

Chapter Title: LITERATURE AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Book Title: Antonio Candido

Book Subtitle: On Literature and Society

Book Author(s): Antonio Candido

Published by: Princeton University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvn0t.11>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Princeton University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Antonio Candido*

JSTOR

LITERATURE AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

MÁRIO VIEIRA DE MELLO, one of the few writers to approach the problem of the relations between underdevelopment and culture, makes a distinction for the Brazilian case that is also valid for all of Latin America. He says that there has been a marked alteration of perspectives; until the 1930s the idea of “the new country,” still unable to realize itself, but attributing to itself great possibilities of future progress, predominated among us. With no essential modification in the distance that separates us from the rich countries, what predominates now is the notion of an “underdeveloped country.” The first perspective accentuated potential strength and, therefore, a still unrealized greatness. The second pointed out the present poverty, the atrophy; what was lacking, not what was abundant.¹

The consequences Mário Vieira de Mello drew from this distinction do not seem valid to me, but taken by itself it is correct and helps us to understand certain fundamental aspects of literary creation in Latin America. In fact, the idea of a new country produces in literature some fundamental attitudes, derived from surprise, from the interest in the exotic, from a certain respect for the grandiose, and from a hopeful sense of possibilities. The idea that America constituted a privileged place was expressed in utopian projections that functioned in the physiognomy of conquest and colonization; and Pedro Henríquez Ureña reminds us that the first document about our continent, Columbus’s letter, inaugurated the tone of seduction and exaltation that would be communicated to posterity. In the seventeenth century, mixing pragmatism and prophesy, Antônio Vieira recommended the transfer of the Portuguese monarchy, fated to realize the highest ends of History as the seat of the Fifth Empire, to Brazil. Later, when the contradictions of colonial status led the dominant strata to a political separation from the mother countries, there emerged the complementary idea that America had been predestined to be the country of liberty, and thus to consummate the destiny of Western man.

This state of euphoria was inherited by Latin American intellectuals, who transformed it into both instruments of national affirmation and an ideological justification. Literature became the language of celebration and tender affection, favored by Romanticism, with support from hyperbole and the transformation of exoticism into a state of the soul. Our sky

was bluer, our flowers more luxuriant, our countryside more inspiring than that of other places, as in a Brazilian poem that, from this point of view, is valuable as a paradigm: the “Song of Exile,” by Gonçalves Dias, who could stand for any of his Latin American contemporaries from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego.

The idea of *country* was closely linked to that of *nature* and in part drew its justification from it. Both were conducive to a literature that compensated for material backwardness and the weakness of institutions by an overvaluation of regional features, making exoticism a reason for social optimism. In the *Santos Vega*, of the Argentine Rafael Obligado, on the verge of the twentieth century, the nativist exaltation is projected onto a patriotism properly speaking, and the poet implicitly distinguishes *country* (institutional) and *land* (natural), nevertheless linking them in the same gesture of identification:

La convicción de que es mía
La patria de Echeverría,
La tierra de Santos Vega.

[The conviction of what is mine
The country of Echeverría
The land of Santos Vega.]

Country for the thinker, *land* for the singer. One of the assumptions, explicit or latent, of Latin American literature was this mutual contamination, generally euphoric, of land and country, the grandeur of the second being considered as a kind of unfolding of the strength of the first. Our literatures are nourished in the “divine promises of hope,” to cite a famous verse by the Brazilian Romantic poet Castro Alves.

But, the other side of the coin, the discouraged visions shared the same order of associations, as if the weakness or the disorganization of institutions constituted an inconceivable paradox in the face of the grandiose natural conditions. (“In America everything is great, only man is small.”)

Now, given this causal link of “beautiful land—great country,” it is not difficult to see the repercussions a consciousness of underdevelopment could produce in a change of perspective that made evident the reality of the poor lands, the archaic technologies, the astonishing misery of the people, the paralyzing lack of culture. The resulting vision is pessimistic with respect to the present and problematic with respect to the future, and the only remnant of the previous phase’s millenarianism, perhaps, might be the confidence with which it is acknowledged that the removal of imperialism could bring, in itself, an explosion of progress. But, in general, it is no longer a matter of a passive point of view. De-

prived of euphoria, the point of view is combative, and this leads to a decision to struggle, since the trauma of consciousness caused by the confirmation of how great the backwardness is is catastrophic, and invites political reformulations. The preceding gigantism, based on a hyperbolic view of nature, then appears in its true essence—as an ideological construction transformed into a compensatory illusion. From this comes the disposition to combat that is diffused through the continent, the idea of underdevelopment becoming a propulsive force, which gives a new stamp to the political obligation of our intellectuals.

The consciousness of underdevelopment followed the Second World War and was manifested clearly from the fifties on. But there had been, since the thirties, a change in orientation, which could be taken as a thermometer, given its generality and persistence, above all in regionalist fiction. It then abandoned pleasantness and *curiosity*, anticipating or perceiving what had been disguised in the picturesque enchantment or ornamental chivalry with which rustic man had previously been approached. It is not false to say that, from this point of view, the novel acquired a demystifying force that preceded the coming-to-awareness of economists and politicians.

In this essay, I will speak, alternatively or comparatively, of the literary characteristics of the mild phase of backwardness, corresponding to the ideology of the “new country”; and of the phase of catastrophic consciousness of backwardness, corresponding to the notion of “underdeveloped country.” The two are intimately meshed with one another, and we see the lines of the present in both the immediate and remote past. With respect to method, it would be possible to study the conditions of the diffusion of, or of the production of, literary works. Without forgetting the first focus, I prefer to emphasize the second by means of which, though we leave aside statistical rigor, we come close, in compensation, to the specific interests of literary criticism.

