape is affected, if only superficially, as man builds, plants and destroys. A nature that can harbor forces of good and evil is described in the story "El camino desandado" (1755). Here almost a century has elapsed since that first time when Lumbi stepped on the soft sands of the riverbank. The tree ("el tala gris"), perhaps a few centuries old, has grown comparable to a sinister mythical being, setting the mood for a story of nightmarish visions:

A cien metros de la casona, un tala tan torturado y antiguo que parecía carbonizado por la centella, elevaba su ramazón de víboras como un Laoconte negro.²

The focus of many of the stories' settings does not always rest on the natural habitat. Once the house is built on the land, the house becomes an important barometer of the material and spiritual condition of its inhabitants. The natural environment itself participates in certain man-initiated changes. New qualifying adjectives are added to each subsequent description. The environment assumes subtly differing moods according to the conflicts portrayed, although it seldom reflects the

¹Ibid., p. 56.

²Ibid., p. 85.

violence man is capable of showing vis-à-vis other men. The hut of the early stories becomes a massive structure in "Los amores de Leonor Montalvo." It is the year 1748, the future suburb of San Isidro is still an unimportant village bordering the outskirts of Buenos Aires, when Don Francisco de Montalvo, owner of the property of the "Montes Grandes" commissions his friend to build him a house:

Su amigo el capitán Don Domingo de Acassuso edificaba a la sazón una iglesia, cumpliendo un voto, a cinco leguas de la ciudad, frente al Río de la Plata. Crecía en torno una población titubeante, que empezaba a llamarse San Isidro en homenaje al santo labrador a quien estaba consagrada la capilla. En 1718, un año después de su boda, Montalvo adquirió allí una propiedad sobre la barranca Era un sitio encantador en el que quince años antes se había levantado la choza de un torero que murió hermitaño en olor de santidad Bosquecillos de talas, de espinillos, chañares, sauces y durazneros cortaban la aspereza del pasto puna. Más allá, hacia la ondulación gentil de las lomas, trepaban las huertas con zapallos, con melones y sandías. En los contornos, las chacras desplegaban sus sembrados irregulares con algunos ranchos dispersos. Como grises tropas de paquidermos, grupos de ombúes erguían su robustez sobre la gracia de las margaritas, de las azucenas silvestres de los cardos.¹

The mood of this passage parallels the activities of the population. The house that is built overlooking the ravine becomes the tacit scenario of the remaining short stories in the book, to be seen, at the end, crumbling, corroded and dejected as are its final aristocratic owners. The house is symbolic of the rise and

¹Ibid., pp. 70-71.

downfall of the Argentinian oligarchy, a metaphor for the evolution of a social class. A similar thematic motif appears in other works of Manuel Mujica Láinez, notably his 1954 novel La casa, which parallels the house of Aquí vivieron in being the scene of the glory and decadence of a wealthy Buenos Aires family at the turn of the twentieth century.

A succession of three historically known Argentinian families owns the sprawling aristocratic property. Their names--Montalvo, Islas de Garay, and Ponce de León--can be traced to a generation of founders who helped shape and develop Argentina. When the last of the owners, Don Diego Ponce de León, abandons the property and sells its priceless art collection to help pay his debts, we are made to perceive one of the most poignant notes of social commentary found in Aquí vivieron. The house crumbles, signalling the decline of a decaying and inadequate social structure. Nature, no longer controlled by man, rapidly proceeds to obliterate the futile advances of "civilization." All this happens in the year 1913, in one of the final stories of the collection:

El parque había crecido libremente en su torno, borrando los caminos, devastando los canteros, apoderándose de las estatuas y de los jarrones. Los árboles entremezclaron sus ramas en el ahogo de las trepadoras y de los parásitos tendidos de follaje a follaje. Un agua turbia, zumbante de mosquitos, envenenó la fuente. La herrumbre comenzó a roer los arcos de la glorieta. El edificio mismo, el desconcertante edificio construido por tantas generaciones que multiplicaron en él añadidos y

remiendos, adquirió la traza de un inmenso animal peludo, bajo las enredaderas. Algunas ventanas fueron tapiadas por la hiedra voraz. Había hormigueros en los patios y murciélagos en los corredores. Una palmera, locamente, había empezado a erguir su penacho en un hueco del mirador, junto a los vidrios rotos.¹

While nature or the natural habitat remains a permanent unifying force throughout these short stories, history shows human fluctuation and conflict. Perhaps the most important of all the commentaries on Argentine society emerge from those short stories where the personal conflict is accentuated by historical struggles. Manuel Mujica Láinez does not always include elements of historical strife in his short stories, but when he does, he tends to depict particularly turbulent eras of Argentinian history, such as the outrages of the dictatorship of Don Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852), or the British invasion of the colony in 1806, during the Napoleonic wars. The latter, portrayed in the story "Los reconquistadores," is a good example of the author's ability to interpolate a fictitious episode within a larger historical framework.

The historical conflict depicted in this story is as important as the fictitious conflict; and it is a measure of the story's balance between the historical and fictional levels that both conflicts are resolved simultaneously.

¹Ibid., p. 248.

The title, "Los reconquistadores," the date, 1806, and the first two paragraphs of the short story introduce the spatial and chronological elements within which ensues the smaller portrait of personal conflict. It is the time of Napoleon's rule over Spain, and French and Spanish troops have assembled in the colonies in order to repel the British invaders. The military parade, "una galería de cuadros históricos,"¹ includes the renowned names of Santiago de Liniers, Agustín de Pinedo, Juan Gutiérrez de la Concha, as well as the Frenchman François-de-Paul Hippolyte Mordeille.

"Habían llegado a San Isidro dos días antes," the author tells us in the second paragraph of the short story,

calados hasta los tuétanos, famélicos, rendidos de fatiga, pues la travesía iniciada en La Colonia había sido azarosa Desde la margen del río del Tigre, los soldados arrastraron con la lengua fuera los viejos cañones, por el camino de la costa. Dijérase que el barro tenía manos que tiraban de los ejes. Los chubascos, al transformarse en tormenta, les obligaron a detenerse en los Montes Grandes. Liniers y los oficiales se alojaron en la casa que había pertenecido a los Montalvo y que ahora, después de una sinuosa testamentaria papelera, había sido adquirida por Don Fernando Islas de Garay, descendiente del fundador de Buenos Aires.²

Having presented the geographical and historical framework, the author proceeds to develop a theme involving a love triangle. The main protagonist of the short story, Bertrand de Suliac, French soldier enlisted in the ranks

¹Ibid., p. 105.

²Ibid., pp. 105-106.

of Mordeille's regiment, seduces a young peasant woman the night her husband is away on some unspecified errand. That same night, however, as Bertrand amuses his mistress with stories of his worldly adventures, he hears a noise in the hallway:

En la galería se oyó un ruido quedo, como el que podría hacer una espuela al rozar sigilosamente una baldosa¹

Startled, and fearing that the husband may have returned somewhat earlier than expected, Bertrand de Suliac rushes out of the bedroom. The next morning, as his regiment moves on towards Buenos Aires, the Frenchman perceives, among the people assembled to bid them farewell, his nocturnal companion and her husband,

un paisano alto y flexible El hombre tenía algo de árabe y algo de indio, quizá² por lo curvo de la nariz fina y el tinte de la piel.

This image of the Indian peasant returns to plague Bertrand for the short remainder of his life.

The scene changes to the day of August 12, 1806, when a decisive battle is being waged in the heart of Buenos Aires. The British forces are losing ground to the troops of the Spanish and French armies, which are aided by the populace. At this point in the narrative, Bertrand de Suliac once again meets the husband of his mistress. He cannot escape feelings of foreboding as he senses the danger awaiting him. His mind wanders off to the quiet

¹Ibid., p. 111.

²Ibid., p. 112.

night of the seduction, and he tries to recall and analyze the distinctive footsteps he had heard in the hallway. Next to him, the Indian phlegmatically discharges another round of ammunition. Nothing in his face reveals any sign of hostility. If anything, Bertrand perceives only contained politeness and reserve in the face of his fighting companion.

As the plot thickens, the British, now totally surrounded, give up: the day has been won by the Spanish and French. The scene flashes back to Bertrand de Suliac. He is beside himself as he reflects on the day's victory. Tears of happiness fill his eyes, and he

comprendió entonces cuánto amaba la libertad, cuán hondamente llevaba metida en la sangre su pasión generosa.¹

Not only has the young protagonist rediscovered his longing for freedom, but in his desire to wipe out all previous offense against his fighting companion he harbours the possibility of becoming his friend. The Indian, taking advantage of the Frenchman's now trusting lightheartedness, raises his carbine and, in an act of final, unexpected vengeance, kills the unassuming Bertrand de Suliac. This act of vengeance appears all the more violent as it is presented against a background of military victory and a cheering happy populace, on the one hand, and since it is

¹Ibid., p. 114.

totally opposed to the nobler aspirations of the young Frenchman, on the other.

This short story, in many ways a historical vignette, is an example of the structural format employed by the author in many of these historical short stories. The historical phenomena are used to reinforce human conflict, and vice-versa. As distinguished from his lengthier later novels, he does not attempt to show the limits of modern historiography. Thus, it is important to stress that, in these stories, historical data is accepted at face value. It is used in conjunction with human conflict in order to reveal particular periods in Argentine history. Where the author does introduce the fantastic or the imaginary (as, for example, in the story of the bullfighter meeting his destiny), it is very clearly only an aesthetic device, or else pertains to the realm of the human conflict within the short story.

This attitude towards the fantastic and the imaginary is to change drastically in works such as Bomarzo and El Unicornio, where Mujica Láinez portrays the elements of the fantastic or the imaginary as belonging intrinsically to the realm of historical reality, as emanating from man's perennial dialectic with the forces of good and evil, rational and irrational. The concern for the historical as evidenced in Aquí vivieron precedes the author's future involvement with psychohistory. His

delicate brushwork in the development of credible protagonists for his short stories later becomes more defined through the adaptation of the canons of modern psychology, specifically the theories of Freud and Jung. Together, they will enable him to conceive complex figures such as Pier Francesco Orsini, Duke of Bomarzo, and the fairy Melusina, heroine of El Unicornio.

Human Psychology and the Supernatural in Misteriosa Buenos Aires

Misteriosa Buenos Aires marks a number of further developments in Mujica Láinez' conception of the short story. In Aquí vivieron, the author had placed an emphasis on the continuity and interdependence of most of the short stories within the framework of the book. This he sought to achieve by locating all the conflicts within a particular geographical setting, through the chronological representation of historical data, and also through the use of recurring leitmotifs and recapitulatory vignettes in which the author would allude to previous protagonists.

In Misteriosa Buenos Aires, he no longer attempts to bridge the gap between the short stories in order to portray continuity and homogeneity of action and character. Each short story can be seen as an autonomous unit within the larger framework of geographic setting and historical process. Here it is Buenos Aires, the city, that serves as impartial scenario of a number of

self-contained stories. Any attempt at unity of narrative and space-time continuity derives solely from the fact that we are exploring the life of one city, from its colonial birth to the twentieth century metropolis which it becomes. Thus, Mujica Láinez avoids some of the pitfalls which beset stories in Aquí vivieron, particularly those which had bounded him too narrowly to the laws of causality.

In Misteriosa Buenos Aires, it is the quality of mystery which is essential to most of the short stories. The accent is on what makes events stand out of the ordinary within a background of political and economic evolution. The search for a deeper reality and the mysteries of human life within ordinary historical dimensions--these are the essentially masterful touches which Manuel Mujica Láinez weaves into his otherwise straightforward "cuadro de costumbres" or "historical portrait."

In this collection of short stories the author reveals some of the characteristic motifs which he later develops in his longer narrative. In fact, many of the stories indicate his growing interest in elements found in much of magic-realist literature. For example, some stories deal with the esoteric, particularly with demonology; however, they are developed in a psychologically realistic manner. They represent, often in

juxtaposition, elements such as the supernatural, the grotesque and the erotic. Often they portray the human psyche as it responds to the forces and pressures from without and from within. Some stories show periods of turbulence in the history of Buenos Aires, and these historical phenomena are further enhanced by certain aspects of human neurosis subtly uncovered by the author's probing of the subconscious. Furthermore, the use of dreams and dream sequences becomes an important way of revealing basic human needs and drives. Finally, the introduction of myths and archetypes--the Hermaphrodite of Salamina, the Wandering Jew--becomes symbolic of a very important psychological dimension to be found in these stories. We are exposed to a whole gamut of aberrant behavior (incest, homosexuality, sadism and masochism, etc.), much of it developed as symbolic example of the very tenuous line which separates what society chooses to call "normal" within personal relationships from what can no longer be accepted according to social norms.

All in all, it is a collection comprised of thirty-two stories, remarkably balanced in structure and subject-matter, which stand as self-contained, autonomous units. Thematically, the stories give us the impression of Buenos Aires' geographical and historical growth through the growing self-consciousness of its inhabitants,

who gradually shed their colonial character and acquire the traits of the twentieth century. Autochthonous elements (for example, dialogue and dialect, regional description) are sparingly used in each tale to complete a picture faithful in detail to the particular historical era. Yet every bit of information seems to have been carefully selected so as not to alter the inner harmony in the poetic vision of the narrative. The plot is developed and brought to its conclusion within a very short time span, since most of the stories average a mere six to seven pages, while the longest is sixteen pages.

These are mostly stories in which it is action that determines the character and state of mind of the protagonist. The tales do not abound in moralization; the didactic aspect of narrative is practically nonexistent. Action as well as historical framework are stripped down to the barest essentials. The main catalyst in most of the stories is fear: the fear of death and of the unknown; and, diametrically opposed to this fear, the attraction of death, of darkness, and of the unknown, as the quest for these elements takes shape in the imagination of the protagonists. The motifs in those stories where the supernatural plays an important role are generally greed (as in "La Galera"), envy (in "La hechizada"), and jealousy (as portrayed in "El espejo desordenado"). Other stories deal with magical occurrences--enchanted mirrors,

the appearance of disappearance of talismans or objets d'art--which are exemplified in the very beautiful story, "El hombrecito del azulejo," and in the dark and looming tale, "El arzobispo de Samos." Ghosts and related supernatural occurrences appear frequently in the stories of Misteriosa Buenos Aires; such supernatural and fantastic motifs had barely entered the stories of Aquí vivieron, and then only dimly and lifelessly. In Misteriosa Buenos Aires, they reinforce the historical dimension by uncovering a mysterious essence involving the city and its inhabitants.

The city of Buenos Aires grows by leaps and bounds as the stories progress. It is but an ill-defended garrison in 1536, but by 1904 has grown into a bustling capital that has already experienced the trials and tribulations of war and peace, affluence and decadence. Throughout Misteriosa Buenos Aires, the author focuses on some key landmarks and their development over a span of almost four centuries. One of the repeatedly introduced landmarks is the main townsquare, silent observer of the comings and goings of the inhabitants. In the first story, "El hambre," the townsquare serves to display the bodies of hanged men; the year is 1536. In the following stories, new buildings are erected around both square and fort until, by 1644, the makeshift camp has evolved into

a commercially thriving community and the townsquare into a "plaza inmensa."

Life in colonial Buenos Aires is depicted much as it would be in any comparable feudal city-state--rhythmically slow and very much attuned to the social hierarchy. The absolute rulers represented here are not the Spanish kings, too far removed from the problems of the New World to be of practical importance, but the governors and the tribunals of the Inquisition, symbolic of Spanish oppression in the New World.

In fact, the Inquisition plays an important part in the historical framework of many of the stories set prior to the wars of independence. For example, in "La enamorada del pequeño dragón," the captured nephew of Sir Francis Drake, John Drake, is sent to Lima to be tried by the "Santo Oficio." In another story, "El libro," which deals with the discovery of a clandestine copy of Cervantes' Don Quijote, a Dominican priest fears it may be a dangerous book: "Acaso sea un peligroso viajero y convenga someterlo al Santo Oficio."¹ In the story, "El imaginero," the demented protagonist, Manuel Couto, had been incarcerated by the Inquisition for a period of five years on grounds of heresy. These and many other stories present the Inquisition as symbolic of the worst and most

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, Misteriosa Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, third edition, 1968), p. 26.

demoralizing abuses which the Spaniards brought to the New World. It serves as an important social and historical commentary on the large quantity of human vice and folly which underlies history.

With few exceptions, practically all of the stories of this collection deal with some aspect of the supernatural; but they do so from an aesthetic point of view, where the supernatural does not emerge directly from the natural or cosmic order. Rather, its existence is ascribed to some deeply felt fear or neurosis on the part of an overly sensitive protagonist. Thus, the intrusion of ghosts and goblins, demons and enchanted mirrors, invites the reader's skepticism. We know from the way the supernatural motif is presented that it is but an ornament, a symbol of the possibilities which fear can instill in a deranged mind.

Fear is also the main catalyst which brings about resolution of the plot in these stories. We know, of course, that fear is one of the strongest motivating forces in man. Fear results from man's inability to explain some aspect of nature: the less man knows about an event, the more he fears. Manuel Mujica Láinez, as a good story teller, knows the value of this very human catalyst, and employs it in most of the short stories where the supernatural plays a very important role. He explores and exploits this emotion with his protagonists

and with his readers, very much as had been done by other great story tellers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Algernon Blackwood, and the Argentinian Horacio Quiroga. This particular knowledge of the value of "fear" as an aesthetic, poetic device, as a catalyst within the short story, is used in a traditional manner in Misteriosa Buenos Aires.

In these stories, Mujica Láinez still remains within the naively rationalist perspective which Peter Penzoldt has described in his book, The Supernatural in Fiction:

The short story of the supernatural is one of the most effective devices for combatting that secret and persistent faith in the unknown. As we close the book we can feel delightfully certain that the horrors we have been contemplating are naught but fiction. The very word 'fiction' assures us that our fears are vain. It is infinitely easier to vanquish the remnants of ancient superstitions in half an hour's pleasant reading than to apply a difficult philosophical system or the principles of an exacting religion in everyday life.

Thus, the modern weird tale meets a deeply rooted psychological necessity. One could even say that it has a sociological importance and a high moral value, insofar as it actively contributes to the elimination of ancient and modern superstitions, and does not preserve them as is usually supposed.¹

If in Misteriosa Buenos Aires, the author uses the fear of the unknown as a form of combatting that "secret persistent faith in the unknown,"² it is part of his evolution as a narrator that in subsequent works he does

¹Peter Penzoldt, The Supernatural in Fiction (London: Peter Nevill, 1952), pp. 6-7.

²Ibid., p. 6.

not merely explore the fear of the unknown as an aesthetic device, but traces this aspect of the human psyche through the ages, to the past, in search of those archetypical experiences where the fear first lodged in human consciousness. The search for this particular archetype--the fear of death--will be the source of his journey to the Middle Ages, to the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem during the Crusades, and to the Italian Renaissance.

Supernatural elements which appear in the short stories of Misteriosa Buenos Aires are set in the context of historical data in a fixed geographical milieu. The function of this admixture of the historical and the fantastic serves a multiple purpose. It is, first, an aesthetic means of creating interest in the conflict which surrounds protagonist and environment. Secondly, it brings us to a confrontation with man's essence, particularly with the world of inner psychological conflict, fear and repression. In addition, it is one of the narrative elements which is found throughout the history of both fictional and non-fictional literature in Latin America. In this respect, Manuel Mujica Láinez is reflecting the two dimensions often found in the cultural background of the New World: Christianity and paganism, superstition and religious idolatry, Spain and Latin America. That is why we find in these short stories, in seminal form, of course, that combination of elements which has served the

writers of magic-realist fiction: elements which involve a balanced juxtaposition of two opposed visions--the "ought-to-be" of the poet and the "has been" of the historian.

One example of an interesting short story where the historical and the supernatural dimensions are harmoniously fused is "El espejo desordenado." The protagonist of this tale is a converted Jew of Portuguese descent, living in Buenos Aires at a time (1643) when both Portuguese and converted Jews were very much in disfavor. While Mujica Láinez presents his protagonist as a typical convert, the emphasis is never on the issue of religion, but on the personal character of the protagonist who has hypocritically renounced all past allegiance to Judaism in his wish for total assimilation:

Simón del Rey es judío. Y portugués. Disimula lo segundo como puede, babeando un castellano de eficaces tartamudeos y oportunas pausas. Lo primero lo disfraza con el rosario que lleva siempre enroscado a la muñeca, como una pulsera sonora de medallas y cruces, y con un santiguarse sin motivo Pero no engaña a nadie¹

His wife, although she represents to him the values of the Catholic society to which he wishes to assimilate, is also of an "hidalguía discutible."²

The sources of the personal conflict in this story is the discovery of the infidelity of Doña Gracia, Simón's

¹Mujica Láinez, Misteriosa Buenos Aires, p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 43.

young wife; while the two-fold source of the historical conflict is Spain's religious crisis at the time of the Counter-Reformation and the political turmoil deriving from the war between Spain and Portugal. The catalyst in the development of the plot is the presence of a supernatural element, a unifying aesthetic element which precipitates the dénouement. This element is represented by an exquisitely carved Venetian mirror which has been sent to Simón del Rey as a present by his Chilean business partner. The mirror, an objet d'art as often found in the work of Manuel Mujica Láinez, calls forth to the poetic imagination of the reader:

Todo el hechizo de Venecia . . . en cuyo encuadramiento persiste la delicadeza de los "margaritaios," y los sutiles fabricantes de perlas de esmalte y de vidrio y de pendientes con granates, que Marco Polo hizo enviar a Bazora y a los puertos del Asia Menor, del Mar Negro y de Egipto, para que de allí las caravanas los transportaran hasta China, donde decorarían los botones de los mandarines¹

But the mirror is no ordinary ornament. It has the quality of revealing the secrets of past and future with equal facility. Thus, the mirror reveals to Simon del Rey his wife's betrayal, while at the same time it shows that he is fated soon to be taken prisoner by the king's men. Fearing this fate, the protagonist perceives that to avenge his honor--for example, by killing his wife--would precipitate the mirror's prophecy. Thus he

¹Ibid., p. 46.

refrains from killing her. As it happens, the king's messengers do come to Simón del Rey's home in order to confiscate all his weapons, since he is a Portuguese national. However, he does not know their limited objective and thinks the men have come to kill him. And so, in a moment of terror, he strikes one of the guards. This offense is the one that turns out to be responsible for his downfall; it is an ironic ending in which the protagonist falls prey to his own fear.

Meanwhile, against the background of enchanted mirrors and supernatural powers, we have been given a historical account of the period. It is 1643, and the city is turned against all its Portuguese inhabitants for fear of political subversion:

Hace menos de dos años, en 1641, fueron condenados a muerte en Buenos Aires los pilotos del navío Nuestra Señora de Oporto y dos lusitanos más, que trajeron del Río de la Plata anuncios de la rebelión del reino portugués. ¡Y qué comunicaciones! Doña Margarita de Saboya, Duquesa de Mantua y gobernadora del reino, había sido detenida; el pueblo se había levantado en masa y coronó al Duque de Braganza bajo el nombre de Don Juan IV,¹ ardía la guerra entre España y Portugal

What is important here is the amalgam of two visions: one provided by the historical background, the other by the supernatural element. The combination of both results in a universal theme which indicates the limited extent to which man can master his destiny. The

¹Ibid., p. 47.

supernatural element is not so much at war with realism as it serves to enhance the story by contributing that element of mystery which is so enjoyable to the reader's imagination.

In another unusual story, the author probes human psychology by introducing the reader to the dream-world of a sensitive, dying young girl. "La princesa de Hungría" focuses on a young beggar girl who, in the elusive world that clouds her imagination moments before her death, imagines herself becoming a Hungarian princess. This story offers a veiled allusion to an incestuous relationship in the strong affection between a brother and sister. Lorenzo Salay, the twin brother of Isabel, has left his sister in order to join a band of robbers. He pillages villages until his luck runs out, and he is caught and sentenced to death. While in jail he devises a plan to save himself: he pretends that he has been mistaken for a brigand, that he is actually a Hungarian prince, leader of his people:

. . . le afirmó con voz ronca y triste mirada
que él no era tal bandolero sino un príncipe potentado
conde de Buda, señor de vasallos en Hungría¹

Lorenzo almost succeeds in fooling first the priest, then the prosecutor, but his story does not stand up under closer scrutiny and he is sent to the gallows.

¹Ibid., p. 128.

Isabel, not knowing her brother's whereabouts and fearing his death, has lost her will to live. Weakened by sorrow, compounding her weakness by a continuous refusal to take nourishment, she is brought close to death. In her final coma, as death approaches, she imagines herself entering the marvelous Hungarian kingdom, replete with towers and castle walls, silent fountains and magnificent sculptures, which her brother Lorenzo had uselessly forged for his salvation. The lie of the desperate brother had traveled unknown psychic distances to lodge in the sister as a final death-wish.

The poetic tone the author here employs when referring to one of the most sympathetic feminine characters of the short stories is a tone highly reminiscent of Valle-Inclán:

¡Melancólica princesa de la Corte de los Milagros! Simón el Bizco sé ha dormido a su vera y más allá el negro Pesares y Francisca la Loca y Garrafón, el de las llagas. El viento ulula en la recova.¹

The tale is a reflection of a sensitive brother-sister relationship. They are twins and, as such, their story enables the author to explore not only an ambiguously defined physical link, but also the spiritual awareness that twins are inseparable, that they are both fractions of a whole, and that they can exist only as an

¹Ibid., p. 129. This paragraph, in particular, is highly reminiscent of Valle-Inclán's work La corte de los milagros, and also of his dramatic trilogy, Cara de Plata, Águila de Blasón, and Romance de lobos.

interdependent unit. They are also symbolic of a myth which both ancients and moderns have forged with regard to this unusual biological phenomenon. Because these twins are spiritually inseparable, we are, poetically speaking, ready to accept the sister's illusory entrance into the fictitious kingdom of her brother's (imaginative) lie.

The story is also a variant of the "tale within the tale," where fantasy enters the world of reality and where fiction is of greater import than fact. It is a symbolic and poetic rendering of impossible spiritual salvation and physical union in the after-life.

But "La princesa de Hungria" is an exception to the rest of the stories in this collection in that the historical dimension is practically nonexistent. We are more concerned with the fictional account than with the geographical surroundings, such as the townsquare or the various landmarks built around it. This is, however, one of the few stories where the world of the imagination triumphs over the crude realities of everyday life. For the most part, the writer does focus on the customs and habits of each age, and does give us a birdseye view of the ruling class throughout important periods of Argentine history.

