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The Political Commentary of David Viñas: The "Resemanticization" of a "Borgean" Reality

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The hermeneutical code underlying David Viñas's essayistic and critical writing production takes into account the dialectical relationship existing between discourse and historical or lived reality: the first transforms the stuff of the second in a combination of operations including conscious distortion or play, semi-conscious ideological penetration, and mythical adaptation; the second consists of men and institutions whose behavior and situation are structured — and here enters Viñas's Marxist persuasion — according to largely coherent and recognizable patterns. Throughout the diverse moments in the evolution of his criticism, Viñas's critical goal has been fairly constant: to delineate and identify the different operations or constituent ideologies which have acted upon and influenced the production of discourse, and to clarify as much as possible the nature of the relationship which that particular discourse enjoys with the historical or lived reality. However, what has changed during the last thirty years is the objective Viñas has held for his writing with regard to the dialectical process linking discourse and history.

Identifiable are three more or less distinct stages with regard to the different roles Viñas has depicted for his writing. The first stage, which lasted from his initiation as a writer at the beginning of the 1950s, and ended more or less with the folding of *Contorno* at the end of that decade, was characterized by the strong emphasis given to the role of writing, and in general, culture, in influencing society's socio-economic and political structures. The second stage, which began in the late 1950s and extended more or less up through the 1970s, saw the predominance of a "genetic structuralism." This new critical practice placed an emphasis on analyzing the fundamental relations of consciousness which give the literary work its unity and its specific literary quality; at the same time it sought analysis, through its "political reading" of the text, to complement other readings in demonstrating the maximum possible consciousness

of the social class which created that work in and through the figure of the individual author. The third stage, beginning more or less at the end of the 1970s, and extending up to the present, can be characterized as Viñas's acceptance of a "Borgean" quality to cultural and political discourse in that it sometimes develops in entirely independent ways which cannot be related to changes in society's socio-economic and productive structures.

Viñas's auspicious eruption upon the national cultural scene in Argentina was in conjunction with a talented group of young middle-class writers of university extraction who edited the journal, *Contorno*, between 1953 and 1959. He and his brother, Ismael, were the founders, guiding influences, and principal writers. The ideas and orientations of *Contorno*, therefore, can be accepted as those largely characterizing the early critical writing experience of David Viñas. This stage in his critical trajectory was marked by the group's "partricial" revolt against the older writers of their class on account of the mystified and deceptive labels which the latter's cultural discourse had perpetrated with regard to the society of the time. The underlying principles of almost all of the *Contorno* writing, first in relation to the nation's fictional literature, then in relation to its political system, was the attempt to unangle the confusion of significations that clouded understanding on all fronts. Implicit in the *Contorno* writers' critical task was a belief in the relative power of their own writing, in the first instance, to clarify the body of concepts and theoretical formulations then prevailing in the cultural and political life of their society. Then, in the second instance, the transformed cultural and theoretical fold would in some manner bring about a more coherent and progressive environment with regard to the exercise of political power. That is to say, they believed that the critical act of explaining the link which they held to exist between the liberal writers' brand of irrationalism or lack of realism and a reactionary political position (examples: Martínez Estrada, Borges, and Mallea), was equivalent to effecting a change within the social and political system itself. However, their critics rightly pointed out that this conception of the *engaged* writer, with a supposed voluntaristic power over society's culture, and therefore over social and political structures, revealed the *Contorno* writers' "Promethian *hybris*" — that is, their pretense of being superior to the processes of history and of occupying a privileged role as cultural priests of the social revolution. Critics also pointed out that the *Contorno* critical task largely centered around the cultural production of society's elite groups, and hardly took into account other social groups; almost entirely lacking, even in the *Contorno* essays analyzing the society of their time, was a consideration of the power and performance of Argentina's agro-bourgeois oligarchy and the military, perhaps the two most important forces in public life, both then and today. In essence, the *Contorno* writers' mystified belief in the power of their writing practice for effecting social change, accompanied a near lack of attention to factors relevant to society's infrastructure.¹