II

If we think of the material conditions of literature's existence, the basic fact, perhaps, is illiteracy, which in the countries of advanced pre-Columbian culture is aggravated by the still present linguistic plurality, with diverse languages seeking their place in the sun. In fact, illiteracy is linked to the manifestations of cultural weakness: lack of the means of communication and diffusion (publishers, libraries, magazines, newspapers); the nonexistence, dispersion, and weakness of publics disposed to literature, due to the small number of real readers (many fewer than the already small number of literates); the impossibility, for writers, of

specializing in their literary jobs, generally therefore realized as marginal, or even amateur, tasks; the lack of resistance or discrimination in the face of external influences and pressures. The picture of this weakness is completed by such economic and political factors as insufficient levels of remuneration and the financial anarchy of governments, coupled with inept or criminally disinterested educational policies. Except in the contiguous meridional countries that form "white America" (in the European phrase), there would have to be a revolution to alter the predominant condition of illiteracy, as occurred slowly and incompletely in Mexico and rapidly in Cuba.

These features are not combined mechanically, nor always in the same way, there being diverse possibilities of dissociation and grouping among them. Illiteracy is not always a sufficient explanation of the weakness in other sectors, although it is the basic feature of underdevelopment in the cultural area. Peru, to cite an example, is less badly situated than various other countries with respect to the index of schooling, but it presents the same backwardness with respect to the diffusion of culture. In another sector, the publishing boom of the 1940s in Mexico and Argentina showed that the lack of books was not uniquely a consequence of the reduced number of readers and of lower buying power, since all of Latin America, including the Portuguese-speaking part, absorbed significant numbers of its publications. Perhaps we can conclude that the bad publishing habits and the lack of communication further accentuated the inertia of the public; and that there was an unsatisfied capacity for absorption.

This last example reminds us that the problem of publics presents distinctive features in Latin America, since it is the only group of underdeveloped countries whose people speak European languages (with the exception, already noted, of the indigenous groups) and have their origins in countries that today still have underdeveloped areas themselves (Spain and Portugal). In these ancient mother countries literature was, and continues to be, a good of restricted consumption, in comparison with the fully developed countries, where publics can be classified according to the kind of reading they do, such a classification permitting comparisons with the stratification of the entire society. But, as much in Spain and Portugal as in our own countries of Latin America, there is a basic negative condition, the number of literates, that is, those who could eventually constitute the readers of works. This circumstance brings the Latin American countries nearer to the actual conditions of their mother countries than are, in relation to theirs, the underdeveloped countries of Africa and Asia, which speak different languages than those of the colonizers and confront the grave problem of choosing the

language in which to display literary creation. African writers in European languages (French, like Léopold Senghor, or English, like Chinua Achebe) are doubly separated from their potential publics; and are tied either to metropolitan publics, distant in every sense, or to an incredibly reduced local public.

This is said to show that the possibilities of communication for the Latin American writer are greater, compared to the rest of the Third World, despite the present situation, which reduces greatly his eventual public. Nevertheless, we can imagine that the Latin American writer is condemned always to be what he has been: a producer of cultural goods for minorities, though in this case that does not signify groups of high aesthetic quality, but simply the few groups disposed to read. But let us not forget that modern audio-visual resources might change our processes of creation and our means of communication, so that when the great masses finally acquire education, who knows but what they will look outside the book to satisfy their needs for fiction and poetry.

Put another way: in the majority of our countries large masses, immersed in a folkloric stage of oral communication, are still beyond the reach of erudite literature. Once literate and absorbed by the process of urbanization, they come under the dominion of radio, television, and comic strips, constituting the foundation of a mass culture. Literacy would then not increase the number of readers of literature, as conceived here, proportionally; but would fling the literate, together with the illiterate, directly from the phase of folklore into this kind of urban folklore that is massified culture. During the Christianization of the continent the colonial missionaries wrote documents and poetry in the indigenous language or the vernacular in order to make the principles of religion and of the metropolitan civilization accessible to those being indoctrinated by means of consecrated literary forms, equivalent to those destined for the cultivated man of the times. In our time, a contrary process rapidly converts rural man to urban society, by means of communicative resources that even include subliminal inculcation, imposing on him dubious values quite different from those the cultivated man seeks in art and in literature.

This problem is one of the gravest in the underdeveloped countries, by virtue of the massive pressure of what could be called the cultural know-how and the very materials already elaborated for massified culture coming from the developed countries. By such means, these countries can not only diffuse their values in the normal fashion, but also act abnormally through them to orient, according to their political interests, the opinions and the sensibility—the political interests—of underdeveloped populations. It is *normal*, for example, that the image of

the cowboy hero of the Western is diffused because, independent of judgments of value, it is one of the features of North American culture incorporated into the average sensibility of the contemporary world. In countries with a large Japanese immigration, such as Peru and above all Brazil, there is diffused in a similarly *normal* manner the image of the samurai, especially by means of the cinema. But it is *abnormal* that such images serve as the vehicle for inculcating in the publics of the underdeveloped countries attitudes and ideas that identify them with the political and economic interests of the countries in which those images were made. When we realize that the majority of the animated cartoons and comic strips have a North American copyright, and that a large proportion of detective and adventure fiction comes from the same source, or is copied from it, it is easy to evaluate the negative effect it could eventually have, as an *abnormal* diffusion among a defenseless public.

In this respect it is convenient to point out that in erudite literature the problem of influences (as we will see later) can have either a good aesthetic effect or a deplorable one; but only in exceptional cases does it have any influence on the ethical or political behavior of the masses, since it reaches a restricted number of restricted publics. Even so, in a massified civilization, where nonliterary, preliterate, or subliterate media, such as those cited, predominate, such restricted and differentiated publics tend to unify themselves to the point of being confounded with the mass, which receives the influence on an immense scale. And, what is more, by means of vehicles whose aesthetic element is reduced to a minimum, thus rendering them capable of being confounded with ethical or political designs that, in the limiting case, penetrate the entire population.

