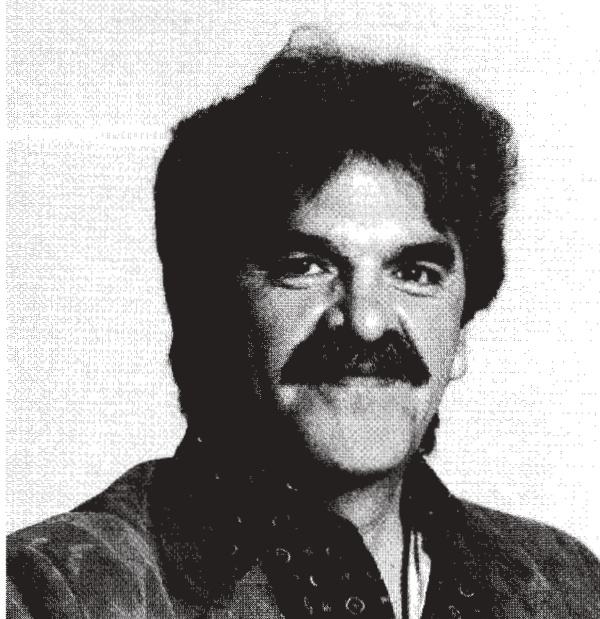


ENCUENTROS



*Brief Notes on
Ecuadorian and
U. S. Literature*

Lecture by

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BRIEF NOTES ON ECUADORIAN AND U.S. LITERATURE

Raúl Pérez Torres

I would like to tell you about where I am from. Ecuador is the umbilicus of the world, the center of the earth. The name of my country was defined not by history, but by location. If you pick up a dictionary, you will find that *el ecuador*, or the equator, is the largest circle of the earth, running perpendicular to the line defined by the North and South Poles. I am from the country in the middle, a country which should have been called Quito. Before we began life on our own as an independent republic, our small beloved piece of land was called the *Gobernación Independiente de Quito*, and later the *Audiencia y Presidencia de Quito*. But let us set these names aside and say, as a historian once did, that to live 8,550 feet above sea level—the altitude of Quito—one has to expand the thorax.

In some countries they believe that we who live at the equator are barbarians in loincloths with spears who eat human flesh, and celebrate orgiastic and bloody rituals.

Others believe that we are situated in Africa or Central America (because of the idea of being in the middle). No, we are South Americans, and we share borders with Peru and Colombia.

Since we have been born at the equator, it would be correct to say that our geography separates us from everyone else, and does not allow uniformity. We are jungle and tropics, but also mountains and snow, a fantastic fusion of cosmogonies and races—Black, Indian, *cholo*, mulatto, mestizo and White—from which a multifarious art and literature have emerged that I will now describe for you.

Just like the hesitant, indecisive first steps of a child, Ecuadorian literature began to walk under the protective, liberating, and polemical shadow of an Indian from Quito called Eugenio Espejo. In 1770, his pamphlets, books and newspapers assumed a valiant anti-colonial attitude which ultimately cost him his life. He was a conspirator of and an inspiration

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to the Independence movement. Later, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Ecuadorian literature was guided by a rationalistic optimism in a world that was unyielding, feudal, and conservative. Fictional stories did not go beyond relating traditions or legends, and the themes were linked to blunt realism. Later, an over-sweetened and tormented romanticism became popular, whose supposed fathers were Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Walter Scott, among others.

In any event, the characters in this literature are "village idiots, and the writer, writing from a higher plane, often makes fun and ridicules them." Humor in this context is the backdrop for a privileged class consciousness that holds popular culture in contempt. "The hierarchy of classes is clear and should be maintained in literature as in life." It was all based on that which was classical, credible, and realistic.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the writers aimed their dreams toward unbridled optimism that infused life with quietude and happiness. Their names have been impressed on the minds of school children to the point of martyrdom, and include Juan León Mera, Antonio Campos, and Remigio Crespo Toral.

The characteristics of this literature are shaped by its ideological character. The narrator is the God of men and circumstances, He is everywhere (but can be seen nowhere). The third person is used, the landscape is detailed, and settings are described using a language that is "academic, antiquated, and conventional." It is the appropriate instrument for interpreting

the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie: formally proper, moderate in expression, chastely idealistic, and affected.

But there was someone outside the story and the novel, alienated from the moderation and optimism, who would lambaste the dictators and the powerful with his pen. He was an Ecuadorian praised by José Enrique Rodó, Rubén Darío and Miguel de Unamuno: I refer to Juan Montalvo, a writer of irreproachable purity whose pen did not tremble when he sat down to write *Capítulos que se le olvidaron a Cervantes* (Chapters That Cervantes Forgot).

