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Between Confession and Realism: Lack, Vision, and the Construction of Identity in Rafael Arévalo Martínez's *Una vida* and *Manuel Aldano*

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ABSTRACT The present study explores the relationship between generic ambiguity in *Una vida* (1914) and *Manuel Aldano* (1922) by the Guatemalan Rafael Arévalo Martínez, and the Darwinian/Spencerian discourse with which the narrator attempts to construct an identity that will grant him a legitimate speaking subjectivity in the face of his inability to adapt to the changes in the Spanish American *letrado*'s role within societies at the periphery of modernization. Through an analysis of the narrator's development and the emerging relationships between sexuality, language, genre, and vision in Arévalo Martínez's short novels, the reader will note the irresolute tension between confession and realism that characterizes the narration. This tension is determined by the narrator's guilt at not being "modern" on the one hand, and on the other, his attempt to conform to the needs of the *ciudad modernizada* by constructing a "proper" identity and thereby justifying his right to reproduce and to speak. As a result, the works belie the inherent ambiguity of discourses on identity that produce the ambivalence that they are meant to eliminate, thus opening up the possibility of exploring less exclusionary alternatives to both generic definition and self-definition.

Most of the sporadic literary criticism directed at the Guatemalan Rafael Arévalo Martínez's work has either situated it in the context of *modernismo*[1]

1. Examples of this critical tendency are found in Manuel Antonio Arango (197), Arturo Arias (ii), Mario Alberto Carrera (46), Martin Erickson (48), Dante Liano (*La palabra* 88), Seymour Menton

(with some caveats), or in that of postmodernism and fantastic or psycho-zoological literature as a preview to 20th-century literary experimentation. Most of the critics in this latter category base their conclusions primarily on Arévalo Martínez's psycho-zoological stories, in particular his most famous "El hombre que parecía un caballo." This has proven to be the narrative that has largely defined the writer's work, and has led several critics to focus on his other stories and novels to note the development of animal imagery in his work and its relationship to later innovative narrative in Spanish America.[2]

Such categorizations, however, do not account for the primarily realist/autobiographical vein evident in his first two novels, *Una vida* (1914, hereafter referenced as *UV*) and *Manuel Aldano* (1922, hereafter referenced as *MA*). Nor do they account for what Seymour Menton has mistakenly called the lack of thematic unity, especially in *Manuel Aldano*. In this book, the narrator ends with what Menton calls a psychological novel about a young poet trying to find and keep work with an essay-like epilogue full of Darwinian theory diagnosing the protagonist's inability to adapt to modern work after leaving school and working at a series of jobs, mostly in foreign-owned enterprises. While to Menton this "digression" seems out of place (160), the present study will treat it as a mediating discourse around which coheres a careful construction of identity throughout the two texts, in order to answer two basic questions. First, how does the protagonist's discursive "choice" determine the careful construction of identity that allows him to exist as a writer and as the "caso clínico . . . emblema de la doliente nación del trópico" (*MA* 144–45)? Obviously, my debt here is to Michel Foucault, who poses the questions "under what conditions and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in a given type of discourse, what function can it assume and by obeying what rules?" ("What Is an Author" 221). Secondly, how does the protagonist's discursive formation, which provides him with a superior identity while simultaneously relegating him to inferior status, affect the generic qualities of the novels?

The choice of social Darwinism and the struggle for life to construct a discursive identity, always present in the narrator's attempt to make a place for himself in the realms of work and family, is inextricably linked to the

(149), María Salgado (*Rafael Arévalo Martínez* 18, "Arévalo Martínez" 159), Evelyn Uhrhan Irving (51), and Marc Zimmerman (102).

2. See, for example, Ramón Luis Acevedo, Jaime Herszenhorn, Luis Leal, William Lemus, Daniel Reedy, and Harry Rosser.

rights to language and sexuality, the two linchpins which the protagonist, Aldano, considers essential for legitimacy. His consciousness of the relationship between work, identity, and sexuality, always present throughout the novels, becomes more explicit when he attains and struggles to keep what might be considered the ideal job of Ángel Rama's *ciudad modernizada*, which required modernizing the function of the lettered city with the advent of internationalist modernization and the division of labor.[3] If the narrator sees before him the carrot of the right to reproduce, the right to fatherhood associated with the attainment of a job at the bank, then behind him lie his "paternal" obligations to his widowed mother and his sister, all tied to his struggle for identity: "había pobrezas vergonzantes como la de mi madre; ávidos deseos insatisfechos, como los de mi hermana; ambiciones de ocupar un puesto en la vida, formar un hogar, de reproducirse . . . y llenar un destino, —como la mía" (*MA* 108–09). The right to reproduce and to the attainment of a legitimate subject status, then, is contingent upon the acquisition of capital, and Aldano is well aware of this contingency: "El neurasténico es un hombre con la mitad de deberes y la mitad de derechos que los demás hombres" (*MA* 110).