As indicated previously, each story in both Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires includes, annexed to the title, the date of the year in which the action is

supposed to have occurred. This has the psychological effect not only of placing particular conflicts in corresponding chronological eras, but also of giving the semblance that what is being written about is actual "truth." Our modern understanding of truth has accustomed us to expect that the data given be as accurate as possible. In addition, while a historical figure is never made the main protagonist of a short story, those historical characters which are observed in the background lend realism to the tale. Even the most imaginative story in the collection is always presented as conveying some historical truth.

There is no overtly moralizing tale in these two collections of short stories; the author does not visibly present a code of morality to be followed or a set of values by which to judge social institutions. By this criterion, it is a literature that could be considered "escapist." The fact remains that Manuel Mujica Láinez rarely concentrates upon the here and now, the present political strife; the confusing chaos of political and economic upheaval in post-war Argentina does not yet concern him. These two collections of short stories, both ending their accounts at the turn of this century, are witness to this. Those fictional works which enlighten us as to the political and social views of the author are yet to come, as for example Crónicas reales (1967) and De milagros y de melancolías (1968), but only after an

intervening period of magic-realism. However even these last-mentioned two works are not true political and social commentaries: they are set in totally imaginary environments and can be taken rather as parodies of history, or as humorous accounts of man's "uncivilized" trajectory through time. In this respect, of course, the work of Manuel Mujica Láinez is not too different from that of his contemporaries in Argentine literature. We are given an inkling of the gravity of the political situation by the very silence displayed in the narrative of the country's writers.

It is Buenos Aires that is the continuing force binding the stories of Aquí vivieron and Misteriosa Buenos Aires. The city lends geographic unity to the tales and is seen developing from various vantage points. Throughout these two collections, we do not receive explicit commentary regarding the historical development of Argentine society. We can, however, deduce from them a negative vision which intimates a destructive aspect to human nature, one that does not permit man to raise himself far above his limited destiny. As far as human society is concerned, we are made to see that the upper classes, the supposed carriers of culture, pose no questions and seek no answers. They are portrayed as oblivious to the problems surrounding them. Their rule is ineffectual, inefficient, and devoid of energy; their lives are portrayed in

the context of a frivolous, parasitic existence. In short, they are too indulgent, self-abusive and soft to provide strong leadership for Argentine society.

As far as man in general is concerned, one emerges with the feeling that the advances of civilization and the progress of the industrial revolution have not brought man to a better understanding either of nature or of his own self. In the stories, man is dialectically pitted against his environment. He seeks to control his milieu without showing any appreciation of it. This is a vision which Mujica Láinez transforms into a cyclical understanding of history in his longer narratives, El Unicornio, Crónicas reales, and De milagros y de melancolías. In the short stories, we can simply observe that one generation gives way to another, without providing for any liberation from human weakness, foibles, and suffering. The positive aspect of the stories is the aesthetic one: the author's poetic imagination and the interest he shows in the introduction of elements of the supernatural, the grotesque and fantastic, as complements to historical fiction.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL VISION AND MAGIC-REALISM

IN BOMARZO

The decade of the sixties produced one of the great Latin-American novels of all time: Gabriel García Márquez' Cien años de soledad. Critical and popular reception throughout the world indicated that, during this decade, the Latin-American novel shed its parochialism and became more universal in theme, while yet retaining some autochthony in its style and content. Thus, for the first time the novel could, with justice, be regarded as an original and authentic contribution of Latin America to literature, rather than simply as a pale imitation of literary currents born in Europe or the United States.

García Márquez' work succeeded in synthesizing a number of literary themes and perspectives whose fusion has come to be known under the rubric of magic-realism. Other Latin American writers, drawing on the same roots, and expressing a similar vision of man's destiny, have been Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Manuel Mujica Láinez. The last of these came to the genre of magic-realism out of the conventional school of historical

fiction, which he gradually transcended and deepened with a more mature vision and a greater mastery of the literary craft. The novel which exemplifies this phase of his literary development most fully is Bomarzo, published in 1962. It is almost perfectly balanced between the traditional vision of the historical novelist and the newer themes contained in magic-realist narrative. The latter themes were to be increasingly predominant in Mujica Láínez' later novels, such as Crónicas reales and De milagros y de melancolías. While the later works can be clearly subsumed within the mainstream of Latin-American magic-realism, and their resemblance to the great works of Carpentier and García Márquez has been acknowledged by literary critics,¹ Bomarzo comes before us as a historical novel of the Italian Renaissance. It is therefore all the more interesting to see how the internal logic of the work leads inescapably from the world of the probable and ordinary to the realm of the fantastic and the supernatural.

This chapter will examine the relationship between the historical perspective and the magic-realist vision in the novel Bomarzo. Of course, historical fiction is an established genre while magic-realism is a relatively

¹See, for example, George O. Schanzer, "The Four Hundred Years of Myths and Melancholies of Mujica Láínez," Latin American Literary Review, I, No. 2 (Spring, 1973), 65-71. Also, Gregory Rabassa, Review of Reasons of State, by Alejo Carpentier, Saturday Review, May 29, 1976, 36-37.

modern and uniquely Latin American contribution to the novel. It will therefore be necessary, first, to indicate the literary influences which gave birth to the new Latin American perspective, and to define the essential characteristics of magic-realism. We shall demonstrate that Bomarzo possesses these defining characteristics. Secondly, this chapter will delineate the historical vision that animates Bomarzo: this will include the techniques of social and political description which it shares with the classical historical novel as far back as Scott, together with the newer techniques of biographical verisimilitude which the twentieth century has derived from psychology. Thirdly, we shall show how a major turning point in Bomarzo coincides with the introduction of a new tone, that of magic realism. The use of magic-realist motifs will be traced by focusing on Manuel Mujica Láinez' treatment of the esoteric sciences--of astrology, demonology, and alchemy--as they entered into the civilization of the Renaissance. We shall argue that this perspective, with its symbolic implications for an understanding of the forces governing man's psyche, aims to give a more accurate portrayal of both Renaissance and modern man than was afforded by the techniques of conventional historical fiction. Finally, we shall indicate the place of Bomarzo in the further evolution of Mujica Láinez' literary career.

Literary Trends Responsible
for the Development of
Magic-Realism

Although for the purposes of criticism we often study literary movements within a generational scheme, the group of writers which emerged in the years after the second world war, despite their differences in political ideology, social values and aesthetic penchants, proved able to synthesize or syncretize themes and stylistic elements belonging to past and present alike. As modern writers they were, of course, well acquainted with literary currents and undercurrents of the twentieth century. But, in addition, they pursued themes and techniques which span the centuries and treated human dilemmas which have been the perennial province of literature. Finally, they sought to define the meaning of the temporal and spiritual drama of man as it has developed within the pre-Colombian (or pagan) and the post-Colombian (or Christian) worlds which are equally essential to the understanding of the Latin American civilization.

The novel genre in Latin America has always developed in conjunction with European and North American literary trends, usually following at least a decade, but sometimes a whole generation later, the themes and forms developed abroad. Specifically, the emergence of the contemporary Latin American novel can be traced to three fundamental foreign influences. First, and most important,

was the surrealist movement of the beginning of the century, with its liberating impact on many of the conventional artistic forms. It is noteworthy that several prominent Latin American Writers were living and studying in Paris during the early decades of this century, at a time when surrealism was at the height of its influence. And while surrealism was originally thought to be an elitist movement with only limited impact on popular culture, it is now clear that it also changed the narrative perspective of the realistic and naturalistic novel and thus introduced new forms of consciousness to the broader reading public. The Latin American writers who grew to maturity in the European environment shaped by the surrealists transported the new perspectives to Latin America; they became the leading writers of the mid-twentieth century.

An additional point should be stressed. Whereas Europe had, by the turn of the century, long left romanticism behind in favor of realistic and naturalistic modes of expression in the novel, the slower development of Latin American literature had led to the retention of much of the romantic tradition, including its agonistic vision of man, nature and destiny. Thus, while the vision of Latin American writers remained basically romantic, it was often covered by a superficial patina of realism and naturalism derived from the latest European literary styles. This

whole amorphous amalgam had produced a literary stalemate, which it was the merit of surrealism to explode. Surrealism, and movements connected with surrealism in Latin America, such as Ultraism, opened new vistas for both readers and writers; through their influence on the novel form, they gave surrealism a popular influence which the original elitist aesthetic pioneers had lacked.

While the followers of Bréton's Manifesto experimented in aesthetics, pursuing the perfect metaphor or disclosing veiled subtleties of language, writers not formally belonging to particular movements were showing a new awareness of the possibilities of change within the novel form. This is the second major influence behind the contemporary Latin American novel. We are referring to the process whereby disciples of James Joyce and his contemporaries were developing a number of original perspectives from which writers could legitimately present their themes. Among the most widely used innovative techniques derived from these pioneers could be mentioned stream-of-consciousness, automatic writing, flashback techniques, the disruption of chronological and spatial unities, etc. They exerted their influence on Latin American literature through the works of novelists such as Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Mann and Faulkner, whose full influence on writers of the continent still remains to be assessed.

Thirdly, we can detect in the contemporary Latin American novel the influence of newly acquired attitudes with regard to the representational or mimetic purpose of art. While this has some points in common with the second factor, it refers to a different aspect of the creative process. The second factor related to the stylistic techniques which form the external scheme or cloak of narrative; this one deals more specifically with the nature, psychological or philosophical, of the themes and concerns of the narrative.

It is with respect to these three fundamental influences--the first, an offshoot of surrealism; the second, a result of new developments in narrative technique; the third, a new perspective from which art could be said to mirror nature--that the Latin American novel can be said to have become independent of literary currents in Europe and North America. It attained its independence not so much in its reaction against the traditional regionalist novel of Latin America, as in its creation of a new synthesis in time and space, a synthesis which required a re-evaluation of attitudes old and new, of concerns sacred and profane, of history and prehistory, of magic and realism. This new and original synthesis has been called magic-realism.

The term magic-realism has been closely linked to surrealism by a number of critics. It was first coined by

the German critic Franz Roh in 1925 and, after traversing the realm of literature in Europe and America, it settled as a characteristic element in the work of a group of Latin American writers whose aesthetic vision entails an unusual or unorthodox perception of reality.

Magic-realism is essentially "una actitud frente a la realidad"¹--a perspective on reality which introduces the prodigious, miraculous or marvellous as an aesthetic category intimately linked with ordinary reality. As such, the perspective is not a product of the twentieth century alone, for it is observable in Cervantes' masterpiece, in which the "prodigious" enters in a great multiplicity of forms:

El secreto de la visión llamada mágica no es tanto la invención como el reconocimiento cándido de lo ambiguo, tarea artística originada por Cervantes: la idea de que la esencia de cada fenómeno es o puede ser múltiple Hemos pasado de la edad de la mimesis representativa a la de la metamorfosis contemplativa. El realismo mágico, que duró un breve momento como tendencia fundamental (el momento de Asturias y Carpentier) fue punto de transición entre los dos. De las magias mitológicas de El reino de este mundo, de Los pasos perdidos y de Hombres de maíz, se ha pasado a una nueva síntesis de entusiasmos que son los cuatro imperativos apuntados ya: lo violento, lo onírico, lo absurdo, y lo prodigioso. Con el tiempo se le atribuirá al realismo mágico una significación cada vez menor, y no es porque como actitud y técnica haya carecido de importancia, sino

¹Luis Leal, "El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana," Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, XXVI, No. 4 (Julio-Agosto, 1967), p. 233.

porque la novela hispanoamericana se ha aspirado a una mayor universalidad.¹

It is true that Professor Earle, in the above passage, points to the short duration of the magic-realist movement. Nevertheless, just as Cervantes, in a work that marked the birth of the modern novel, had intimated a possible multiplicity of essences, some conventional and others extraordinary, so also can magic-realism refer to a quality of vision or an aesthetic category not limited to a particular localized trend or style, but related to a more fundamental understanding of the human psyche which emerged at this point in history. For magic-realism is, indeed, a movement with a profound psychological vision of human nature. It is a vision which seeks to reach through the cultural strata of history and social process, and to expose the archetypes which form the "collective unconscious" of western man.

André Bréton, in his first Manifesto, gives to the marvelous element in literature the status of an aesthetic category corresponding to an important mode of human life. It was he who recognized the importance of the fantastic and the marvelous as an artistic category. To be sure, the use of the fantastic and the marvelous is apparent throughout the history of literature. But the

¹Peter G. Earle, "Muerte y transfiguración del realismo mágico," Otros mundos otros fuegos, ed. Donald A. Yates (Michigan State University: Latin American Studies Center, 1975), p. 69.

surrealists proclaimed that the fantastic did not need to be justified by seeking to elucidate its "meaning," or referring to its moral or didactic impact on the audience. Previously, literature had always sought to justify itself on the ground of mirroring reality; the surrealists recognized that the fictional, the fantastic, and marvelous, give us insight into a new and deeper reality of the human psyche.

This is the lesson which the writers of magic-realist narrative have taken from the surrealists. Alejo Carpentier sees the importance of the marvelous not simply as an aesthetic category, for he perceives the marvelous as existing in historical reality. The term magic-realism, which had existed since 1925, thereby becomes applicable to a whole generation of Latin American writers twenty-five years later, because it fittingly reflects the new vision of Carpentier and his contemporaries:

Lo maravilloso en Carpentier responde a una ontología, a una forma de ser del hispanoamericano que excluye la reflexividad para dar paso a la fe que le permite vivir inmerso en la cultura y sentir la historia como sino, no como un proceso causal analizable intelectualmente (Ti Noel al final de El reino de este mundo), estupefacto, anonadado por la creación de un estado que se ha implantado como orden social, y que ha cambiado incesantemente a su alrededor, destruyendo su mundo de mitos, leyendas y creencias. Desde la perspectiva que ese modo de ser conlleva, la fantasía deja de ser incongruente con respecto al mundo real para convertirse ambas en un mundo completo, esférico, sin fisuras ni desdoblamientos irónicos.¹

¹Roberto González Echevarría, "Carpentier y el realismo mágico," in Yates, op. cit., p. 227.

Carpentier's work stands as a major example of magic-realist writing, notable for the original and harmonious fusion of historical reconstruction with the deeper infra-historical determinants of the human psyche which are expressed in myth and culture. He has captured the psychological alienation of man from nature by his vivid recollection of the lost myths and idols of the indigenous inhabitants of Latin America. Other writers, accepting the validity of this vision, have followed closely in his footsteps and created examples of a novel form in which a secondary reality is perceived to underlie the historical process.

There are, to be sure, some difficulties attending the study of magic-realist narrative. The term itself is highly ambiguous, and has been used, sometimes indiscriminately, to encompass a number of quite distinct approaches. And as long as it remains ambiguous, there will be different attempts to define it and multiple diatribes arguing its demise or its survival. In its various dimensions, it is a movement of far-reaching consequences. Aesthetically speaking, it requires the juxtaposition of complex forms of metaphorical language and a stylistic complexity that occasionally deserves the epithet of baroque. As a prose narrative, it often combines in-depth character studies with a thorough knowledge of religious and philosophical movements. And, lastly,

it combines more than one dimension of reality--the possible "ought-to-be" of the poet, to paraphrase Aristotle, with the "has been" of the scientific historian.

For the purposes of this study, I shall maintain, as the most appropriate and general definition, the one given by Luís Leal. As a more specific definition which has especial importance for the development of Latin American letters, that given by Alejo Carpentier in Tientos y diferencias (also to be found in the prologue to El reino de este mundo) also deserves to be noted:

Muchos se olvidan, con disfrazarse de magos a poco costo, que lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de "estado límite." Para empezar, la sensación de lo maravilloso presupone una fe.¹

Magic and fantasy have always been associated with the art of narrative fiction. They are to be found, time and again, as illustrative of the human dream "come true." But whereas the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries clearly differentiated the realm of myth and magic from that of history and social reality, the magic-realist narrative of Latin America provides a new perspective through the fusion of dream world and real world, a perspective which sheds

¹Alejo Carpentier, El reino de este mundo (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1967), prologo, p. 12.

light upon the essence of man at this historical cross-roads. Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes and Manuel Mujica Láinez are all writers of magic-realist fiction. They have, without exception, evinced an interest in the human psyche as it is shaped by historical happenings. But, having made a thorough investigation of the historical and psychological features of their characters, they have concluded that the evolution of western (and Latin-American) man cannot be grasped without envisaging the world of pagan cosmogony and religious idolatry which preceded it. These writers have, consequently, shown varying degrees of interest in the esoteric sciences. They are well read in eastern philosophers and ponder the concept of transmutation or transmigration of the human soul and form, as they search for that aspect of nature which can lead to a deeper knowledge of the self and of human destiny.

The numerous references to the esoteric sciences, and the allusion to an occult dimension of nature, form a constant in all so-called magic-realist narrative. And it is this dimension which is characteristically found in Manuel Mujica Láinez' major work, Bomarzo. As a result, one of the objectives of this chapter will be to assess the author's intention in bringing this hermetic dimension into a narrative that might, in all other respects, be

classified within the conventional genre of historical fiction.

Bomarzo, Mujica Láinez' lengthiest novel to date, was published in 1962. Set in sixteenth-century Italy, it is a rare compendium of political trends, social conflicts and cultural life at the height of the Renaissance. If any work should put Luís Leal's and Alejo Carpentier's definitions of the term magic-realism to the test, it would be this highly complex novel, in which the archeological reconstruction of a historical era is further complicated by the author's interest in the esoteric sciences. Bomarzo describes a chaotic age that was not unlike ours, and is indeed a pivotal point in the development of western thought. It portrays man at a historical crossroads where the roads to the past and to the future were still open, and the development of the modern scientific age was not a foregone conclusion. The sacred, the profane, and the demonic were still competing for man's soul. Bomarzo shows demons answering the call of the believers, while unbelievers occupy the very throne of St. Peter. We are witness to the discoveries of science in the alchemist's den. We are confronted with man's spiritual malaise as he desperately seeks for meaning in the esoteric sciences. Bomarzo is, indeed, an example of the many possibilities of magic-realism, fulfilling and absorbing in its attitude towards reality.

Bomarzo begins on the plane of historical fiction, but ultimately moves to the plane of magic-realism. Perhaps no better illustration of this transition could be found than the reflections which Mujica Láinez puts into the mouth of his protagonist, the Duke of Bomarzo. Musing about a particularly heroic exploit of his own age, he compares it to the mythical time of the knights of Charlemagne, and then expresses his belief in an underlying "marvellous" reality. In doing so, he employs terminology which parallels closely Alejo Carpentier's definition of magic-realism. He says:

Y lo mismo que el Orlando es un adiós nostálgico a la edad en que la realidad y la fantasía eran inseparables porque formaban una esencia única, sucesos minúsculos y maravillosos como el que motiva estas reflexiones, al desarrollarse repentinamente y encender de mágica claridad reverberante la atmósfera cotidiana del mercado prosaico del mundo, simbolizaban también, con sus últimos brotes esporádicos, la despedida desconcertada de una época en la que lo real y lo fantástico empezaban a clasificarse en distintos ficheros para siempre, a una época en que la generosa ilusión hizo flamear los estandartes poéticos.¹

The Historical Vision in Bomarzo

Historically speaking, much happens in the age depicted by Bomarzo. The action of the plot commences in Italy in the year 1512, shortly after two warring families, the Orsinis and the Colonnas (whose fates

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, Bomarzo (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1968), Chapter VII, p. 409.

intertwine throughout the novel) participate in the signing of a Pax Romana designed to bring tranquillity to the troubled politics of the Italian city-states. In the larger European realm, the Spanish king Charles becomes Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519. We know, of course, that he shortly became embroiled in the bitter religious disputes of the Protestant Reformation. In Bomarzo, however, that struggle for the soul of Europe occurs virtually off-stage. Whereas our historical hindsight tends to emphasize the religious conflicts which afflicted the sixteenth century, the concerns of Bomarzo and his Italian contemporaries dwell more on two other dimensions, namely the secular and the demonic. Thus, the novel portrays the gradual diminution of Charles's power as a result of purely political conflicts and maneuvers. On the Italian front, the rise of two dynasties, the Borgias and the Medicis, to the papacy, also assumes a purely secular dimension which is reflected in the increasing corruption of church officials. And, while we tend to look back to the sixteenth century as a golden age of culture seldom surpassed in its creativity, Mujica Láinez does not let us forget the shabby contrast provided by the disunity and corruption in the political and religious realms. He shows how government positions were often bought or acquired at the price of human atrocity and depravity. It is a fitting punishment for this state of

disunity that the Western Christian world became a natural prey to the attacks of the Turkish Sultan. Once again, as during the crusades half a millenium earlier, Christians and Moslems confront each other in battle, culminating in 1571 at the great naval engagement of Lepanto. The protagonist of Bomarzo relives the military strategy and ordeals of the naval battle in what is one of the most exciting narrative sequences of the novel. But the battle also represents one of the last aspects of historical time depicted in the novel. The political conquests and achievements have failed to satisfy Bomarzo, and we are left with an aged, unfulfilled protagonist still pursuing his dream of immortality. But now he turns from the secular world and opens his soul to Paracelsus, the alchemist, to Sandro Benedetto, the astrologer, and to Silvio de Narni, the demonologist. Turning all his attentions to the quest for immortality, Orsini seeks to discover the meaning of human life by a different path.

From Pope Julius II to Pius V; from the Borgias through the two branches of the Medicis, the legitimate and the illegitimate; from defeat to victory, Mujica Láinez vividly reconstructs this historical era and endows it with a life that only the pageantry of fictional prose can add to the dry record of historically verifiable truth. But Mujica Láinez believes that the real meaning of these external events--of all the sufferings,

injustices, wars and other assorted evils--lies not on the political surface, nor yet in the religious self-understanding of the people of the time, but rather in the exposition of the deeper irrational forces of the human psyche. He carries historical description to its limits in order to show that historical verisimilitude is not finally decisive for the design of the novel. History sets the stage for the protagonist, a realistically developed character whose search through the elemental world of the esoteric sciences grows naturally out of his commitment to the Renaissance world view.

Pier Francesco Orsini, Duke of Bomarzo, the main protagonist-observer and autobiographer of the novel, provides a strong character study of an archetypical figure of the Renaissance. His strength derives from the careful preparation of the reader with a psychologically realistic portrait of the man. Pier Francesco's account of his life must be credible if the novel is successfully to portray the era for the reader. For this reason, it is important to describe the techniques by which the author relates the development of his protagonist on both the historical and the fictional levels of the story. These techniques, in brief, fall into two categories. The first includes the various devices developed since the time of Walter Scott for the realistic depiction of a historical era. The second involves applying the insights of twentieth-century

psychoanalysis in order to render a psychologically compelling portrait of an individual life.

Walter Scott chose historically unknown protagonists as observers of history. This device lent his historical objectivity to his portrayals, while the fictional element added not only a degree of personal interest to the account, but permitted a free interaction between his heroes and other characters from all levels of society.

Manuel Mujica Láinez' fictional character has been developed along similar lines. Although a historical "unknown," Pier Francesco is high-born, and therefore close to the political factions he is about to observe. As a fictional character, he can interact with representatives of diverse social and cultural strata, bringing renewed interest to familiar historical events. However, Walter Scott's heroes, removed from our time by more than a century of narrative and literary development, do not enter into that world of elemental essences--of the irrational, which forms the subject of contemporary magic-realist narrative--of which Bomarzo is an example. The Scottian hero projects what is observable and verifiable, or at least probable, but only very seldom does he glimpse past the world of social convention and political history and into the realm of underlying essences.

Conceived as a historical as well as a psychological being, Pier Francesco Orsini is not merely an

observer of historical data. He is given added credibility by becoming part of the external world of the Renaissance, observing and re-enacting the power moves of corrupt or ambitious individuals within state and church. From this world of the external event, the protagonist gradually moves to the more elusive world of essences. He reconstructs the puzzle of Renaissance history within the narrative so that he becomes inescapably historical, but once he has conquered his place as a historical archetype (by developing along the lines of the Machiavellian Renaissance courtier) within the narrative, he moves into the unfamiliar, speculative world of hermetism, a world which historians so far have not included in standard descriptions of the age.

We know, of course, that the hermetical world of magic and early science was full of meaning for the men of the Renaissance. The fact that our histories tend to treat it as an aberration indicates nothing so much as the encapsulation of the modern world within a purely materialist perspective. It indicates that we have become alienated from part of our own elemental nature. And by re-emphasizing the magical side of Renaissance man in his portrayal of Bomarzo, Mujica Láinez has utilized a fictional medium to correct the one-sided portrayal not only of Renaissance man, but of modern man as well, so

many of whose aspirations are rooted in the period of the Renaissance.

The focus of interest of this novel, then, is the first person protagonist, Pier Francesco Orsini, Duke of Bomarzo. He is credible to us because he has been developed with the psychological realism which twentieth-century literature demands. The author accomplishes this through two techniques: first, as already indicated, by choosing a relatively unknown aristocrat of the Italian Renaissance who can both observe and participate in the important events of his age without overshadowing or diminishing the greatness of the era he represents; secondly, and more importantly, by the use of a Freudian approach to develop the protagonist as realistically as possible, with his various complexes, sexual drives and sublimations.

The link between the conventional world of history and social reality, on the one hand, and the mysterious world of elemental essences explored by magic-realism, on the other, is provided by the insights of psychoanalysis. Man, in Bomarzo, is first of all historical man. But in his desire to free himself from the chains of time, that is, in his search for immortality, he is, in the world of Norman O. Brown,

. . . the discontented animal, unconsciously seeking the life proper to his species, [man] in history: repression transforms the timeless instinctual compulsion to repeat into the forward moving dialectic

of neurosis which is history; history is a forward-moving recherche du temps perdu, with the repetition-compulsion guaranteeing the historical law of the slow return of the repressed. And conversely, life not repressed--organic life below man and human life if repression were overcome--is not in historical time. If we connect--as Freud did not--the repetition-compulsion with Freud's reiterated theorem that the instinctual processes in the id are timeless, then only repressed life is in time, and unrepressed life would be timeless or in eternity. Thus again, psychoanalysis carried to its logical conclusion and transformed into a theory of history, gathers to itself ageless religious aspirations. The Sabbath of Eternity, that time when time no more shall be, is an image of that state which is the ultimate¹ goal of the repetition-compulsion of the timeless id.