An ideological confrontation began between two literary trends, represented on the conservative side by Juan León Mera, and Juan Montalvo for the liberals. After the great epic poetry of José Joaquín Olmedo (who also sang of the great feats of the Liberator Simón Bolívar and the dictator Juan José Flores), modernism, in the words of Jorge Enrique Adoum, appears "as the most complete and faithful expression of the frustration of the bourgeoisie and the provincial political bosses." Four tragic poets emerged in the painful strain of Baudelaire and Verlaine. The four would end up taking their own lives, which is why Ecuadorian writer Raúl Andrade would dub them the Lost Generation. They were excellent poets, their works are pearls of sadness, precise and pure, and all marked by melancholy. Their names are Medardo Angel Silva, Humberto Fierro, Ernesto Noboa y Camaño, and Arturo Borja.

Once the independence struggles had subsided, it seemed necessary to make a

commitment and lay the foundation for a national and popular literature. Liberalism came to power in 1895, and at that moment a liberal novel appeared called *A la costa* (To the Coast) by Luis A. Martínez.

Since I am presenting this lecture in the wonderful and multifaceted United States, perhaps now is the time to mention that our writers were reading Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and especially Walt Whitman. As Jorge Luis Borges said, Whitman represented the idea that America was a new event in literature, in contrast to Poe who thought that American literature was a continuation of European literature. In any event, let us not forget that in only five prodigious years, from 1850 to 1855, the following works appeared in the United States: *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Representative Men* by Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, and *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman. A few years later Mark Twain would write *Huckleberry Finn* which returned American language to the American man, so that Ernest Hemingway could state, between whiskeys, that with Twain the American novel began. Borges reminds us that Halley's Comet appeared when Mark Twain was born, and Twain predicted it would appear again when he died. So it was that Twain was the oracle of his own destiny.

The twentieth century began splendorously for Latin America with the great Argentine story writer, Horacio Quiroga. In Ecuador, two strains of realism asserted themselves and pervaded literature in the

early years of this century: social and psychological realism. A book appeared by Pablo Palacio in 1927, *Un hombre muerto a puntapiés* (A Man Kicked to Death). Palacio would later go mad and die in a psychiatric hospital, but that book set the direction for practically all the literature that followed. The other significant writers of the famous generation of the 1930s would embrace social realism out of the need to denounce social injustice, and to show the reality of the feudal tyranny occurring in the rural areas.

Beginning in 1925, three great lyrical poets in Ecuadorian literature emerged: Jorge Carrera Andrade, Alfredo Gango-tena, and Gonzalo Escudero. There were internal and external influences that marked that literature which I have drawn from recent research in Ecuador.

Internally, our society experienced rampant growth of the cities, nascent industrialization, the formation of an urban proletariat, and disenchantment due to the betrayal of the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From 1920 to 1940 we had twenty presidents, almost one per year, tremendous insecurity and political instability.

External events included the barbarism of World War I, disappointment with European civilization, the constant imperialistic interventions of the U.S. in Latin America, and the economic crisis of 1929. There was a fascination with the new ideas of Marx and Freud, and the Socialist Party and Communist Party were founded in Ecuador.

Those were the years in which all liberal vestiges of the Revolution of 1895

went up in flames in the same barbarous bonfire in which they burned the top leader of the liberation movement, Eloy Alfaro, who prefigured, with his defeats and victories, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the García Márquez character in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It was a time of chaos, exploitation and misery, and soon the dreadful specter of World War II would appear.

In 1922 the nascent working class of a new industrial era received a baptism of blood in the most merciless killing of strikers Ecuador has ever seen. This painful historic experience gave rise to the staunchest work written by a Communist party activist in Ecuador: I am referring to *Las cruces sobre el agua* (Crosses on the Water) by Joaquín Gallegos Lara. Every year the people of Guayaquil still throw wooden crosses or flowers into the river in memory of the workers who were murdered and thrown into the water on November 15, 1922.

In 1925, the July Revolution, which survived only in the form of a tenuous reformism, was carried out by low-level military officers on behalf of a rising middle class, which would later bow to pressure from the oligarchy and feudal interests. Similarly, the Four Day War in 1932 produced a massacre in a fratricidal struggle for power between liberals and conservatives. In addition, the depression following World War I was acutely felt in the Ecuadorian market for agricultural goods.