Seeing that we are a “continent under intervention,” an extreme vigilance is proper for Latin American literature, in order not to be taken in by the instruments and values of mass culture, which seduce so many contemporary artists and theorists. It is not a case of joining the “apocalyptic,” but rather of alerting the “integrated”—to use Umberto Eco’s expressive distinction. Certain modern experiences are fruitful from the point of view of the spirit of the vanguard and the connection of art and literature to the rhythm of the time, as in Concretism and other currents. But it costs nothing to remember what can occur when they are manipulated politically by the wrong side in a mass society. In fact, even though they present at the time an hermetic and restrictive aspect, the principles in which they are based, having as resources an expressive sonority, graphical elements, and syntagmatic combinations of great suggestive power, can eventually become much more penetrating than traditional literary forms, functioning as nonliterary instruments, but more penetrating for just this reason, reaching massified

publics. And there is no point, for the literary expression of Latin America, in moving from the aristocratic segregation of the era of oligarchies to the directed manipulation of the masses in an era of propaganda and total imperialism.

III

Illiteracy and cultural debility influence more than the exterior aspects just mentioned. For the critic, their action in the consciousness of the writer and in the very nature of his work is more interesting.

In the time of what I called the mild consciousness of backwardness, the writer shared the *enlightened* ideology, according to which schooling automatically brought all the benefits that permitted the humanization of man and the progress of society. At first, schooling was recommended only for the *citizens*, the minority from which were recruited those who shared economic and political advantages; later, for all the people, seen dimly, vaguely, and from afar, less as a reality than as a liberal conception. Emperor Dom Pedro II said that he would have preferred to be a teacher, which denoted an attitude equivalent to the famous point of view of Sarmiento, according to which the predominance of civilization over barbarism had as a presupposition a latent urbanization, based in schooling. In the continental vocation of Andrés Bello it is impossible to distinguish the political vision from the pedagogic project; and in the more recent group, Ateneo, of Caracas, the resistance to tyranny of Juan Vicente Gómez was inseparable from the desire to diffuse enlightened ideas and to create a literature full of myths of redemptive education—all projected in the figure of Rómulo Gallegos, who ended up as the first President of a renascent Republic.

A curious case is that of a thinker like Manuel Bonfim, who published in 1905 a book of great interest, *A América Latina*. Unjustly forgotten (perhaps because it based itself on outmoded biological analogies, perhaps because of the troublesome radicalism of its positions), it analyzes our backwardness as a function of the prolongation of colonial status, embodied in the persistence of oligarchies and in foreign imperialism. In the end, when everything leads to a theory of the transformation of social structures as a necessary condition, a disappointing weakening of the argument occurs, and he ends by preaching schooling as a panacea. In such cases, we touch the core of the illusion of the *enlightened*, an ideology of the phase of hopeful consciousness of backwardness that, significantly, does little to bring what is hoped for to realization.

It is not surprising, then, that the idea already referred to, according to which the New Continent was destined to be the country of liberty, has undergone a curious adaptation: it would be destined, equally, to be

the country of the book. This is what we read in a rhetorical poem in which Castro Alves says that, while Gutenberg invented the printing press, Columbus found the ideal place for that revolutionary technique (the italics are the poet's):

Quando no tosco estaleiro
Da Alemanha o velho obreiro
A ave da imprensa gerou,
O Genovês salta os mares,
Busca um ninho entre os palmares
E a *pátria da imprensa* achou.

[While in the rough workshop
Of Germany the old worker
Begot the bird of printing,
The Genoese leaped over the seas,
Seeking a home among the palms
and discovered the *country of printing*.]

This poem, written in the 1860s by a young man burning with liberalism, is called, expressively, “O livro e a América” (The book and America), displaying the ideological position I refer to.

Thanks to this ideology, these intellectuals constructed an equally deformed vision of their own position, confronted by a dominant lack of culture. Lamenting the ignorance of the people and wishing it would disappear so that the country might automatically rise to its destined heights, they excluded themselves from the context and thought of themselves as a group apart, really “floating,” in a more complete sense than that of Alfred Weber. They floated, with or without consciousness of guilt, above the lack of culture and the backwardness, certain that it could not contaminate them, or affect the quality of what they did. Since the environment could only give them limited shelter, and since their values were rooted in Europe, it was to Europe that they projected themselves, taking it unconsciously as a point of reference and a scale of values; and considering themselves the equals of the best there.

But in truth the general lack of culture produced, and produces, a much more penetrating debility, which interferes with all culture and with the quality of the works themselves. Seen from today, the situation of yesterday seems different from the illusion that reigned then, since today we can analyze it more objectively, due to the action of time and to our own efforts at unmasking.

The question will become clearer as we take up foreign influences. In order to understand them best, it is convenient to focus, in the light of these reflections on backwardness and underdevelopment, on the prob-

lem of cultural dependency. This is, so to speak, a natural fact, given our situation as peoples who are colonized, or descendants of colonizers, or who have suffered the imposition of their civilization, but a complicated fact, with positive and negative aspects.

This cultural penury caused writers to turn, necessarily, toward the patterns of the mother countries and of Europe in general, creating a group that was, in a way, aristocratic in relation to the uneducated man. In fact, to the degree that a sufficient local public did not exist, people wrote as if their ideal public was in Europe and thus often dissociated themselves from their own land. This gave birth to works that authors and readers considered highly refined, because they assimilated the forms and values of European fashion. Except that, for lack of local points of reference, they often could go no farther than exercises of mere cultural alienation, which were not justified by the excellence of their realization—and that is what occurred in what there is of the bazaar and of affectation in the so-called “Modernism” of the Spanish language, and its Brazilian equivalents, Parnassianism and Symbolism. Clearly, there is much that is sound in Rubén Darío, as in Herrera y Reissig, Bilac, and Cruz e Sousa. But there are also many false jewels unmasked by time, much contraband that gave them an air of competitors for some international prize for beautiful writing. The refinement of the *decadents* was provincial, showing the mistaken perspective that predominates when the elite, with no base in an uncultivated people, has no way of confronting itself critically and supposes that the relative distance that separates them translates of itself into a position of absolute height. “I am the last Greek!”—so shouted theatrically in 1924 in the Brazilian Academy the enormously affected Coelho Neto, a kind of laborious local D’Annunzio, protesting against the vanguardism of the modernists, who eventually broke the artistocratic pose in art and literature.