The second stage of Viñas's critical trajectory began toward the end of the 1950s when he and his associates with the journal *Contorno*, upon observing first hand the disappointing political results of their previously "illuminist" ad-

macy of socio-economic and productive interests in influencing society's culture and politics. This meant that although Viñas continued to focus upon aspects of the literary text or writing activity, he now took into account to a far greater degree how these were related to social and economic factors. Although the fictional narrative he wrote during this period conforms by and large to the norms associated with "critical" or "social" realism, it would be a mistake to make this same association with his essayistic and critical production,² since that characterization wrongly suggests a fidelity to the tenants of Lukácsian realism, that is, the perspective of society and the individual as seen through the lens of a mechanistically rendered philosophical (or Stalinist) materialism. On the contrary, Viñas's critical discourse has always been characterized by a dialectical quality which has elevated it above the writing of other committed writers embracing a more traditional or "vulgar" Marxism.

Nicolás Rosa and David William Foster persuasively argue that during this second period Viñas's critical practice largely embodied the tenants of "genetic structuralism," as outlined by French Marxist Lucien Goldmann.³ Similar to the advocacy of Goldmann, Viñas's critical discourse called attention to how the ideological crystallizations either articulated by the text or suggested by its context (special metaphors, idiosyncratic repetitions, distinctive syntactic formations, or thematic homologies) functioned on different levels (literary, social, economic, or biographical). In works such as *Del apogeo de la oligarquía a la crisis de la ciudad liberal: Laferrère* (1967)⁴ and *Literatura argentina y realidad política: de Sarriente a Cortázar* (1971),⁵ Viñas continued to focus on texts which were primarily literary in nature. In *Indios, ejército y oligarquía* (1979),⁶ his attention turned to "historical" or political materials. Viñas's task was not to establish a causal structure linking economic to literary or political structures, but rather to suggest totally new readings which went beyond simple thematic signification. In doing so, the "literariness" of the text was respected for its own value — unlike the practice of social realists who tended to reduce the literary text to a sociopolitical script. At the same time, he succeeded in offering a new reading of how the sociopolitical context acts as a catalyst around which the semantic transformations of the text take place. In this critical operation, Viñas has gone beyond the shortcoming of his principal influence, Goldmann, in that his resulting discourse only remotely resembles the *sociology* urged by the latter. Instead, he *imaginatively* relates the different spheres of consciousness, activity, or presence of the writer(s), as revealed or suggested by his reading of the text(s). Unfortunately, Viñas's analysis sometimes confuses the reader due to its overly opaque style or in its facile jumps from one level of analysis to another. But if some passages challenge the reader's comprehension, others offer enormously insightful interpretations.

Viñas's critical discourse parallels the concerns of Goldmann not only with regard to strategies for studying the structures or displacements of a given text, but also with regard to an implicit Marxist hermeneutics which guides the critic in linking super- and infrastructural phenomena. An integral part of this shared Marxist hermeneutics is the understanding that the formal or ideological structures observed in or through the text have "intelligible" or "rational"

zation" and then articulation of "coherence."⁷ There is nothing new or startling about this critical objective, which I articulate here merely to establish a point of comparison for defining the subsequent and most recent stage of Viñas's critical trajectory.

In a recent review article, David William Foster demonstrates the similarity of Viñas's critical practice with the "deconstructive" reading urged by Jacques Derrida (those comments are primarily in relation to *Indios, ejercicio y oligarquía*).⁸ Like Derrida, Viñas first documents how an apparently coherent "discourse," when subjected to a rigorous critical reading, is revealed as a fatally flawed, "unstable equilibrium," due to the self-serving distortions and ideological adjustments that occurred in the process of its production. Second, Viñas's readings from diverse perspectives not customarily associated with the discourse under consideration "open" up the text, thereby demonstrating that it is not hermetically closed but rather enjoys overlapping relations with other texts. And third, by viewing the "discourse" historically, Viñas demonstrates how it functions as a segment of a global text of that nation's self-identity. Although Foster correctly indicates these similarities linking the critical practice of Viñas to that of Derrida, he fails to point out the fundamental difference: whereas the postmodern objective of Derrida is the decentralization of reason and the dissemination of meaning, Viñas's neo-positivist critical endeavor (similar to that of the early Foucault), involves the movement from what is visible and superficial to a latent, uniform, underlying meaning; Viñas's analysis of a set of discourses acquires its fullest meaning only when viewed in the light of what he identifies as the fundamental codes or structures that order social reality. As such, his "deconstructionalist" endeavor hardly differs from the "genetic structuralist" writing of a decade earlier. Indeed—and I restate with emphasis—Viñas's critical writing throughout all three stages is remarkably similar with regard to the strategies employed for analyzing the text and relating that information to the context.