Pier Francesco Orsini, the lame hunchback of Bomarzo, sees the light of day on the 6th of March, 1512. His horoscope destines him to immortality; his father, proud and passionate, unfeeling for his son's physical imperfections, though these are true reminders of his own bestial nature, wishes his death. Such is the intensity of the father's hatred that, in what is to become one of the traumatic pivotal points in the protagonist's life, he imprisons his eleven-year-old son, whom he hopes to render insane, in a secret wall of the castle with only a grotesque skeleton for company. The experience does not lead the protagonist to insanity; however, it does pave the road for the atrocities which Pier Francesco commits as he becomes the future duke of Bomarzo. The young boy's first contact with the terror of death remains a recurring

¹Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (Middletown: Wesleyan U. Press, 1972), p. 93.

nightmare throughout his life. It is the linking image upon which hinge both the psychological frustrations of the protagonist's life, as well as the ensuing sublimation of his search for immortality.

The unkindness and sadism of Pier Francesco's brothers, Girolamo and Maerbale, ends in their own death, and even the protagonist's hateful father as well as his loving grandmother die (perhaps indirectly, we are led to believe) through the actions of the thwarted Pier Francesco. The traumas of the youth become the frustrations of the adult. In suggestive language we are informed of Pier Francesco's sexual ambiguity. He pursues pleasure with both sexes. However, he is impotent in his initiation by the prostitute Pantasilea, an act which becomes a painful reminder of his "potential" impotence in his later life. We are led to believe that his love for young and beautiful men is but the result of a search for the loving father-son relationship he never had. We detect another sign of his inferiority complex when we observe his impotence towards his virginal wife, a symbol of the untainted, the pure, the "normal." Pier Francesco's marriage to Julia Farnese is not consummated until she is cunningly corrupted by being encouraged to commit adultery. Throughout, Manuel Mujica Láinez uses the twentieth-century perspective in his psychological delineation of Pier Francesco's impotence:

Un médico, un psicoanalista actual . . . podría explicar qué era lo que me pasaba, . . . qué redecillas habían puesto en marcha el mecanismo de mi inhibición frente a Julia Solo subrayaré para el lector escéptico la circunstancia de que mis triunfos se lograran sobre gente de categoría subalterna.¹

But proclivities of a sexual nature are never ostentatiously displayed in the work. They are one of the leitmotifs to the understanding of the young protagonist. Once we are convinced that he has come face to face with the traumas of his youth, we are brought to the final stages of the book, which deal primarily with a reassertion of the self. The protagonist has developed spiritually to the point of condemning all previous acts of violence:

¿Sabemos por qué matamos? ¿Lo sé yo, lo sabe Lorenzino? ¿Podemos asegurar que entendemos algo de alguien, cuando atravesamos las capas obvias de la superficie y nos adentramos en lo más profundo? Nos entendemos a nosotros mismos? Tantos elementos sutiles, delicados, ignotos, juegan cuando cumplimos cada acción--la de matar a un hombre o la de amar a otro--que en verdad para comprender cualquier sentimiento y cualquier actitud, aún las aparentemente más simples, deberíamos dedicar nuestra vida entera a desmontar, pieza a pieza, el misterio de las razones acumuladas, entreveradas y² aún así probablemente se nos hurtaría lo principal.

Knowledge of the self comes at the same time as Pier Francesco progresses from the external world of power politics to the internal world of the spirit. The protagonist reaches a stage in life when he begins to yearn for immortality, and in this quest he seeks to unlock the

¹Mujica Láinez, Bomarzo, Chapter VII, p. 397.

²Ibid., p. 466.

secrets of nature. This stage in the book is the one most readily identified with magic-realism. If we look at the development of the protagonist, we see that he has been traced on two levels, corresponding, respectively, to the historical or external framework of the novel, and to the internal, mythical, magical or fantastic world of *infrahistory* or *psychohistory*. To enter the second level, we must be led through the first.

Thus, the protagonist, through whom we have been given a bird's-eye view of the Renaissance, is first introduced as a historical being; he is shown as a victim whose circumstances are closely linked to the state of his birth and position in society; and as a psychological being of depth, whose awareness and introspection leads him beyond the deceitful external world of appearances to a world of essences, a world where life revolves not around externals or particulars, but around universal human dilemmas and eternal life choices. He is then to discover, as the alchemists believed and as the magic-realist writers perceive, that the universe "posee un alma que es menester despertar y una realidad que es necesario perseguir."¹

The protagonist's perception of the world which
surrounds him, once he has come face to face with the

¹Nelly Martínez, "Realismo mágico y lo fantástico en la ficción hispanoamericana contemporánea," in Yates, op. cit., p.

traumas of his youth, discloses a fantastic universe which lies within the reach of man, but to which man has lost admittance. The key to this universe is lodged, ironically enough, within the novel, in the rediscovery of the rose-crowned skeleton, once the source of terror to the young boy, now a symbolic messenger of the after-life in the scheme of the novel.

The encounter with the skeleton is a poetic trick of sorts, by which the author proclaims the duality or ambiguity of everything which we conventionally regard as possessing some fixed, unchangeable essence. Thus the skeleton, generally conceived solely as a symbol of death, becomes, ironically enough, also a messenger of life to Orsini, a symbol of hope and immortality as well as of deceit and suffering. The eleven-year-old child's experience is still present in the new dimension, for the grown man still finds the image of death repulsive: "de él emanaba un invisible vaho maligno . . . que envenenaba el calabozo."¹ But this image is quickly overpowered by the promise of eternal life, for the skeleton is that of the fourteenth-century alchemist Dastyn, and within this now frail image of death lies the formula for the elixir vitae, the potion which will ensure the protagonist's immortality. At this point ends the protagonist's life of "external"

¹Mujica Láinez, Bomarzo, p. 497.

accident. He seems to conquer the nightmarish vision of death, and a new reality takes over:

Yo, Pier Francesco Orsini, santifiqué el esqueleto que, de instrumento de pavor, usado con el fin de torturarme y vejarme, se había transformado para mí en una alegoría de la vida eterna.¹

As Orsini spurns the political scene of his time in favor of the permanence offered him by the occult, the subject matter becomes more speculative. We begin to move in the realm of fantasy, magic and religious mysticism.

The Magic-Realist Vision in
Bomarzo: The Esoteric
Sciences

In Bomarzo, Manuel Mujica Láinez projects certain facets of Renaissance life through the extensive use of historical data, and through numerous references to the plastic arts and literature of the period. The novel traces the literary and aesthetic currents of the age as well as recalling important controversies regarding issues of a philosophic, religious or political dimension. But the main focus of the novel (given its subject matter, namely the life and goals of the protagonist, Pier Francesco) is placed not so much on the rational world--of which the plastic arts, literature, and politics stand as witnesses--as on the irrational world of astrology,

¹Ibid., pp. 500-501.

demonology, and alchemy: that is, the world of the esoteric sciences.

Particularly noteworthy is the author's employment of the esoteric sciences in his attempt at an archeological reconstruction of a period marked both by great political turmoil and by outstanding artistic and scientific exploits. If scientia arbor vitae--if science is to unfold the secrets of the tree of life--then it is science at its highest level, the pursuit of truth and beauty, which is the predominant goal of the main protagonist, Pier Francesco Orsini. But his quest, although almost indefinitely postponed by the protagonist in favor of an immersion in the affairs of state which form the other focus of the era in which Orsini lived, is as important to the novel's theme as are the various psychological and historical details which crowd the narrative.

What decidedly sets the tone of the novel's magic-realist dimension is the location of much of the plot: Bomarzo and its environs; the castle of the Orsinis and its garden of monstrous allegory, built upon the ruins of what once must have been one of the prime centers of the mysterious Etruscan civilization. It is a proper milieu for the introduction of the occult:

Más que en ninguna parte, más aún que en los sepulcros subterráneos, se sentía uno allí cerca de la tierra y de su secreto Todo so volvía, en esa zona huraña, mucho más antiguo, como si el tiempo no hubiera conseguido desalojar de ella a los moradores que la poseían desde antes de la conquista

Etrusca, y que habían refugiado en su dédalo salvaje a los dioses primeros, los dioses que gobernaban a la región antes de que Charún, Tuchulcha y los otros demonios mitad hombres y mitad bestias irrumpieran en los fúnebres banquetes.¹

In such a surrounding, serving more the call of the pre-historical than the historical, the preternatural rather than the natural, we are further removed from the world of actuality and of physical realism to plunge again and again into the cataclysmic world of the unknown. It is this world which history has continually veiled, a realm of obscure, half-apprehended essences, which the pursuit of demonology and alchemy seeks to disclose. It is, paradoxically enough, this world of the occult to which we are led by the historical fiction of Manuel Mujica Láinez. He demonstrates that historical reconstruction of an era, if conducted with sufficient care, leads to unresolved dilemmas of human nature and ambition. It is the fate of history, of that which is verifiable, to lead to prehistory and eternity, to that which is scientifically unverified but perhaps possible.

If he concentrates on verifiable data, the Renaissance historian is rather limited in his reconstruction of the era. One might add that historians generally place too much emphasis on the political scene and too little on the spiritual meaning of historical

¹Ibid., Chapter IX, "La desgraciada guerra," p. 556.

events. What ultimately remains from such a reconstruction is a rather dry account of power struggles in Renaissance Italy, an account which ignores the underlying principles or objectives that caused men to act as they did during this turbulent era. If the political historian's view is limited, literature and the plastic arts stand again as monuments to the cultural heights attained in this hitherto unsurpassed century in which modern Western civilization was born. But artistic achievement is the final proof of the contact which some highly motivated great mind made with the surrounding world. The work of art stands at the end of a chain of events, and that chain must be traced back to its origin.

The historian cannot indulge in random speculation as he contemplates the final products of the period he is investigating, its wars, its cultural monuments, its philosophical distillations. The novelist, on the other hand, can blend fact and fiction to rebuild the (possible) chain of events and thereby to enlighten the reader as to the prime mover or drive experienced by historical actor and artist. The psychological or philosophical frame of mind which might have existed at the roots of the creative impulse can be revealed. On the other hand, the historian's need to be faithful to fact results, perforce, in an incomplete vision of an era. Furthermore, as a modern "man of science," the historian would feel reticence in

dealing with a symbolism that attests to the existence of the irrational. This prejudice on the part of the scientist against probing the realm of the sacred, the mythical or the mystical, is part of the objectivism of most scientific approaches of the twentieth century, not least that of the realistic historian.

But in sixteenth-century Italy, scientific thought itself was still linked to a divine dimension of nature. The Pythagorean union of mathematical rationalism and religious mysticism had not yet been sundered. Therefore, a search for the truth about the sixteenth century would entail a consideration of sacred elements, or a search for the hidden "mystical" qualities which that era sought in the elements composing nature. It is small wonder that, in an age when the Church lacked strong spiritual leadership, people would--as they also do in our day and age--try to find answers to life's enigmas through hermeneutics. Religious corruption as it existed in the Renaissance was largely responsible for the formation of new orders and movements, including those initiated by Erasmus and Luther. As in our own age, skepticism heightened man's search for some sustaining sacred principle which would unlock the riddle of history and mortality. In our age, a man might be motivated by this spiritual quest to seek the key to the meaning of human life in the esoteric Marxist science of history. In the sixteenth century, explanations were

sought from the esoteric domain of alchemy, demonology, and astrology. We see in Bomarzo how Renaissance man, alienated from traditional religious beliefs, looked for answers pertaining to the cosmos and the spirit behind the cosmos, and he sought these in latitudes beyond the Greco-Roman or the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

The limited understanding provided by conventional historiography opens the possibility that historical fiction can supply a more complete, if perhaps less precise, reconstruction of an era. In an age of specialized disciplines, others besides novelists have felt the limitations of a totally rationalistic approach, and have begun to resurrect studies incorporating the "irrational." Thus, modern psychology as well as literature seek to study both the individual and the collective unconscious. Recently, too, historians of science have begun to realize the need to include "hermetism" in an approach to a self-understanding of the origins of western history and its distinctive ideas and preoccupations.

In literature, this concern for the irrational element is essential to the study and understanding of human behavior, and magic-realist narrative affirms both the irrational and the occult as fundamental facets of the real world. This is not so in the world of historiography at the present time. However, Mircea Eliade affirms that

no less important and significant for the broadening of the western historiographical consciousness are some recent works on Hermetism and its relations with Renaissance science, art and philosophy. We may quote as an example the superb monograph of Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (Chicago, 1965); it brilliantly illustrates the progress realized in the last years in understanding a world of meaning which was neglected, or despised, by the Renaissance historiography of the previous generation. The importance of the Hermetic "univers imaginaire" in the victory of Copernican heliocentrism and in the development of Italian Renaissance philosophy is overwhelming.¹

Eliade expresses the hope that such studies, which opened new vistas to the understanding of the origins of western civilization, would be extended as well into the world of meaning hidden in the writings of the alchemists.² In subsequent years, a veritable revolution in the study of the origins of science laid bare, among other things, the Pythagorean background of Galileo's physics, the occult world of witchcraft and astrology which impinged on the life and astronomical revolution of Kepler, the theological concerns which dominated nine-tenths of the writings (many unpublished) of Isaac Newton and which he sought to underpin by presenting a new vision of natural order, and the reflections on transmigration of souls which lay at the root of Benjamin Franklin's first formulation of the

¹Mircea Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp. 198-99. Quotation taken from the postscript, "Metallurgy and Alchemy as Religious Phenomena."

²Ibid., p. 199.

principle of conservation of matter.¹ A spiritual dimension at the very heart of the scientific enterprise, which was intuited by the writers of magic-realism, was brilliantly confirmed in subsequent empirical studies.

Seen in this light, the originality of Bomarzo is not limited solely to the portrayal of an interesting protagonist, or to the complexities of plot, nor yet to the archeological reconstruction of an entire era, but resides rather in a combination of all three of these factors and in their utilization to uncover such a "univers imaginaire" at the heart of Renaissance life and thought--an essence hitherto disregarded or unperceived by scientists and historians alike.

Much if not all of the magic-realist narrative of the last two decades in Latin America deals with some form or other of hermeneutics, the study of the occult as a primary category of modern man's consciousness. In this respect, the themes of Bomarzo echo the perceptions which writers such as Asturias and Carpentier have derived from works devoted to Mayan or Afro-Caribbean cosmogonies.

Both Asturias and Carpentier have demonstrated man's belief in the existence of a dualistic tendency in nature, encompassing both good and evil. In Asturias'

¹Among the pathbreaking works in which these relationships were established are Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Arthur Koestler's The Sleepwalkers and The Act of Creation, and Lewis Feuer's The Scientific Intellectual.

work Hombres de maíz, man is forced to wander from human to animal form in an endless dialectic of good and evil. He seeks control of his destiny by appealing to equally serviceable evil as well as good idols. Everything is possible within Mayan cosmogony, for man never ceases to exist. He is merely transmuted into one of the many forms which exist in nature, a nature which is sacred and alive with the myths of his ancestors. Similar spiritual transmutations occur in Carpentier's Haitian saga, El reino de este mundo. In it, the resurrection of Mackandal serves as a foil to a dialectic of good and evil in which the forces of nature acquiesce to the worshippers of voodoo. This work, along with Graham Greene's The Comedians, leads to the exposure of voodooism as one of the fascinating enigmas of modern time: black magic, and the belief in man's ability to control nature through the worship of evil, emerges as a new spiritual dimension.

Manuel Mujica Láinez also examines that which is termed "evil"--both in actions on the stage of profane history and through an examination of the esoteric sciences--in order to make the reader conscious of certain questions regarding the symbolism of evil as perceived by Renaissance man. Questions regarding the nature of evil are first expressed through the development of the Machiavellian protagonist, Pier Francesco Orsini. According to the author, Pier Francesco has all the potential

to lead what we would call a good and honorable existence. He is capable of love--so we have been told--and he would have deeply loved and respected both his brothers, Girolamo and Maerbale; he worshipped his father who responded by seeking to have him killed. In essence, he has all the potential of a sensitive, artistic poet and philosopher, and the inquisitive mind of the scientist. However, his tragic flaw is symbolized in his physical flaw: he is both hunchbacked and lame. To add insult to irony, he lives at the height of the artistic fervor of the Renaissance, an age which glorified man's form as the center of the universe, whose masters--many of whom, including Cellini, Michelangelo, Titian, Lotto, step from the pages of the novel--expressed its beauty in immortal works of art. Pier Francesco's artistic temperament is imprisoned in what he believes to be a vile and ignoble fortress, and the paradox of his love of perfection and beauty and his lack thereof becomes the basis of a psychological instability, and the source of the anguish, remorse and hatred which afflict him throughout his life. Since he is thwarted in his search for love and beauty, since he is despised by those who surround him, all his artistic creativity is turned to fuel for the acquisition, first, of power, and second, of an immortality which will outlive his more fortunate contemporaries.

This sensitivity on the part of the protagonist is also basic to understanding his interest in the occult. At the root of Pier Francesco's quest for love and power, at whatever cost of human life, lies his experience with a callous and indifferent society. Because of its callousness, his innate potential for positive action is turned to evil action. It is revenge and revolt, coupled with an inner desire to attain a fulfillment denied by society, which impels him to his various crimes. To the degree that his love is stunted, he becomes hateful and destructive to those around him and, perhaps, also to himself.

Evil, rather than being merely the absence of good, corresponds to potential human goodness which has been thwarted and discouraged in its contact with the material world. It is to this conception of the roots of evil that the author alludes by quoting from Machiavelli's Song of the Hermits, a passage which might function as a leitmotif of the ethical theory contained in the book:

"He who truly sees the devil, does not see him as horny or as black."¹ Pier Francesco's search for "evil" stems from an effort to control the destiny of those surrounding him as well as his own. Having been taught the power of evil by his peers, he proceeds to immerse himself in a study of the occult in order to emerge, at long last, powerful

¹Mujica Láinez, Bomarzo, Chapter V ("El duque de los gatos"), p. 317. Translated from the Spanish.

in his knowledge, confident in his ability to tame, through evil, the forces of nature. He thereby hopes to gain acceptance in a world which had previously rejected him.

Judaeo-Christian tradition denies to man the power to prolong his earthly existence indefinitely. Pier Francesco therefore directs his search for immortality by appealing to the powers of the occult. He pursues his quest through three avenues, astrology, demonology, and finally, alchemy. Quite probably, for reasons having to do with his life and traumas, Orsini's exploration of the occult is more intense than it was for the generality of Renaissance men. This dimension enters at the very inception of his life, as Mujica Láinez indicates his intention of fusing fact and fiction, magic and historical verisimilitude:

Sandro Benedetto, físico y astrólogo de mi pariente, el ilustre Nicolás Orsini, condottiero a quien, después de su muerte, compararon con los héroes de la Ilíada, trazó mi horóscopo el 6 de marzo de 1512¹

The horoscope, with its deceptive or ambiguous message, foreshadows the ultimate destruction of the protagonist even as it sets the ominous tone of the narrative:

. . . cuando yo nací, Sandro Benedetto señaló importantes contradicciones en la cartografía de mi existencia. Es cierto que el Sol en signo de agua, reforzado con mi buen aspecto ante la Luna, me confería poderes ocultos y la visión del más allá, con

¹Ibid., Chapter I ("El Horóscopo"), p. 9.

vocación para la Astrología y la Metafísica. Es cierto que Marte, regente primitivo, y Venus, ocasional, de la casa VIII, la de la Muerte, estaban instalados, de acuerdo con lo que Benedetto subrayó insistentemente, en la Casa de la Vida y anulados para la muerte y que en buen aspecto con el Sol y la Luna, parecían otorgarme una vida ilimitada Y que Venus . . . indicaba facilidad para las invenciones artísticas sutiles. Pero también es tremendamente cierto que el maléfico Saturno, agresivamente ubicado, me presagiaba desgracias infinitas¹

The protagonist places his faith in his horoscope just as did his pagan ancestors. This provides the link between the pagan or profane and the sacred elements which are fused in Bomarzo. As an opening paragraph, it sets the tone for the rest of the novel, defining and presaging Pier Francesco's worldly ambitions and his subsequent quest for immortality. Ultimately, it is this mistaken notion of the power of the occult which leads the protagonist to self-destruction.

If the horoscope is his first intimation of the occult, the next encounter with the esoteric involves demonology. Devil-worship belongs again to the realm of pagan and pre-Christian substrata which survived throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In Bomarzo, Pier Francesco relies on the power of the demonologist Silvio de Narni to attain the love of his first wife, Julia Farnese. However much he witnesses the rites of his companion Silvio, he nevertheless cannot shake his skepticism as to their efficacy. He can never concede that Julia

¹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

becomes truly his wife as a result of Silvio's pact with the Devil, and neither is he totally convinced that his father and brothers perish, indirectly perhaps, as his servant Silvio invokes the demons Amon, Saracil, Sathiel and Jana.

Demonology adds a certain flavor of the profane as a counterpoint to the strongly moralistic historical account of the era. It is a subterfuge the author employs as a stepping-stone to depict his protagonist's last and most important encounter with the esoteric sciences in the novel: his study of alchemy, the close relative of modern chemistry.

The alchemist we are brought face to face with in Bomarzo is none other than Paracelsus. Paracelsus is introduced as a sorcerer rather than as a man of science; "En medio de los vapores amarillentos, su cara lívida asomaba, como la de un brujo."¹ His character, ambiguous function and philosophy of science is traced according to the attitudes put forth by Eliade in his studies on hermetism. But here we are faced with a man of legend rather than a man of science. He contributes an element of magic to the already fantastic tone of the narrative. The historical Paracelsus, however, is still much shrouded in doubt. In the history of modern medicine, he is the

¹Ibid., Chapter VI ("El retrato de Lorenzo Lotto"), p. 331.

rebel surgeon whose contribution to the treatment of diseases such as gout, kidney malfunction and syphillis was of unparalleled importance in the Renaissance. He is remembered "for introducing chemicals as medicine, for putting alchemy to work in healing His greatest contribution was his endless asking of bold questions and reaching for their answers. By his courage he made it possible to sweep aside the curtain, drawn for a thousand years, on all that was stagnant and stifling in the ancient teaching about health and disease."¹

Paracelsus is symbolic of the rational world of scientific discovery and the irrational world sought out through the esoteric sciences. As a historical character in Bomarzo, he shares with the protagonist of the novel an interest in the attainment of immortality. To some of his peers, Paracelsus is a worthy follower of Hippocrates; to others, he is but a quack and devil worshipper. He is introduced as the leading influence in the second half of Bomarzo, although one is much aware of his presence throughout the book. We are first introduced to him through hearing divergent opinions as to his character, voiced by travelers at a roadside inn between Bomarzo and Venice. He is the subject of a contrapuntal argument in which both followers and enemies enumerate or question

¹Sarah R. Riedman, Masters of the Scalpel (New York: Rand McNally, 1964), pp. 44-5.

Paracelsus' knowledge and magic powers. To some he represents evil; to others, good, or the mastery of nature. He is immersed in controversy as the argument draws again upon the ambiguous nature of what is termed "evil." For, if he uses evil means indiscriminately, he is responsible for the well-being of many. What pragmatism must be involved in the trials of the man who accepts the validity of witches' brews if they serve the cause of science. But such is the state of scientific research in sixteenth-century Europe; and Paracelsus, as controversial a figure as he must have been and as this fictional representation suggests, ranked with Galileo and Celsus as one of those "freaks" of nature who laid the foundations of modern science.

This fitting contrapuntal argument (pp. 313-320) does not clarify the ambiguous historical image we have of Paracelsus. However, Pier Francesco, who had previously looked askance at the practices of his demonologist servant, is no longer a skeptic in the presence of Paracelsus, placing his confidence in the "man of science." Alchemy, unlike demonology, could bring immortality to the protagonist and Paracelsus leads the way, in the fictitious world of Bomarzo, to the uncovering of the magic potion which will assure eternal life.

The dimension of the alchemist in search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life brings Bomarzo

to the doors of magic-realism. This vision involves the novelist's perception of hidden essences, of a complex and multiple reality, rich in texture, unfolding through the world of outer appearances an inner world of unperceived reality.

Pier Francesco does not believe in the God of Old or New Testament (nor, for that matter, does modern man, heir to the Renaissance, have a deep religious commitment). He is a pagan who relates to the Etruscan spirits of the region of Bomarzo. His paganism is historically credible, because it takes place against the background of the commonly known corruption which permeated the church hierarchy during the Renaissance. But his cynicism is directed solely at establishment ideology, and does not preclude a belief in the existence of a divine dimension in nature which can be the object of an intense faith. He turns to the work of Dastyn and Paracelsus because he believes that the two alchemists are closer to discovering and taming the powerful forces guiding human destiny than are the obsequious but shallow popes of the Renaissance. It is through alchemy that Pier Francesco finds his theism: for alchemy treats nature not only as matter alive, but searches for the divine or sacred dimension which transcends the purely material qualities of the natural realm. The alchemist emerges as the most enlightened "priest" of the Renaissance. Curiously, Mujica Láinez'

fictitious representation of these early men of science is parallel to contemporary accounts of the emergence of the science of alchemy, with its secret myths and esoteric symbols, as a precursor of modern Western civilization. The goals of Pier Francesco and Paracelsus are those revealed in Mircea Eliade's study on the origins and structure of alchemy:

If our analysis and interpretation are well founded, alchemy prolongs and consummates a very old dream of "homo faber": collaboration in the perfecting of matter while at the same time securing perfection for himself One common factor emerges from all these tentative probings: in taking upon himself the responsibility of changing nature, man put himself in the place of Time; that which would have required millenia or aeons to "ripen" in the depths of the earth, the metallurgists and alchemists claim to be able to achieve in a few weeks.¹

Furthermore, as we see very clearly in Bomarzo, the alchemist is represented as the supreme priest or worshipper, firm in the conviction that he is working in conjunction with god-like natural essences:

The alchemists considered their work as a perfecting of Nature, tolerated if not encouraged by God. Far removed though they were from the ancient metallurgists and smiths, they nevertheless continued the same attitude vis-a-vis Nature. For the primitive miner, as for the western alchemist, Nature is a hierophany. It is not only "alive"; it is also "divine"; it has, at least, a divine dimension. It is . . . thanks to this sacred quality of nature . . . that the alchemist thought he could obtain his transmuting agent, the Philosopher's Stone, as well as his Elixir of Immortality.²

¹Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible, p. 169.