Let us recall another aspect of alienated aristocratism, which at the time seemed an appreciable refinement: the use of foreign languages in the production of works.

Certain extreme examples were involuntarily saturated with the most paradoxical humorlessness, as in the case of a belated Romantic of the lowest rank, Pires de Almeida, who published, as late as the beginning of this century, in French, a nativist play, probably composed some decades earlier: *La fête des crânes, drame do moeurs indiennes en trois actes et douze tableaux* (The festival of the skulls: A drama of Indian customs in three acts and twelve tableaux).² But this practice is really significant when it is linked to authors and works of real quality, such as those of Cláudio Manuel da Costa, who left a large and excellent body of work in Italian. Or Joaquim Nabuco, a typical example of the cosmopolitan oligarchy of liberal sentiment in the second half of the nineteenth cen-

tury, who wrote autobiographical passages and a book of reflections in French—but above all a play whose conventional alexandrines debated the problems of conscience of an Alsatian after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870! A variety of minor symbolists (and also one of the most important, Alphonsus de Guimaraens) wrote all of their work, or at least a part thereof, in the same language. The Peruvian Francisco García Calderón wrote, in French, a book that had value as an attempt at an integrated vision of the Latin American countries. The Chilean Vicente Huidobro wrote part of his work and of his theory in French. The Brazilian Sérgio Milliet published his first poetic work in French. And I am certain that we could find innumerable examples of the same thing in every country of Latin America, from the vulgar official and academic work of pedants to productions of quality.

All this did not happen without some ambivalence, since the elites, on the one hand, imitated the good and bad of European models; but, on the other hand and sometimes simultaneously, they displayed the most intransigent spiritual independence, in an oscillating movement between reality and a utopia of an ideological stamp. And thus we see that illiteracy and refinement, cosmopolitanism and regionalism, could all have roots that mingled in the soil of the lack of culture and the effort to overcome it.

More serious influences of cultural weakness on literary production are the facts of backwardness, anachronism, degradation, and the confusion of values.

All literature presents aspects of backwardness that are *normal* in their way, it being possible to say that the media of production of a given moment are already tributary to the past, while the vanguard prepares the future. Beyond this there is an official subliterate, marginal and provincial, generally expressed through the Academies. But what demands attention in Latin America is the way aesthetically anachronistic works were considered valid; or the way secondary works were welcomed by the best critical opinion and lasted for more than a generation—while either should soon have been put in its proper place, as something valueless or the evidence of a harmless survival. We cite only the strange case of the poem *Tabaré*, by Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, an attempt at a national Uruguayan epic at the end of the nineteenth century, taken seriously by critical opinion despite having been conceived and executed according to the most obsolete patterns.

At other times the backwardness is not shocking, simply signifying a cultural tardiness. This is what occurred with naturalism in the novel, which arrived a little late and has prolonged itself until now with no essential break in continuity, though modifying its modalities. The fact

of our being countries that in the greater part still have problems of adjustment and struggle with the environment, as well as problems linked to racial diversity, prolonged the naturalist preoccupation with physical and biological factors. In such cases the weight of the local reality produces a kind of legitimization of this delayed influence, which acquires a creative meaning. So, when naturalism was already only a survival of an outdated genre in Europe, among us it could still be an ingredient of legitimate literary formulas, such as the social novel of the 1930s and 1940s.

Other cases are frankly disastrous: those of cultural provincialism, which leads to a loss of a sense of measure, the result of which is to evaluate works of no value at all by the standards applied in Europe to works of quality. This leads, further, to phenomena of true cultural degradation, causing spurious work to *pass*, in the sense in which a counterfeit banknote *passes*, due to the weakness of publics and the absence of a sense of values in both publics and writers. We see here the routinization of influences already dubious in themselves, such as Oscar Wilde, D'Annunzio, and even Anatole France, in the books of our own Elísio de Carvalho and Afrânio Peixoto in the first quarter of this century. Or, bordering on the grotesque, the veritable profanation of Nietzsche by Vargas Villa, whose vogue in all of Latin America reached milieus that in principle should have been immune, on a scale that astonishes us and makes us smile. The *profundity* of the semicultured created these and other mistakes.

IV

A problem that touches on the topics of this essay and is worth being discussed in light of the dependence caused by cultural backwardness is that of influences of various types, good and bad, inevitable and unnecessary.

Our Latin American literatures, like those of North America, are basically branches of the literature of a mother country. And if we give up the sensitivities of national pride, we see that, despite the autonomy gained from those mother countries, these literatures are still partly reflections. In the case of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, the process of autonomy consisted, in good part, of transferring the dependency, in such a way that, beginning in the nineteenth century, other European literatures, not those of the metropole, and above all French, became the model; this had also occurred in the intensely Frenchified mother countries. These days it is necessary to take into account North American literature, which became a new focus of attraction.

This is what could be called the inevitable influence, sociologically linked to our dependency, since the colonization itself and the at times brutally forced transfer of cultures. As the respected Juan Valera said at the end of the last century:

From both sides of the Atlantic, I see and admit it, in the people of the Spanish language, our dependence on the French, and, to a certain point, I believe it ineluctable; but I neither diminish the merit of the science and poetry of France so that we can shake off its yoke, nor want us, that we may become independent, to isolate ourselves and not accept the proper influence that civilized peoples must exert on one another.

What I maintain is that our admiration must not be blind, nor our imitation uncritical, and that it is fitting that we take what we take with discernment and prudence.³

We must therefore confront our placental link to European literatures calmly, since it is not an option, but a quasi-natural fact. We never created original frameworks of expression, nor basic expressive techniques; we never created such things as Romanticism, on the level of tendencies, or the psychological novel, on the level of genres, or indirect free style, on that of writing. And while we have achieved original results on the level of expressive realization, we implicitly recognize the dependency, so much so that we never see the diverse nativisms disputing the use of imported *forms*, since that would be like opposing the use of the European languages we speak. What these nativisms required was the choice of new *themes*, of different *sentiments*. Carried to an extreme, nativism (which at this level is always ridiculous, though sociologically understandable) would have implied rejecting the sonnet, the realistic story, and free associative verse.