The literary movement of the 1930s, whose key exponents were Alfredo Pareja, Enrique Gil Gilbert, José de la Cuadra,

Demetrio Aguilera Malta, Joaquín Gallegos Lara, Pablo Palacio, and Jorge Icaza, gained strength and social influence, and presented unique opportunities since all artistic movements draw the sap that nourishes them from the social environment. Enrique Gil Gilbert wrote his best work in 1940, *Nuestro pan* (Our Daily Bread), which received second place in a contest won by Ciro Alegría's *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (Broad and Alien is the World). Demetrio Aguilera Malta is the alter ego of Gil, and in his novels, *Don Goyo* and *La isla virgen* (The Virgin Island), his sociological commentaries are striking. José de la Cuadra was perhaps the best story writer of his day, both in Ecuador and throughout Latin America. Wise, lucid, and with a great capacity for synthesis, magic realism flowed from his pen with *Los Sangurimas* (The Sangurimas), a short novel that preceded *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by several years.

The Ecuadorian writers of the 1930s were committed to the interests and demands of the poor. All were active in leftist organizations, and their work was critical, realistic, and devastating. To compare the situation with what was happening in the United States at that time, let us not forget what F. Scott Fitzgerald said about the Roaring Twenties: "There was a new generation here that grew up to find all the gods dead, all the wars waged, all faith in man broken." It was the Lost Generation which Gertrude Stein would later succeed in naming. It was a time of disdain, and most Americans still shielded themselves in the old values of tradition,

family, small business, and the farm with animals and a tractor. Darwin was a devil, and one heard the last gasps of an exacerbated fundamentalism fading against overwhelming modernism in a cosmopolitan and urban country.

Freud and the libido were discovered. Women were struggling for their rights in the workplace, the right to vote, and the right to affection. The Black Power movement slowly emerged out of the unmistakably melancholy jazz of Louis Armstrong and King Oliver. Africa and Europe were heard in Chicago and New Orleans.

Einstein was driving scientists mad. Up until then, they had been complacent and certain about the unchangeable theories of Newton. With great brazenness, Einstein said that "space, time, and mass are not absolute, but rather relative to the location and movement of the observer." Then came Heisenberg's uncertainty principle which haunts us to this day, and the great American poets, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, emigrated to London in despair.

In *America: A Narrative History* by George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, a Harvard mathematician is quoted from 1929: "The world is not a world of reason that the human intellect can understand. The deeper we penetrate the law of cause and effect, which we used to think was a formula that God Himself had to subscribe to, it stops making sense at some point." There was F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and above all, William Faulkner who, as it says in the Bible, would beget Gabriel García Márquez, who

would beget Isabel Allende, and so many other contemporary writers.

Literary critics have found much social realism in the works of the uncompromising Ecuadorian writers of the 1930s, who filled their fiction with harsh social injustice, violence, sex crimes, and extraordinary situations. It is a literature that is a warning rather than a diversion, moving from informative to subversive, including the magical element at the base of popular culture. Reality is described in hyperbolic terms, and the characters are proletarians. Diego Araujo says prototypical characters appear as the exploited Indian, the boss, the foreman, the priest, etcetera. The proselytizing sermon includes technical innovations in language where we find a fresh and realistic discourse. One such writer, perhaps the most experimental and authentic, José de la Cuadra, said that writers seek the "photography and phonography of reality."

The 1950s were somewhat sterile years marked by calm, yet even so they began with a great novel by Angel Felicísimo Rojas, *El éxodo de Yangana* (The Exodus of Yangana), one of the most innovative, critical, and beautiful texts in Ecuadorian literary history.

Meanwhile the literary struggle between the two realisms continued. Social realism was embodied in Jorge Icaza, author of the most famous novel in Ecuador, *Huasiyungo* (The Villagers); and in stories by Gallegos Lara, Pedro Jorge Vera, Alfredo Pareja, and Adalberto Ortiz with his brilliant novel *Juyungo: Historia de un negro, una isla y otros negros* (Juyungo: A Classic Afro-Hispanic Novel).

Psychological realism was produced by many new writers on the scene who have since made their reputations, including César Dávila, Rafael Díaz Icaza, and Jorge Enrique Adoum.

In the wake of the Cuban revolution and the various liberation movements that deeply affected Latin America, groups, movements, workshops, and individual writers came forward with the idea that literature is an essential factor for change, new direction, and testimony. Of the various literary genres in Ecuador, the short story has had the greatest resonance, and the contemporary writer's objectives include deciphering and interpreting an alienating world fraught with ambiguity.

In one of the manifestos of the *Frente Cultural*, a literary liberation movement, it was said that the formation of political organizations to vindicate proletarian interests was among the fundamental elements that determined the formation of groups of intellectuals from the middle sector, who no longer answered to the interests of the dominant classes. It was not until the 1960s that progressive intellectuals became, as part of their political commitment to history, activists in leftist organizations.