²Ibid., p. 170.

In his search for immortality, the protagonist of Bomarzo seeks to free himself from the laws of Time very much as the alchemist wishes to free nature from the laws of Time--as evidenced in the desire to change base metals into gold, or by reversing the aging process of the base human metal through the Elixir Vitae.

According to Manuel Mujica Láinez, another form of achieving immortality, equally a product of a vision entailing the "magical" handling of words and concepts, is the path of artistic creativity. But the protagonist of his novel considers this path to immortality as futile compared to the alchemist's promise of eternal life and spiritual fulfillment. In other words, art which does not mirror reality in all its complexity is futile and incomplete, and only an art which rediscovers the previously veiled soul of things can stand the test of time.

Orsini muses:

Cuál era la auténtica de las dos verdades, y cuál la absurda fantasía: si el alquimista que, hundido como un topo en el seno de la tierra, rodeado de efigies de los supremos taumaturgos, mezclaba sus filtros buscando la fórmula del oro y de la inmortalidad, o los hombres de letras que con bellas palabras astutas, esforzándose para hipnotizarse entre sí por medio de metáforas y emblemas, practicaban otra forma de magia, preciosa y estéril.¹

To the modern mind it is, of course, art and pro-
creation, rather than alchemy, which are the only paths
to immortality open to man. But Pier Francesco, guided

¹Mujica Láinez, Bomarzo, p. 511.

by the light of the Renaissance, seeks for a true immortality "sin alegorías ni trampas retóricas." This search, traversing all the realms of human endeavor and never crowned by fulfillment, leads him ultimately to the world of magic. Possibly presaging the sentiments of those modern alchemists, the worshippers of science, Pier Francesco finds in alchemy that which human contact could not give him,

el calor de una atmósfera de arrebató, de real
maravilla cuyo origen espurio no disminuía la¹
intensidad de su estremecimiento vivificante.

With this search, Pier Francesco leaves the temporal age of historical fiction for the world of essences, for the realm of the divine, that which Manuel Mujica Láinez terms "real maravilloso."

Since Pier Francesco dies an unexpected death, poison having been added to the supposed Elixir Vitae, the secret of immortality perishes with him. The reader's curiosity is never satisfied, and we have a rather moralistic ending in which the very human villain must perchance find his death as justification and punishment for previous acts of violence. Thus, from the perspective of poetic justice, we are confronted with the problem of human fate or destiny and what decides it. The astrologer had predicted immortality at Orsini's birth; but his search for immortality entailed a sacrifice of the

¹Ibid., p. 488.

ethical dimension, and this sacrifice is what in turn condemns the hero to a violent, abnormal death. The unethical being cannot attain immortality, according to the canons of poetic or literary justice.

Whatever vision regarding twentieth-century man we can extract from this, it must be tied in with the protagonist's self-examination as he confronts his circumstances and the dilemmas of survival. We recognize ourselves in the portrayal of this complex and vulnerable human being. He is archetypical man seeking for permanence, where permanence does not exist. In Bomarzo, man sees himself not only in the mirror of history, but also in that of psychology. These two perspectives enable the twentieth-century writer to endow the sixteenth-century man with a greater richness or complexity of personality, while at the same time indicating that the forces governing human destiny are universally the same, and that technological or scientific advances do not provide a solution to the same basic problems that transcend the centuries. Man's inability to become the forger and master of his own destiny is demonstrated. However, we also perceive that this "powerless" or "impotent" man is, simultaneously, the only center of the universe. We are provided with a Renaissance view as well as with a twentieth-century view of man's potentiality in a world

from which the gods have fled, but where the ancient myths remain as symbols of the quest for eternal fulfillment.

The Place of Bomarzo in the
Literary Development of
Mujica Láinez

Manuel Mujica Láinez began as a writer of historical fiction and certain recurrent themes can be traced from his early short stories to his latest works. It cannot be said that he wishes to teach through history. He does tell us that history repeats itself and that man will forever be blinded by power and artifice. He asserts that history moves not so much in spirals as conceived by Spengler, and certainly not in a unilinear direction of progress as taught by Hegel, but in cycles. If the names change, both human potential and the contingencies of accident present themselves in monotonous repetition.

But in Mujica Láinez this vision of history is deepened by the added dimension of psychohistory; and it was the latter dimension of the narrative which led him, in Bomarzo, to utilize a narrative form most appropriately entitled magic-realism. Fact and fiction, truth and beauty, aesthetics and history, serve to frame the dualistic tendencies of Bomarzo. The experiments with magic and the occult are clothed in richly textured prose not unlike the baroque prose used by Asturias and Carpentier in some of the most important works of narrative in contemporary Latin America.

Bomarzo is an original example of a historically based narrative in which divergent elements such as fantasy, hermetism, art history, and historical verisimilitude are found harmoniously fused to recreate an era in all its brilliance. The vision is plausible due to the perception of a protagonist of great complexity who, we are led to believe, is the archetypical Renaissance man.

In his later works, Manuel Mujica Láinez moves further into magic-realism. Bomarzo still deals with a historically based figure in an era illustrated by verifiable historical data; with the protagonists of De milagros y de melancolías and Crónicas reales, the author moves decidedly into the realm of the fantastic.

In Bomarzo, history triumphs at the expense of fantasy; in the following historical novel, El Unicornio, fantasy triumphs over historical truth. In essence, the author declares his predilection for "beauty," not at the expense of "truth," but of "beauty as truth." It is in this vein that he comments in the semi-autobiographical work Cecil:

¿Destituír a la leyenda de su función de auxiliar poética de la historia? ¿Desterrarla de un texto en el que lo lírico ocupa amplio espacio? Sería necio e inútil. Ella triunfa siempre con su seducción.¹

Bomarzo sets the tone and style the author was to make his own in future novels such as El Unicornio, De

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, Cecil (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1972), p. 71.

milagros y de melancolías, Crónicas reales, and El viaje de los siete demonios. The leitmotifs are woven in a careful net of constants, which are provided by basic literary topics: life and death; the search for immortality; the attainment of self-knowledge through the esoteric sciences or through an examination of the human psyche; unrequited love, and love in all its many changing faces. Each of these works is set in the past, and just as Alejo Carpentier's historical novel, El siglo de las luces is an amalgam of realism and fantasy, so also do history, magic and demonology play an important part in recreating the very imposing "univers imaginaire" of Manuel Mujica Láinez.

It is fair to conclude that Bomarzo is a genuine example of magic-realism if we accept Carpentier's definition of the term. It fits this category because of its fundamental fusion of history and the fantastic, of the plausible and the impossible. It differs from the magic-realist novels of Carpentier and other Latin American writers because they have dealt with the history and pre-history of the pre- and post-Colombian cultures. Manuel Mujica Láinez' narrative deals almost entirely with European history, and therefore, with European man. But this feature may only accentuate the relevance of Bomarzo for the contemporary reader. The protagonist's frustrating attempts to master himself and his destiny are symbolic

of the quest of twentieth-century man, and it is appropriate to witness these themes not in some remote past but in the very heart of the century and the society that gave birth to modern western civilization.

CHAPTER IV

MAGIC-REALISM AND THE APOCALYPTIC VISION

OF MAN IN EL UNICORNIO

A characteristic of magic-realist narrative is that, while focusing, almost without exception, on some aspect of historical reality, it does so through an incorporation of elements which are unquestionably "unreal." The classification which Mario Vargas Llosa gives to the real-imaginary in his book García Márquez, historia de un deicidio comes to mind. According to it, the real-imaginary can be achieved by the use of four different elements: the magic, the miraculous, the mythical-legendary and the fantastic.¹ These four elements are, in varying

¹"Llamo 'mágico,' al hecho real imaginario provocado mediante artes secretas por un hombre ('mago') dotado de poderes o conocimientos extraordinarios; 'milagroso' al hecho imaginario vinculado a un credo religioso y supuestamente decidido o autorizado por una divinidad, o que hace suponer la existencia de un más allá; 'mítico-legendario' al hecho imaginario que procede de una realidad histórica sublimada y pervertida por la literatura; y 'fantástico' al hecho imaginario 'puro,' que nace de la estricta invención y que no es producto ni de arte, ni de la divinidad, ni de la tradición literaria: el hecho real imaginario que ostenta como su rasgo más acusado una soberana gratuidad." Mario Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio (Barcelona-Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1971), p. 529. From Chapter VII, "Realidad total, novela total."

degrees of importance, what constitutes the fictitious, or real-imaginary, world in Manuel Mujica Láinez' historical novel, El Unicornio. Published in 1965, it follows closely in the footsteps of Bomarzo, signifying a marked progression effected by the author from the purely historical account to the tale of the fantastic.

El Unicornio is unmistakably historical in both the author's vision of twelfth-century France and in his perception of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem at the close of the Second Crusade, as well as in his account of the spiritual turmoil underlying the historical phenomena surrounding the crusades. Yet, for all the historicity and descriptive verisimilitude found in this novel, one cannot fail to observe that the intent no longer lies with the faithful portrayal of an historical age, nor with the realistic psychological development of the heroine, but rather with the poetic rendition of an age of which hero and heroine become prophetic symbols. That the fairy-tale protagonist Melusina does not appear as human or as historical as the protagonists of Manuel Mujica Láinez' previous narratives is indicative of the author's emphatic projection of poetic symbolism upon the world of historical truth, of fantasy upon reality. In this novel, the elements previously termed as "real-imaginary" appear with a clarity hitherto unperceived in the author's historical works. We are indeed dealing with magic, miracle, myth

and fantasy; and these elements are fundamental to the understanding of history, of social, moral and religious consciousness in twelfth-century France.

The elements of magic-realist narrative are elements basic to poetry, and in particular to the epic and lyric romances of wide distribution throughout the Middle Ages. This concern for the literary antecedent--of which the numerous legends woven around King Arthur and Charlemagne provide ample proof--is found throughout the composition of El Unicornio. The author has fashioned his heroes and their experiences as they embark on two pilgrimages, one through the Poitou, and one to Jerusalem, according to the romantic visions of the medieval bard. In so doing, he has succeeded in juxtaposing two perfectly complementary views of an era--that provided by the poet, spiritual recorder of his age, and by the chronicler, historical interpreter of his age. This juxtaposition or interpolation of two worlds appears to reinforce a view, as it did previously in Bomarzo, which is somewhat obtuse to the historian. It implies that poetry holds as much truth about the movement of man as does the historical chronicle. Thus, in the context of the novel, the fusion of poetic symbolism and historical data, rediscovered from the medieval French epic, becomes as important a source of knowledge as history, offering renewed interest in the

study of the psychological and spiritual dimension of medieval man.

The purpose of this chapter will be two-fold. First, using Mario Vargas Llosa's definition of the real-imaginary as a point of departure, I shall attempt to show how its four elements--magic, the miraculous or prodigious, the mythical-legendary, and fantasy--are here combined with the objective reality provided by the historical event to portray a multi-faceted era such as the Middle Ages, and a particularly interesting spiritually-based movement such as the crusades.

Secondly, there are some points of interest with regard to the first-person narrator, the incidents of the plot and the introduction of fantasy in the narrative of El Unicornio which provide a marked contrast to the stylistic and structural composition of the previous work, Bomarzo. El Unicornio presents thematic leitmotifs similar to those of the preceding work on the Italian Renaissance. It answers Pier Francesco's call for immortality in the face of human deception and political chaos by showing that immortality is senseless where love is denied. But it goes deeper than Bomarzo did in the symbolic portrayal of the dialectical forces of good and evil which stand at the heart of the historical event, implying that these forces can be either of an external nature, as medieval man believed, or of an internal nature, as part

of each and every man's own dualistic claim to self-fulfillment or self-destruction.

In El Unicornio, the historical framework serves to reinforce the real-imaginary world, the world of fiction and poetic symbolism, of which the character Melusina is a foremost exponent.

In order to expose the "real-imaginary" elements in this work, we shall first look into the world of objective-reality, of history, which forms the setting for the development of this novel.

Myth, Fantasy and Literary Tradition: Medieval France

As was the case in Bomarzo, so also in El Unicornio, history cannot be separated from the concerns of man's spiritual quests at a given point in time. The latter must be incorporated as an important element, although not a self-sufficient one, in the perception of an era.

The twelfth century marks an awakening in the creative energies of European man, notably in the realms of history and literature, and presents a sharp contrast to the preceding "Dark Ages." This is particularly so in France, and "the civilization of southern France in the twelfth century was generally held to be the first notable secular culture since classical antiquity."¹

¹Lionel Gossman, Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 299. From Chapter 10, "The Histoire Littéraire des Troubadours."

Manuel Mujica Láinez focuses his attention on this particular region of France. The Poitou becomes the idyllic setting of the first part of El Unicornio: its gently rolling countryside becomes the inspiration of the troubadour, its language, the doux provençal, becomes the language of the courtly poet. The Poitou was one of Eleanor of Aquitaine's hereditary possessions. Poitiers, one of the region's most important cities, became Eleanor's residence in the year 1170, shortly before the narrative time of El Unicornio. With Eleanor's eldest daughter, Marie de Champagne, the prestige of the region was enhanced as it became the literary center of France. And since much of the crusader spirit originated in this region (for such historical figures as William IX, Raymond of Poitiers and Aimery of Lusignan were born in France's Midi), the action of the plot fittingly commences in Lusignan's ancestral chapel, home of Melusina, fairy of the Poitou.

The actual time-span of the plot in El Unicornio is limited to approximately fourteen years. It corresponds, historically speaking, to the time of Philip of Flanders' pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the year 1177. In fact, the second half of El Unicornio describes how Aiol and the metamorphosed fairy "Melusín de Pleurs" enlist in Philip of Flanders' crusading army. Their observations while in France and, later, in the Holy Land, provide the historical

subject matter, the world of the real-objective necessary to an understanding of El Unicornio's dualistic framework.

Melusina's narrative begins in the year 1174, an important turning point in the ever-violent encounters between the Moslem East and the Christian West. It is the year when Saladin proclaims a "jihad," a holy war which has the political objective of uniting the various quarrelsome Moslem principalities into a single force which can successfully destroy the weakening Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem. The fragmented leadership of the Christian communities in the Holy Land increases the probability of a Moslem victory. And in this same year of 1174, Amalric, King of Jerusalem, dies, leaving his thirteen-year-old son, Baldwin IV, to face alone the Christian disintegration and the Moslem onslaught.

The shadow of Baldwin the Leper is projected symbolically as an image of pain, courage and dissolution throughout El Unicornio. He is the last king of the male line of Godfrey, the first crusader knight to establish the Frankish dominion in Jerusalem. Historians speak highly of him, and his life is tinged with the same heroism displayed in the medieval epic:

Valiant the spirit that endured the growing pain,
without respite or hope--cherishing, like a dream, the
memory of that day when he had been still sightly . .
. . He moved like a man in pain, sitting upon a bench,
his hands hidden in his sleeves. Men awaited within
sound of his voice, but he did not call them. For he

was the son of Amalric, Baldwin, by the Grace of God sixth king in the holy state of Jerusalem.¹

Another account describes Baldwin's struggle and courage in a manner similar to Manuel Mujica Láinez' fictionalized portrayal:

This descendant of Baldwin II and Fulk of Anjou, of Gabriel of Melitene and Joscelin of Courtenay, was born for action, and however genuine his piety he was never, even at the end of his short life when his limbs were literally falling from his body, to find consolation in the mystic's exaltation or the peace of prayer. Up to the last moment he wanted to be a king and a general, and he wanted to be obeyed. It was his way of clinging to life and he was a terrible fighter.²

King Baldwin is one of the most important historical figures presented in El Unicornio. He belongs to the realm of the real-objective, offering a contrast as a "real," historical presence of painful struggle, to the world depicted by the imaginative Melusina. As a character within the novel, he emerges fully only during the second half of Melusina's account, and even then we are aware of his presence but marginally. He is but a point of leverage in the structure of the work, an allegory of spiritual and physical destruction such as that mirrored by the fall of Jerusalem.

¹Harold Lamb, The Crusades (New York: Bantam Editions, 1962), p. 295.

²Zoé Oldenbourg, The Crusades, translated from the Frency by Anne Carter (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1966), p. 388.

Whereas the first four chapters of El Unicornio deal chiefly with Melusina's wandering through the French Midi, thereby constructing for the reader a romanticized version of courtly France in the twelfth century, the last five chapters follow the events leading up to the destruction of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem.

The difference between what we may refer as the first and second halves of El Unicornio is simultaneously one of geographical location, historical consciousness and narrative "point of view." For there is a definite structural rift in this work which stems primarily from the literary concerns of the first half of the novel, as opposed to the chronicle-like exposure of historical events in the second half. At the root of this duality, joining the two worlds of the real-imaginary and the real-objective, stands the first-person narrator, the fairy Melusina.

Melusina begins her account of the "true" Middle Ages in the chapel of the Lusignans "en aquel verano del año 1174" (p. 34), and ends it with the loss of Jerusalem to the hosts of Saladin in 1188. The first half of the novel, that concerned with a vision of literary and courtly France, covers the years from 1174 to 1177, and corresponds to the time when the narrator is an invisible and omnipresent being. The second half of the book is narrated first by Melusín de Pleurs, the transformed fairy who has

willingly lost her "magic powers" in her search for love. Melusín embarks with Aiol to the Holy Land, serving as his companion until shortly before the end of the narrative time. During the battle of Hattin (1187), Melusín dies. The account is thereupon resumed by Melusina, who is soon forced to witness and record the tragic death of her beloved Aiol. Thus, historically speaking, the second half of El Unicornio spans more than a decade, following the fortunes of the Franks from the victory at Montgisard (1177) to the fall of Jerusalem in 1188. The novel's dénouement occurs shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, with a resolution in which Aiol dies and Melusina returns to her fairy realm.

These are the main historical events in a consideration of the novel's spatial and temporal structure. These details are "real-objective" in nature and provide the essential background for the unfolding of the "real-imaginary" elements in El Unicornio. It must be stressed that those elements which compose the real-imaginary within the novel cannot be separated from that other reality, here arbitrarily called "real-objective." For in Mujica Láinez' portrayal the real-imaginary and the real-objective coexist and complement each other towards a poetic and historical synthesis of the Middle Ages.

The narrator-protagonist of El Unicornio, a mythical-legendary being, is symbolic of the

real-imaginary. It is a fairy's account we are presented with: we are to explore reality through the eyes of an unreal, fictional being.

As a point of departure in the novel, Mujica Láinez inserts a short quotation preceding the actual narrative. It is from Victor Hugo's poem Une Fée, and reads "cachée en tout ce que je vois." The account, as this poem implies, is to be about a "hidden dimension," a hidden soul at the root of the external world of accident and contingency. The novel is about things unseen: mythical, legendary beings which are not part of our everyday experience but which do, at least symbolically, exist in medieval literary tradition and medieval lore, undergird objective-reality, explain the inexplicable. This quotation is therefore a fitting introduction for the fairy Melusina, a heroine who, belonging to the world of the unreal, will proceed to illustrate how the world of the objectively real partakes of this hidden essence.

Out of the synthesis of Melusina's observations and experience, we obtain a view of the historically real medieval man, a view not too different from the faithful historian's observations on the culture of medieval man. For the historian tells us that

the first essential fact to be borne in mind is the simple and obvious one that at this period man was still the measure of all things Man was therefore infinitely closer to physical reality than we can be now. Tools and raw materials had a value and immediacy not easy for us to understand. The

direct contact with matter whose laws he knew only empirically made man superstitious more than we are today, and more skillful and enterprising.¹

Medieval man is then portrayed according to both historical and literary sources in El Unicornio. The introduction of a fantastic element in the narrative is itself important to the understanding of medieval superstitions and pagan beliefs, however much the reader's skepticism may resist this fantastic element. For this reason, Manuel Mujica Láinez explicitly entreats the skeptic to leave the book. To understand fully medieval man's spiritual turbulence and physical quests implies faith. The reader must, if he is to listen to this "true" account, accept, if only symbolically, the validity of the fairy's narrative:

Es la historia de un hada, la vida de un hada; que quien no crea en las hadas, cierre este libro y lo arroje a un canasto o lo reduzca al papel suntuario de relleno de su biblioteca, lamentando el precio seguramente substancioso que habrá pagado por su gruesa estructura. Al proceder así y al no tener en cuenta que todo, absolutamente todo, en este mundo inexplicable, funciona por razones que se nos escapan, su escepticismo anticuado, que tacharía de victoriano, de no mediar mi respeto por esa reina, lo privará de enterarse de asuntos de interés trascendente.²

These "asuntos de interés trascendente" refer to affairs of the spirit and indicate that this novel is concerned about

¹Oldenbourg, p. 2.

²Manuel Mujica Láinez, El Unicornio (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1965), Chapter I, "El hada, el caballero y el doncel," p. 13.

recreating a past age through a re-enactment of human motives and psyche. The relationship of Melusina and Aiol, the human object of the fairy's love, stands at the heart of the novel's structure. This romantic, never-fulfilled relationship serves to portray the spirit of an age as it was captured by the medieval bard. All the elements of the medieval epic are here: the romantic longing for meaning, purity and order; the display of courage in chivalric tournaments as well as in that higher expression of the chivalric spirit, the crusade; the sensual images floating through the stream of the narrative; the presence of the demon in the form of carnal temptation, and of the angel in the form of final redemption. All these elements add up to a romanticized vision of an age which resembles the self-interpretation of that age as provided by its chansons de geste and its courtly romances.

Melusina is a mythical-legendary symbol of pagan life. The name is linked both to the region of the Poitou and to the Lusignan family, members of the French nobility. The Grand Larousse Encyclopédique provides the following information about the fairy:

Personage fabuleux, dont la légende a été contée pour la première fois dans un roman de Jean d'Arras (1387). Mélusine a reçu de sa mère, une fée, le don d'avoir, le samedi le bas du corps en forme de serpent. Elle épouse le comte Raymondin, auquel elle fait promettre de ne jamais chercher à le voir le samedi. Elle bâtit pour lui le château de Lusignan; un jour, Raymondin surprend au bain le secret de Mélusine, qui s'échappe par une fenêtre du château en poussant des cris affreux. On racontait qu'on l'entendait pousser

des cris chaque fois qu'un malheur frappait le seigneur de Lusignan.¹

Manuel Mujica Láinez establishes the identity of Melusina by providing her with the traits ascribed to her in the legends cited above. The myth of Mélusine forms the subject matter of the first chapter in El Unicornio. But it is literature, and not exactly history, that establishes the fictional authenticity of the fabled Melusina of legendary tradition. As a mythical-legendary being, she partakes of both a fictitious and a real world, in that she is presented as an imaginary being with a historical past--a literary history which stretches far back in time to the hoary pre-historic past of which we know very little. At the heart of this myth is an element of truth, but it has been obscured, sublimated, exaggerated and even perverted to the point where, as in so many myths besides Melusina's, the kernel of truth can only be revealed in an overall synthesis of the figure's symbolic, metaphorical, and allegorical nature.

Melusina's essence prior to the incidents of the novel is traced and developed in various ways. First, there is the description of the source from which the winged serpent-tailed fairy emerges: her story belongs to medieval lore and poetry--"esas son exageraciones de Juan de Arrás, novelista que, trazando mi historia en el siglo

¹Grand Larousse Encyclopédique (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1963), tome septième.

XIV para el duque de Berry, señor de Lusignan"¹

This is followed by extensive summary of her engineering accomplishments. This is rooted in the common practice of folklore, according to which men sought to explain the marvelously engineered medieval structures by ascribing them to the "magic" arts of the fairy.²

Further testimony of the symbolic strength of Melusina's mythical being, as it evolved in the consciousness of the French nobility, is her widespread appearance as a symbolic motif on many a nobleman's coat of arms:

Cuando mis descendientes--entre ellos los de la Rochefoucauld, tarde, en el siglo XVII--resolvieron incorporarme a sus blasones, asomando mi torso desnudo en cimera sobre las coronas y los yelmos³

Melusina's genealogical influence spreads far and wide, and she became a recognized ancestor of the most important aristocratic houses of Europe:

Mi linaje se extendió Príncipes y reyes de Jerusalén, de Chipre, de Armenia y de Bohemia, se dividieron mi legado sanguíneo de hada catastrófica; resultó de buen tono proceder del hada Melusina y, a medida que el árbol de mi progenie alargaba sus ramas internacionales, los duques de Luxemburgo, los Pembroke ingleses, los Parthenay, los Lézé, los Eu, los Dié, los Saint-Valérien, los Saint-Gelais, los de la Rochefoucauld, los Cabièrre d'Aragon, los Sassenage, los Candillat, los Saint-Séverin, los Chateauroux y sus alianzas innúmeras.⁴

¹Mujica Láinez, El Unicornio, Chapter I, p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 24.

³Ibid., p. 29.

⁴Ibid., p. 33.

Melusina's symbolism is far-reaching. As an immortal fairy, she is both an omniscient and an omnipresent first-person narrator. She symbolizes the pagan ideal--both pre-Christian and prehistoric. In the context of the novel, she becomes the supernatural agent of the fantastic, situated half-way between the demon and the angel. As a supernatural being, she sees while remaining herself invisible; she metamorphoses herself into any possible form; and she has supernatural powers, as, for example, to read the mind of Aiol. The psychological development of both Aiol and Melusina is given at least a semblance of realism, for the narrator is allowed total control of the hero's motives. She is also the agent of the magical and the fantastic elements in this novel, while merely recording the miraculous-Christian elements as they appear.

Manuel Mujica Láinez introduces Melusina's life story in order to set the tone and character of the narrative, following in the lines of the legendary-literary figure. Not without humor, Melusina tells us that she is highly qualified to tell her story: "era graduada en fantasía." The narrative proceeds with an account of the mythical-legendary past, the tone a parody of the medieval romance:

Me llamo Melusina y la sola mención de mi nombre
debería bastar

Mi padre Elinas, que otros apellidan Thiaus . . .
era rey de Albania, es decir, de Escocia; mi madre,

Presina, era un hada. Por aquel entonces, quien no gozaba del privilegio de ser hijo de un rey, se enfrentaba en la vida con serios obstáculos La prueba es que la mayoría de los grandes personajes de la naciente literatura fueron hijos de reyes. Sin embargo, mi desgracia eterna procede del hecho de ser la hija de un rey. Y de un hada; no olvidemos al¹ hada, causa principal del infortunio que padezco.