In light of the above, it is necessary to clarify and even correct some misguided comments which Viñas himself made about his critical function in an essay significantly entitled "Poderes de la literatura y literaturas del poder: trabajadores, burócratas y francocontradores" (1975).⁹ The title suggests two unacceptable types of critical endeavor which Viñas wished to overcome in his own practice. The first, written by bureaucratic "escritores carbónicos," utilizes mechanistic categories for interpreting reality according to the prevailing party line; consequently, these critics often render an "artistic" text into a banal, sociological script. The second, produced by the "consabido escritor águila," loses itself in idealistic principles or the folds of the imagination; its attempts at treating human or social problems resemble pot-shots hazarded from such a distance that rarely if ever do they find their mark. Rejecting these two extreme forms of critical praxis, Viñas chose to characterize his own critical endeavor as one among several forms of social production. Like other producers, he provides both a good and a service (through the medium of language), and his vocation obeys many of the same rules as other productions: in exchange for his diligence and concentration ("No cabe hacerse el distraído"), he

idealist myth that treats writing as a form of spiritual activity. No. Writing is merely one profession among many. Without specifying exactly how, Viñas posited that his form of critical and literary production helped him to overcome the "separation" experienced by both the bureaucrat and the eagle. The first, writes Viñas, experiences a type of schizophrenia with regard to society's material bases, to which he ultimately pledges allegiance. The second (he gives Borges as an example) lives mentally distanced from his own body and the society that sustains him. Viñas's theoretical solution for avoiding either practice is to resist mental rigidity through self-criticism and by recovering his "totality" through a continual "dramatización del espacio político" in his writing.

Fine and well up until here. But then Viñas apparently falls for one aspect of the "escritor águila" myth when he explains that the objective of his intellectual labor is to "denaturalize" language: "el material con el que yo trabajo es el lenguaje. . . . Y sobre esa materia concreta yo hago mi faena, trato de elaborarla, de re-elaborarla, de *desnaturalizarla*. Ese es mi oficio." Unfortunately, Viñas does not offer an explanation for this confusing affirmation. Many readers would wrongly interpret these words as an indication of his desire to emulate in his essayistic writing praxis the "denaturalized" aestheticism which typifies the French *nouveaux romans*, Barthesian "degree zero" criticism, or the innovative fiction of one such as Cortázar.¹⁰ (I, however, prefer to interpret the apparent "denaturalization" in *Rayuela* and similar works as an indication of this last author's profound insight into the post-modern life and inauthentic existence of Argentinians.) Nor should Viñas's words be interpreted as an endorsement of a voluntaristic type of writing whose subversive power could overturn corrupt and unjust social institutions—the advocacy of Nietzsche, Sartre, Lukács, and from Argentina's cultural tradition, the young Sarmiento. A contemporary proponent of this writing objective is the latter Foucault, who, with radical hostility toward the existing order, attacked anything smacking of "humanism" and "anthropologism."¹¹ Undoubtedly, Viñas shares to some degree this hostility toward the existing socioeconomic and political order, but his writing *in praxie* hardly incarnates the anti-humanism advocated by Foucault. On the contrary, Viñas's critical strength, ever since the beginnings of *Contorno*, has not been the decentralization of signification, but rather the reestablishment of a level of coherence between culture and material base, between literary and political discourse and lived reality. As such, his attack on *naturalization* seems to follow an early advocacy of Roland Barthes, who in *Mythologies*, condemned any attempt to pass off as *natural* and thus true any concept or analysis that was in fact arbitrary or ideologically determined. Seen in this way, the axis of Viñas's critical writing has been to *resemanticize* language by seeking a new integration of words and meanings. And, as will be demonstrated, his most recent critical endeavor, that of political commentator, continues this task of reconstructing and reendowing with human meaning the cultural and political discourse that has been so trammelled by the forces of oppression in the last decade.