Both the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by the emergence of iconoclastic movements grouped around excessively short term agendas. They were taken with Sartre's concept of intellectual commitment and represented a total break with the cultural status quo. One example is the group *Tzánzico* and its journal, *Pucuna*, which assumed the need to kill sacred cows, i.e., parricide. This was more pos-

ture than praxis; nevertheless, it succeeded in breaking with the dead weight that had accumulated with conformity, and led some groups to frame their work in terms of a political statement, which they hoped would ultimately result in a better grasp of the country's cultural reality.

Their manifesto also said that history, and the direction it takes with the impetus of a working class, has shown that the only way to truly be an intellectual is to create insurgent cultural practices. As this practice does not occur on a neutral playing field, but in real history, characterized by the class struggle, the intellectual, as an agent reproducing ideology, should be linked with the masses and assume his or her function as an organic element for change, as conceptualized by Gramsci. The process of transformation, led by the exploited classes, demanded our participation in terms of investigating, apprehending, developing and disseminating the culture of the people.

Under these circumstances, we reformulated culture as the interrelationship of the various expressions of the people, and this interrelationship was in permanent contradiction with any other expressions. One unmistakable characteristic of this literature was to consider artistic creation as a vocation, as a dedicated, rigorous daily profession; it was not the work and grace of inspiration of the muses. It required different points of view on the form and substance of what is said and how it is said, of language and its conceptual depth. What was apparently insignificant was filled with meaning, and the mundane was replete with latencies and inner reflections.

The person passing by on the street, his or her attitude toward a child, a woman, her way of sitting in the park, their words, all would acquire other meanings.

Another symptom of our young literature was the need to feel the city, to rediscover and love it, to go deeply into our historical roots, into where we came from and where we were going. We see Iván Egüez, who wrote *La Linares* (The Linares Woman) and *Pájara la memoria* (Memory is a Bird), fantasizing ironically in his convents and cupolas, giving epic proportions to an everyday character, attacking the language, infusing it with breath, recreating it, embodying it. In one of these stories, Abdón Ubidia, who wrote *Ciudad de invierno* (Winter City), combs the city, looks at it from different angles trying to provoke it, unveil it, explain it, and thereby explain himself; he thinks perhaps that the city's delicate climate is what makes us feel melancholy, or that its architecture is what gives our language its baroque quality. There is Jorge Velasco Mackenzie, who wrote *Como gato en tempestad* (Like a Cat in a Storm), reinventing the popular street language of Guayaquil. Eliécer Cárdenas, *Polvo y ceniza* (Dust and Ashes), seeking the mysterious Creole banditry in the image of Naúm Briones. Jorge Dávila, *María Joaquina en la vida y en la muerte* (María Joaquina in Life and in Death), analyzing and detailing the existential and alienating traits of provincial sanctimoniousness. Francisco Proaño Arandi, who wrote *Historias de disecadores* (Stories of Dissectors), apprehending the histrionic and phantasmal gestures of that character who, for forty years, lashed

out at the country's soul with his finger and his oratory; and Jorge Rivadeneira, *Las tierras del Nuaymás* (The Land of the Nuaymás), hunting for a lost guerilla movement. We see Vladimiro Rivas, *Los bienes* (The Property), delving among his family memories, reminding all of us of our grandmothers and their vicissitudes; Marco Antonio Rodríguez, *Historia de un intruso* (Story of an Intruder), tormented by the importance of the common man, of his future, and of his psychic metamorphosis vis-a-vis a society bereft of values; Raúl Vallejo, *Máscaras para un concierto* (Masks for a Concert), making a real character out of one who had been the poet of all decapitated persons; and Javier Vásconez, *Ciudad lejana* (Far Away City), dismembering the limbs of an aristocracy with no goals and no way out. In other words, all of us were in the same critical and compromised situation, using the weapons of man, through literature, to attack from several angles the unwieldy evil of the century: corruption.

Then came the 1960s—the marvelous, enchanted, disenchanting, overwhelming, free, schizophrenic, tragic, luminous 1960s. Now that I have come this far through a century of social and psychological realism that began in the 1930s, I have to ask myself, because by now I too am involved, of what reality am I speaking?

"Reality does not exist. At least not as you understand it, Sancho," Quijote would say. Reality for those of us from the 1960s is a trap. In literature, reality is appearance. The writer only understands "reality" when it is written in quotation marks. Vladimir Nabokov, Franz Kafka, and

in power the two major parties. This may have impressed outsiders as the country's final arrival at modern, bipartisan democracy. But such is not the case. On every occasion the election was treated more as the triumph of a leader and a movement than as the victory of a party and a program. On every occasion the victor, once in office, entertained fantasies of remaining there indefinitely, and succumbed to the temptation to occupy the entire political space.