As her father, King Elinas, does not honour his liaison with Presina, Melusina grows naturally revengeful:

Llegó el día que nos graduamos de bachilleres en ciencia mágica y, merced a un encanto, encerramos a nuestro padre Elinas en la montaña de Brumbeloy, para más precisión, en el frío condado de Northumberland.²

When Presina discovers that her former lover has been punished, she is overcome with tenderness and remorse, and, in her rage at her daughter, devises a form of punishment for Melusina:

Me sentencié a metamorfosearme, los sábados, en un monstruo mitad mujer y mitad serpiente. Mi marido--si me casaba--no debería verme bajo ese aspecto desazonante; aún más, debería ignorar que esa transmutación semanal existía, pues de lo contrario yo sufriría para siempre, como mi desdichada hermana Meliás, la insoportable penitencia de la inmortalidad.³

The fairy's account continues its description of her subsequent marriage with Raimondín and Raimondín's betrayal when Presina's curse is fulfilled:

Y por primera vez lancé mi grito destinado a ser célebre el grito de Melusina, de la mère Lusine, la mater Lucinia, la madre de los Lusignan. No me creí capaz de tal estruendo Mi esposo me había

¹Ibid., p. 13

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Ibid., p.

descubierto, quebrando el pacto, y el anuncio de mi madre debía cumplirse.¹

To this point we have listened to the already familiar fairy tale of Melusina. What remains is the unusual physical presence of the fairy--one felt throughout El Unicornio. As a supernatural being, Melusina is pictured with vampire-like wings and a serpent tail. Her body, half woman, half reptile, reminds us of other mythical beings with which medieval lore was replete and which were, sometimes, derived from Greek antiquity. The centaurs, the Chimera, and the sirens are versions, as is Melusina, of beings juxtaposing beastly and human characteristics. They all remind us of man's essentially dualistic nature.

Melusina's domestic happiness ends with Raimondín's betrayal: her ill-fated metamorphosis has doomed her to an immortal life, a life she does not desire. No longer is she visible to those surrounding her unless they be creatures of her own fabled species. She resigns herself to this monotonous immortal existence until rescued from it by falling in love with Aiol, the impoverished knight who is the main "human" protagonist of El Unicornio. The unilateral love affair which ensues--for Aiol never suspects even the existence of the fairy Melusina--and the confrontation of Melusina and Aiol with the

¹Ibid., p. 30.

real-objective "historical" world, form the synthesis of medieval culture which is the subject matter of El Unicornio.

One cannot fail to observe the complex fictional world presented in this novel. It is highly ironic that Melusina, a fairy conceived poetically and symbolically in the work of a medieval troubadour should become the narrator and main protagonist of another fictitious narrative in which the world narrated is more "real" than the narrator herself. Melusina, the dream and the fantasy, holds here the key to a faithful interpretation of the world of historical reality.

Once the symbolic status of Melusina is established, once she is given psychological depth--in this case achieved through the heroine's mythical-legendary story--we can proceed to follow her account, and to discover the truth or the synthetic perspective which her life and observations convey. The fantastic element leads no longer to doubt, uncertainty, and ambiguity, but serves rather to enhance, through the symbolism of poetry, qualities which really belong to the world of observable reality, the world of accident and contingency.

Que el sensible lector se convenza: hay, como en la Edad Media, hadas y ángeles, que eso fue la Edad Media: el Hada y el Angel. Y el Demonio.¹

¹Ibid., p. 14.

It is interesting to note that Melusina, as the pagan, pre-Christian Element in the novel, identifies with the Christian ideal both in her description of the chivalric spirit in France and with the development of the crusading fervor that leads to heroic exploits in the quest for the Holy Land. As an explanation of this, it may be argued that the fairy in this novel is not so much representative of the purely pagan or pre-Christian view of the world, as she may be symbolic of the pagan cults and traditions which the Christians incorporated into the teachings of the Church for the benefit of the original pre-Christian inhabitants of western Europe. These cults were so deeply imbedded in the cultural and religious traditions of medieval man that they surfaced in both the literature of the time and in its religious ceremonies. The lives of saints, and in particular, the life of St. Brendan, mentioned in the first part of El Unicornio, exemplify man's encounter with the supernatural. Thus, the hagiographic tale is but one example of the blending together of Christian and pagan elements to portray the intercession of a higher order in earthly concerns. The medieval epic and the medieval courtly romance are further examples of this co-existence of the pagan and the Christian. All these serve to enlighten the reader, as intended by Melusina, about the intellectual and spiritual climate of medieval life.

Melusina becomes an agent of the fantastic as the fantastic partakes of historical reality. She is not only psychologically credible; she also has a history, even if only one based mostly on literary and heraldic antecedent. The history which her numerous descendants endowed her with in poem or coat-of-arms shows the tenacity of their belief in the reality of the fantastic in their lives and destinies.

Adding to the fantastic nature of the narrative is the unexpected transformation of this mythical being, half-way through the novel, into a knight of flesh and blood--much against Melusina's wishes, for she would have preferred to be changed into a maiden. The transformation creates a particular form of ironic tension, deriving from an impossible situation in which the lover cannot accomplish the seduction of the loved one. This ironic "tour de force" is basic to an understanding of the novel's main theme. It shows that Melusina's search for happiness is meaningless in a world moved by occult, unpredictable forces. But she is also doomed to perpetual wandering, and therefore perpetual suffering, as long as she seeks for an elusive "happiness" in the external world of human accident and human limitation. Both of these courses fail to come to grips with the essential nature and meaning of human life. It is Brandan, the lonely hermit whom Melusina

encounters in the Poitou, who holds the answer to the riddle of man's eternal search for self-fulfillment.

Brandan

comprendió que el Paraíso se oculta dentro de cada uno de nosotros y que, para hallarlo, el viaje no debe realizarse hacia los peligros del exterior sino hacia las cavernas y laberintos del interior. Y lo había descubierto entre unas piedras del bosque de Lussac. Allí también abundaban los demonios y los prodigios; allí aguardaba, cuando se había vencido a las tentaciones de la gloria y de la carne, el celeste y mundano Edén.¹

Aiol, the object of Melusina's love, is the second important character in the novel. Insofar as El Unicornio offers an account of the Middle Ages, he is symbolic of the spirit of knighthood. He corresponds in image to the literary ideal of the perfect knight traditionally associated with the Arthurian and Carolingian legend cycles. It is a literary tradition which created a model of exemplary behavior basic to the understanding of the medieval crusader and to his conduct with regard to religion, kinship ties, oaths of loyalty, and women.

But Aiol is also symbolic of the all-too-human struggle against the devil. In El Unicornio, the devil presents himself as a force inherent in the historical process, as well as in the destructive power which develops when man's natural impulses are frustrated by man himself. In Aiol's case, the devil is the eternal seducer, the force which prompts the hero to succumb time and again

¹Ibid., Chapter III, "En la ermita de Lussac," p. 120.

to the temptations of the flesh. To fight this force, Aiol, the "perfect" knight, embarks as a crusader to the land of faith, to the realm of miracle and redemption. There, he hopes to cleanse himself from guilt and to achieve that state of purity which, in Christian terms, can only come out of sacrifice and martyrdom, deprivation and self-immolation.

The two protagonists of this tale, Melusina and Aiol, offer an interesting counterpoint of goals and interests. One desires what the other denies; one acts as a foil to the other's character and intimate needs. The entire situation generates tension through irony, ambiguity, and the widespread use of "double entendres." It is the magical element--the use of fantasy in the fairy-land atmosphere of the work--that saves the narrative from the stalemate which ensues with the knowledge that there is no such thing as an earthly paradise.

Melusina is the agent of the fantastic and magical elements in El Unicornio. She holds the strings of the narrative, fulfilling a function similar to that of the gypsy magician Melquíades in García Márquez' magic-realist novel Cien años de soledad. Melquíades foresees the historical end of the dynasty of the Buendías, while at the same time he is instrumental in educating them to the eternal existence of prodigious elements in nature. Introducing them as "miracles," he gradually develops the

consciousness of the as-yet unsophisticated inhabitants of Macondo.

Melusina is symbolic of that same "hidden" dimension of nature. Just as Melquíades does in García Márquez' novel, she is instrumental in the fusion of poetry and history. Because of her uniqueness as an omnipresent and omniscient narrator, she can interact with the two worlds of the real and the imaginary. Because of her symbolism, her existence as an allegorical, metaphorical figure, she is able to present an eclectic, multidimensional view of the Middle Ages.

Once the author has established Melusina's identity through the description of her mythical-legendary being, he proceeds to guide us on a fantastic voyage spurred on by the heroine's pursuit of self-fulfillment. The voyage, an important theme in the structure of much of Manuel Mujica Láinez' narrative, symbolizes man's internal pilgrimage towards self-understanding and self-realization. Used in this manner, it is a common theme in the magic-realist narrative of Latin America. The musician-protagonist-narrator of Los pasos perdidos, Alejo Carpentier's novel of primeval search, travels from a North American city to the depths of the Venezuelan jungle. In another of Carpentier's novels, El siglo de las luces, the rise to power of Victor Hughes covers a pilgrimage from Europe to the isles of the New World and then back

to Europe. Gabriel García Márquez' saga of the Buendías involves a family's exodus to Macondo, the mythical Aracataca of the author's childhood. Julio Cortázar's existential anti-hero, Horacio Quiroga, searches for a reason for being, first as an exile in Paris, later as an exile in his own homeland. The list could grow substantially longer if we were to trace the numerous voyagers who have journeyed on the spiritual seas first charted by that mythical wanderer from Ithaca, Odysseus.

Thus, the voyage has been used as a literary device throughout the history of fictional narrative. In El Unicornio, the voyage, encompassing first the region of the Poitou and later the Kingdom of Jerusalem, has a dual purpose. First, on the realistic-objective level, it portrays accurately the road taken by pilgrims and crusaders throughout the Middle Ages as they sought to create or restore the Christian kingdom in the Holy Land; secondly, it serves to illustrate an important leitmotif whereby the physical aspect of the voyage symbolizes the internal spiritual search, either for love, as in the case for Melusina, or for freedom from evil (carnal temptation), as in the case of Aiol.

Although some reference has been made already to the type of conflict and the manner in which the main themes (such as the search for self-fulfillment) are presented in El Unicornio, little space has been devoted to a

chronological study of the plot incidents and their resulting conflicts within this complex narrative.

Melusina begins her tale of the Middle Ages, half history and half fantasy, after a long period of quiescence: "sola, en el campanario de Lusignan, no hablo con nadie desde el siglo XII."¹ Her retrospective account of this important era in her life commences in 1174, when she awakens from her legendary dream of centuries' vigil in the tower of the Lusignan chapel, to follow two of her descendants: Ozil, knight of the Unicorn, veteran of the Second Crusade and impoverished cousin of the powerful Lusignans, and his estranged son Aiol, born out of wedlock in Jerusalem, and now a member of an itinerant troop of troubadours en route to Poitiers. Father and son meet after years of separation in the mysterious, dream-like atmosphere of the forest of Lussac, in a scene reminiscent of the prophetic encounters found in the medieval chansons de geste, or in the epic outpourings of Chrétien de Troyes, the "best-seller del siglo XII."²

The case for purity as a thematic leitmotif in El Unicornio is introduced: Ozil is carrying with him his sole earthly possession, the horn of a unicorn. As the title of the book implies, the unicorn becomes synonymous with the hero's search for purity and self-fulfillment; or, if we consider the author's ironic reminder that symbols

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 35.

partake of dualistic tendencies in nature, the unicorn would also bring to our attention those other, antithetical forces (such as carnal temptations) within him which he is seeking to overcome and which are at the root of Aiol's search for purity.¹

Melusina's interest in and subsequent love for Aiol stems from the resemblance of the impoverished young knight to her adored husband Raimondín:

El parecido era portentoso. Acaso ese muchacho ganara en altura y flacura a los de Raimondín, más su rostro y él largo pelo negro que sobre él se volcaba, sus pómulos salientes, su nariz fina y menuda y, especialmente, increíblemente, la diferencia de sus ojos, uno azul y el otro con un tenue tinte áureo, chispa de una luz que acentuaban los reflejos temblones de la antorcha, correspondían con exactitud a los rasgos del hijo del rey de los bretones, de manera que pensé tenerlo ahí redivivo, reencarnado, y el viejo ardor que había quemado mis venas en la fuente de la Sed, la tarde de la cacería famosa, se despezó y torno a encenderme y sofocarme.²

The resemblance of Aiol to Raimondín contributes to the structural continuity of the legend within the novel. This encounter, fantastic in nature, in which Aiol appears to reincarnate the fairy's only love centuries later, provides a welcome element of coincidence that seems to lighten the novel's serious outcome by giving the narrative a sense of freedom and imagination so characteristic of

¹Ibid., pp. 36-38.

²Ibid., p. 43. Aiol's description is highly reminiscent of Percival, the "perfect knight" of the Arthurian legends.

the traditional fairy tale. As the heroine often reaffirms, "para mí, lo mágico, la atmósfera de magia, era tan indispensable como el aire para un mortal."¹

The reappearance of Aiol-Raimondín belongs to the realm of the real-imaginary. The heroine is now to follow her knight in pursuit of her lost youth, seeking to regain the happiness she once experienced as the legendary founder of the house of Lusignan.

Melusina never lets us forget that she is as real as the age she is describing; that she belongs as symbol to that age; that she is as essential as were the Angel and the Devil in the triptych that formed belief and idolatry during the Middle Ages: "La Edad Media pujante, la Edad Media que yo y mi enigma y mi fantasía simbolizábamos con incorporal prestigio"²

As an incorporeal being, she follows Ozil and Aiol, the itinerant troubadour Ithier, and Azelais, Aiol's stepsister, to the town of Poitiers, where Aiol's mother Berta has settled. Berta's story adds local color to the narrative. In her youth, she had accompanied the armies of the second crusade to Jerusalem, where she had been a prostitute, and where Ozil of Lusignan had fathered Aiol. Berta traced her ancestry to the mystic Peter Barthélemy. It was Peter Berthélemy who had discovered, in St. Peter's basilica at Antioch, through the miraculous intercession

¹Ibid., p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 45.

of St. Andrew, the spear known to have wounded Jesus on the cross. This little bit of information, pertaining to the miraculous element in El Unicornio, might pass unnoticed were it not for its becoming important to the outcome of the plot. Aiol is to embark to the Holy Land in search of his great uncle's relic, and he fulfills his goal in the novel's tragic ending.

In Poitiers, two incidents occur which add to the netherworldly atmosphere of this tale. These incidents further attest to the ever-present ironical twists which remind us of the ambiguous nature of reality. The first incident involves the tragic death of Berta's husband Pons, thereby denying Berta's long claim to a normal existence. The second incident of a miraculous nature involves the demonic possession of Aiol's sensuous sister, Azeláis. There are two possible explanations for Azeláis' demonic possession. To begin with, Melusina hints at the possible incestuous relationship that could evolve between Azeláis and Aiol. This fear of incest materializes in Poitiers, where Azeláis succeeds in seducing her stepbrother. To the medieval audience, however--and this is, after all, a novel about the Middle Ages--such a sinful act is necessarily interpreted as the work of the Devil. The narrator perceives a basic dualism in the interpretation of this event, for while she shows medieval man's concern with sin, she perceives, on a higher level, that the notion

of sin is itself unnatural and perverted, stemming from an overly strict, superstitious adherence to Christian principles. Of course, medieval man dared not question those principles; to do so would in itself have constituted heresy.

Azeláis' desire is therefore explained as demonic possession. She appears not as a woman torn by the pain of her impossible situation, but as a being whose body has been appropriated by supernatural powers:

Hincaba los dientes en las briznas; tartajeaba unas palabras ahogadas, en añicos, como si hubiera perdido la razón, y todo su cuerpo, luminoso de tan blanco, se agitaba violentamente en la tenebrosidad del improvisado pórtico A Pons y a mí nos pareció que encima de aquel cuerpo convulso se alzaba, como si se desprendiera de la tenaza de los muslos febriles, un negro vapor, que podía asumir la estatura de un hombre y que, después de oscilar brevemente, se desflecaba, desvaneciéndose en el aire¹

¿Cabía la eventualidad de que un elemento diabólico hubiera intervenido en un incidente tan herméticamente obscuro? Cabía, sin duda, y ya dije que a la sazón el Demonio se inmiscuía en todo²

Melusina, however, questions this superstition "husmeando la paja, en la pesquisa de algún rastro de olor a azufre o a mixtura del Infierno. Pero nada especialmente perverso olf" ³ Hers is the position of the skeptic, the contemporary point of view, and her "enlightened" assessment of the event synthesizes the age as people saw

¹Ibid., Chapter II, "La endemoniada de Poitiers," p. 88.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³Ibid.

it then, and as people see it today. Azeláis is exorcised by the bishop of Poitiers. We hear no more of her until the end of Chapter IV, when she decides to go as a pilgrim to the Holy Land. The cycle of Azeláis' life closes in Jerusalem. She is the mysterious woman in white, constant companion to the leper king Baldwin IV, who has herself contacted the disease. Just as her brother Aiol and countless others, she seeks to redeem her carnal, "sinful" self through total devotion to a higher ideal.

From Berta's tragically torn household, Ozil and Aiol, accompanied by the incorporeal Melusina, set out towards the forest of Lussac. The idyllic setting of Lussac reminds the reader of the forest frequented by King Arthur and his supernatural preceptor, Merlin. In Lussac, Melusina discovers that she has the additional magic power of reading Aiol's mind, and thus, of entering his subconscious. Her earlier suspicion of Aiol's lust for his sister is confirmed. She gains knowledge of Aiol's desires, guilty feelings, and of his need to become a crusader in the Holy Land.

The forest of Lussac becomes, as it did in the Arthurian legends, the meeting point between the pagan and the Christian elements. Here our protagonists encounter Brandan, the saintly hermit with a literary antecedent, who gives them shelter. The author humorously parodies the tone of the literary romance: "Hace aquí su

entrada el santo ermitaño que invariablemente figura en estas narraciones."¹ Brandan's figure is certainly modeled after a hagiographical theme, perhaps referring to a St. Brendan of Irish provenance. The encounter with Brandan is also symbolic in the sense that it echoes the main theme of El Unicornio: the protagonists are searching for an earthly paradise very much as was the wish of the original St. Brendan.

Brendan's story is typical of the "quest" type of literature, of which El Unicornio is a modern echo. According to the medieval tradition, St. Brendan, a monk of royal Irish lineage, wished to see Paradise and Hell before his death. As God granted him his wish, the monk and fourteen companions set out to accomplish this mission. They encountered numerous perils until, after roughly seven years of hardship, they reached Paradise: "The garden of Paradise is full of sweetly perfumed flowers and many different fruits"²

The appearance of the earthly Brandan in El Unicornio signals a welcome change from the atmosphere of death and struggle characteristic of this novel. Brandan's hermitage is propitious to the introduction of

¹Ibid., Chapter III, "En la ermita de Lussac," p. 114.

²John Fox, A Literary History of France: The Middle Ages (London: Barnes & Noble, 1974), p. 36.

further elements of the fantastic. The heroes are surrounded by a world of make-believe in which time is at a standstill. This feeling of timelessness is important to the evocation of the fairy-tale atmosphere, where hero and heroine "live happily ever after." And this feeling of timelessness, however brief, recreates the atmosphere of magic and fantasy which is lost in the scenes of political struggle and spiritual turmoil in the remainder of the novel. Adding to the sense of the supernatural, Brandan's hermitage offers magic potions for the cure of Ozil and Aiol. Goblins such as "Fadet" accomplish the household chores in the dead of night. Even angels seem to surround the saint's retreat, thereby complementing the serious political events with an atmosphere filled with marvelous or prodigious elements.

Brandan's paradise is real in so far as it demonstrates a man's coming to terms with himself and with his surroundings. This, however, is contrary to the knight's (i.e., man's) disposition, which feels the need to conquer the paradise through feats worthy of human strength. Therefore, the protagonists set out from Lussac to meet their uncertain destiny.

On the way, they make a stop at Castel-Roussillon, home of Aymé and Seramunda, and scene of the fourth chapter of El Unicornio. This chapter, titled "El devorado corazón," presents the state of love and courtship in

twelfth century France. Aymé and Seramunda are developed very much according to the literary models of the age they serve to illustrate:

Para ella [Seramunda] como para Alienor de Aquitania y para sus dos hijas, Alix, casada con Thibaut VII de Blois, y María, casada con Enrique I de Champagna--a quienes¹ imitaba dentro de lo que permitían sus recursos

As the narrator humorously suggests, Seramunda "estaba enferma de literatura."² Her total existence revolved around, was bounded by the laws of love and courtship, which, at the time, neglected the husband in favor of a "literary" acceptable lover. Chapter IV offers a strong counterpoint to Brandan's harmonious existence and to the crusading spirit displayed in the last four chapters of El Unicornio. In the court of Aymé and Seramunda, all is passion and jealousy. The heroes encounter once more, another facet of the Middle Ages, and they succumb to the worldly pleasures offered them. It is here that Ozil and Aiol learn of a code of courtship whose ceremonies seem beautiful; but they discover that this courtly life is aimless. The spiritual stalemate which characterizes Aymé and Seramunda leads, in the author's moral view of man's destiny, to their physical death. And our

¹Mujica Láinez, El Unicornio, Chapter IV, "El devorado corazón," p. 130.

²Ibid., p. 130.

protagonists continue on their pilgrimage of life by following the crusaders to the east.

The episode at Castel-Roussillon is highly reminiscent of the second chapter of El Unicornio, set in Berta's hostel at Poitiers. They are similar in dénouement as well as in the thematic leitmotifs they serve to illustrate. Both settings provide an arena for the sensuous element, forcing the heroes to engage in a confrontation with the "Devil."

The tragic endings of these two chapters indicate that the "Angel's" conquest of the "Devil" can be achieved only at the expense of human sacrifice. If there is one lesson to be learned from these chapters, it is found in the antithesis of man, the sensual being, and religion, censor and negator of this basic nature. Moreover, on the political level, the sublimation of the sensual impulse was at the root of the mysticism, the ideology and the aspirations which resulted in the migrations of the crusaders. Man, taught by religion that it was sinful to succumb to the temptations of the body, was ready to embark eastwards in his desire to redeem himself from worldly, material concerns. The medieval knight and crusader who has denied physical love because he envisions the carnal as destructive and corrupting--is personified in Aiol.

It is at this point in the novel that Aiol and Melusina decide to journey to the Holy Land. They have by now lost Ozil, who has died needlessly in a tournament at the hands of his blood cousin, Geoffrey of Lusignan. Returning to the forest of Lussac, they have been confronted with the death of Brandan, an earthly reminder of the temporal nature of worldly happiness. It is after a number of these catastrophic events that Melusina's metamorphosis occurs. She had aspired to become a young maiden and thus to accomplish her seduction of Aiol; but, ironically, she is changed into Melusín de Pleurs, male companion to Aiol. This twist is another example of the author's repeated use of unexpected and ambiguous elements throughout the novel. It is part of the fantastic dimension in the tale, and it adds to the highly imaginative vision of the Middle Age culture in which fantasy played so great a role.

The two knights decide to enlist in the armies of Philip of Flanders. Before they embark, Aiol is formally knighted by his dead father, in a ceremony not uncommon to the medieval chanson de geste. Ozil's unicorn horn is passed down to his son, suggesting continuity in the symbolic search for purity. And Aiol now expresses interest in his great uncle's holy relic: "He prometido recobrar

la Santa Lanza que mi antepasado Barthélemy descubrió en Antioquía" ¹

Thus far, the wanderings of Melusina and her entourage have taken them across France's Midi: from Lusignan to Poitiers, from there to the forest of Lussac, and from Lussac through Perpignan, Auxerre, Tours, Noblat, Limoges, Autun, Beauvais, Clermont, until finally they reach once more the forest of Lussac, ending their cyclical voyage in Pleurs. Constant exposure to tragedy has imbued them with cynicism. The devil, personifying the temptations of the temporal world has--as Melusina comments--taken a heavy toll:

. . . muertes y muertes y muertes ¡Cuántas muertes desfilan por este libro! . . . la de Pons, la de Guilhem de Cabestanh, la de Seramunda, la de Yolanz, la de Aymé de Castel-Roussillon, la de Ithier Me quedo sin personajes. ¡Y todavía me falta un cúmulo que recordar! Pero la vida está llena de muertes. ²

History, Miracle and Legend: The Crusades

The second voyage begins in 1177, as Melusín and Aiol embark towards the remote and threatened kingdom of Baldwin the Leper. What follows in this second voyage contrasts sharply with the quasi-pastoral surroundings of the French Midi. It is true that, for the medieval French

¹Ibid., Chapter V, "Un cuerpo para Melusina," p. 220.

²Ibid., Chapter IV, p. 187.

pilgrim, the Middle East discloses exotic secrets quite different from the fairy-tale atmosphere of the French Midi. But, in the second half of El Unicornio, elements of magic and fantasy are overshadowed by real-imaginary elements of a prodigious or miraculous-Christian nature, as well as by real-objective historical elements.

The narrator focuses sharply on the historical era he is about to describe. No longer is he merely an observer as was the fairy Melusina, but a protagonist who acts out his role according to historical circumstances. On the one hand, the change in narrator halfway through the novel is welcome, for he is able to be a full participant in all the events leading up to the battle of Montgisard and ending with the fall of Jerusalem in 1188. On the other hand, a mounting sense of irony accompanies Melusina's transformation into a young knight. We are constantly reminded of her love for Aiol, and confronted by the awkwardness of her situation as a man. This disproportionate love-relationship is once again basic to the understanding of the author's cynical view of man's nature, and reiterates the themes of wish-fulfillment in an impossible terrestrial paradise:

. . . Nos hemos enamorado de un imposible. Pero, si bien se mira, todo¹ gran amor es imposible y en eso finca su grandeza.

¹Ibid., Chapter VI, "El rey leproso," p. 270.