This brings us to the third stage of Viñas's development as a critic, that he-

his core. Viñas, who was among the most eloquent voices opposing the Isabel charade and then the savage authoritarianism of the generals, was singled out as a target for extra-legal execution by the death squads of the ultra-right. After a narrow escape from the country, he eventually joined the large community of Latin American intellectuals in exile. Although Spain became his new home base, he resided for months on end in several different cities of the United States and Europe, where he exercised the responsibilities of "profesor golondrina." But three brothers of the craft were not so fortunate: Haroldo Conti, Rodolfo Walsh and Paco Urondo were all clandestinely seized, undoubtedly tortured, and then "disappeared" by hit-squad thugs. Their crime was presumably "treason" to the homeland for having practiced a critical writing function that "called things by their correct names" — the same lifelong advocacy of Viás himself. Then, he experienced an even greater affliction upon learning that his daughter and son-in-law had met a similar fate; both fell to the rapacious violence that completely consumed the country at the time. Back in the days of *Contorno* Viñas had exhorted his associates to "vivir y escribir como culpables."¹² Now, that would be superseded, at least in his personal case, by what could be described as a mission of "vivir y escribir como afligidos." In this light, his credentials as "agonista" of his country even surpass those of Miguel de Unamuno a half-century ago in Spain. Like Unamuno, Viñas could sincerely declare, "Me duele Argentina. La Argentina soy yo."

Spanish exile brought upon Viñas, among other things, a new set of writing imperatives. His urgent task was now to attack in whatever form possible the heinous military regime back home. Like the exiled Sarmiento before 1852 and Alberdi after that same year, he found in journalistic activity a convenient means for channeling his anger into constructive activity and for reaching to the widest possible audience with his reasoned attacks. This required no new analytical instruments or writing procedures. On the contrary, Viñas has always held that writing genres were merely different strategies for the same basic labor:

La producción literaria como trabajo. Teatro, novela, ensayo, cine. . . . No hay saltos. No. Yo hablaría de desplazamientos. De desplazamientos que tienen como soporte un determinado continuo, un sustrato común: el trabajo literario. Es decir, una misma preocupación literaria. O una misma problemática tratada de diversas maneras. Vistos así, los llamados géneros pueden entenderse como tácticas de composición. Como procedimientos heterogéneos, con sus propias peculiaridades, pero que operan sobre una materia común. En este caso, en mi caso, la Argentina, sus problemas, sus hombres, sus lenguajes, sus miserias y sus contradicciones.¹³

These words of 1975 are brought up to date merely by adding political journalism to the list of genres; it is that writing "tactic" which satisfied best the exigencies of his new situation.

Viñas's critical endeavor in this more recent period remains largely similar to that of the two earlier periods. While not ignoring topics most appropriately understood as literary, cultural, or historical, the subjects he now chooses to investigate belong primarily to the domain of contemporary social and political discourse. Given this new focus and the journalistic medium, his analyses

do not only consist of written documents (whether literary or cultural compositions, speeches, slogans or blueprints for political action); it also encompasses the ideology of a social group and the different manifestations of that ideology as reflected in the gestures and actions of those individuals who have been protagonists in the social or political theater.

Viñas's preferred topics have to do with the most trying issues confronting the country at present. Political and historical analysis receives a high priority in "Argentina, ejército, isabelismo y terror,"¹⁴ in which he outlines the recent developments that have led to the explosion of the "Dirty War" of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Similarly, in "Nacionalismos: del integral al populista" (1984),¹⁵ he compares the military leaders' reactionary political objectives with those of a rekindled Peronism, in that both are implausible and unlikely solutions for Argentina's near future. In "La iglesia entre el Vaticano y Pinochet" (1976),¹⁶ he analyzes the changing role of the Church vis-à-vis the deteriorating human rights situation in Southern Cone countries. "Las armas secretas" (1980)¹⁷ is a passionate but eloquent expression of ire upon learning of the assassination of fellow writer Rodolfo Walsh. "Malouines: de la crise au désastre" (1982)¹⁸ brilliantly analyzes the historical and cultural causes and results of the Malvinas debacle. Lastly, in "Sobre dos falsas simetrías" (1984),¹⁹ Viñas builds upon the syntax of the contemptuous graffiti slogan, "Ni yanquis ni marxistas," in order to analyze key aspects of neo-fascist ideology in Argentina.

Perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of this recent writing is Viñas's consciousness that he is witness to and analyst of a cultural life in radical disequilibrium. That is to say, the words, slogans, political promises, and right-wing threats which have characterized the recent experience of his country, and which continue even after the election of President Raúl Alfonsín, are above all gestures and dramatizations; although inevitably related to observable historical causes, they nevertheless play themselves out according to irrational subjective motivations or labyrinthian social-psychological patterns that have little to do with those historical causes. Consequently, in order to "explain" the bizarre phenomena of contemporary Argentine culture, Viñas often defers to Borges instead of Marx. In comparison to the critical objective of the previous stage, then, his Marxist hermeneutics sometimes is powerless for establishing an intelligible and coherent link between political acts or slogans and social structures.

Here are some examples: When Perón returned to Argentina in 1974 and realized the impossibility of holding together his fragile coalition of political forces, he opted for the path of self-destruction, just like he did back in 1955:

De manera clásica, pues, todo se repitió. Pero con la clave en drama desplazada hacia la entonación del sainete. Claro, de un singular sainete trágico: bufonadas bajo la presencia de la muerte.

Podría decirse, también, que en julio del 74 Perón eligió su muerte. Fue su último golpe de astucia.²⁰

Perón, a perverse Juan Dahmann (the protagonist in Borges's story, "El sur")

institutions, was succeeded in the presidency by his third wife, Isabel. Her role playing at Eva Duarte was to little avail, given the intensification of the country's structural crisis. Most noteworthy about Isabel, Viñas states, were her "ademán 'revolucionario'" and her "alaridos." "Se trataba de un régimen que vociferaba al máximo para seguir disimulando que se quedaba afónico." The repression that followed was similarly out of proportion to the motivating circumstances: "Se sobreactúa hasta el terror."

Then followed the government of Videla, which had no real agenda other than that of destruction: "Con el régimen de Videla el vacío de Isabel se ha hecho sistemático. Su único pivote es la negatividad que se actualiza como antimarxismo, y su solitaria ideología rige como antipensamiento."²¹ People will remember this regime primarily for the terror it left in its wake:

El videlato, así como perdía impetu, ganaba cómplices: los verdugos al servicio de una burocracia concluyeron por proliferar instaurando una burocracia de verdugos. De las dédenes se pasó a las conivencias. Del uniforme, al disfraz. De la jerarquía, a la promiscuidad. Y de San Martín a don Corleone.²²

As the colonels' hold over the country became even more fragmentary, the irrationality of their ideas exceeded previous levels and their actions bordered on the desperate. Galtieri, in order to regain public support, ordered the occupation of the Malvinas and the expulsion of the British. With this flourish he attempted to realize the wildest ambition of the nationalist mythology. According to Viñas, this "dramatic decision," like "un coup de baguette magique," was based on an illusory conception of Argentine military potentialities and a tragic misreading of these interests which would influence the actions later taken by both Washington and London:

Les résultats en sont patents: beaucoup de bruit, une véhémence emphatisée, des 'feits' de rhétorique sans causalité élaborée. Finalement, la magie du verbe! Déplorables conséquences d'une priorité tirée par les cheveux, que nul ne réclamait ni prévoyait et à laquelle personne ne pensait. Ce sont uniquement les généraux qui, par leur opportunisme haletant et sans nuances, prétendent assimiler les Malouines au canal de Suez, au canal de Panama ou au Texas mexicain. Et pourquoi pas un Viet-nam de Ho-Chi-Min!

The conflict that consequently transpired was akin to a "disproportionate game" played by demented souls attempting to fulfill in deed an illusory self-conception of their "exceptionality" and "heroism;" it was their attempt to recreate on the battlefield the ephemeral victory of the national soccer team a few years before. The only doubtful argument observed by this reader in Viñas's otherwise brilliant analysis is the issue of whether the colonels acted on their own behalf — were they totally to blame for leading *el pueblo* in the dramatization of self-congratulatory illusions. On the contrary, there is much to suggest that the conduct of the country's leaders then and in other moments responded to the arrogance and cynicism of a broad sector of the *porteño*, if not national, population.