The most important political fact in Argentina is that Peronism has consistently won in national elections—in 1987, 1989, 1991, 1994, and 1995. Today, Peronism is the dominant force in a competitive system of several parties. Nevertheless, since in the past Peronism was something more—a hegemonic political movement—it still tends to behave in government as if it were an entire political system unto itself. As long as the other parties or coalitions are weak and fractious, this belief is reinforced. But this also means that political conflict, far from ceasing, migrates to explode within Peronism itself. The struggles over the control of the Peronist movement and party apparatus become crucial for the political future of the country. This situation raises deep concern, because of Peronism's poor record in peacefully solving its internal disputes.

As for the opposition parties and coalitions, Radicales, Frontists, and anti-Menem Peronists have challenged the present government policies. None of them have produced credible alternatives. Yet in the stridency of opposition, all have, at one point or another, revived the themes of old-time Peronism.

Today, the Peronist administration leads a nation that is growing weary of the human

costs of adjustment. It is a government riddled with corruption, and not especially motivated to clean house. And it represents a party in turmoil over the president's succession, and prone to reactivate its ever latent irrationality.

Juan and Eva Perón once built a system of social support. Peronism has destroyed it. The movement that took the Peróns to the heights of power and filled the squares and the streets of Buenos Aires with frenzied masses of hopeful nurses, mechanics, and meat workers⁹ is but a distant echo in an era of fragmentation and mediated communication. Peronism survives as a flexible myth¹⁰ and a somewhat confused popular culture, in which the smile of Juan Perón has been cosmeticized as the grin—also heavily made up—of Menem, and the face of Eva is now Madonna's.

The legacy of Juan and Eva Perón persists today not in society, since the institutional edifice they once erected has fallen down, but in the bad habits of politics, even under a democratic regime. Another, more positive part of their legacy, awaits vindication. This is the legacy of social justice. Peronism could revive itself and mature into a modern party if it sponsored not just a modern economy, but also a just society—the only condition that would make economic development sustainable. A new commitment to social inclusion would mark the shedding of the last remnants of the old millenarianism and the assumption of the responsibilities of the real millennium that is upon us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a series of loops and a final vertical stroke, likely representing the author's name, Juan E. Corradi.

and human resources of the 1970s? What is the meaning of *Pájara la memoria*, that permanent tribute to language and life? What is the meaning of *Polvo y ceniza, Bruna Soroche y los tíos* (Bruna Soroche and the Uncles) by Alicia Yáñez Cossío, and what of the profound stories of Ubidia, Velasco Mackenzie, Vásconez, Dávila Vásquez, Proaño Arandi? What to say about the secret worlds of Humberto Vinuesa, Euler Granda, Javier Ponce, Jara Idrobo, Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo, etcetera; or the substantial contributions of thinkers like Agustín Cueva, Fernando Tinajero, and Alejandro Moreano who sought to give organic form to our alternative views?

It is true that our generation has been one of rupture and contribution, perhaps because of our assimilation of the writers of the 1930s, especially Pablo Palacio, but it is also possible, as Vladimiro Rivas says, that “our adhesion to the work of Palacio should be understood as a symptom of helplessness, of an absence of fathers,” and the absence of a means of communication.

I think that enough pilgrimages have been made to their books, and that after so much looking at them, there is a danger they will become mirages. It has been painful for us to grow up as orphans, and perhaps that is why we have acquired the vices of orphans. But we have grown remarkably well, in solidarity, in the street, in the open air.

I return to the book, *Desciframiento y complicidades* (Deciphering Complicities), by Vladimiro Rivas (whose virtues as an essay writer are undeniable, but not so his narrative work which has excessively obvious literary debts, especially to the

circle around Borges), who, referring to our generation, says: “...this generation has taken a long time to discover the world around it and to discover itself. With hard work and sacrifice, it is reaching literary maturity; in other words, understanding what a novel is, and how its writing is experienced. Adoum himself came to the novel late. He published *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda* when he was fifty years old. But Adoum had already said his peace in poetry. In between was the generation gap of the 1950s. We had a hard time understanding that one does not write to fulfill a civic duty, but for more intimate reasons, which end up reaching out to a social imperative.”

New realities call for new forms, new languages, and new challenges. What were those realities that gave impetus to and modified our expression, that reinvigorated a literature that already smelled of aromatic herbs, that gave it vitality under a new, more profound and complex realism? Let us take a quick look.

We were born amidst an exaggerated sense of defeat because of the war with Peru; everything we touched became defeat. We suffered a long, mediocre folkloric period of populism and militarism. Later came the fragmentation of the left and its internal strife, which was waged among ourselves, turning friends into enemies.

