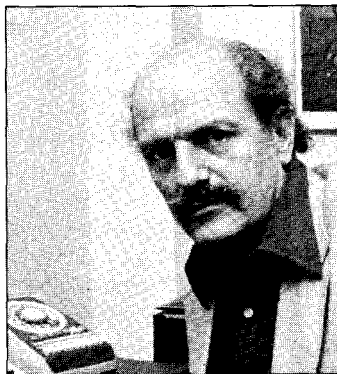


# LITERATURE AND EXILE

The history of exile in Latin America is so extensive, the countries involved are so numerous and the political and cultural problems entailed so complex, that to try to deal with the entire subject in a few pages would be futile. I have chosen, instead, to limit myself to an area vaguely designated as the "Southern Cone," in view of the bonds uniting the four countries involved—Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay—and the remarkable concurrence in the establishment of the military dictatorships which during the 70s resulted in the violent and massive exile of intellectuals in three of these countries. Visibly missing here is another country closely linked to those mentioned—Bolivia. But the person who should have testified to the situation there would have been none other than Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz [Bolivian politician and novelist] who was assassinated by the Bolivian dictatorship. It is to his memory that I dedicate this study of the political and cultural problems of this area of the continent. *Angel Rama*

## FOUNDING THE LATIN AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY

ANGEL RAMA



*Translated by Pamela Pye*

The turbulent political history of Latin America, including the constant confrontation between the civilian-minded intellectual sector and the military forces or political bosses and warlords which began immediately following the wars of independence, has continued up to the present moment, complicated by new factors, such as the economic migra-

tions occurring in this century. It would be casuistry to separate these related factors from a discussion of political exile.

### 1. The People of the Diaspora

The millions of Mexicans who have migrated to California or Texas, the equally numerous Paraguayans who have made Buenos Aires the major Paraguayan city, the Dominicans or Colombians who have settled in Venezuela, as well as the Chileans, Argentines, and Uruguayans who have recently scattered throughout the world are part of a migratory phenomenon that cannot be exclusively attributed to seemingly impartial economic reasons unlinked to politics. In many cases one will find that the root cause is a political oppression that, by maintaining a rigid and unjust social structure, limits the possibilities of people and impels them toward an emigration similar to the one that took place in Europe during the second half of the 19th century.

At best, such migrations testify to the inability of governments to provide citizens with basic necessities, in this sense underscoring the bond between economics and politics. From 1930 on, massive displacements have increased in Latin America: on the one hand, the internal migration that results in uncontrolled urban growth and whose immediate cause is the impoverishment of rural areas stemming from the new distribution of labor occurring throughout the world; on the other hand, exacerbating the process, the external migrations toward such poles of attraction within Latin America as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico, and more recently Caracas and outside of Latin America toward various North American cities, ranging from Miami to Los Angeles.

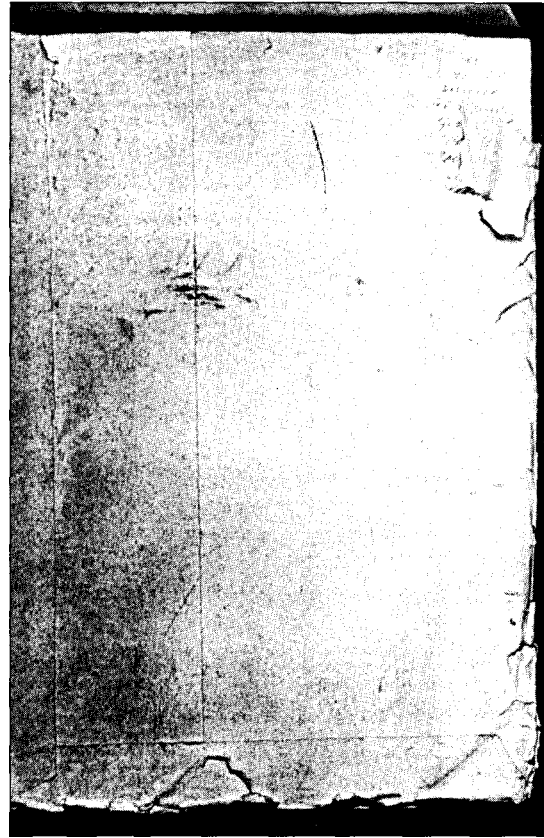
The somewhat elitist distinction between the exile and the emigrant should be corrected, particularly in view of the subtle semantic shift that has replaced such 19th century words as "banishment" and the legal term "ostracism" with the new term of foreign origin: exile. The exile is no longer the citizen expelled from his homeland—a somewhat chivalric measure that repressive regimes have stopped practicing—but rather one who voluntarily abandons his land to avoid persecution, prison or death, or, more frequently, in order to continue his work in a country which provides more appropriate conditions; this work often includes the struggle against the exile's own government. Although among exiles, members of the intellectual sector—politicians, professionals, and writers—are more notorious, laborers, white collar workers, students, and even businessmen are much more numerous. If we consider the deep roots of contemporary mass migrations together with the modern realities of exile we can see how the rigid boundaries between exile and migration disappear.