The simple fact of the question never having been raised reveals that, at the deepest levels of creative elaboration (those that involve the choice of expressive instruments), we always recognize our inevitable dependence as natural. Besides, seen thus, it is no longer dependency, but a way of participating in a cultural universe to which we belong, which crosses the boundaries of nations and continents, allowing the exchange of experiences and the circulation of values. And when we in turn influence the Europeans through the works we do (not through the thematic suggestions our continent presents to them to elaborate in their own forms of exoticism), at such moments what we give back are not inventions but a refining of received instruments. This occurred with Rubén Darío in relation to “Modernism” (in the Spanish sense);⁴ with Jorge Amado, José Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos in relation to Portuguese neorealism.

Spanish-American "Modernism" is considered by many as a kind of rite of passage, marking a literary coming of age through the capacity for original contribution. But, if we correct our perspectives and define the fields, we see that this is more true as a psychosocial fact than as an aesthetic reality. It is evident that Darío, and eventually the entire movement, for the first time reversing the current and carrying the influence of America to Spain, represented a rupture in the literary sovereignty Spain had exercised. But the fact is that such a thing is not accomplished with original expressive resources, but rather by adapting French processes and attitudes. What the Spaniards received was the influence of France, already filtered and translated by the Latin Americans, who in this way substituted themselves as cultural mediators.

This in no way diminishes the value of the "modernists" nor the meaning of their accomplishment, based on a deep awareness of literature as art, not document, and an at times exceptional capacity for poetic realization. But it permits the interpretation of Spanish "Modernism" according to the line developed here, that is, as an historically important episode in the process of creative fertilization of dependency—which is a peculiar way in which our countries are original. The corresponding Brazilian movement was not innovative at the level of general aesthetic forms either, but it was less deceptive because, by calling its two large branches "Parnassianism" and "Symbolism," it made clear the French fountain from which they all drank.

A fundamental stage in overcoming dependency is the capacity to produce works of the first order, influenced by previous national examples, not by immediate foreign models. This signifies the establishment of what could be called, a little mechanically, an internal causality, which makes borrowings from other cultures more fruitful. Brazilian Modernism derived in large part from European vanguard movements. But the poets of the succeeding generation, in the 1930s and 1940s, derived immediately from the Modernists—as is the case with what is the fruit of these influences in Carlos Drummond de Andrade or Murilo Mendes. These, in turn, were the inspiration of João Cabral de Melo Neto, even though he also owes much to Paul Valéry, and then to the Spaniards who were his contemporaries. Nevertheless, these high-flying poets were not influential outside their own countries, and much less in the countries from which the original suggestions came.

This being the case, it is possible to say that Jorge Luis Borges represents the first case of incontestable original influence, exercised fully and recognized in the source countries, through a new mode of conceiving of writing. Machado de Assis, whose originality was no less from this point of view, and much greater as a vision of man, could have opened

new directions at the end of the nineteenth century for the source countries. But he was lost in the sands of an unknown language, in a country then completely unimportant.

It is for this reason that our own affirmations of nationalism and of cultural independence are inspired by European formulations, an example being the case of Brazilian Romanticism, defined in Paris by a group of youths, who were there and who founded in 1836 the magazine *Niterói*, symbolic landmark of the movement. And we know that today contact between Latin American writers is made above all in Europe and in the United States, which, in addition, encourage, more than we do, the consciousness of our intellectual affinity.⁵

The case of the vanguards of the 1920s is interesting, because it marked an extraordinary liberation of expressive means and prepared us to alter sensitively the treatment of themes proposed to the writer's consciousness. As a matter of fact, these vanguards have been, throughout Latin America, elements of autonomy and self-affirmation; but what did they consist of, examined in the light of our theme? Huidobro established "Creationism" in Paris, inspired by the French and the Italians; he wrote his poems in French and made his position public in French, in magazines like *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Argentine ultraism and Brazilian Modernismo are directly descended from these same sources. And none of this prevented such currents from being innovative, nor those who propelled it from being, par excellence, the founders of the new literature: Huidobro, Borges, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, and others.

We know, then, that we are part of a broader culture, in which we participate as a cultural variant. And that, contrary to what our grandparents sometimes ingenuously supposed, it is an illusion to speak of the suppression of contacts and influences, simply because, the law of the world now being interrelation and interaction, the utopias of isolationist originality no longer survive as a patriotic attitude that was understandable when the young nations were being born, a time that called for a provincial and umbilical position.

In the present phase, that of the consciousness of underdevelopment, the question presents itself, therefore, in a more nuanced way. Could there be a paradox here? Indeed, the more the free man who thinks is imbued with the tragic reality of underdevelopment, the more he is imbued with revolutionary aspirations—that is, with the desire to reject the political and economic yoke of imperialism and to promote in every country the modification of the internal structures that nourish the situation of underdevelopment. Nevertheless, he confronts the problem of influences more objectively, considering them as normal linkages on the level of culture.

The paradox is only apparent, since in fact it is a symptom of a maturity that was impossible in the closed and oligarchic world of jingoistic nationalisms. So much so that the recognition of linkage is associated with the beginning of the capacity to innovate at the level of expression, and to fight at the level of economic and political development. Conversely, the traditional affirmation of originality, with a sense of elementary particularism, led and leads, first, to the picturesque and, second, to cultural servility, two diseases of growth, perhaps inevitable, but nevertheless alienating.

Beginning with the aesthetic movements of the 1920s; the intense aesthetic-social consciousness of the 1930s and 1940s; the crisis of economic development and of technical experimentalism of recent years—we began to see that dependency was a step on the road to a cultural interdependency (if it is possible to use this expression, which has recently acquired such disagreeable meanings in the political and diplomatic vocabulary, without misunderstanding). This not only will give writers in Latin America an awareness of their unity in diversity, but will favor works of a mature and original tone, which will slowly be assimilated by other peoples, including those of the metropolitan and imperialist countries. The road of reflection on underdevelopment leads, in the field of culture, to transnational integration, since what was imitation increasingly turns into reciprocal assimilation.