If Melusín and Aiol had made their decision to flee their native Poitou in order to escape the temptations of the Devil, they are soon to be disappointed. The Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, as portrayed in this novel, is disintegrating from greed and corruption, from fragmentation and intrigue. The work of the "Devil" is to be seen everywhere, as the young king Baldwin, whose decaying body provides an allegory to the political situation of his kingdom, struggles to provide strong leadership in the face of Saladin's challenge.

Due to the nature of the events described in the last four chapters of El Unicornio, the narrative becomes far more historical (that is, focusing on the real-objective) than that of the first half of the book. Not only are we now following factual historical detail, together with all the intrigues and accidents that govern this realm of contingency, but we also lose interest in the heroine as a psychological study (a perspective that had retained priority in the first half of the book) in order to immerse ourselves in the world of pagan idolatry and Christian morality which are striving for mastery in the Holy Land. Because the author's interest in the crusades and his treatment of the problems confronting Christianity take precedence over considerations of a fantastic nature, those elements dealing with the sacred or the prodigious (of which the fight against the "Devil"

is exemplary) assume priority in this second half of El Unicornio.

King Baldwin, constantly undermined by the agonies of advanced leprosy, shows miraculous vigor¹ in resisting the advances of Saladin. The victory of Montgisard, the last great battle won by the Christians before the fall of Jerusalem, is one of the climactic points of the pilgrimage. Mujica Láinez endows this historic episode with vitality and enthusiasm which make it one of the most evocative and emotive passages in El Unicornio:

. . . Me colma de alegría la perspectiva de enfrentarme--por fin--con un tema tan alto y tan puro como Montgisard, una ocasión que hermanó a los contemporáneos de Baudoin IV con los mejores contemporáneos de Godofredo de Bouillón, y siento que mi pluma corre, feliz, sobre las cuartillas, mientras las figuras se levantan y se ordenan; los héroes se tienden las espadas y los laureles; los ángeles victoriosos abren las alas de bronce, y el monumento entero crece delante de mí, comparable por su calidad con los más dignos que esculpiera la Historia. Y lo que exalta más mi entusiasmo es el saber que yo fui parte de esa empresa, no como un hada, sino como un hombre Montgisard es un diamante que se incendia de luces de maravilla en las manos trémulas de un leproso.

Montgisard becomes the point of highest achievement, the climax of the historical world portrayed in El Unicornio. With respect to the structure of Manuel Mujica Láinez' novel, it is parallel to the author's epic introduction of the battle of Lepanto in Bomarzo, a historical

¹Ibid., p. 291. The words are "milagroso vigor."

²Ibid., Chapter VII, "Azares de la guerra," p. 285.

landmark which also constitutes the high point of the novel about the Italian Renaissance. From here on, the historical fabric of the kingdom of Jerusalem disintegrates, as Baldwin IV succumbs to an inevitable death.

Melusina's metamorphosis, as well as the intrinsic change of narrative pace provided by the turbulence of historical struggle, are the two most significant elements contributing to the novel's structural dichotomy. We see this in the transitional Chapter V, in which Melusina is changed into a young knight, and where both Aiol and Melusín leave the pastoral French Midi for the Holy Land, as crusaders in the ranks of Philip of Flanders.

With Melusín de Pleurs we lose, if only superficially, the sense of objectivity provided by the invisible fairy's account. On the other hand, Melusina's incarnation in a time of historical upheaval is more desirable, since she(he) is able to narrate a first-hand account of the struggle between East and West--a struggle of which she is no mere spectator-observer, but a protagonist-actor who partakes of its emotions and actions. In one respect, however, the narrative point of view is not altered as much as might have been expected. It is still tinged with that aura of magic, of potions, magic wands, fairies and goblins which serves to retain the stylistic continuity and structural balance of El Unicornio.

The novel has a balanced but dualistic structure. Its account of the two voyages or pilgrimages is in itself symbolic of the dualistic world of the Middle Ages. Much of the novel's dualism resides in Aiol's constant fight against sin. The Devil and the Angel are perennially at war, both in the political arenas of East and West, and in the personal life of hero and heroine. Throughout the plot, the hero's encounters with historical accident and with his own urges symbolize this perennial dialectic of Good and Evil. And this dualism, intrinsic to the fabric of the Middle Ages, is to be found repeatedly in both the first and second halves of El Unicornio. Aiol plans his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, desiring to redeem himself from previous sin, only to find that the familiar Devil is everywhere, and particularly at war in man's inner self.

How the author synthesizes this dialectic of good and evil, personified both in Aiol's personal nature and his historical exploits, is basic to an understanding of medieval man's spiritual dilemma. Because the angel, the devil and the fairy are at the root of medieval life, we shall examine a number of examples wherein Aiol encounters this darker side of nature, as described in the second half of El Unicornio.

In the Poitou, pastoral calm underlies a world of seething passion, a world of ferment and dissatisfaction which at times explodes into petty warfare. The

Devil runs rampant in the chapters preceding Aiol's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The France depicted in El Unicornio corresponds to the image portrayed in the literature of the period. Life at court shows man's inordinate preoccupation with the frail, temporal world. By adding numerous literary sources, the author focuses on literature's own concern with the forces operating in the world, in particular, the forces of good and evil.

The first voyage of Melusina and Aiol becomes a time for the apprenticeship of the knight, in accordance with ideals expounded through literature. The first four chapters provide a propitious environment for the fashioning of the "perfect" knight through his encounter with the external forces of good and evil. Aiol follows the romanticized vision of the medieval knight. A descendant of the princely house of Lusignan, he bears upon his shoulder a mark by which his father, Ozil, recognizes him as his own son. Throughout his formative years, he proves himself a knight after the traditional literary models. Worthy of a title, he is knighted by his father. And many times his spiritual integrity is put to the test as much as is his physical courage. His training, however, has one pitfall--he is to fight for the supremacy of good, but he is taught that he himself--or, rather, his sensuous self--is basically evil. This dilemma is at the root of Aiol's problematic existence; for, to fulfill the ideals

of his "perfect" knightly upbringing, he must deny and reject part of himself.

If Aiol hoped to flee from the terror of sin by enlisting in the armies of Philip of Flanders, he is soon to witness that, in the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, the same sinful existence lies at the root of the kingdom's disintegration. After the victory of Montgisard, Aiol and Melusín follow King Baldwin through a series of defeats. While the Franks are losing ground before the advances of Saladin, the royal family itself is faction-ridden and engenders discontent among the various feudal lords and religious orders of the kingdom. The narrator does not lose the strings of the story as she comments on the intrigue and gossip, and all the historical figures reappear in her thickly woven tapestry. The details of King Baldwin's sensuous mother, Agnes; the matrimonial web spun around the life of Baldwin's two sisters, Sibila and Isabella; Reginald of Chatillon's rebellious and treacherous spirit; the life of the Leper-King himself and his miraculous warrior feats at Montgisard--all these appear in the narrative. And throughout the narrative, Melusín and Aiol stand as two symbols of an historical era, an era that cannot be apprehended without the participation of four figures: the fairy, the knight, the angel, and the devil.

Aiol's struggle against his sensual self becomes as much a leitmotif in the second part of El Unicornio as it was in the first. He is tempted by Sibila, Baldwin's older sister, and in reaction to his vulnerable self he vows to be chaste:

Una mañana, delante del Santo Sepulcro, prometió solemnemente que permanecería casto hasta que le fuera concedido el privilegio de hallarla [i.e., la Santa Lanza] Ni siquiera daría un beso. Tales eran sus anhelos de pureza, que hubiera querido que la mitad inferior de su cuerpo fuera de mármol, como la del joven hechizado del cual se habla en Las mil y una noches,¹ para suprimir las tentaciones de la carne

But Aiol's fight against sin does not cease with this vow of chastity. He is cunningly seduced with the help of an erotic potion while he sojourns in Antioch, and later he cannot contain the ardent flow of his repressions:

El, tan austero, tan mesurado, se lanzó a hostigar con su voracidad a las doncellas del castillo. Dijérase que la ruptura de su voto había destruído también el dique del desenfreno y que se dejaba arrastrar por el tumulto de una inundación liberadora.²

The fight against carnal temptation continues in the measure that the kingdom of Jerusalem disintegrates, as if both struggles were directed at one and the same evil force. But, while the kingdom of Jerusalem is lost to the Moslems, Aiol is yet to vanquish his own personal version of the Devil. A powerful, though somewhat anticlimactic, vision of the hero's tragic death is presented, occurring somewhere during the flight from Jerusalem to the valley of

¹Ibid., p. 298.

²Ibid., p. 304.

Moses. It is appropriate to the formalistic structure of the novel that Aiol should, at last, find his ancestor's relic, Peter Barthélemy's spear, on his flight from Jerusalem. It is even more ironic that this holy relic be given to the hero by Pascua de Riveri, mistress of Jerusalem's last Patriarch, and reincarnation of Aiol's perennial temptation:

Imágen postrera del Amor obstinado, de la sensualidad vigilante, del mundo hostigador, cobra y pavo real, Azeláis, Seramunda, Sibila, Pascua de Riveri, Aymé de Castel-Roussillon, imagen posible de mí misma, de Melusina-Melusín, del hada--doncel engendrada por Eros.¹

Aiol, however, does not succumb to this temptation. In a final, desperate attempt to free himself from the chains of his all-too-human self, relic in hand, he braves a step towards a precipice, and falls to his death.

In El Unicornio, we perceive a vision of an era through the juxtaposition of two separate sets of elements: one, on the real-objective level, which pertains to the historical, geographic and literary reality; the other, on the real-imaginary level, which pertains to the use of imaginative elements from the categories of the mythical-legendary, the miraculous, the magical, and the fantastic. It is this juxtaposition of the real and the imaginary that makes El Unicornio an interesting addition to the contemporary genre of magic-realist fiction in Latin

¹Ibid., Chapter IX, "El cuerno de Oberón," p. 387.

America. It offers a new, valid interpretation of a historical era--an interpretation in which the poetic element, rather than obliterating the importance of historical accident, serves to enhance it by revealing these accidents in the light of man's perennial quest for objectives which transcend him, as well as in his perennial failure to achieve his highest aspirations.

With this textual explication of the plot, I have attempted to illustrate Manuel Mujica Láinez' dualistic rendering of the Middle Ages. It is a vision which seeks to understand the spiritual struggle between man and his destiny, and the paths whereby man tries, often mistakenly, to pursue an ultimate, life-sustaining principle. The pilgrimage undertaken by Melusina for the sake of her love; that of Aiol for the sake of spiritual salvation; the incidents of the plot as they are given in a chronologically developed historical space and time--these make up the real-objective strata in Mujica Láinez' study of the Middle Ages. However, his is an "unorthodox" study of a historical age, given the kind of hero chosen to narrate the events and the generally ambivalent descriptive passages necessitated by this fantastic agent and the magical-miraculous world she inhabits. These elements, more appropriate to fairy-tales than to conventional historical studies, have been purposefully selected by the author in order to convey an intrinsic facet of the age.

With the introduction of the real-imaginary world through its agent, Melusina, and through the use of medieval folklore and literary symbolism, El Unicornio offers an original and faithful portrait of the medieval spirit.

Furthermore, the structure of the plot with its dichotomies--such as the contrast between life in the Poitou and the historical struggles in the Christian kingdom outremer, or the symbolic struggle between good and evil which is evident throughout the narrative--provides a foil to the study of the hero's own ambivalent nature. Aiol synthesizes, in his search for Barthélemy's relic, man's universal dilemma, the man-made dilemma that arises from the notion of sin and that is deeply rooted in the pervasive Judaeo-Christian consciousness of man's shortcomings. Aiol, the carnal--and therefore sinful--being, is a representative of the inner struggle between good and evil, between angel and devil, between those basic dialectical elements which, in their struggle, create historical phenomena. For Mujica Láinez has grasped that history is not made by social or economic forces, or by politicians engaged in the naked pursuit of power. Rather, it is a product of man's noblest aspirations, values and multi-faceted beliefs, as these impinge upon the nature of man and the world. And these aspirations, values and beliefs can only be understood symbolically as the men of

each culture understood them, lived for them, and gave their lives for them.

El Unicornio abounds with symbolic passages illustrative of this dialectic. Perhaps Melusina herself can best summarize the conflicting tendencies which make up the texture of medieval life as it is shown to us in El

Unicornio:

Me gustan los símbolos y más los oscuros y arduos de descifrar. También yo soy medieval hasta la punta de las uñas, y me he movido en un dédalo místico y trovadoresco de emblemas pintados, de bordadas divisas, de alusiones enigmáticas en las que la heráldica se enlaza con la alquimia, de Cortes de Amor en las que se pesaba el pro y el contra de lo puro y lo impuro. Por eso me gustó el encuentro, en la desértica nada, luego de la caída de la impúdica Jerusalén, de cuatro personajes que se destacaban como cuatro alegorías, como cuatro hojas de un políptico amoroso: el Doncel del Unicornio, hijo del Caballero y la prostituta, el inmaculado permanentemente perseguido por los venablos del amor; el Hada tierna, pasional, desprovista, a causa del amor, de su poder mágico; la mujer erótica, que manchó con su amor libertino la virtud de la Iglesia; y el Execrable, que le negó la limosna de su amor al cordero,¹ sublimación del Amor, cuando la requería

¹Ibid., p. 382.

CHAPTER V

PARODY AND MAGIC-REALISM IN DE MILAGROS Y DE MELANCOLIAS

Man is voyager through time and space. He is impelled by a nature forever restless, his hopes forever fixed on some insurmountable goal. Physically and spiritually in quest of strange deeds and exotic places, perennially dissatisfied with the present, he generally neglects the past and thereby foregoes that legacy of historical memories which stands as an open forecast of his future. Although history might teach man about his potential destructiveness and forewarn him about his ambivalent nature, a myopic disinterest in the past has prevented that lesson from sinking in.

This image of man's weakness and of his perennial shortsightedness has been the subject as well as the regret of much of Manuel Mujica Láinez' fiction. The problems resulting from man's inability to learn the lessons of history run as a leitmotif through the historical novels treated in the two previous chapters, Bomarzo and El Unicornio. In these two novels, the author reconstructed a historical chain of events which showed how,

on the one hand, men's beliefs and values shape historical phenomena and how, on the other, historical structures influence man's encounter with himself, with his destiny. The outcome of that encounter seemed to be inevitably tragic, and was so portrayed in each of these novels. However, since Bomarzo and El Unicornio were both far removed, in space and time, from the experiences of twentieth-century man--one dealing with the Italian Renaissance and the other with twelfth-century France and the Crusades--the reader could feel less personally threatened. When the same themes reappear in De milagros y de melancolías, through the author's incorporation of events not far removed from the contemporary Latin American scene, he can no longer escape the confrontation with his destiny. The message becomes all the more threatening in the light of Mujica Láinez' perspective on the incurable ills of Latin American society, indeed of society in general, as studied in a fatalistic chronicle of its inception, growth, and downfall.

There has been a surprising number of Argentinian writers who have, whether purposely or subconsciously, chosen not to write about their homeland's contemporary political and social scene, but have instead reverted either to works of a metaphysical nature, such as Borges, or to existential concerns--such as Mallea, Onetti, Sábato and Cortázar--or to works of sheer fantasy, such as

those produced by all of the above-mentioned writers. Manuel Mujica Láinez, as was shown in the second chapter of this dissertation, started out by portraying the images of past splendor and present decadence of his homeland, Argentina. Yet, novels such as Bomarzo and El Unicornio, Crónicas reales and El laberinto, led him further away from the realm of local politics and bitter power disputes, and into a realm where the universal rather than the particular, the past rather than the present, the occult and immanent rather than the explicit, the subconscious rather than the conscious, emerged against a background of remote history. No so with De milagros y de melancolías.

The differences between De milagros y de melancolías and the previous "historical" novels are many and far-reaching. At first glance, the most salient distinction is one of tone. In De milagros y de melancolías we are dealing with a parody of historical narrative rather than with history itself. Secondly, an essential characteristic which sets this work apart from the others is its purely imaginary format: all the names, the dramatic action, the geographical location, the customs, together with the exhaustive account of human vices and follies--however much of human experience they may catalogue--are totally fictitious. In addition, of course, we have the

fact that De milagros y de melancolías offers a bitter attack on Latin American society.

It is interesting to note that De milagros y de melancolías was written roughly at the same time as Gabriel García Márquez' Cien años de soledad. However different they may seem in structure, style and development of subject matter, both partake of certain modern ideological and aesthetic currents; and both develop a detached, intensely ironical, pervasively humorous approach to theme and conflict. This comparison is helpful in ascertaining whether De milagros y de melancolías is an example of magic-realist narrative.

In this chapter, we shall first focus on the nature of parody and its place in the narrative of Manuel Mujica Láinez. By so doing, we hope to single out some basic satirical elements in the style and structure of De milagros y de melancolías. Specifically, we shall show how the author parodies and satirizes historians and historical chronicles, and thereby indicates his rejection of the "objective" viewpoint of the observer. To a lesser degree, the parody is also directed at his own earlier work and historical perspective. Secondly, we shall indicate Mujica Láinez' indictment of the institutions and attitudes of Latin American society, by summarizing his satirical treatment of politics, the legal profession, the religious establishments, the educational system and

the social conventions of the mythical (and archetypical) city of Apricotina. Finally, we shall trace some of the magic-realist motifs which parallel those of García Márquez' novel, and which shed further light on the historical process as envisioned by Manuel Mujica Láinez. In De milagros y de melancolías, the author uses real-imaginary elements to document a "fictitious" history of the New World. The vision which emerges, not unlike Jonathan Swift's witty treatment of the world's vices and follies in Gulliver's Travels, is in itself a sincere and powerful condemnation of western values. But that message Manuel Mujica Láinez leaves for the end. His first concern is with the stylized construction of an anti-historia, a mockery of history and of historical fiction; in other words, a parody. It is the logical end-product of his own literary development from historical fiction to magic-realism.

Mujica Láinez' Parody of
History and the His-
torical Vision

In his semi-autobiographical novel Cecil,¹ Manuel Mujica Láinez refers to the creative period following the publication of his historical novels, Bomarzo and El Unicornio, as one of anguish:

¹Manual Mujica Láinez, Cecil (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1972).

Recuerdo que cuando estampé la palabra 'fin' en mi dilatada novela del Renacimiento italiano, luego de más de dos años de redacción, me sobrecogió el desconsuelo de que ya no volvería a escribir, tanto había puesto de mí mismo en sus 650 páginas. Sin embargo, al cabo de un período de opresivo tormento, empezaron a agitarse en mi ánimo las figuras del libro siguiente, el de la evocación medieval, y respiré al saber que una vez mas sobreviviría. La siniestra etapa que vino después de su conclusión fue agudamente mala.¹

The author proceeded to develop other themes for a future historical novel. But his trials ended in failure and he became more disheartened. It was at this point in time, perhaps as a reaction to the trials and tribulations of writing another historical novel, that Manuel Mujica Láinez turned towards the creation of two of his most imaginative novels: Crónicas reales (1967) and De milagros y de melancolías (1968). The following passage from Cecil supplies us with further information regarding the creative process surrounding these two satirical works:

Y súbitamente, en pleno desaliento, se presentó ante mí con nitidez, casi de punta a punta, como un tapiz completo, el libro que debía componer. Eran los relatos, que unidos entre sí, organizan una novela, y que al referir las vicisitudes de una dinastía imaginaria, en un imaginario país del centro de Europa, me facilitaron la ocasión reconfortante de mandar al diablo el terror del anacronismo y de desquitarme de los pavores que me habían comunicado mis dos novelas históricas, las cuales, si bien me procuraron, como todos mis demás libros, intensas felicidades, mazclaron a sus goces el permanente miedo que suscita el trato con la verdad verdadera Con [las Crónicas] abrióse para mí la puerta de

¹ Ibid., Chapter V ("Fracasos del escritor"), p. 48.

un mundo que había entrevisto apenas: el de la ironía pura, el de la sátira, rico en fecundas probabilidades.¹

Published in November 1968, De milagros y de melancolías was written as a parody, an "antihistoria," "compuesta por un escritor que se vengó así, alegremente, de las torturas que le habían impuesto la celosa Historia y su hijo bastardo el Anacronismo."²

De milagros is the story of an imaginary, but recognizably South American, city, traced from its discovery and foundation to the year 3000. The work is satirical in both form and content. It imitates, through ridicule, the historical chronicle and historical fiction. However, its satire does not stop with the emulation of traditional literary forms; the tools of satire are directed against every possible or imaginable facet of the political, social, religious, and cultural scene of the New World. Nothing remains sacred in this work as the author excels in proliferating the caricatures--including one of himself--which people his account of human vice and folly, stupidity and abuse, in the city of miracles and melancholies.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the satirical elements found in the novel, it would be in order to

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Letter from Manuel Mujica Láinez to George O. Schanzer, quoted in Schanzer, op. cit., p. 70.

formulate a definition of satire. The original meaning of satire in English and other languages refers to a literary work of a special kind, one "in which vice, follies, stupidities and abuses, etc. are held up to ridicule and contempt."¹ A more modern meaning is provided in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: "the employment in speaking or writing of sarcasm, irony, ridicule, etc. in denouncing, exposing or deriding vice, folly, abuses or evils of any kind."²

Insofar as Manuel Mujica Láinez' novel deals with the régime and institutions of a Latin American society, it is a work of political satire, and it is perhaps the author's most "political" work to date. This is an interesting fact by itself, considering how little in the form of overt political criticism has come out of Argentina in the last two decades. The political dimension, the essential butt of the satire in the novel, leads, in turn, to a consideration of the validity of past and present institutions, and ultimately to a confrontation with Mujica Láinez' negative vision of the historical process as a whole.

¹Matthew Hodgart, Satire (London: World University Library, 1969), p. 7. From Webster's New World Dictionary.

²Ibid., p. 7.

Insofar as Mujica Láinez deals with historical writing and literary productions in his novel, the work is a parody. According to Meyer Abrams, a parody "derides, not its subject, but a particular literary work or style, by imitating its features and applying them to trivial or grossly discordant materials."¹ In De milagros, the parody of allegedly objective historiography is accomplished through the tone or attitude which the author imposes upon the reader: the latter must follow the book's natural, inevitable descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. It is, as Northrop Frye argued, "the completion of the logical process known as the reductio ad absurdum" of a particular model, but it "is not designed to hold one in perpetual captivity, but to bring one to the point at which one can escape from an incorrect procedure."² In addition to historical writing and historical fiction, Mujica Láinez also parodies classical and romantic poetry, as well as certain artistic styles, by applying them to "grossly discordant" subjects such as the mediocre and obscene productions of tyrants, where power exacts the applause that honest criticism would deny.

¹Meyer H. Abrams, "A Glossary of Literary Terms," in Charles A. Allen and George D. Stephens, Satire: Theory and Practice (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1962), p. 38.

²Northrop Frye, "The Nature of Satire," in Allen, p. 30.

Perhaps the most extensively used satirical tool in the novel is irony. It is a standard tool of the satirist. Irony, meaning dissimulation in its literal sense,

is the systematic use of double meaning. It also assumes a double audience, one that is deceived by the surface meaning of the words, and another that catches the hidden sense and laughs with the deceiver at the expense of the deceived. This usually involves a persona (literally, a mask), or fictional character assumed by the satirist; and a narrative form which will allow a double flow of meaning to be maintained, such as parody, imaginary voyage, utopia or mock-heroic Satire . . . is militant irony: the satirist uses irony to make the reader uncomfortable, to shake him out of his complacency and to make him¹ an ally in the battle against the world's stupidity.

Mujica Láinez employs irony quite systematically in De milagros. The book is divided into six main parts, supposedly written by six different "historians" whose works Mujica Láinez is collating. The attitude of the novel changes according to the focus of the attack in each of these parts. But in each case Mujica Láinez is far removed from the account he is editing, and under this pretense of objectivity he can take the position of the moral being whose "contemptuous" attitude leads, in effect, to an assertion of certain superior moral principles. He can point to absurd, incongruous situations, even humorous ones, without ever letting go of the tone of high moral principle. The barbs of the satirist, as eloquently apparent in the case of Swift, are directed by

¹Hodgart, p. 130.

a deeply moral purpose. It is as if "he is a prophet sent to lash the vices and follies of the time and he will not stop until he has cleansed the foul body of the infected world."¹

Since De milagros y de melancolías delivers its satirical barbs both through its form and its content, we shall first examine the elements of parody in the structure of the novel. Through the use of a persona--the fictional chronicler or chroniclers who account for each particular stage in the development of the archetypical city, San Francisco de Apricotina--Manuel Mujica Láinez achieves a certain detachment and superior vantage point from his work.

The novel is divided into seven parts. Of these, the first six deal with particular stages in the growth of the city. They show, in the form of parody, the historical progression (though the author sometimes implies retrogression) of any sizeable Latin American community, from its discovery and colonization, through the stages of revolutionary unrest, independence, military dictatorship, tyranny, and ending in the final destruction of the city. The seventh part is a sardonic account of the tyrant's last vision, which takes place at a séance held in the "Lider's" personal bordello. Titled "Epílogo espiritista," it is a fitting introduction to the year

¹Frye, "The Nature of Satire," in Allen, p. 19.

3000, and it stands as a permanent mockery of those historical theories--past or future--which endorse progress and ultimate freedom as the human condition which is the goal of historical evolution.

The first part of the work, dealing with the founder of the mythical San Francisco de Apricotina, was supposedly written by Don Diego Cintillo, member of the founding expedition and its imaginary chronicler. His posthumous work is the source for another imaginary or fictitious historian, the exiled twentieth-century journalist who has composed the entire novel after drawing his knowledge from several specific accounts such as Cintillo's. Don Diego, the soldier in the line of duty, reminds us very much of that "real" soldier, historian, and chronicler, member of the expedition of Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo.

This is the first instance of a "twice-removed" fictitious chronicler which is so essential to the sense of irony in Mujica Láinez' novel. It allows him both the pretense of objectivity and also the implication that there is an ultimate bastion of morality undergirding the tale. Furthermore, the fact that the events of the novel are twice removed from the persona of the writer allows some discrepancies of style and structure among the different parts: indeed, the author does incorporate the nuances of the baroque, the neoclassical and the romantic

styles during the course of the narrative. We have, then, the use of double masks or personae; for the journalist has fashioned a seemingly rectilinear account of the foundation and evolution of the city, drawing material from previous "fictionalized" chroniclers, or from other incidental materials such as statistical records, letters, and the like.