Several colleagues from that time chose a vehement radicalism, while for others Marxism, as Hemingway would say, clashed with their style. A whole avalanche of life, hope, and tragedy came closer and closer. What did not happen in

the 1960s? Everywhere the world was astir, people were alive, nature was alive. Those were great times in which the most profound virtues of the human being surfaced, and obviously their counterparts as well.

Iconoclastic and vagabond literary movements emerged in our America, such as *Nadaísmo* and *Tzantzismo*, among others. Ecuador had an oil boom, we extolled a fake modernity which quickly tuned us into consumers and “elevated” us to the status of blue jeans and rock-and-roll. The epic history of Cuba, Fidel and Che Guevara; the liberation struggles in Latin America: the Tupamaros, the Montoneros, our frustrated Toachi guerilla movement; the tenacious and exemplary struggle of women for their rights; the youth of the world against that thousand-headed monster: power; the theology of liberation; the beat movement, especially in poetry, and the pop movement in painting. The Beatles and their profound *Let it be*. May 1968, the Revolution of the Walls and the “expansion of possibilities,” as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the young German Jew who set Paris ablaze with his graffiti, explained to Sartre. Let us recall what the walls of Nanterre said at that time:

We have a prehistoric left
Imagination to power
Exaggeration is the weapon
Talk with your neighbors
We have peace of mind,
Two plus two is no longer four
Prohibiting is prohibited
France for the French
is a fascist slogan.

Sartre, Marcuse, Debray, Yevtushenko, Althusser, Roland Barthes, Angela Davis, Julio Cortázar and many others discussed politics, philosophy, and literature. There was a liberation of conduct, a search for authenticity in emotions, an opening of the mind and its infinite possibilities. There was a tendency to embrace nature and dismiss plastic; feelings, desires, and needs were given new content. An unregulated spontaneity multiplied throughout the Latin American fraternity, represented by the backpackers, the hippies who are the true *chasquis* (Inca runners) of our time, who bore in their messy beards news of the new life, of the new brilliance, which led Cortázar to say that we were amidst a golden century, no matter how long it might last.

Then came the Vietnam War. I will never forget the farewells of the family members of those soldiers, especially the Puerto Rican, Latino, and Black soldiers at the Chicago airport, with the perplexity of death already in their faces, with the indecipherable anguish of not knowing where they were going, or what for, or what they were defending, or why. Much later, *Perestroika*, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, the events in Nicaragua, the fast bleed of the Cuban revolution, its frightful solitude and isolation.

The accelerated technification, dehumanization and robotization of being, the shame of being human in this humankind. The manipulated post-modernity and self-interested end of ideologies, the collapse of communism and, as though this were not enough, AIDS.

These and a thousand more have been

the realities that have constituted the socio-political and spiritual context in which our literature has come of age. It comprises ambiguity, anguish, uncertainty, and disenchantment with man and his institutions. It seeks its lost identity, innocence, the gesture, the other face of an urbanized existence built in concrete. It flows from consciousness, internalized in the broken links of the human being who disturbs the day-to-day reality when its secret is revealed; consciousness that envelops, enlightens, and obscures the identity of the common man, that forgets about the anecdote and goes straight to the existential essence of a gesture, a word, a tear. Up to a point, it is a secret literature with the aura of an intimate diary in which the unadorned anti-hero looks at himself in the mirror, makes faces and cries out to the conscience of the reader, so as to begin together a playful and tragic task to search for dignity, freedom, and love gone astray.

It is a literature of crisis that was strengthened within the same crisis, and did not lose its critical, scathing, incisive perspective of the society from which it was born, nor its relentless self-criticism, nor the polemic as to the purpose and the aesthetic objective. It is a generation that still has much to say, perhaps something less stentorian and spectacular, but more reflective and wise.

I recall T.S. Eliot's phrase (another putative father): "the words of last year belong to last year, the words of next year await a new voice." The words of those years past depicted a world that, little by little, became disenchanted with illusory idealism. Fraternity and hope would give

way to individualism, solitude, defeat, and doubt. Grenada was invaded: Goliath against David. Vietnam was the great war that we all carried in our hearts, and that we never understood. The artist and intellectuals began to grow infirm from disenchantment and melancholy. The great beat generation or degeneration would not survive into the 1970s, with the death of Jack Kerouac and Louis Althusser. As the Ecuadorian journalist Javier Ponce put it, "Althusser continued from hospital to hospital, marking with his personal life, the transition from intellectual Marxism to personal tragedy, which would culminate later with the murder of his wife, Helene, and his terminal insanity." Roland Barthes would die under the wheels of a truck after desperately stating, "I am a dispersed man," and Sartre would die alone, vomiting *dans les toilettes* while looking at the face of God. Ezra Pound, exiled and embittered in Venice, would say before they buried him: "I no longer know anything. I have come too late to total uncertainty. I have reached something due to suffering. There is no contemporary man. There is only a man who can have greater awareness of mistakes... All my life I thought I knew something. Then one strange day I realized I did not know anything. And the words have become empty of meaning..."