One example among many: in the work of Vargas Llosa there appears, extraordinarily refined, the tradition of the interior monologue, which, Proust's and Joyce's, is also that of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, of Döblin and of Faulkner. Perhaps certain modalities preferred by Vargas Llosa are due to Faulkner, but in every case he has deepened them and made them more fruitful, to the point of making them into something of his own. An admirable example maybe found in *The City and the Dogs*: the monologue of the nonidentified character leaves the reader perplexed, since it intersects with the voice of the third person narrator and with the monologue of other named characters, thus being capable of being confused with them; and, in the end, when this character reveals himself as Jaguar, it illuminates the structure of the book retrospectively, like a fuse, requiring us to rethink everything we had established about the characters. This seems like a concretization of an image Proust uses to suggest his own technique (the Japanese figure revealing itself in the water of the bowl): but it signifies something very different, on a different plane of reality. Here, the novelist of the underdeveloped country received ingredients that came to him as a cultural loan from the countries from which we are accustomed to receive literary formulas. But he adapted them profoundly to his intention, compounding from them a peculiar formula, in order to

represent problems of his own country. This is neither imitation nor mechanical reproduction. It is participation in resources that have become common through the state of dependency, contributing to turn it into an interdependency.

Awareness of these facts seems integrated into the way of seeing of Latin American writers; and one of the most original, Julio Cortázar, writes interesting things on the new appearance local fidelity and world mobility present, in an interview in *Life* (vol. 33, no. 7). And, with respect to foreign influences on recent writers, Rodríguez Monegal assumes, in an article in *Tri-Quarterly* (nos. 13–14), an attitude that could with justification be called a critical justification of assimilation. Nevertheless, opposing points of view, linked to a certain localism appropriate to the “gentle phase of backwardness,” still survive. For those who defend them, such facts as we have mentioned here are manifestations of a lack of individuality or of cultural alienation, as can be seen in an article in the Venezuelan magazine *Zona Franca* (no. 51), where Manuel Pedro González makes clear that, in his view, the true Latin American writer would be one who not only lives in his land, but who also uses its characteristic themes and expresses, without any exterior aesthetic dependency, its peculiar features.

It seems, nevertheless, that one of the positive features of the era of the consciousness of underdevelopment is the overcoming of the attitude of apprehension, which leads to indiscriminate acceptance or the illusion of the originality of work and the charm of local themes. Whoever fights against real obstacles is more balanced and recognizes the fallacy of fictitious obstacles. In Cuba, that admirable vanguard of the Americas in the fight against underdevelopment and its causes, is there artificiality or flight in the surrealist suffusion of Alejo Carpentier, or in his complex transnational vision, including the thematic point of view, as it appears in *Siglo de las luces*? Is there alienation in the bold experiments of Cabrera Infante or Lezama Lima? In Brazil, the recent concrete poetry movement adopts inspirations of Ezra Pound and aesthetic principles of Max Bense and other Europeans; but it produces a redefinition of the national past, reading ignored poets, such as Joaquim de Sousa Andrade, a precursor lost among the Romantics of the nineteenth century, in a new way; or illuminating the stylistic revolution of the great modernists, Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade.

V

Taken as a derivation of backwardness and the lack of economic development, dependency has other aspects that have their repercussions in literature. Recall again the phenomenon of ambivalence, translated into

impulses of copying and rejection, apparently contradictory when viewed alone, but which can be seen as complementary when confronted from this angle.

Backwardness stimulates the servile copying of everything the fashion of the advanced countries sometimes offers, as well as seducing writers with migration, an interior migration, which corrals the individual in silence and in isolation. Backwardness, nevertheless, the other side of the coin, suggests what is most specific in the local reality, insinuating a regionalism that, appearing to be an affirmation of the national identity, can in truth be an unsuspected way of offering the European sensibility the exoticism it desires, as an amusement. In this way, it becomes an acute form of dependency within independence. In the present perspective, it seems that the two tendencies are mutual, born of the same situation of retardation or underdevelopment.

In its crudest aspect, the servile imitation of styles, themes, attitudes, and literary usages, it has a comical or embarrassing air of provincialism, having been the compensatory aristocratism of a colonial country. In Brazil this reaches an extreme, with the Academia de Letras, copied from the French, installed in a building that is a reproduction of the Petit Trianon in Versailles (and the Petit Trianon is, in all seriousness, what the institution is called), with forty members who call themselves *Immortals* and, further like their French models, wear embroidered uniforms, cocked hats, and swords . . . But the functional equivalent of that Academy for all of Latin America might often be, in the guise of an innovative rebellion, the imitated Bohemias of Greenwich Village or Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Perhaps no less crude, on the other hand, are certain forms of nativism and literary regionalism, which reduce human problems to their picturesque element, making the passion and suffering of rural people, or of the populations *of color*, the equivalent of papayas or pineapples. This attitude may not only be the same as the first, but combine with it to *furnish* the urban European (or artificially Europeanized) reader the quasi-touristic reality it would please him to see in America. Without recognizing it, the most sincere nativism risks becoming an ideological manifestation of the same cultural colonialism that its practitioners would reject on the plane of clear reason, and that displays a situation of underdevelopment and consequent dependency.

Nevertheless, in light of the focus of this essay, it would be a mistake to utter, as is fashionable, an indiscriminate anathema against regionalist fiction, at least before making some distinctions that allow us to see it, on the level of judgments of reality, as a consequence of the effect of economic and social conditions on the choice of themes.⁶ The areas of underdevelopment and the problems of underdevelopment (or back-

wardness) invade the field of consciousness and the sensibility of the writer, proposing suggestions, setting themselves up as topics impossible to avoid, becoming positive or negative stimuli to creation.