In brief, all these essays communicate the idea that the rational observer can accept the events of the recent decade only as aspects of a grotesque carnival. But this does not mean that Viñas has abandoned his Marxist hermeneutics.

try in recent years, of relating the threads of cultural discourse to historical action. Viñas traces the roots of the problem as such: In the 1950s the latifundista oligarchy began to realize that the rapid modernization of the country had contributed to the disintegration of its control; its short range remedy was to arrest as much as possible the changes occurring: "Que entre 1952 y 1973 la estructura tradicional de la Argentina ha permanecido intacta pese al verbalismo 'revolucionario' peronista. A la vez que las contradicciones insinuadas en aquella época se han exacerbado al máximo." Later, the oligarchical leaders were joined by the military, who in growing desperation implemented a program aimed at turning back the development of historical forces. All these efforts were inevitably counterproductive and merely exasperated social contradictions. Powerless or unwilling to alter the causes for their declining hegemony, their response was to juggle images and symptoms. They resorted to ideological subterfuge, that is, the creation of a facade of words and gestures in order to mask the severity of the crisis. To be sure, not all of their frenzied acts and ideological and linguistic distractions were totally intentional: witness the widespread mystification in the political arena, as groups from every point of the ideological spectrum — and in particular the ideological right — joined to support the return of "El Gran Utilizador" in 1973, because each group believed that Perón would favor its own interests. Witness Timerman's testimony of what in all likelihood was his torturers' sincere phobia of an Anglo-American capitalist-Russian Communist-Israeli Zionist axis that was intent upon dominating not only the First and Second Worlds, but also the Third. Witness the dehumanized irrationality that reigned in nearly all circles throughout the years of the "Dirty War," but especially in groups associated with the military and the extreme political right: utopian goals legitimized violent means; barbarians considering themselves "clean" and "healthy," committed torture and killing, and those whom others labeled "locoas" mourned over the disappearance of their loved ones. And witness the sheer fantasies of the nation's rulers that led to the tragic-comic finale of the Malvinas debacle. From Viñas's perspective, this reign of unreason does not invalidate a Marxist sociology, *per se*; instead, he realized that the study of Argentina's socio-economic forces hardly clarifies or explains the general hysteria that has typified official thought and actions during the recent decade of the nation's history. Viñas implies that an end to this cultural dislocation will occur only in conjunction with a radical change in society's structures: an altered historical base will favor the return to a more normal relationship linking culture and lived reality.

"El sistema burgués se viene abajo," Viñas had optimistically announced in the prologue to a 1971 work.²³ He was right, prophetically and tragically right. But his prognosis would not be fulfilled in the way he had predicted. This is because the system still stands. Even though it teeters and sways, it will probably continue to resist internal dissent and external threat for some years to come. But what has crumbled is the ideological edifice of liberal optimism that has served as a beacon for the leaders of Argentina over the last century and a half. Near the end of his life, a heaven-gazing Esteban Echeverría had paid homage to "las leves generales del desenvolvimiento progresivo de la civilización humana-

to the skies; its progress, instead, has followed the mud-encrusted path back to the Maradero.

The task of the colonels was to "denaturalize" Argentine society, and in particular, its sense of humanity. In the realm of language, they precipitated an explosion of the signifier in their manipulation of opinions, their twisting of meanings, and their self-serving play at mystification. They have intentionally confused the linkages between words and deeds. Previously cherished social values such as community, nationality, Latinamericanism — Viñas reminds us — now run the risk of becoming converted into cheap official slogans.²⁷ This is the context into which the deconstructive political writing of Viñas is inserted, with its objective of rationally accounting for the atrophy of values and language in all aspects of Argentine public life.