Only by looking at the process as a whole can one understand the problems of exiled writers: as they cease to be isolated centers of attention, they become distinguished members of a wide stratum of educated persons displaced along with entire populations. All make up the Latin American people of the diaspora, in search of countries and cities where a higher degree of civil liberties and greater possibilities of employment, education, and social mobility amount to a fuller expression of human rights. Writers as well as emigrants, by being faithful to such ideals, are unfaithful to their native countries in which such principles are denied, and they are constantly reproached for this with the emotionalism that accompanies national sentiment. The answer to such reproaches is the work that these exiles are accomplishing abroad and their intent to return to their homelands when they are finally able to make their ideals and national realities coincide.

When José Martí appealed to the fishermen and laborers of Tampa for their indispensable support for the cause of Cuban independence, he set up a model of the cooperative effort linking intellectuals and emigrants devoted to a common cultural and political cause which has benefited from the survival of the national culture abroad as well as from the experience of a non-colonial way of life that is more democratic than that of the homeland. Thus, a process of subtle transculturation has been characteristic not only of the diaspora in general but of the experience of the individual intellectual, subjected to the same unsettling social experiences and abrupt changes as the Mexican day laborer living on the outskirts of Los Angeles, the Colombian peasant settled in Maracaibo or Caracas and the Paraguayan in Buenos Aires. The shock of modernization experienced in the United States may be more drastic but it is not essentially different from that experienced by peasants from areas of traditionally strong Indian influence when they settle in teeming Latin American cities modernized according to European or North American norms.

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Huguette Franco. *Series Escritos y Silencios*.  
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Although better educated, with greater ability to adapt and more universal perspectives, the intellectual sector is also affected by transculturation in both the sense of culture shock (as noted above) and in the discovery of the cultural diversity traditionally obscured by the belief that the continent is a homogeneous unit. Not only must one stress the flagrant cultural differences that distinguish the Andean region from the River Plate area or the Antilles from the zone of cultural influence of the Mexican plateau; one must also recognize that in spite of all the speeches, international agreements and ceremonious artistic exchanges, there is much less communication among different regions in Latin America than in Europe. For example, there is no cultural bridge between Argentina and Mexico: the highly developed intellectual sectors of both countries are notoriously ingrown and find common ground only when looking abroad, particularly toward France or the United States. Writers such as Jorge Luis Borges or Octavio Paz have had rewarding intellectual careers which have not involved an awareness of the rest of Latin America: their axis has been national culture in relation to Europe. This is why Argentine exiles who have recently settled in regions with which they had practically no previous contact—the America of mestizos and mulattoes—are discovering exotic realities similar to those encountered in the Orient by Europeans during the last century.

Brazilian intellectuals, scattered throughout the Latin American countries when the Goulart regime fell to the military (1964), have had a similar experience, which promises to have beneficial results, now that they are returning to their country. These intellectuals "discovered" Spanish America, not only in its political peculiarities, but

also in its cultural modes: Mario Pedroza in Chile, Ferreira Gullar in Buenos Aires, Darcy Ribeiro in Montevideo, and Francisco Juliao in Mexico, all went on to become ambassadors for their own unknown culture and analysts of the familiar and yet remote countries of others. An imaginative and intelligent work such as Darcy Ribeiro's *The Americas and Civilization* would have been impossible without those long years of exile. If one adds to this the large professional sector from the Southern Cone which has settled in Brazil in the last decade, we can state that, for the first time in almost two centuries, the traditional lack of communication between the two large hemispheres of Latin American culture is being remedied. This seems to me to be an event of major importance.

## 2. A Macrostructural Vision of Latin America

The above tends to confirm a paradoxical truth I have already suggested with respect to intellectual exile: it is actually the dictators whom we must thank for the acceleration of cultural exchange and unification in Latin America—ideals so often espoused on paper and so rarely practiced. Interregional contacts have been established to a degree improbable under normal circumstances, a situation that has facilitated not only the exchange of knowledge but also a cultural confrontation which could have rich and unforeseen consequences. Such links have helped shape an overall vision that is better informed and better structured; they have also led to joint ventures based on global interpretations. The process was already evident in the vigorous development of the social sciences in Latin America, but it has now involved other intellectual groups, strengthening the development of a general critical discourse about the region.