In French or English literature there have occasionally been great novels whose subject is rural, such as those of Thomas Hardy; but it is clear that this is a matter of an external framework, in which the problems are the same as those of urban novels. In the main, the different modalities of regionalism are in themselves a secondary and generally provincial form, among much richer forms that occupy a higher level. Nevertheless, in such underdeveloped countries as Greece, or those that still have major underdeveloped areas, like Italy or Spain, regionalism can be a valid manifestation, capable of producing works of quality, such as those of Giovanni Verga at the end of the last century, or of Federico García Lorca, Elio Vittorini, or Nikos Kazantzakis in our time.

For this reason, in Latin America regionalism was and still is a stimulating force in literature. In the phase of “new country” consciousness, corresponding to the situation of backwardness, it gives a place, above all, to the decoratively picturesque and functions as a discovery, a recognition of the reality of the country and its incorporation into the themes of literature. In the phase of the consciousness of underdevelopment, it functions as a premonition and then as a consciousness of crisis, motivating the documentary and, with a feeling of urgency, political engagement.

In both stages, there occurs a kind of selection of thematic areas, an attraction for certain remote regions, in which the groups marked by underdevelopment are localized. They can, without doubt, constitute a negative seduction for the urban writer, through a picturesqueness with dubious consequences; but, beyond this, they generally coincide with areas of social problems, which is significant and important in literatures as engaged as those of Latin America.

An example is the Amazonian region, which attracted such Brazilian novelists and storytellers as José Veríssimo and Inglês de Sousa, from the beginnings of naturalism, in the 1870s and 1880s, in a fully picturesque phase; it furnished the material for *La vorágine*, by José Eustasio Rivera, a half century later, situated between the picturesque and the denunciation (more patriotic than social); and it became an important element in *La casa verde* of Vargas Llosa, in the modern phase of high technical consciousness, in which exoticism and denunciation are latent in relation to the human impact that is displayed, in the construction of style, with the immanence of universal works.

It is not necessary to enumerate all the other literary areas that correspond to the panorama of backwardness and underdevelopment—such as the Andean *altiplano* or the Brazilian *sertão*. Or, also, the situa-

tions and places of the Cuban, Venezuelan, or the Brazilian Negro, in the poems of Nicolás Guillén and Jorge de Lima, in *Ecué Yamba-Ó* of Alejo Carpentier, *Pobre negro* of Romulo Gallegos, or the *Jubiabá* of Jorge Amado. Or, still further, the man of the plains—*llano*, *pampa*, *caatinga*—the object of a tenacious compensatory idealization that comes from such Romantics as José de Alencar in the 1870s; which occurred largely among the peoples of the Rio de la Plata, Uruguayans like Eduardo Acevedo Díaz, Carlos Reyles, or Javier de Viana, and Argentines, from the telluric José Hernández to the stylized Ricardo Güiraldes; which tends to the allegorical in Gallegos, in Venezuela, and reaches, in Brazil, in the full phase of preconsciousness of underdevelopment, an elevated expression in *Vidas Secas* of Graciliano Ramos, without the vertigo of distance, without tournaments or duels, without rodeos or cattle roundups, without the centaurism that marks the others.

Regionalism was a necessary step, which made literature, above all the novel and the story, focus on local reality. At times it was an opportunity for fine literary expression, although the majority of its products have dated. But from a certain angle, perhaps, it can't be said that it is finished; many of those who today attack it, at bottom practice it. The economic reality of underdevelopment maintains the regional dimension as a living object, despite the urban dimension's ever-increasing importance. It is enough to remember that some of the best writers find substance for books that are universally significant in it: José María Arguedas, Gabriel García Márquez, Augusto Roa Bastos, João Guimarães Rosa. Only in countries where the culture of big cities has absolute dominion, such as Argentina and Uruguay, has regional literature become a total anachronism.

For this reason, it is necessary to redefine the problem critically, seeing that it is not exhausted by the fact that, today, no one any longer considers regionalism a privileged form of national literary expression; among other reasons because, as was said, it can be especially alienating. But it is appropriate to think about its transformations, keeping in mind that the same basic reality has been prolonged under diverse names and concepts. In fact, in the euphoric phase of consciousness of the new country, characterized by the idea of backwardness, we had picturesque regionalism, which in various countries was inculcated as *the* literary truth. This modality was long ago left behind, or survives, if at all, at a subliterate level. Its fullest and most tenacious manifestation in the golden phase was perhaps the gauchoism of the countries of the Río de la Plata, while the most spurious form was certainly the sentimental Brazilian "sertanejismo" [from *sertão* = backlands] of the beginning of the twentieth century. And it is what has irremediably compromised certain more recent works, such as those of Rivera and Gallegos.

In the phase of preconsciousness of underdevelopment, through the 1930s and 1940s, we had problematic regionalism, which called itself the “social novel,” “indigenism,” “novel of the northeast [of Brazil],” depending on the countries and, though not exclusively regional, in good part it was. It interests us more for having been a precursor of the consciousness of underdevelopment—it being fair to record that, much earlier, writers like Alcides Arguedas and Mariano Azuela were already guided by a more realistic sense of the conditions of life, as well as of the problems of unprotected groups.

Among those who then proposed, with analytic vigor and at times in artistic forms of good quality, the demystification of American reality are Miguel Ángel Asturias, Jorge Icaza, Ciro Alegría, José Lins Rego, and others. All of them, in at least some part of their work, created a kind of social novel that was still related to the universe of regionalism, including what was negative in it, such as a sentimental picturesqueness, or kitsch; these remnants of regionalism amounted at times to a schematic and banal humanitarianism, which could compromise what they wrote.