It is ironic that the cultural environment of Argentina has acquired to such a degree the characteristics that can imperfectly be described as "Borgean" in nature. Here I wish to disassociate myself from that body of opinion — sometimes fueled by Viñas himself — that has seen in Jorge Luis Borges a staunch defender of the decrepit liberal order in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, and therefore as one who has granted tacit approval to the violence inflicted upon the nation by its ruthless military overlords.²⁸ While his infrequent political utterances have sometimes lent themselves to that interpretation, it is not justified to associate the content of his writing with any specific political or ideological tendency. At the same time, it is hard to ignore the striking resemblance between the literary and philosophical world described by Borges in his writing, and the bizarre tendencies of the national culture during the "Dirty War." In both, one observes the "liberation" of ideas and acts from traditional systems of reference associated with lived reality. In both, one observes the prevalence of a cultural fabric without coherence or rational order. For a brief period of time in Argentina's history, it is as if a demented being from Borges's fictional world had maliciously acted out his fury over the destinies of men and society.

It is fitting that Borges be brought into consideration here because over the years Viñas and his followers have regarded the blind creator of labyrinths as a paradigmatic *Other*, and perhaps literary or ideological foil, against which Viñas's own person and writing production had to be compared. This view held Borges to be "un artista de denegación del cuerpo" — that is, a writer who completely avoided confronting the materiality of existence in his refusal to situate his protagonists within a verisimil social experience.²⁹ Viñas, in contrast, held himself to be the writer who realized his "body" within the context of his writing and through his objective of promoting political action. With the advent of the "Dirty War," and even in its aftermath, the previous opposition has acquired new meaning and has assumed the larger dimension of a national, cultural struggle. Whether it be the work of malicious gods or deranged men, a "Borgean" spirit now casts its shadow over the nation's institutions and social discourse. Within this climate of social entropy, Viñas struggles to reconstitute coherence; against the nihilism of his country's power elite, he signals a promise of transformation.

Notes

- 1 I discuss these issues in detail in *Contorno: Politics and Culture in Post-Peronist Argentina* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University, forthcoming); this work includes a long bibliography of Viñas's diverse publications.
- 2 David William Foster groups Viñas's narrative and critical writing together as "Probably the most perfect Argentine examples of 'critical' or 'social' realism" — *A Dictionary of Contemporary Latin American Authors* (Tempe: Center for Latin American Studies, Arizona State University, 1975), p. 107. Although Viñas's fidelity to social and political "realism" is undeniable in a work such as *Los hombres de a caballo* — which is held to be his finest — his other novels cannot be characterized by such a "thesis" tendency. In general, Viñas's narrative writing clearly surpasses in aesthetic quality the "sociological" or "political" novels of mainstream Argentine "social realist" writers Enrique Verónica, Luis Horacio Velázquez, Raúl Larra, Bernardo Verbitsky, and Alfredo Varela. I prefer the characterization offered by Pedro Orgambide and Roberto Yahni, *Enciclopedia de la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1970), p. 625, that Viñas's fiction is a "committed literature of direct social tendency" whose main theme is the "stages of psychosocial transformation from a traditional society to a society of the masses."
- 3 Nicolás Rosa, "Viñas: la evolución de una crítica (literatura y política)," *Los Libros 2*, no. 18 (1971): 10-12; and David William Foster, "*Literatura argentina y realidad política*:" David Viñas and Sociological Literary Criticism in Argentina," *Ibero Americanisches Archiv 1*, no. 3 (1975): 253-77.
- 4 Buenos Aires: Jorge Alvarez, 1967.
- 5 Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1971.
- 6 Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982.
- 7 I quote key words and concepts from Lucien Goldmann, "Genetic-Structuralist Method in History of Literature," in Berel Lang and Forrest Williams, eds. *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism* (New York: David McKay Company, 1972), pp. 249, 253.
- 8 David William Foster, in "David Viñas: Deconstructive and Corrective Readings of Argentine Sociocultural History" (unpublished).
- 9 According to Viñas's own notes, this interesting essay was published in *El cronista comercial* of Buenos Aires on December 12, 1975, and was to be reproduced in *Caravalle*. Although these data have not been verified, my quotes have been taken from a carbon copy of the original given to me by the author.
- 10 Carlos Fuentes aptly calls the French *nouveau roman* the novel of capitalist realism, due to the manner in which it depicts objects seen by personages in the most fragmented psychological stage. (*La nueva novela latinoamericana*, as reproduced by Juan Loveluck, ed., *La novela hispanoamericana* [Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1969], p. 170.). It therefore offers a most "denaturalized" view of individual and society. Similarly, the critical endeavor, as described by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* has as its objective the separation of text from "meaning," and thereby liberating "interpretation;" its objective is the restoration of the writerly text as "a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be imposed; the writerly text is *itself* writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, pluralized by some singular system. . . ." (Richard Miller, trans. [New York: Hill and Wang, 1974], p. 5.)