With Don Diego Cintillo's death, the exiled journalist turns to the second chapter of his work: "Gobernadores que tuvo San Francisco de Apricotina del Milagro hasta su independencia." Here the parodic attack is centered on the problems of scholarly erudition and historical objectivity. The journalist is confronted with a "serious" dilemma in his reconstruction of history, namely, that there are so many rulers that his sources have actually lost the count:

Tan extenso y complejo es el catálogo de los gobernadores auténticos, gobernadores interinos, gobernadores honorarios, tenientes de gobernadores, delegados de gobernadores, gobernadores que no asumieron el gobierno, gobernadores visitantes, gobernadores apócrifos y gobernadores fantasmas, que gobernaron y desgobernaron.¹

Our apocryphal author humorously tries to keep his objectivity amid the frustrations of the historian who cannot trust his sources. Thus, he tells us that

¹Manuel Mujica Láinez, De milagros y de melancolías (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, Second Edition, 1969), p. 121.

a nosotros no nos corresponde terciar en un debate que contradice nuestra intención de gozar de la vida. Los gobernadores de San Francisco de Apricotina del Milagro pueden haber sido sesenta y seis, como demuestra irrefutablemente el Padre Quiñones O.P., o cuarenta y uno, como demuestra irrefutablemente el Padre Heiligenacht S.J.¹

Nevertheless, however many and varied may have been the governors of the city of miracles, our journalist, disregarding the erudition of the above-mentioned sources Quiñones and Heiligenacht, singlehandedly decides to mention only twelve. The remainder of the chapter, a successive reading of the humorous and frivolous vicissitudes of the twelve governors of Apricotina, sheds some light on the intended irony. For here the author neither furnishes any truly important data nor does he mention the dates for the period as a whole, or for the duration of each governorship:

Hemos preferido no sobrecargar su memoria con cifras fugaces, que no significan nada, ya que cada vez se aferra más en las modernas mentes, la noción de que el Tiempo no existe.²

In this section, Mujica Láinez may be alluding ironically to those twentieth-century literary movements which have made a principle out of their disregard of order and causality in the dimensions of time and space.

The third part of the novel deals with the era of the "Libertador." A close reading would confirm a definite change in narrative style, necessitated by the

¹Ibid., p. 121.

²Ibid., p. 141.

historical progression (which, the author implies, may not have been without its regressive features).

Here again, the fictitious chronicler confronts us first with the problems of documentation. He must supplement fact with fiction where he lacks data pertaining to this important era. As he very aptly puts it,

también la Leyenda, hada de la Historia, nos ha secundado en la tentativa de reconstruir la fuente de acontecimientos que tanto importan a la gesta de la ciudad de Don Nufrio de Bracamonte. La Leyenda suele ser la imágen poética de la verdad: embellece y depura¹

Since the chapter on the "Libertador" deals with events associated with the first half of the nineteenth century, the author refers to various philosophic and cultural trends of the period. The names of Voltaire and Rousseau, Robespierre, Marat and his executioner Charlotte Corday, all are incorporated into the pages of De milagros y de melancolías. We are given a brief glimpse into the European ideological and political currents which, in the New World, catalyzed the wars of independence.

The protagonist of this third part, General Xavier Moncil, is presented as the archetypical hero of the revolution; his portrait, however, is closer to that of the modern anti-hero. Through him the author seeks to parody, not so much the actual figures evoked by this period of Latin America's struggle for independence--e.g.,

¹Ibid., p. 147.

Simón Bolívar, San Martín, O'Higgins--but the exalted, and inaccurate, images which historians have forged of the heroes of independence. For this reason, the use of exaggeration and rhetoric in the narrative of the chapter conveys an effective parody of the highly melodramatic, highly adulatory historical chronicles much in vogue during the years following independence. The following quotation, taken from the final sketch of Xavier Moncil and concluding the chapter, illustrates Mujica Láinez' use of hyperbole, exaggeration, reduction and antithesis:

En medio de un charco de sangre, nos despedimos del General Xavier Moncil, del héroe puro. Como acertó Octaviano con aquello de: "Melpómene, la musa de la Tragedia viene."! Vino, en la noche de la Gran Equivocación de los Atridas, y se quedó. Y también se quedó para siempre nuestro Xavier, el hermoso Xavier, el de los laureles de oro, el del párpado inmóvil, sangrante el corazón como el del pelícano nutricio; el eterno, el eterno Moncil. Soñó una Monarquía para la República, y no la logró; soñó una Virginidad permanente, y no pudo lograrla; soñó un congreso inútil; soñó una Paz robusta, una Paz Romana, y logró un disloque. Fue un hombre de acción, como su genitora, y un hombre de obsesiones extrañas, como su genitor: el caudal materno prosperó en marciales triunfos, y el paterno maduró en errores civiles. Una espléndida ola de poesía (y no aludimos aquí a la que inspiró a Panida Sistro) lo envuelve. Está de pie, en nuestra memoria, al hucarán los pendones y los gallardetes, batallando y planeando, amando y recatándose, entre el Inca y Socorro, entre Casta Folia y Marte. ¿Cómo no estremecerse y admirarlo? Bendito seas, General Virgen, Padre y Madre de Santa Fe: cada uno de nosotros, tus hijos y tus hijas, hubiera deseado ser la Vizcondesa dos Assombros, para aliviar tus inquietudes y para colmar tu exaltación.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 225-26.

Part Four deals with the corroding forces of dictatorship. It is centered around the life and death of the sinister "Caudillo" Gaspar Bravaverga. Gaspar's takeover, partially ascribable to his mother's mastery of voodoo, is the culmination of a long period of indecisive struggle known as the "black anarchy" (La Negra Anarquía).

Gaspar Bravaverga is symbolic of the triumph of barbarism over the civilizing, humanistic ideals which impelled the revolution. We cannot but notice the intended parallelism with the dictatorship of Don Juan Manuel de Rosas. Although no dates are given, the allusions to this dark period of Argentine history (1829-1852) are unmistakable. For example, the narrator describes an incident which is often connected with the death of Facundo Quiroga, a collaborator of Rosas:

Una mañana, salió el Gobernador General Manlio Perlones a inspeccionar su provincia, sin más acompañamiento que sesenta mutucos de Bronce de Moncil, y en la proximidad de las minas de Chancaca, entregó el último suspiro, con sus sesenta acompañantes, al caer en una emboscada.¹

The author of this massacre, "un desconocido envuelto en un poncho violeta"--note that the color red had always been associated with Rosas--is none other than Gaspar Bravaverga. Describing Bravaverga's assumption of power, the narrator indulges in an "objective" enumeration of the caudillo's politics of barbarism. His law is the law

¹Ibid., p. 230.

of the jungle. For him, we are told, "no existen potencias grandes o pequeñas sino individuos fuertes y débiles."

Perhaps the most successful tool used in describing the caudillo's life is irony. The omnipresent author, Manuel Mujica Láinez, here seems far removed from the narrative, while his fictitious journalist-historian naively proposes to describe what happened realistically. In fact, Mujica Láinez is so intent on showing the "mock integrity" of his fictitious narrator that he stresses his nonpartisanship. For example, at one point the narrator cites the sources for his biography of Gaspar Bravaverga:

El lector interesado puede recorrer [la enumeración de los títulos del caudillo] en la Historia del Caudillo, del Dr. Atanasio Setira y Cepeda (pág. 606 y sig.) cuya filosofía no recomendamos, pues lo ubica dentro de la maliciosa corriente revisionista.¹

The distances between author, narrator and reader are essential to the ironic tension in the narrative. The author's contempt for the vices and follies described as evidenced not by an overt didacticism, but by his distance from the narrative itself. This produced a constant tension of implied attack; however, it is up to the reader to choose between that which is seriously questioned and that which constitutes a "satirical tease."

Since De milagros is a parody upon a string of historical accounts, it also includes a series of stylistic

¹Ibid., p. 240.

imitations of popular verse forms, ridiculed and reduced to the absurd.

A notable example of this type of imitation occurs in Part Four, where the author mocks both gaucho and neo-classical poetry to a point of exaggeration. Thus, on the occasion of Bravaverga's double marriage to Ifigenia and Electra, the friends of the caudillo regale a "night of literary insomnia" with a vulgarized example in the gaucho poetry style:

La suerte te ha regalao
dos estrellas, Bravaverga,
porque no se te posterga
el doblete afortunao.
Cuando estés bien encamao,
de un lao y del otro frito,
tené en cuenta que el maldito
al pancho con frío aqueja,
y a más de su helada vieja
dale un nuevo calorcito.¹

Mujica Láinez parodies neoclassical verse in his references to a tragedy written by the "Virgil" of San Francisco de Apricotina, Octaviano Panida Sistra; this may, incidentally, be a good-humored allusion to the well-known contemporary Mexican poet, Octavio Paz. The poetry was to be recited by Bravaverga, who had taken the lead role of Nero, on the play's opening night. The constant lisping sound, the gross admixture of the tragic and the prosaic in a recitation by this "César analfabeto" who enters

¹Ibid., p. 256.

dressed as a "puerco espin con disfraz de Imperator"--all these serve to delineate a tyrant in caricature:

Zi me amaraz un día, yo te diera
 laz perlaz de Popea emperadora,
 puez erez por tu porte y tuz hechizoz
 más capaz de luzirlaz, Paba hermoza.
 No la leche de burraz nezezitaz
 para hazer de tu cuerpo zuave joya,
 ni el mazaje eficaz de los eunucoz,
 ni el licor que de Perzia dan laz rozaz.
 Tóname: tuyo zoy. En cuanto abjurez
 el credo zanguinario, tuya ez Roma.
 A mi lado tendraz ezparzimientoz,¹
 agudoz, como zonlo miz zozobraz.

This particular eleven-syllable verse form (endecasílabo) is generally used for subjects of a more serious nature. Here it serves as setting for the antithetical juxtapositions of sexually grotesque allusions and the sublime form of classical tragedy. The situation which unfolds within the drama is also exemplary of a double parody--for the characters Nero (Bravaverga) and Paba (Bravaverga's mistress Aleluya) are ridiculing on-stage their own incongruous relationship offstage. It is a parodistic interpretation of the "play within the play" theme.

In Chapter Five, the age of the industrial revolution, with its stress on scientific discovery and technological advance, comes to San Francisco de Apricotina. As the main protagonist in the era of progress of the Latin American city, the narrator introduces Cagliostro Bravaverga. Cagliostro--his name recalling the eighteenth-

¹Ibid., p. 269.

century magician, charlatan, social climber and habitué of the royal courts of Europe--is presented as an allegorical embodiment of Progress. However, contrary to the image we might expect from the idea of progress, he is no giant; rather, he is a likeable, one-eyed dwarf. A magician and agent of the element of fantasy in this chapter, Cagliostro is nevertheless one of the more sympathetic figures of De milagros y de melancolías. His Lilliputian stature and his magical ability to actualize any of his thoughts merely by concentrating on the object of his desire provide amusing reading, somewhat reminiscent of Gulliver's travels to the land of Lilliput and to the scientific utopia of Laputa.

Since Cagliostro Bravaverga's life spans the latter half of the nineteenth century, the narrative echoes a concern with the Romantic movement. Just as, in the preceding chapter, Manuel Mujica Láinez had parodied gaucho and neo-classical poetry, so here he employs smatterings of French in the dialogue. For example, after indulging in the romantic story of Cagliostro and the young seamstress Franconia, he amusingly interpolates a French expression, as follows: "Lo que hemos narrado es très joli y doloroso." Franconia herself is a symbol of the romantic heroine. A nineteenth century tubercular Juliet, she is in love with the dwarf-leader Cagliostro. The juxtaposition of grotesque and sublime contributes visibly

to the tragicomic in the situation, which is presented as a parody on the romantic, sentimental novels of the period.

Additional elements of parody within the framework of this chapter center around the introduction of scientific and technological discoveries to the people of the mythical city. The Apricotinos get their first English train, "El ferrocarril Jipi-Océano," and their dwarf-leader, true to his vocation as "civilizer," invites four European scientists to settle in his town. There is humor in the exaggerated inventiveness of the scientists, as well as in their names (pp. 339-340): for example, a Dr. Kronos Verboten ("forbidden time"), who discovers a red hammer-like stone with Germanic inscriptions. Recognizing it as a runa, he considers it evidence that the New World was first discovered by some early Germanic people.

This discovery provides both a "magical" and a "historical" dimension to the novel. How the stone came to San Francisco de Apricotina remains a mystery until the end of the work. However, the scientist's interpretation of the inscription on the stone leads immediately to dangerous speculation on the superiority of the Germanic race. We cannot escape Mujica Láinez' vitriolic allusion to the Nietzschean superman propaganda of early twentieth-century Germany. In addition, however, the red color and hammer-like shape of the stone invite speculation

concerning the revolutionary message and historical theories of Karl Marx, who was, of course, very much concerned with time. Thus the two dimensions of magic--the inexplicable appearance of the stone--and history, together with man's often erroneous interpretation and use of empirical evidence--unite in this one symbol to give us an insight into Manuel Mujica Láinez' understanding of the historical process.

The progress of science and technology leads San Francisco de Apricotina into the twentieth century. Gradually, it transforms the culture, the vocabulary, and the thought-processes of its inhabitants. In recording spoken dialogue, the author now employs colloquial expressions to mark the change in customs and manners. If we compare the dialogue in the first chapter with that of Chapter Six, we perceive an enormous change in social and cultural development. Here, for example, are two passages, the first showing the peninsular inflections, style and verb forms of the Spanish conquistador, and the second illustrating patterns common to twentieth-century Argentine speech.

- (1) --Sé que voy a morir, Fray Seráfico. Os imploro que me perdonéis y que transmitáis a Bracamonte la sinceridad que os confío. Hacedlo con miramientos. No olvidéis su carácter.
 --Miramientos?

--Oíd, que la respiración se me va. Llevaos mi sortija . . . mi esmeralda La daráis en mi nombre a la Virreina . . . para auxiliar . . . a los fines . . . de Nufrio¹

- (2) --Aquí me tenés--me dijo irónicamente Piña--, de capitán de los Vergas Bravas y de dueño de la maldita ciudad del Milagro. Lo único que me ha incomodado, en el camino del triunfo, es que para obtenerlo debí convencerme de que soy hermano tuyo.

--Mi hermano?

--A medias. El día feliz de Plocoploco en que mi pretendido abuelo el Presidente apareció mientras jugueteábamos con unas damas, para comunicarme que no soy su nieto, se dilataron frente a mí admirables perspectivas. ¿Te acordás, Cagliostro?²

The fifth chapter ends with a parody of yet another style, namely that of the obituary. The satirical elegy on the death of Cagliostro includes superfluous and incongruous elements, on which the narrative of the age and chapter closes:

De esa suerte, en un mezquino charco rojo, concluyó la vida del Dr. Octaviano Cagliostro Bravaverga, del Gobernador Enano. Olvidemos su extravío final . . . y recordemos . . . al hombre excepcional que, si pequeño de cuerpo, tuvo el alma eminente, y cuya manceba suprema no fue ni Franconia Salmón, ni Electra Tejerina Moncil, ni Misiamís del circo, ni Walküre Verboten, sino la sublime Cultura.³

With Chapter Six, San Francisco del Milagro has definitely evolved into a twentieth-century metropolis. The style of the narrative, as in previous chapters, conforms to the historical time described. The author delights in inventing prosaic expressions: "Hombre sin

¹Ibid., p. 73.

²Ibid., pp. 348-49.

³Ibid., p. 352.

siesta--dice un refrán lugareño--, hombre sin testa y sin fiesta." A stylish section of the city is labeled "el barrio chic de la Mandioca."

The age of mass production brings with it mass populations and mass culture. The government builds public housing in order to solve the problems of urban sprawl, but it succeeds only in creating a blighting environment of "monobloques":

Caravanas de hormigas treparon los catorce pisos, pués los ascensores no funcionaban aún
Mostraron a parientes y amigos . . . los cuartos de baño minuciosos, las cocinas alertas; lo que calentaba y lo que refrigeraba; las idénticas Bicicletas minúsculas, fijas sobre los lechos iguales; los Niños Cíclopes de celuloide; los muebles provenzales; las flores de engomada cartulina; los espejos y su adorno de borlas, todo ello reiterado de un domicilio al siguiente con fotográfica exactitud, y de un nivel al otro, y de un bloque a su mellizo.¹

But the proletariat is not happy, engages in successive strikes and, eventually, civil war breaks out.

At the other pole of the social world, it is the era of sophisticated entertainment, exemplified by the important role played by the "Apricotina Golf Club." At night, party-goers, anxious to try new rhythms, spend their time in a "boîte." The distance between the Old and New Worlds is diminished by modern transportation, and a whole generation of (wealthy) Apricotinos traverses the sea to lively Paris. Among them is the future "Líder" himself, Benicio Bracca Montete, later called Bracamón

¹Ibid., p. 395.

in imitation of the original founder of the city. He also leaves for Paris as the cosmopolitan members of the Apricotina Golf Club sing "For he's a jolly good fellow." Once there, Benicio Bracca's political nature begins to reveal itself and we follow him as he searches out those who will eventually further his rise to power. Mujica Láinez is here offering us a caricature on the common Latin American history of mercurial governments and successive coups d'état. The very name Bracamón, recalling the founder of the city, reinforces the cyclical historical vision of Mujica Láinez, where the more things change on the surface the less they change in essence:

Eso lo llevó a intimar con ciertos grupos de políticos sudamericanos, exiliados a raíz de distintas revoluciones, en cuyo seno anudó amistades numerosas y cambiantes, ya que quienes los integraban, a menudo mudaban su posición de proscritos por la de dueños de la sartén del mando, lo que los obligaba a regresar apresuradamente a sus capitales respectivas. Los lugares que los ayer desterrados y hoy gobernantes dejaban en los cafés, donde se discutía sin parar, la situación laberíntica del nuevo continente, no quedaban mucho tiempo vacíos¹

At times, the narrator presents a view of the age through a collage. Such an interpolation of superficially unrelated ideas can, in combination, give an overall image of extreme realism. It is a technique used in surrealism, in the nouveau roman, in Pop Art, and in modern cinematography. Within the novel, one can exemplify it through the following monologue, in which Benicio,

¹Ibid., p. 378.

returning from Europe, formulates sentences of "unconnected subject matter":

Doña Cleo ofreció una comida para su ahijado, a la que asistió el Gobernador, en el comedor presidido por los retratos de Don Máximo Cochón y Rocaful y de la renga Casilda Hambres, y Benicio la salpimentó con frases polilingües que dieron idea de su evolución, como "see you in church," "Aimez-vous Brahms?" y "Davanti a lui, tremava tutta Roma."¹

The last comment is an ingenious allusion to Tosca's line at the end of the second act of Puccini's opera, after she has murdered the tyrant Scarpia. The irony results from the author's intentional allusion to tyranny, as naively spoken by a would-be-tyrant (Benicio Bracamonte) in a work (De milagros) which is a bitter denunciation of Latin American tyranny.

In the sixth chapter the journalist-historian appears as both observer of the action and protagonist; previously, he had merely recorded data or synthesized historical sources. Manuel Mujica Láinez uses him in this chapter to portray the travesty of the historian's quest, and he achieves this by lampooning the sham objectivity on which the journalist-historian prides himself. Essentially, Mujica Láinez is saying that objectivity in historiography is a myth, and that, more often than not, historians cannot avoid taking sides. They are, after all, products of a particular environment, and their life experiences and values guide them towards

¹Ibid., p. 386.

a particular ideological interpretation of reality. In this chapter, the journalist-historian is unwittingly manipulated by the leader so as to produce a censored history. But Mujica Láinez also warns against the pitfalls of socialist-revolutionary history, towards which some historians might be drawn by their desire to escape the "establishment" interpretation. At one point, the journalist has been accorded an interview with the proletarian leader, and he seeks to obtain some badly needed information regarding the latter's youthful trip to Paris. He does not get much hard data, but he does get a lesson in how to write revolutionary history. The leader says to him: "A la Historia, como a lo demás en la vida, hay que gobernarla. Me imagino que Usted sabrá ponerla con los fines de nuestra revolución."¹

While we cannot turn to De milagros in order to learn how to write history or historical fiction, it is worthwhile to study the use and manipulation of irony throughout the novel. We can see how the journalist-historian, the narrator and collator of the chronicles which together form this complex account, emerges as the object of attack precisely because of his closeness to the historical account. Meanwhile, the author, Mujica Láinez, has maintained a distance through witty dissimulation and the use of a double persona. Through

¹Ibid., p. 400.

this mask he has, in effect, mocked the narrator's semblance of objectivity and constant assertions of professional "integrity." The latter emerges as an "esclavo de la verdad."¹ Time and again he asserts that his conclusions are based on bona fide documentation: "Hasta ahora," he explains, "la elaboración de este volúmen se efectuó sobre la base exclusiva de tradiciones y documentos."² Since the journalist-historian has been portrayed as naive and certain of the honesty of his task, he appears to the reader as an object of ridicule by the "real" author, the true creator of De milagros y de melancolías.

The seventh part of the novel, the short "Epílogo espiritista," centers on the leader's vision of the future. Mujica Láinez' cynical perception of world politics and his vision of the historical process hinge on the outcome of this final part of De milagros. The work can be seen as a microcosm of the vicissitudes of all mankind, and, in particular, of the destruction wrought by single-minded political leaders. In this respect, the images developed in the last part of the novel remind us of themes in Boule's Planet of the Apes and Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey. They are not comforting in the least.

The vision portrays a destroyed San Francisco de Apricotina, perhaps in the year 3000, which is in the

¹Ibid., p. 400.

²Ibid., p. 401.

process of being rediscovered and founded once again. The group of beings who form that future expedition, although of human semblance, may be closer to apes in appearance (the author mentions "monas"). In any case, they are hairy beings: "Integraba el grupo ambulante medio centenar de individuos hirsutos, cubiertos de pelos . . . que aparecían y desaparecían bajo las estrellas metálicas."¹ Just as the original expedition of Don Nufrio Bracamonte had sported a soldier-chronicler, so this group includes its own historian, another "Diego Cintillo," one whose chronicles are written, not on paper, but are hammered and carved into red stones. Here is the final irony of the novel, for the red stone is linked to the runa of Chapter Five, which was supposedly the evidence that a superior Germanic race were the first discoverers of the New World. Here is a structural hinge which portrays, symbolically, the myth of eternal recurrence. The red stone--message from the future or relic of the past, we never really find out which--is one of the fantastic elements in the narrative. Insofar as it implies a Communist vision of historical progress, it is ironical to see the future belonging to a race of beings who have receded from the features we associate with humanity. In any case, the red stone is a symbolic element indicative of man's perennial voyage and eventual return.

¹Ibid., p. 421.

Since every work of erudition must contain a well-documented bibliography, Manuel Mujica Láinez furnishes a rather complete set of references for each of his chapters, immediately following the "Epílogo espiritista." This last gesture of humorous counter-erudition completes the novel's parody of a "true" historical account. It is, in its totality, an ironic summary of the imaginary sources which an equally imaginary narrator has consulted for the faithful documentation of his work.

Mujica Láinez' Satire of
Political and Social
Institutions

De milagros y de melancolías contains an incisive parody of historiography and scholarly erudition. It also satirizes the follies and vices of Latin American politics and society, and the enormous distance between the aspirations and realities of the various institutions. Among the objects of the author's attack are political leaders, the legal profession, the religious establishment, and the modern intelligentsia in its educational and scientific bastions.

It is worth mentioning that in the long line of leaders of San Francisco de Apricotina, even those who showed potential affinity for nobler ideals succumbed to the dehumanizing forces of power as they reached the top rungs of the social ladder. Perhaps the author is stressing the corrupting effects of power, and the inability of man

to resist the corroding effects of leadership. But if the political intention of the satire is evident, especially in reference to many particularly disastrous events in Latin American history, Mujica Láinez is also implying an overall nullifying process of constant progression and regression, which extends all the way to human knowledge itself. One has only to witness the dehumanizing power of scientific discovery in the light of man's inability to learn, to transcend and conquer the vices and stupidities of his character.

As an example of a potentially just and honest leader, the author selects the "Libertador" Xavier Moncil. He heads the movement for independence and clearly represents an allusion to Simón Bolívar. "El General Virgen," as he is humorously styled even after losing his virginity, is presented as "un joven minado por el liberalismo francés."¹ He is seen to pursue the ideals of independence with a singlemindedness comparable to that of the resplendent epic heroes:

. . . fue . . . un paladín medieval, persuadido de la trascendencia sacra de su misión, que infligió las derrotas personalmente, metiéndose a caballo en el remolino de las ofensivas y matando a derecha y a izquierda, y a filo y contrafilo.²

Yet this physical and moral leader of the Revolution undergoes a change sometime after the wars of Independence. He is repeatedly shown to flaunt and betray the very ideals

¹Ibid., p. 160.

²Ibid., p. 168.

in whose name the revolution was started. After the fight, "ahito de sangre fraterna y adversaria,"¹ he is shown to adhere to reactionary principles:

El general [now promoted to Jefe] decidió que la Monarquía, lo más parecido que hay a la Iglesia Militante en este frágil mundo, protegería con su fe santa al destino de Santa Fe.²

Moncil learns to deceive the public with the charisma of the politician's rhetoric: "Se advertía con exceso que era más importante el embalaje retórico que la sustancia medular."³ As his government takes shape, he promotes values responsible for the persistent ideological factionalism which is to plague all subsequent governments. The city of miracles itself never returns to the legitimacy of monarchy, nor yet does it achieve the democratic self-rule of a republic. Finally, the general is murdered, the implication being that only very seldom can the political leader die a natural death. His death, similar to and equated by the author with that of Marat at the hands of Charlotte Corday, is the logical culmination of his own political predicament.

An expansive satirical note marks the passing of the "Libertador," as the author incorporates, in Pop-Art fashion, the elegiac notes of Borges and José Asunción Silva:

¹Ibid., p. 171.

²Ibid., p. 174.

³Ibid., p. 182.