Here it is useful to recall Foucault's thesis on the production and deployment of familial sexuality and its relationship to marital alliances in the strategies of "biopower" that formed in the 19th century. He sees familial sexuality as a necessarily regulated element in the expansion of capitalism which would require a "biopolitics" for societal regulation and hierarchy (*History* 139–41). According to him, modern sexuality is "born of a technology of power that was originally focused on alliance. Since then, it has not ceased to operate in conjunction with a system of alliance on which it has depended for support" (108). This shift coincides with the medicalization of sex in the 19th century, at a time when hereditary discourse, such as evolution, "was placing sex (sexual relations, venereal diseases, matrimonial alliances, perversions) within a framework of 'biological responsibility' with

3. A description of this transformation makes up the bulk of Rama's chapters "La ciudad modernizada" and "La polis se politiza." With the advent of modernization and the division of labor, the *letrado* must adapt by transforming himself into a doctor, bureaucrat, or lawyer capable of carrying out a modernizing function. Julio Ramos has described this period as the end of "el papel paradigmático del *saber decir* of the *letrado civil*" (62), whose task, as reflected in the work of Andrés Bello, was to locate language and letters within a struggle to order the chaos of Latin America (Ramos 44). In Guatemala, Liano associates this shift with the increase in the cultivation of coffee for export, which was accompanied by the growth of a tertiary sector that favored, in particular, the legal profession (*La palabra* 89).

regard to the species," of which eugenics and the medicine of perversions were a part (118). The primary concern was not repression, but rather the preservation of the bourgeois body and its self-affirmation. For Foucault, it is through the framework of normative sexuality that each person must pass "in order to access his own intelligibility (seeing that it is both the hidden aspect and the generative principle of meaning), to the whole of his body (since it is a real and threatened part of it, while symbolically constituting the whole), to his identity (since it joins the force of a drive to a singularity of a history)" (156).

In Guatemala, the adoption in the 19th century of controls on sex and sexuality was centered on the racial question of what to do about the "Indian problem," and was evident in the proliferation of ideas on evolutionary anthropology spawned by Darwinian theory. In contrast to its counterparts in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, where intellectual elites tried to form a national identity based on the incorporation of the indigenous populations to create a cultural identity of *mestizaje*, Guatemala's nation-building framework used Spencerian and Darwinian evolutionary theories to support the State's desire to insert itself into "universal" (Western) culture (Taracena Arriola, *Etnicidad* 107; González Ponciano 111–16). Such a framework rested on the creation of a bipolar society that segregated the *ladino*, a social identity based on the rejection of any indigenous heritage and culture, from the majority indigenous population. In keeping with Foucault's concept of biological alliances in the preservation of the bourgeois body, Paul Dosal and Marta Casaús Arzú have analyzed respectively the maintenance of familial alliances between *ladinos* and foreigners during the rise of Guatemala's industrial oligarchy, and the connection between familial alliances and racial purity.

Turning once again to Arévalo Martínez's work, racial "purity" is also tied, through degenerative discourse, to sexuality. The narrator's Darwinian diatribe at the end of *Manuel Aldano,* the presumed "digression," makes a clear distinction between appropriate, masculine sexuality, reflected in the blond, imperialist foreigners who own most of Guatemala—according to Aldano—and the degenerate feminine sexuality of the tropics.[4] As the narrator describes the actions of North on South, the feminization of Latin

4. This gendering of territories in literature is well documented. See Liano (*Rafael Arévalo Martínez*), Sandra Siegel, Doris Sommer, Benigno Trigo, and Robert Young for some interesting discus-

America connotes the act of intercourse: "sobre el vivaz latino, especulativo y sentimental, inteligente y lánguido, . . . bajaban los bárbaros del Norte, de pupilas celestes y brazos de acero" (*MA* 140–41).[5] Here the reader begins to see what Robert Young has called "the fetish of unbounded fecundity" typical of colonial desire and discourses on race (181). In *Manuel Aldano*, the protagonist's imagery reflects further this idea of colonized fertility, as his description of imperial interests parallels the acts of penetration and insemination: "El suelo fertilísimo [Guatemala] alimentaba sin esfuerzo la poco densa población. Sólo una raza fuerte —la raza sajona— *hendía* con su hábito de trabajo y sus cuerpos sanos, como un *cuchillo*, la floja masa de la población indolatina, y *se erguía,* y se hacía servir. Era el alma de toda empresa, la voluntad dirigente de donde partía toda iniciativa" (*MA* 137; my emphasis). Furthermore, the narrator associates the opposition masculine/feminine with that of work or capital versus decadent imagination and letters: "No era esta la tierra que generaba a los hombres de ojos azules del frío Norte, fuertes para la lucha contra los elementos y, como fuertes, conquistadores . . . Era más bien como un país del Mediodía tibio, como la azul Grecia o la feraz Italia . . . El sol y la Tierra . . . hacían propicio el momento para las especulaciones metafísicas y para los deliquios del Arte" (*MA* 140).