- 11 See Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), who criticizes this ontogenetic conception of writing because of the gap that exists-which some idealistic writers sometimes fail to perceive-between discourse and lived reality.
- 12 "La historia excluida: ubicación de Martínez Estrada," *Contorno* 4 (1954), p. 16.
- 13 "Poderes de la literatura."
- 14 I retain a copy of this article, sent to me by the author, which is not identified with regard to journal and publication date.
- 15 *El periódico de Buenos Aires* 1 (15-21 September 1984), p. 9.
- 16 *Cuadernos para el Didlogo* (9 October 1976).
- 17 I retain a copy of this article, sent to me by Viñas, but I lack information regarding the identity of the journal, which was published for August 13-19, 1980.
- 18 *Les temps modernes* 39, no. 437 (December 1982): 1039-63.
- 19 I retain a copy of the article which was supplied by Viñas through David William Foster: the identity of the journal and its date of publication are unknown.
- 20 "Argentina, ejército."
- 21 "Argentina, ejército."
- 22 "Las armas secretas."
- 23 "Malvinas."
- 24 "Argentina, ejército."
- 25 *Literatura y realidad política: de Sarmiento a Cortázar* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1971), p. 9.
- 26 Esteban Echeverría, *Dogma socialista*, Prologue and notes by Alberto Palcos (La Plata: Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 1940), p. 445, from the 1848 essay, "Revolución de febrero en Francia."
- 27 "Malvinas."
- 28 Juan Carlos Tealdi, *Borges y Viñas (literatura e ideología)* (Madrid: Orígenes, 1983), p. 109, makes this association between Borges and liberal Argentine society.
- 29 The quotes are taken from the essay by Nicolás Rosa; in "Burocratas," Viñas makes similar statements, as does Tealdi in his book tellingly titled, *Borges y Viñas*.

Contemporary Mexican Villains in Story and Song: The Popular Representation of Durazo and Caro Quintero

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In the mid-1980s, Mexico was awash in books, articles, comics, and songs describing the colorful lives and alleged misdeeds of Arturo Durazo Moreno, police chief of Mexico City under ex-President José López Portillo, and Rafael Caro Quintero, a young Sinaloan accused of large-scale international drug trafficking. Durazo (born c. 1918), nicknamed "El Negro" because of his dark complexion, had amassed colossal wealth while in office, much of it reportedly derived from extortion and involvement in the drug trade. He had risen to power under the protection of his boyhood friend López Portillo, the latter himself implicated in massive pillaging of public funds during his six-year term (1976-1982). Caro Quintero (born c. 1956) had been linked both with Mexican police agents and with the Mafia. Perhaps most important from the standpoint of international relations, he was accused of having taken an active role in the kidnap-murder of U.S. narcotics investigator Enrique Camarena Salazar and his Mexican pilot, Alfredo Zavala Avelar, in February of 1985.

After fleeing Mexico in 1982, Durazo was a fugitive for a year and a half until he was finally apprehended by the FBI in Puerto Rico in June 1984. Caro Quintero also tried to elude authorities, in his case by flying from Guadalajara to Costa Rica in March 1985, but he was arrested there less than a month later. As of July 1986, both men were in custody. Durazo had been extradited from the United States to stand trial in Mexico, and Caro Quintero was supposedly under heavy guard in a Mexico City prison, although news reports stated that he had been illegally released on many occasions and had been seen carousing in local restaurants with government officials.¹

By 1985, the depiction of these notorious figures in the Mexican press and in commercially-recorded songs had already attracted interest from students of popular culture on both sides of the border. At a conference held at the Uni-