Moreover, unlike the generalizing vision of previous decades, rooted in Paris, London or New York and often dangerously schematic, the new discourse, practiced mainly by Latin Americans, has begun to function from within Latin America (Mexico, above all, but Caracas and Havana as well), with curious results, because its predictable political and social belligerence and all-encompassing scope do not exclude the rigorous methodology and solid documentation that were frequently lacking before.

National or regional compartmentalization has been replaced by a better articulated comprehensive vision. Obviously this is due not only to the clusters of exiled writers in some cities, but also to the advances in the disciplines they practice, advances which in turn have benefited from the macrostructural and universal perspectives now characteristic of the most varied studies in fields ranging from economics to linguistics.

This change in focus has had repercussions for literature, in both creative works and critical studies. Writers and critics alike have attempted to coordinate the vastness of time in Latin America with the vastness of its space: an ambitious enterprise in which the obsession with current events that dominated the earlier literature has given way to the broader purpose of not only recapturing the past along the straightforward lines established by the Romantic historians but structuring past and present in a single signifying discourse. The past has reappeared in our literature—the colonial period, even the earlier, autochthonous cultures, and, of course, our vibrant 19th century in works that focus less on the exoticism of phenomena than upon the complex

relationships that weave them into patterns: *Yo el supremo* (I The Almighty) by Roa Bastos, *Terra Nostra* by Fuentes, *El estrecho dudoso* (The Doubtful Strait) by Cardenal, or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez are landmarks of this tendency. For other writers, dealing with the vastness of time is not sufficient and so they also attempt to articulate the equally vast Latin American space. Sociological literary essays such as *The Open Veins of Latin America* by Eduardo Galeano have shown the way. The title of a recent novel is revealing: *Homérica Latina*. More than the search for similarities and differences, which from Alfonso Reyes to Ezequiel Martínez Estrada motivated a generation of essayists, what we are seeing now is a search for the macrostructure that might be able to explain to us the functioning of a continent and project a valid future for it. Pedro Orgambide, Abel Posse, and Luis Britto García have proposed differing models of this structure.

## 3. The Writer and His Public

The central problem lies in the relationship between the writer and his public. When exile occurs, a writer is often surprised to discover that that relationship had not been functioning in a single direction, from author to reader, but that the sender and receiver had been nourishing each other, sharing in the same cultural effort, within the same frame of reference and in constant communication.

Now the situation has changed. The exiled writer functions in relation to three potential publics: that of the country or culture in which he has temporarily settled; that of his native country, with which he tries to maintain communication in spite of dictatorial restraints; and the public of his compatriots, who make up the people of the diaspora, as part of which he will probably now function as in a cultural ghetto. Although it is possible to choose a single public, it is more common to try to reach all of these diverse publics: another example of the trend toward macrostructure that we have just examined in the context of themes and which now becomes more intrinsic to the writer's work because it affects its very conception. If one keeps in mind the high degree of cultural, semantic, and linguistic complexity within which literary works are generated, one will easily see that the writer is at a crossroads of conflicting intentions and even contradictions. Paradoxically, this situation can be more intense when he has moved to a country where his own language is spoken than if he had settled in a linguistically foreign locale, since in the latter case the difference is so drastic that he can either abandon his language or fall back completely on his cultural origins, which is the more common of the two choices. He can be Conrad or he can be Kavafis. The long, self-imposed exile of Julio Cortázar in Paris led him to such total concentration on the language of Buenos Aires (even more than that of Argentina) that all his characters, regardless of origin, are linguistically homogeneous in their use of the *porteño* speech.

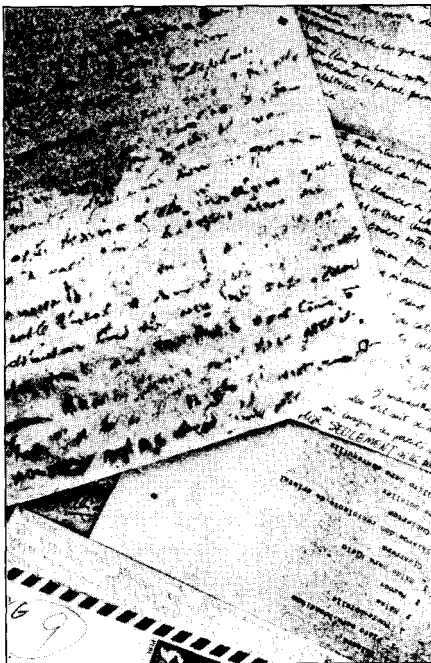
This is a difficult situation for the poet, who works so deeply inside his language. It is not a matter of replacing "auto" with "car," but rather of the emotional charge words carry, the rich semantic plurality a culture gives them as live beings—multifaceted, ambiguous, mysterious, sometimes deceptive, capable of suddenly startling us. "Aduana lingüística" (The Custom House of Language) is the title of an essay by Alfonso Reyes, in which he compares the use of erotic and obscene language in various American