What characterizes them, still, is the overcoming of patriotic optimism and the adoption of a kind of pessimism different from what was present in naturalist fiction. While that fiction focused on the poor man as a refractory element in the march of progress, these uncovered the situation in its complexity, turning against the dominant classes and seeing in the degradation of man a consequence of economic plunder, not of his individual *fate*. The paternalism of *Doña Bárbara* (which is a kind of apotheosis of the good master) suddenly seems archaic, in the face of the traces of George Grosz we observe in Icaza or the early Jorge Amado, in whose books what remains of the picturesque and exotic is dissolved by social unmasking—making it a presentiment of the passage from the “consciousness of the new country” to the “consciousness of the underdeveloped country,” with the political consequences that introduces.

Even though many of these writers are characterized by spontaneous and irregular language, the weight of social consciousness acts in their styles as a positive factor, making room for the search for interesting solutions to problems of the representation of inequality and injustice. Without speaking of the consummate master Asturias is in some of his books, even a facile writer like Icaza owes his durability less to his indignant denunciations or to the exaggeration with which he characterizes the exploiters than to some stylistic resources he found to express misery. In *Huasipungo* it is a certain diminutive use of words, of the rhythm of weeping in speech, of the reduction to the level of the animal that, taken together, embody a kind of diminution of man, his reduction to elementary functions, which is associated with the linguistic stuttering

to symbolize privation. In *Vidas secas*, Graciliano Ramos carries his customary verbal self-restraint to the maximum, elaborating an expression reduced to the ellipsis, to the monosyllable, to the minimum syntagmas, to express the human suffocation of the cowhand confined to minimum levels of survival.

The Brazilian case is perhaps peculiar, since here the initial regionalism, which began with Romanticism, earlier than in the other countries, never produced works considered first class, even by contemporaries, having been a secondary, when not frankly subliterate, tendency in prose and in verse. The best products of Brazilian fiction were always *urban*, most often stripped of any element of the picturesque; its major representative, Machado de Assis, showed since the 1880s the fragility of descriptivism and of local color, which he banished from his extraordinarily refined books. It was only beginning more or less around 1930, in a second phase that we are trying to characterize, that regionalist tendencies, already sublimated and transfigured by social realism, attained the level of significant works, while in other countries, above all Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, it was already being put to one side.

Overcoming these modalities, as well as the attacks they suffer from critics, is a demonstration of maturity. For this reason, many authors would reject as a blemish the name of "regionalist," which in fact no longer has meaning. But this does not prevent the regional dimension from continuing to be present in many works of major importance, though without any feeling of an imperative tendency, or of any requirement of a dubious national consciousness.

What we see now, from this point of view, is a blooming world of the novel marked by technical refinement, thanks to which regions are transfigured and their human contours subverted, causing formerly picturesque features to be shed and to acquire universality.

Discarding sentimentalism and rhetoric; nourished by nonrealist elements, such as the absurd, the magic of situations, or by antinaturalist techniques, such as the interior monologue, the simultaneous vision, the synthesis, the ellipsis—the novel nevertheless explores what used to be the very substance of nativism, of exoticism, and of social documentary. This would lead to proposing the distinguishing of a third phase, which could be (thinking of surrealism, or superrealism) called *super-regionalist*. It corresponds to a consciousness distressed by underdevelopment and explodes the type of naturalism based on reference to an empirical vision of the world, a naturalism that was the aesthetic tendency peculiar to an epoch in which the bourgeois mentality triumphed and that was in harmony with the consolidation of our literatures.

To this superregionalism belongs, in Brazil, the revolutionary work of Guimarães Rosa, solidly planted in what could be called the universality

of the region. And the fact that we have gone beyond the picturesque and the documentary does not make the presence of the region any less alive in works such as those of Juan Rulfo—whether in the fragmentary and obsessive reality of *Llano en llamas*, or in the fantasmal sobriety of *Pedro Páramo*. For this reason it is necessary to nuance drastic judgments that are basically fair, like those of Alejo Carpentier in the preface to *El reyno de este mundo*, where he writes that our nativist novel is a kind of official high school literature that no longer finds readers in its places of origin. Without doubt—if we think of the first phase of our attempt at classification; to a certain point—if we think of the second; not at all—if we remind ourselves that the third carries an important dose of regional ingredients, due to the very fact of underdevelopment. As was said, such ingredients constitute a stylized realization of dramatic conditions peculiar to it, intervening in the selection of themes and of topics, as well as in the very elaboration of the language.

Criticism will no longer require, as previously it would have, explicitly or implicitly, that Cortázar sing the life of Juan Moreyra, or that Clarice Lispector use the vocabulary of the Brazilian backland. But it will, equally, not fail to recognize that, writing with refinement and going beyond academic naturalism, Guimarães Rosa, Juan Rulfo, Vargas Llosa practice in their works, in the whole and in their parts, as much as Cortázar or Clarice Lispector in the universe of urban values, a new species of literature, which still is connected in a transfiguring way to the very material of what was once nativism.

NOTES

This article first appeared, in French, in *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* (UNESCO), 12, no. 4 (1970), 618–40; and was reprinted in Antonio Candido, *A educação pela noite e outros ensaios* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1987), pp. 140–62.

1. Mário Vieira de Mello, *Desenvolvimento e cultura: O problema do estetismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Nacional, 1963), pp. 3–17.

2. I owe this citation to Decio de Almeida Prado.

3. Juan Valera, “Juicio crítico,” in Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, *Tabaré*, edición ilustrada (Mexico City: Casas Editoriales, 1905), pp. 9–10.

4. In Latin American literature in Spanish, the reaction against Romanticism at the end of the nineteenth century is called Modernism. In Brazilian literature, the vanguard literary movement of the 1920s is called Modernism. To distinguish the two, I use quotation marks in referring to the Spanish case.

5. The situation today is different and, besides, was already changing when I wrote this essay (1969). In this change the role of Cuba was decisive, promoting intensely in its territory the meeting of Latin-American artists, scientists, writers, and intellectuals, who could thus meet and exchange experiences without the mediation of the imperialist countries.

6. I use the term *regionalism* here in the manner of Brazilian criticism, which extends it to all the fiction linked to the description of regions and of rural customs since Romanticism; and not in the manner of most of modern Spanish-American criticism, which generally restricts it to the era more or less between 1920 and 1950.