One cannot help but note in this passage the association of Spanish American *modernismo* with the idea of decadence in the classical references and the "deliquios del Arte," a theme found also in such *modernista* writers as Rubén Darío and Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, both of whom also juxtaposed the barbarism of sex in the Latin races with the civilization for which they presumably strove. Michael Aronna investigates this opposition of action to art in an analysis of the medicalization of sex in Hispanic writing rooted in modernity's need to isolate and categorize the sick and "degenerate" as part of the project of modernization and industrialization (14) and to ultimately show how the images of evolution and degeneration are related to a wider ideology and political intentions (30). Also pertinent to Aldano's opposition of masculine capital with feminine imagination are rewritings of Spanish American *modernismo* that examine the bind in which the movement's writers found themselves in the rebellion against materialist theories and positivism,

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sions of degeneration discourse and gendered landscapes in imperial theories and Latin American Literature.

5. Again, this dichotomy is not unique. For example, Young has noted it in Gobineau's work (118) and Ramos discussed its implementation in the work of Eugenio María de Hostos (55–56).

which tended to categorize as "degenerate" the celebration of "modern" elements of European decadence as part of the impulse toward building a "healthy" nation. Oscar Montero, for example, demonstrates the way in which both Darío and José Enrique Rodó must cleanse representations of deviant sexuality in two of *modernismo's* principal influences (the Symbolist legacy of Paul Verlaine, and classical myth). This cleansing aims to preserve the virility of the eroticism on which *modernista* subjectivity, and by extension that of the Latin American writing subject, is founded. Silvia Molloy, in turn, sees the *modernista* dilemma as evidence of the "double discourse of *modernismo,* one in which decadence appears *at the same time* as progressive and regressive, as regenerating and degenerating" ("Too Wilde" 192). For Molloy, it was the *modernista*'s misfortune to turn to Europe's decadents and symbolists for renovation and regeneration of Latin American poetry at the same time that Spanish American countries were also deeply engaged with theories of evolution and degeneration (191–92).

This, then, is the backdrop against which Aldano's problematic construction of subjectivity must be analyzed in the remainder of the two narratives. And while many critics have associated Arévalo Martínez's work with *modernista* or experimental movements, one finds less evidence of linguistic experimentation and more of the seemingly transparent language and scientific discourse often associated with the realist and naturalist movements of the same period in Spanish America. Aldano chooses a scientific discourse which gives him a problematic legitimacy, an *a priori* subjectivity that is considered inferior even as he uses it to try to distinguish himself from indigenous "barbarism." Similarly, the generic qualities of his narratives vacillate between confession, which revolves around his self-proclaimed decadence, and realism, which is reflected in transparent, prosaic language and the incorporation of scientific observation reminiscent of realist/naturalist discourse.[6] The generic ambiguity coincides with the narrator's alternating feelings of fear over his inability to adapt to the marketplace and earn the right to sexuality and paternity, and his attempt to justify and legitimize

6. Francisco Nájera situates this return to simplicity or transparency within two circumstances: the lateness of *modernismo*'s arrival to Guatemala, and a public that was quick to reject it and the threat of North American imperialism that shook *modernistas* (24–25). Thus "todo lo exótico comenzó a ceder paso a un autoanálisis personal y continental" (25), which corresponds to the second period of *modernismo*. My argument will consider this change also as a result of the evolutionary discourse with which Arévalo Martínez frames his narrative.

himself as somehow "superior" to his barbaric environment, through confession.

Mikhail Bakhtin has posited that one of the many generic boundaries that the novel crosses is confession, a "'cry of the soul' that has not yet found its contours" (33). This individualizing force of the confession is taken up by Foucault, who asks, "At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves as mad persons? At the price of constituting the mad person as absolutely other, paying not only the theoretical price but also an institutional and economic price" ("Structuralism" 444). For Foucault, "the truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power" (*History* 58–59). In the 19th century with the medicalization of sex, he discerns a shift in the confessional function: "the sexual domain was no longer accounted for simply by the notions of error or sin . . . but was placed under the rule of the normal and pathological" (67). He asserts, finally, that guilt began to represent "treatment"—i.e. subjectification: "From acknowledgment of his status as object . . . the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason" (*Madness and Civilization* 247). Aldano's narrative, then, seeks to justify his right to speak, despite his inability to fulfill the duties of work.