With their music, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, and Miles Davis would also capture this anguish. In our America, the New Man was being assassinated. Che Guevara was dying, they slaughtered Salvador Allende, the bloodiest and cruellest dictatorships were put in place, but poets and thinkers continued to cry out:

Ernesto Cardenal, Juan Gelman, Mario Benedetti, Julio Cortázar, Juan Carlos Onetti, Jorge Enrique Adoum, and Juan Rulfo. As a corollary in the United States, Richard Rhodes, who came out of the group of Tom Wolfe and Richard West of the new literary journalism, would say with profound melancholy: “The twentieth century has perfected a total death machine. Producing corpses in our best technology.”

Let us think with Nietzsche that “one must have chaos within to give birth to a dancing star.” The advance of modern communications satellites, virtual reality and other masked realities, globalization and neoliberal politics may disintegrate us as a region (I speak of Latin America), absorbing us like cosmic dust into a single center of development and power. Literature and art will always be there to contradict, subvert, and revalue human dignity.

In the United States, there are writers who refuse to allow words to sleep, like J.D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, James Baldwin, John Updike, Philip Roth, and John Irving. Similarly, in Ecuador poets are sprouting up from the sewers and dungeons. They come out of the trees, from the *arupos* and *jacandarás*, from the mountains and the jungle, from the poor urban areas, from the churches, and even from the confessionals.

I have decided to focus my life on literature, and at times I think that I am more alive when I write than when I really live. Art is a kind of serum for the intoxicated, a walking stick for the blind, a psychoanalyst’s couch for those who have gone astray. I recall that when Albert Einstein heard the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin play, he exclaimed: “Now I know

there is God.” Nonetheless, when Menuhin was nine years old, his French teacher traumatized him when he said, “So long as there are men, there will be wars.” From that day, Menuhin has not ceased to use his bow and his violin as weapons of peace: “I am convinced that music can bring men together and cure them,” he has said.

Perhaps that is what I wanted to tell you. Perhaps that is what I seek with my literature: peace and solidarity, the dazzling path to the essence of man.

(At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr. Pérez Torres read the following poem from his collection, *Poemas para tocar*:

Love Poem

I love what you possess of dirty rock,
of saxophones, of Jimi Hendrix
of pederasts.

I love what you possess of my deaf and
dumb Aunt Bertha,
and of Wagner,
I love what you possess of Ella Fitzgerald,
of Marilyn,
and her bed so sad.

I love the glassy eyes that you put on
for seven moons
after John Lennon’s bitter night.

I love the hexagram in you,
your oracular will,
your circular craze for chasing your tail.

I love what you possess of the *I Ching*
that sacred chance
but not the coins,
nor the small stems of yarrow,
only the tremendous pain of truth
the eye of the mask
the labyrinth that implies a center.

I love your need for Camiel Claudel,
not her madness
but her great love,
her asylum sculpture
of a precipice rolling toward Rodin.

I love your madness
which is less than madness,
your small madness
like that of goldfinches.

I love the sound from your navel,
something like jazz
like the navel of Gillespie
(trumpet that died in 1993
death in which I heard you).

I love the mystery of your flesh,
almost oriental,
light like the falling of a leaf in fall
your painful flesh
macerated with tragic legacies.

I love in you the trepidation of your flesh,
burning between my ashen lips,
your boundless flesh,
the smell of your flesh
your flesh of marijuana, of opium
of Cocteau.

I love the sliding of your flesh
the thirty denarii of your flesh

the Judas of your flesh
denying me thrice.

I love in you the lacerated memory
of the first time I awoke
at your side afraid,
believing that I had lived a century.

I love in you
(and I have kissed it with excess)
the blade of grass that grew in your pubis
the same night that we drank beer
with Walt Whitman
in a Manhattan tavern.

I love your childlike bottom
where the hands of God have played
the moons of your breasts
in the closed night,
the moons of your breasts on my lips
in my hands.

I love what you possess of Ilumán
of an animal
that hard coincidence with stone.

I love what you possess of man,
of an angel,
of Hermes and Aphrodite
of an inhabitant of Orion.

I love what you need to reach Rimbaud,
the sacred in the disorder of your spirit,
the bloodhound in you, the cat,
the *hetaera* of Baudelaire.

I love what you possess of Remedios the
Beautiful, of her sheet
blown by the witch of the word.