regions. What speaker of Spanish is unaware of the strength of those secret words in which insult, love, and the entire body burn? And of how those words, in another linguistic community, melt like rubber watches that no longer mark time? And of how the distinctive patterns of that other linguistic community are powerless to express our feelings? This is what happens to words, and it is with words that the writer constructs his work. This linguistic phenomenon is part of a larger one which can only be called cultural, since each Spanish American region responds to specific cultural norms that are inevitably reflected in its language.

These are not insurmountable barriers, but they are hurdles that impede communication. They put the exiled writer in the position of temporary guest of a culture. He is given more of a right to associate with his native community than with the one that he has circumstantially adopted. I will not speak here of jealousy and xenophobia, two scourges more widespread than courtesy and caution would let us admit. There remains the dialogue with the writer's two other publics: that of his homeland, which is in captivity and barely hears his words, and that of the diaspora, which is his most fertile public and the one most interested in his message. This public lives in the same circumstances as the writer: expatriation, homesickness, the hope of return, and worry over the children who, as is normal, begin to sever their links with the past as they become part of the new society in which they are living. In relation to both these publics, the writer assumes a role familiar to all of us from past experience: that of guardian and upholder of his cultural heritage and interpreter of the political solutions that might enable that heritage to survive and prosper.

#### 4. Custodians of the Cultural Legacy

One of the most pernicious traits of dictatorships has been anti-intellectualism. Writers have been viewed by the military as responsible for the social unrest which tries to change the political structures of a country. Although the blame has been exaggerated, there is some truth in the charge. The democratic exchange of ideas among intellec-



Huguette Franco. *Serías Escritos y Silencios*  
Xerox Print. 8 1/2" x 14".

tuals capable of analyzing fundamental problems initiated the questioning of archaic structures within the various countries of Latin America by calling for a modernizing, and at times revolutionary, transformation. The military saw in the universities and intellectual journals a danger greater than that coming from the ranks of the workers. They responded by dismantling the universities, destroying the publishing houses, persecuting intellectuals, and by prohibiting any activity, however harmless, that could lead to the restoration of cultural life. From Guatemala to Uruguay the intellectuals who have stayed in their own countries have been silenced and nothing which might contribute to a cultural dialogue has been allowed in from abroad.

The military order established a rhetorical and official rule in schools and academies. Cultural life was totally suspended: a situation worsened by economic impoverishment. The military imposed a rigid set of values diametrically opposed to those of intellectual freedom. Therefore the writer in external exile, who enjoys freedoms denied the writer in internal exile, has had to become the custodian and defender of his endangered culture. In fact, an overwhelming majority of writers in exile have worked within national cultural traditions (a healthy sign of a new kind of nationalism), striving for the restoration of the creative values of their native culture, and at the same time taking up its causes, its protests, and even its grudges.

This tendency has been most acute in literature, with its peculiar ability to explore and express the causes of the great upheavals experienced by a community, when those upheavals cease, either temporarily or definitively. At that moment literature appears responding to the demands of the public, in this case the people of the diaspora. Time and time again, Latin America has seen these literary explosions after great social upheavals: the literature that grew out of the Mexican Revolution; the literature of violence in Colombia, which started with the "pax" of Rojas Pinilla; the literature of testimony in Venezuela since 1968. The period in which action leaves room only for slogans is followed by another in which reflection, explanation, reminiscence and the testimony of suffering are translated into literature. It is true that the spectre of Edmond Dantès hovers above these works, which at times are heart-rending cries. Nevertheless, in them a community is coming to terms with itself.

It is a literature of the defeated. Someone once observed that our defeats have inspired more eloquent works than have our victories, perhaps because, requiring a more tenacious effort, such works lead to the very limits of literature. A literature of the defeated is not necessarily a sign of resignation but rather a time out for thought. The writer's perspective stands to gain from this brief but necessary respite which allows past events to be seen and interpreted as a coherent whole. Artistically and intellectually, such a period of reflection can be even more profitable than the militancy of an earlier period. *The Poem of the Cid*, the work upon which Spanish literary language is founded, opens with the banished turning back for a last look at their abandoned homes, "tears streaming from their eyes." *The Cid* is the poem of exile and also of the hope of return. And Latin American writers in exile are also writing this long and painful poem. But in sharing their obsession with a national past, they are also founding the Latin American literary community of the future. R