Adiós, réprobo General Xavier Moncil.
 Al fin me encuentro con mi destino sudamericano;
 en esta noche toda llena de murmullos, de perfumes
 y de música de alas, Melpómene, la musa de la
 tragedia, viene.¹

Amid the satirical strains of this "saga Apricotina," the author does occasionally unmask himself, and, in so doing, disclose his moral-didactic stand. At least, the sadness and bitterness of certain passages which comment on the "true" state of affairs in the newly-formed Latin American nations seems to betoken sentiments belonging not only to the fictional personae, but to their creator, Mujica Láínez, as well. The following is an example:

No fueron días sino años y años de ominoso desbarajuste, la Negra Anarquía, la Edad Media de Santa Fe, la época para unos bizantina y para otros bárbara, de nuestro pobre país. Los generales convocaron a sus ejércitos y se repartieron a Santa Fe la Nueva como un succulento pastel. Conchilla asumió el gobierno de Tucla; Perásper, el de Santa Isabel de Avila; Adastra, el de Mirafior de los Batiques; el General Licenciado Ramsés Otero Otero (que hizo popular el alias de Teruteru), maestro de la Logia Masónica de Chango Pampa, empuñó con firmes manos las riendas de Santa Fe, la desvaída capital, y a Octaviano Panida Sistro le concedieron San Francisco de Apricotina, bajo la fiscalización severa del ya General Manlio Perlones. Tras ellos se abatió una nube de parientes codiciosos, reclamando fincas, ganados, muebles, pesos, cargos, títulos, la Orden del Mérito de Moncil, una pensión, una invitación a comer, una sonrisa, un rápido tuteo en público. En verdad ha sido cosa de milagro--de milagros y melancolías--que la integridad nacional no se despedazase en republiquetas, vástagos de las provincias antagónicas.² El Derecho se evaporó y la Justicia fue jubilada.

¹Ibid., p. 217.

²Ibid., p. 225.

In reading this novel, one is reminded of the old adage, "He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword." But Manuel Mujica Láinez seems to go even further than this by cynically implying that he who rules is not only bound to abandon the ideological dreams which originally motivated his quest for power, but that he must eventually also be overcome by the burdens of power and office. The book's import is pessimistic and negative. If there is a saving grace or glimmer of hope in the vision, it is found in the author's ability to mock even the most serious situation, that is, in the humor of the satirical vision.

In addition to the parody of history and historians, and the satire at the expense of political leaders and institutions, Mujica Láinez also directs his irony at the major cultural institutions of Latin American society. Among his tools in this enterprise are the standard techniques of the satirist, namely hyperbole, enumeration, repetition, magnification and reduction.

All of these are exemplified in Mujica Láinez' attack on the legal profession. In the course of it, he creates a humorous situation through a sophisticated juxtaposition of antithetical elements. The attack is centered around the career of Don Baltasar, the son of the founder of the mythical San Francisco, Don Nufrio Bracamonte. According to the story, Don Baltasar was supposed to inherit the government of his father's city

after Don Nufrio's death. However, he was deposed by Don Mendo Desabrido de Acre, who had gained the favor of the Spanish colonial government. Don Baltasar, terribly naive in matters of politics "carecía de políticas luces," decided to take the matter to court for a judicial settlement. Off he goes to Spain, where begins the account of one of the most humorous episodes in the novel, and engages the help of a lawyer. This worthy, "un extraño personaje centroeuropeo" by the name of Barón Kafka, leads Don Baltasar through an insurmountable legal wrangle, a voyage of no return that leads the plaintiff to plead his rights (unsuccessfully, of course) through half the courtrooms of Spain. Needless to say, governments change hands and witnesses die before the verdict is ever formulated. The absurdity of the whole episode bears unmistakeable allusions to Franz Kafka's Trial, and it can itself be viewed as a paradigm of the archetypical trial:

Murió Don Suero por fin, vomitando bilis; murieron el conde de la Amargura y el valido de Su Majestad, y se pudo inferir que la atmósfera cambiaría entonces. Pero--como señaló con acierto el Barón Kafka--el Proceso se había vuelto demasiado complicado, y lo mas púa, aprovechando la inanición de los extintos, era regresar a fojas uno, solicitar otros jueces, otras audiencias. Dejóse el preso arrastrar en el laberinto Kafkiano (el Barón merece el adjetivo), y recomenzaron los trámites, pero era tarde ya para volver sobre tantas y tantas condenas y apelaciones, y además, como dijimos, nadie se atrevía, por generoso que su espíritu fuese, a internarse en el fárrago del litigio, cuyas hojas se numeraban por millares. Hasta que murió Doña Llantos Piña de Toro; murió el Barón Kafka, a quien otorgan, empero, inmortalidad peregrina sus escritos sutiles; murió prematuramente el propio Don Baltasar, mártir de burócratas, de

camarillas, de cohechos, de sobornos, de ignorancias, de testarudeces, de abstenciones, de inercias. Y el Proceso mágico los sobrevivió, porque continuó reptando de tribunal en tribunal, como si hubiera cobrado una vitalidad privada, independiente de la desaparición de su causa, y como si se nutriera y tonificara con el vigor resucitado de tantos difuntos, trémulos de pasión férvida, de modo que a menudo los jueces desconocían el fallecimiento de Don Baltasar y, hartos de revolver una papelería ilegible, ordenaban que los autos y el preso fuesen transferidos a otra cárcel y a otra jurisdicción.¹

Far more complex is the attack formulated, within the context of De milagros, against the religious institutions. First of all, one must bear in mind that the attack is centered not so much on religious belief as it is on the Catholic Church and the important role it has played throughout the history of Latin America. Manuel Mujica Láinez satirizes the hypocrisy of church officials at several stages of the book, corresponding to different periods in the development of the mythical Apricotina. He excels in paradox, intertwining pagan and Christian symbolism. For example, when Don Seráfico, the first priest in the chronicle of the foundation of the city, witnesses the suicide of the fifteen-year-old lovelorn Catalina del Temblor, notwithstanding empirical evidence, he interprets the scene as the miraculous appearance of an angel, an irrefutable messenger of God's divine intercession in earthly affairs.

¹Ibid., pp. 110-11.

We are mockingly introduced to Fray Recato, the young artist-sculptor brought to embellish the city's newly planned buildings. He "disponía de tantos brazos como una diosa Hindú." Again, in another chapter, as the city burns amid the chaos of political upheaval, the church is satirized for its concern with frivolous matters, such as the acquisition of a relic of the "blindwoman of Sape-sape." We are shown how, amid the turmoil,

la iglesia continuaba su sereno camino, segura de su raigambre perpetua, por divina, y al manejar cuestiones que pueden parecer de mínima importancia al desavisado heterodoxo, pero que atañen en lo profundo a sus intereses espirituales y no a los problemas que debate el vulgo, daba un ejemplo de estabilidad conmovedora. El resto, lo humano, lo perecedero, saltaba de agitación en agitación, buscándose, contradiciéndose, desgarrándose, y ella seguía, incólume, fundada sobre una roca.¹

Probably the event which surpasses all previous satire of the religious establishment occurs during the rule of the illiterate "Caudillo" Gaspar Bravaverga (Chapter four), whose "ineludibles botones violáceos" remind us of the Rosas dictatorship and its symbolic color. Gaspar falls in love with two cousins, Electra and Ifigenia: "amó intensa y sincrónicamente a ambas doncellas." In his desire to marry both--and here the author makes veiled allusions to contemporary double standards of morality--Gaspar threatens to break away from the traditional Church and to found a new church ("La Nueva

¹Ibid., p. 173.

Iglesia de Santa Fe"), unless the established Church conforms to his desires.

"Y Gaspar se casó," states the author laconically, "en Nuestra Señora de las Cenizas, con Electra y con Ifigenia. Fue ése, a no dudarlo, de los espectáculos del templo, el más singular, y excedió a cuanto Enrique VIII soñara" ¹

The satire of the religious establishment is paralleled by the sarcastic barbs directed at the modern secular intelligentsia, with its educational and scientific establishments, and its fatuous faith in the idea of Progress through historical evolution. There is passing mention of the feminist movement, which succeeds in teaching men to embroider while women learn to ride horses. ² The author also alludes to the changing role of women in politics, with its negative effect on a predominantly male-oriented society: "Al establecerse el predominio político de las mujeres, afemináronse los hombres." ³ And, of course, he charts the rise to political consciousness of the proletariat contemporaneously with the development of technology, and then proceeds to symbolize the process through its embodiment in their champion and tyrant's promotion of the bicycle.

¹Ibid., p. 254.

²Ibid., p. 311.

³Ibid., p. 316.

Intellectuals and scientists, the high priests of the new social order, are satirized on the basis of their ridiculous names and superfluous activities. Although the author's use of imaginative invented names aids in the depiction of comic situations, it is sometimes overdone to the point of monotony. This stylistic tool is used to enumerate several European scientists and scholars whose years of grueling research produce unnecessary discoveries, or none at all. Some examples of such travesties on the men of science include Professors Kronos Verboten, Tranquille Jamaisplus, Gustav Aberg-Bruchmann, Ruggiero Calotto, Simeón Nocturno y Martín Bartolomé Lindo Bambino. The bearers of these proud names are described in glowing terms:

Su inteligencia, su comprensión, su minucia, su firmeza para aislarse de cuanto se vinculara con la realidad general, y concretarse a la realidad particularísima, reconfortaron a Cagliostro Bravaverga Enclaustrados como cenobitas, entre mapas, herbarios, telescopios, y léxicos, demostraron ser otros tantos fuelles pujantes que alimentaron la fragua de la sabiduría milagrera. Sus cerebros irradiaban tal calor, cuando se reunían para intercambiar observaciones que aún en la estación de las lluvias invernales, debían despojarse de la mayoría de sus ropas, para resistir al baño turco de su erudición, y que sin cesar reclamaban alcoholes que aplacasen el sapiente hervidero.¹

We have emphasized primarily the technical aspects of Manuel Mujica Láinez' attack on the human condition. He has proceeded in his task by transferring elements of

¹Ibid., p. 339.

satire to both the form and content of his work. On the level of form, he has conceived a parody of history and cultural styles which offers the reader a realistic account in the form of an antihistoria. On the level of content, he has fashioned his attack by presenting successive "tableaux of constant irony." The objects of his attack, so varied that a fair treatment would have required more space than can be afforded in a work of this nature, include most aspects of Latin American society. They are treated with the contempt of the satirist. Underlying that contempt, as with all satire, is the reformer's positive desire to expose man's folly and to appeal to his common sense through wit, humor and irony.

Mujica Láinez' Fusion of
Magic-Realism and Parody

In addition, part of the novel's creative function has been to counteract the sobriety of the denunciation with elements of the real-imaginary. The novel's concern with myth, magic, fantasy, the prodigious and the marvelous clearly raises it out of the realm of simple satire, and brings the work into focus with contemporary currents of Latin American magic-realism.

As had been said earlier, De milagros y de melancolías was written around the same time as Gabriel García Márquez' Cien años de soledad. However different the two works may seem at an initial glance, both partake

of certain modern ideological and aesthetic currents. A comparison supports the view that De milagros is an example of magic-realist narrative.

In this regard, George Schanzer has subjected the two works to a detailed study in the article, "The Four Hundred Years of Myths and Melancholies of Manuel Mujica Láinez."¹ He indicates some of the narrative elements which are shared by both Mujica Láinez and García Márquez, whose Cien años is by common consent an outstanding example of the magic-realist genre in Latin America. The parallels between the two authors include the use of the "utopia-épopée" and the "phoenix" myths, as well as the age-old myths of the heroic leader, of unlimited virility, of the conquest of death, and of eternal recurrence. Schanzer also points out further stylistic and structural similarities, including "the extensive use of enumeration and exaggeration, . . . the employment of epithets or 'tags' to identify characters, . . . frequent images of age, decay and destruction; strong female characters and weak male personages obsessed with their extravagant enterprises."²

Additional structural parallels between Cien años de soledad and De milagros y de melancolías include the use of verbal tableaux, the "constant links between past and present; e.g., the characters dream of devices which

¹Schanzer, op. cit.

²Ibid., p. 70.

later would become part of modern life; the use--and perhaps overuse--of comical names; last, but not least, an extraordinary linguistic creativity."¹

Some of these parallels indicate a common satirical intention in the two authors. Others, however, are derived from the realm of magic-realism. Taken together, they indicate that it is possible to achieve a brilliant fusion of the dimensions of humor and magic. Perhaps the most important evidence of a magic-realist framework in the two works is the use of the myth of eternal recurrence as "plot vehicle, unity device and cancellor of time."²

The myth of eternal return is an expression of the traditional conception of history: at one and the same time an analysis of historical change in terms of a cyclic pattern, and a spiritual comfort to traditional man against the terrors of history. This understanding of history was not seriously challenged before the rise of the scientific revolution, when Bacon and Pascal introduced the new "conception of linear progress."³ From the seventeenth century on, the idea of progress in history gained more adherents, almost becoming the faith in infinite perfectability of the Enlightenment, the

¹Ibid., p. 70.

²Ibid., p. 69.

³Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 145.

evolutionary optimism of the nineteenth century middle classes, and the historical determinism of the socialist movement.

We have indicated, in the first chapter, how the modern understanding of history was related to the rise of new literary forms, including the novel and the historical novel, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is not coincidental that a loss of confidence in modern industrial civilization should be accompanied by questioning of the idea of progress in history. Among the prophets of the twentieth century should be ranked Nietzsche, who revived the myth of eternal return as a respectable historical perspective.¹ He was followed by a considerable number of writers, disenchanted with the abuses of industrial society, and by philosophers of history such as Spengler and Toynbee, who re-interpreted history in terms of cyclical patterns.² We have seen how this conception of history has been characteristic of Mujica Láinez from his early short stories up to his very latest adventures in magic-realism and the fantastic.

This theme is also evident in Cien años de soledad. Both Garcia Marquez' novel and De milagros y de melancolías are presented as chronicles or sagas, either of a family (in the case of Cien años) or of a city ruled by successive generations of "one-eyed" men (in the case of De

¹Ibid., p. 146.

²Ibid., p. 146.

milagros). Both combine the chronicle framework with an abundant use of prodigious, mythical, magical and fantastic elements. It is, of course, appropriate that a return to the primitive conception of history should be accompanied by a return to the primitive understanding of reality, with its stress on the mythical and the magical.

My concern in referring to the parallels between the two works of García Márquez and Mujica Láinez stems from an interest in the essentially similar world view which emerges from a careful study of the two novels. They were written around the same time, the first edition of Cien años de soledad appearing in May 1967, while De milagros y de melancolías followed about a year later in 1968. Schanzer has suggested that the unusual perspective of De milagros would have won a wider audience had it not followed so closely behind the publication of García Márquez' novel.¹ In any case, it is apparent that the similarities between the two works derive from a syncretization or synthesis, by their respective authors, of contemporary artistic and philosophical currents. Thus, both authors deliberately incorporate historical data and allude to recognizable institutions of the Latin American scene as objects of attack. Both use irony extensively throughout their novels. And both employ important magic-realist elements.

¹Schanzer, p. 66.

For satire to be a successful art form, it must combine the aggressiveness of denunciation with the poetry of imagination. An admixture of the didactic and the aesthetic is essential if the author's work is to teach and delight at the same time. Thus, in the words of the literary critic Matthew Hodgart, "true satire demands a high degree both of commitment to and involvement with the painful problems of the world, and simultaneously a high degree of abstraction from the world."¹

Many of the imaginative elements which contribute to the abstraction of the satire from the petty trivia of the real world are derived from magic-realism. One fundamental magic-realist theme, echoed in the rise and fall of every sinister figure of the chronicle, and recorded with particular vividness in the seventh chapter with its apocalyptic vision of the city's destruction and rediscovery, is that of eternal recurrence. The circular movement of the plot with its repeated premonitions of catastrophe; the beginning and end of successive leaders; the sequences of clarity intermixed with others of obscurity (mirrored in eras of light followed by eras of darkness--"la época de luz y la época de tinieblas"); the stylistic concerns which alternate between classical and baroque--all these ultimately lead nowhere. In fact, at times, the very exaggeration of this cyclic concept

¹Hodgart, p. 11.

of history, achieved through constant repetition and innumerable allusions to man's folly, becomes overwhelming and emotionally depressing.

Herein lies a drawback to an overall positive critical evaluation of the novel: for monotony ensues from the author's constant reiteration of the absurdity of the human condition, of its perennial defeats in the struggle against the determining forces of nature, both external and human. Only the mythical vision can redeem history.

In De milagros, the theme of eternal recurrence is "plot vehicle, unity device and canceller of time."¹ Nowhere is the import of this Nietzschean theme more evident than in the description of a uniting physical characteristic manifest in every one of the rulers of the mythical city. For every ruler, from the founder Don Nufrio to the Lider Benicio Bracca, is one-eyed; and whether this condition resulted congenitally or through violence, the important fact remains that by the time each of these leaders reaches public office, he is endowed with this defect. Thus, in the perennial legacy of one-eyed men, the tuerto is an element of the fantastic, of the "real-imaginary." Furthermore, and of interest with respect to the author's insight into the genesis of myth, this physical defect is recognized by the people as a

¹Schanzer, p. 69.

prerequisite for holding office in the city. Originally, the defect was seen to be a defect; however, man's easily impressionable nature soon converted the ordinary into an extraordinary trait. It became a characteristic which man wished to link in some symbolic way to the divine order.

The Cyclops holds the key to the interpretation of this myth. It may refer to some particular one-dimensional characteristic of leadership. However, all interpretations regarding the nature of this symbol within Mujica Láinez' narrative can be regarded as only tentative speculation. One thing is certain, and that is the author's interest in the mythical beings of classical antiquity. The Cyclops, the Minotaur, and the Centaur are some of the literary devices which have been used, throughout the history of narrative, to portray, often negatively, the bestial elements in man's nature.

Once again, the use of myth takes us into the pre-modern understanding of history and human nature, where human activities are seen as participating in a mysterious, transcendent, divine dimension, which both symbolizes and explains the many contingencies and irrationalities of human existence.

In De milagros y de melancolías, the author focuses on the fantastic as an aesthetic element, an element ever present in true satire, to develop a parody of the absurdities he has encountered in real-life situations.

The use of fantasy and humor in the narrative enables the author to avoid surrendering to the tragic side of the events described. That would be very easy given the nature of the trials and tribulations of the historical process described. Fantasy and humor give the narrative a certain freedom, fashioning an escape from the oppressiveness experienced by bitter attack while, concurrently, directing our attention to the objects of attack. It allows for the aesthetic fulfillment of a work which might otherwise collapse under the weight of didacticism.

Elements of the "real-imaginary" enter Mujica Láinez' parody of history, as they did in the two previously published historical works, Bomarzo and El Unicornio. But there are essential differences with regard to the function of the "real-imaginary" in the previous historical fiction and in this satirical "anti-historia." Perhaps the most important fact to be remembered is that the first two works interpreted rather than questioned man's fashioning and assimilation of myths. Man was therefore shown as necessarily partaking of the natural and supernatural orders. De milagros y de melancolías, however, mocks this very human longing for a mythology. Here the satire is centered on man's superstitious nature and on his misinterpretation of natural phenomena--all of which leads to a useless "mythification." Here, in part, lies the originality of De milagros y de

melancolías--for it exposes the process of mythification, so essential to the study of magic-realist narrative, while at the same time it is critical if not contemptuous of the very same process.

Thus, the critique of the process of mythification is part of the novel's attack, while myth still remains crucial to the aesthetic composition of the novel, but for its poetic rather than didactic import.

In the process of demythification, Manuel Mujica Láinez satirizes in particular those myths which deal with religious superstition, or those which were incorporated by the Catholic Church for evangelical reasons, as a compromise with the native inhabitants of the New World. The author also excels in satirizing myths which are commonly linked to the particular Latin American culture. For example, he mocks myths dealing with machismo, virginity, virility and longevity. Throughout the book, this is done humorously, the author's intent being to deflate existing myths without moral indictments which would overemphasize the absurdity of the said myths. This allows for a certain pervasive aura of magic which seeps through the whole narrative. The process of demythification is serious in itself, for it serves to illustrate the underlying forces of belief and faith at the root of any civilization, but the manner in which it is done is delightfully humorous and always interesting.

One further point is worth mentioning with respect to the overall use of myth throughout the novel. It is a fact that the process of demythification does not spread to absolutely every facet of the "real-imaginary." Not at all. There are abundant references to the magical dimension for which the author offers no empirical explanation. One of these elements is illustrated by the dwarf-leader Bravaverga and his unaccountable magical powers. Another is the mythical allusion to the Homeric Cyclops, the symbol of the one-eyed rulers. It has a long line of literary antecedents; reputedly, James Joyce used parody in the Cyclops passage of his Ulysses to explode the inflated pretension of nationalism. There is also no explanation for the appearance of the red stones (runas), except that one did appear during the leadership of the "Caudillo" and that a group of them appears in the last part of the novel. The last vision of the séance also pertains to the realm of the real-imaginary, as do the unquestioned practices of voodoo in the fourth and sixth chapters of the novel. Finally, the very city of San Francisco de Apricotina has been founded at the site of an enormous black stone (the Indians called it their "fertility goddess"). The description of this stone cannot help reminding us of the magnificent and mysterious statues of Easter Island, whose presence remains unexplained to this day. Even the legend of El Dorado, the

goal of riches which spurred the original founder Don Nufrio Bracamonte on his voyage, is still part of contemporary speculation; perhaps it will be forever symbolic of man's quest for the unattainable. Thus, man's falsely forged myths--a product of his inordinate desire to reduce the supernatural order to his own field of vision--run, side by side, in this saga of the archetypical Latin American civilization, with that realm of secondary essences which is still to be explored and discovered. For no matter how successful Mujica Láinez is in his satirical deflation of myth, his work attests to the importance of that dimension of hidden reality which still lurks, as yet undiscovered, in the secret enclaves of the New World and in the hearts of its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to trace the changes and evolution in the historical vision of Manuel Mujica Láinez under the impact of the perspective of magic-realism. His literary odyssey reveals a movement from conventional historical fiction towards an understanding of man which is tinged with elements of the irrational, the mythical and the fantastic. It parallels a general re-emergence of mythical elements, which had been relegated to a secondary position by social realist writers and historical novelists alike, within twentieth-century literature. Latin American writers have been prominent leaders in this movement, and the development of magic-realism has raised the literature of the continent, perhaps for the first time, to world stature.

It was argued that the introduction of fantastic, mythical and surrealist elements in twentieth century literature reflects a fundamental re-orientation in the self-understanding of western civilization. It is related to a breakdown in the self-confidence of the scientific perspective and of the middle-class society which rested upon it. Just as the rise of that perspective and that

society had produced the new genres of the novel and the historical novel, so its decline has turned writers back towards a pre-modern orientation to man's nature, to the possibilities of historical progress, and to man's place in the cosmos. Contemporary literature clearly emphasizes the irrational forces governing man, as opposed to those of enlightened self-interest; it has replaced the faith in progress and human perfectability with the pre-modern theme of eternal recurrence; it has abandoned the picture of an orderly cosmos progressively revealed by science and technology with a vision of a mysterious natural order which affects human destiny in unpredictable ways. Because of these changes, contemporary man can more readily interpret his life and its meaning by using the symbols of mythology, whether in its classical, or pagan, or pre-Colombian forms. This is a discovery of Latin American literature. It also represents the culmination of the changing historical vision of Manuel Mujica Láinez.

Literature presents in concrete images the implications of these philosophical and metaphysical changes. That is why a study of the themes and the characters in the novels of Mujica Láinez has an importance beyond the purely stylistic or literary dimension. In tracing the geographical, historical and sociological motifs of Aquí vivieron we discover the starting-point of a traditional historical novelist who sought to chronicle the roots and

essence of his society. In Misteriosa Buenos Aires these realistic elements are supplemented by, but not integrated with, elements of the supernatural--elements such as ghosts, visions, magic mirrors--which are interpreted as epiphenomena deriving from human psychology.

With Bomarzo, Mujica Láinez moved away from a study of Latin American society or history and sought to trace the emergence of the brilliant civilization of the Renaissance. He was able to integrate the historical techniques developed by writers such as Scott for the portrayal of the events of an age, with the psychological insights of thinkers such as Freud and Jung. The key to this fusion is his treatment of the esoteric sciences of astrology, demonology, and alchemy. The nineteenth century novelist might have treated these as idle curiosities or as superstitions which prevented man from attaining his historical destiny. Manuel Mujica Láinez, on the other hand, shows this element to be an ingredient indispensable for grasping the aspirations of the age, even after objective historiography has exhausted the political, military, and artistic dimensions of the period. Bomarzo is an important application of magic-realist insights, not upon some undiscovered tribe or pre-Colombian civilization, but to the very century which gave rise to modern Western culture.

The novels which follow Bomarzo continue this evolution in the historical vision of Mujica Láinez. In El Unicornio, and much more so in Crónicas reales and De milagros y de melancolías, the author subordinates his historical vision to the magical or mythical dimension. El Unicornio does this in the course of a re-creation of medieval life which incorporates four elements: the magical, the miraculous, the mythical-legendary and the fantastic. These four elements constitute the real-imaginary world of medieval France and of the Crusades which the author sets against the real-objective world of conventional history and historical fiction. That the former world clearly dominates the latter is reflected in the character of the main protagonist and narrator of El Unicornio, the fairy Melusina. Yet the entire portrayal is, at the same time, faithful to the psychological insights of the Freudian school, and the reader is asked to balance these two visions, that of medieval man as he understood himself and as we wish to understand him.

Finally, in De milagros y de melancolías, the author parodies the quest for a historical understanding of man and indicates his preference for a fantastic vision. He indicates the impossibility of reconstructing the events of the past with the tools of the chronicler or historian. Myth and illusion are shown to be fundamental in understanding the evolution of an archetypical Latin

American civilization, whose progress from barbarism to civilization is revealed as subject to the myth of eternal recurrence. De milagros y de melancolías culminates the literary development of Manuel Mujica Láinez from historical fiction to magic-realism and fantasy. It succeeds in deflating the historical element in fiction. However, it does not fully succeed in explaining away the mythical dimension of human life. After the many illusions and superstitions which have afflicted Latin American civilization have been exposed, there still remain important unexplained elements which must be understood as mythical symbols of a mysterious cosmos and of a human nature which even magic-realism has not plumbed to its depths.

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