I love what you possess
of the pink panther,
of Chaplin, of Charlot, of Carlitos
his shoelaces,
his saddest strings.

I love what you possess of a city,
of a Greek woman,
of tragedy,
the beauty that stayed with you
from Alexandria.

I love what you possess of Quito
at the time when the deer
refresh themselves at twilight,
I love the pious woman in you
when my heart is a church.

I love what you possess of a courtesan
of Cortázar and his magus
of a whore,
of Sade's Justine
in the chair of sweet torment.

I love the Hermetic in you
the sacred book with open legs,
the balance in you,
the golden proportion,
like that of the hummingbirds
sucking the poppy.

I love your karma
resembling medieval witches.

I love your two-headedness
when I join my tormented head to yours.
I love your crocodile tears
your tears for making me a jacket,
your tears for Sinead O'Connor
abused by her father.

I love the brutality of your father
that let you look for
your human side in me.

I love your age
the warmth of your snugly age
against the cold of my age.

I love your kinship with Moore's stones
and Brancusi's stones
(in the cemetery of Montparnasse)
with the stones of Cuevas
arrested in a human pose,
your stubborn kinship with the wild dance
of Guayasamín,
with its mournful ocarina.

I love what you possess of drugs
of daggers and poison.

I love what your words possess
of precious stones,
of Sacsahuamán stone
of amethyst, of jade, of turquoise,
of drops of rain in the desert,
of tiger eyes, of tiger stains.

I love what you possess of Ariadne
weaving tenaciously from night to morning
the ball of wool of waiting.

I love what you possess
of an inconsolable widow
of post-woman, pre-bellic.

I love what you possess of a retarded baby
of a dyslexic,
the hard "physical sincerity"
of your cheekbones
that turn red when the first cock crows.

I love what Cummings used to tell you
imperceptibly warning you:
"I love my body when it joins with yours,
it is such a new body
of superior muscles and vibrating nerves."

I love you when broken by pain
murmuring downcast
with swinging moods:
"Cursed Flaubert,
everything we invent is not so."

I love what you possess of Milena,
this poor nostalgia for some Kafka,
that great mist...

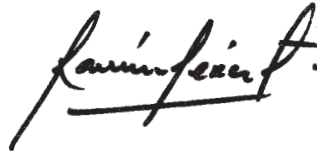
I love what still remains in your eyes
of a song of J.J.
what you possess of an insect,
but especially of a mantis.

I love your sorrow for what you
did not live,
the period of 1870 to 1874

time that only Rimbaud lived
among so much death from equality and
fraternity.

Yes, I love your sorrow
for what you have not lived
the untied panties of 1960
their magnificent infamy,
the mountain
their lysergic acid.

But most of all
I love yours,
what is purely yours,
the door of mystery,
the key,
the otherness,
that with so much bitterness
disappears in the poem...

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Rainer Maria Rilke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent horizontal line at the bottom.

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Raúl Pérez Torres, short story writer and poet, was born May 11, 1941, in Quito, Ecuador, and studied at the Universidad Central del Ecuador. His literary production began with his first book of stories *Da llevando* (1970), and the subsequent *Manual para mover las fichas* (1973), *Micaela y otros cuentos* (1976), *Musiquero joven, musiquero viejo* (1977), *Ana la pelota humana* (1978), *En la noche y en la niebla* (1980), *Un saco de alacranes* (1989), *Solo cenizas hallarás* (1994), and *Cuentos escogidos* (1995). His other works include *Teoría del desencanto* (1985, novel), and *Poemas para tocarle* (1994, poetry).

Among the national prizes awarded to Mr. Pérez Torres is the National Story Prize (1976), the José de la Cuadra Prize (1977), the Best Book Prize (1978), and the José Mejía Lequerica Award (1981). His international prizes include the Casa de las Américas Award (Cuba, 1980), the Julio Cortázar Prize (Spain, 1994), and the Juan Rulfo Prize (France, 1994). At present he is the director of Abrapalabra Editores (publisher of books and magazines on literature and education), and also directs the Nueva Editorial publishing operation of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana.

He has served as Director of the University Press of the Universidad Central del Ecuador, Vice President of the Fundación Libroteca, literary adviser to the Ministry of Education, editor of the newspapers *Aula Abierta* and *Diario de Campaña*, and coordinator of the *Revista Iberoamericana*.

Mr. Pérez Torres has been a juror in literary contests for the municipality of Quito, the Biennial of the Ecuadorian Novel (1966), and the Casa de las Américas Award in Cuba in 1981. He has also worked on articles for Ecuadorian journals, and has presented papers at seminars and meetings of writers in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America. His stories and poems have been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Greek, and Portuguese.

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