Aldano's guilt stems from his apparently pathological aversion to work and his feelings of inadequacy in the face of his various (mostly foreign) bosses. As a result, his confession of his perceived shortcomings is infused with an overriding sense of lack, embodied in his obsession with his poor vision. This sense of deficiency or "otherness" comes from various fields of action open to him, all of which are affected by the narrator's perception of himself as emotionally unstable and which increase his anxiety of exclusion from economic production, sexuality, and language.[7] However, it becomes evident that Aldano's guilt does not come from sexual transgression *per se*, but rather from his perceived "weakness," "femininity," and his *modernismo*. In describing his precocious affinity for letters in primary school, he portrays his brain as where "una dama loca era ama de casa" (*UV* 8–9). Letters

7. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault has outlined four fields of human activity by which individuals and their behavior were judged in determining sanity by the end of the 19th century: labor or economic production, sexuality (the right to a family in the reproduction of society), speech and language, and community ludic activities (336–37). If an individual displayed anomalies in these arenas, (s)he lost all rights to participate in them.

become a liability that separate him from the rest of the boys, who call him "bendito entre las mujeres" (12), his obsession with reading a sign of his "feminine" imagination that is intimately linked with sexuality: "[mi madre] no sabía entonces que el que no fue niño no será nunca hombre. No sabía entonces que, como los eunucos, pasaría de la infancia a la decrepitud, sin tener nunca la virilidad" (14–15).

At this stage of his development in the primary schoolyard, vision does not yet have a disciplinary mechanism to focus it and is associated with unfocused imagination that, taken against the later education of vision in *Manuel Aldano*, represents that of the premodern *letrado*: "mi corta vista de miope, se detenía horas enteras observando un cienpiés o un cochinillo de humedad. ¡Qué mundo en cada pulgada de terreno!" (*UV* 25). What the narrator describes is the absence of what Martin Jay has called "monocentric" or "Cartesian perspectivalism" (69), which characterizes the ocularcentrism of modernity. Citing Foucault, Jay's contention is that Descartes's rejection of a resemblance theory of knowledge in favor of one that introduces signs to be read by the mind puts the French philosopher at the beginning of the epistemic shift from resemblances or similarities to representations. Thus the intervention of language becomes necessary to "read" the world correctly (79). What ensues in Aldano's discovery of the world is a catalogue of uncentered, premodern vision: "¡Y qué descubrimientos misteriosos encontraba nuestro pasmo. Bajados del cielo con las gotas de agua, había alfileres, cuentecillas de vidrio microscópicas —mostacillas— cuentas más grandes, botones, todo un universo de objetos que creíamos bajados de la luna. ¡Cómo se detiene un chiquillo . . . ante una aglomeración de maderas viejas, que el hombre no ve y que en el alma vacía de un niño obtienen un lugar preferente" (*UV* 25–26). Not only does Aldano's reflection on unmediated vision mark a beginning point with which to compare the education of sight, but it also foreshadows his "education" when he enters the world of work, where his myopia will feed into his guilt in the confession of his shortcomings: "a la vez que el mundo se achica conforme vamos creciendo, el mundo se despuebla . . . ¡Oh, la tristeza de cómo se despuebla después la tierra" (*UV* 25, 27). The nostalgia expressed here is the longing for the premodernization period, and the confession will be constituted by guilt at not being modern.

This guilt becomes more pronounced as the protagonist transitions from primary to secondary school, from the feminine influence of letters in a school run by women, to the masculine world of materialism and discipline.

Arturo Taracena Arriola notes that the Liberal Revolution of 1871 had implemented public instruction specifically in the service of modernization by including only instruction in "cursos útiles y prácticos" that would support the displacement of Creole elites by allowing for the education of *ladinos* (229–30). Accordingly, Aldano's myopia suddenly becomes a source of anxiety, indirectly related to his "femininized" sexuality: "Mis emociones de aquellas primeras horas eran exageradas por mi escasez de vista. Era un terrible cegato . . . Tenía la timidez e irresolución de los miopes" (*UV* 33). The *colegio*'s discipline collides with his avarice for letters, turning him into an object, a status exaggerated by his lack of vision. This part of his account is also where his horror at being observed becomes increasingly evident in the face of the "normalizing judgment" (Foucault, *Discipline* 177) of his teachers, and exams that create agonies similar to the Inquisition. He is mortified when observed by the Rector leaving the library with books during a work time, and belittled by a teacher who uses him as an example of those who stray because of reading Zola or Balzac. His strict paternal uncle, "amo absoluto" whose "severa imagen" (*UV* 30) monitors Aldano's progress toward the ultimate goal of a legal or medical degree, crucifies him with an omnipresent gaze, and whips him when the protagonist fails to adapt.

The narrator's early life is thus composed primarily of the guilt he feels for his affinity for letters, and the constant functional surveillance and correction as a part of the normalization or individualizing process.[8] Even the generic title—*Una vida*—suggests that a desired identity has not been reached and that this narrative represents his "other" life. On a discursive level, the confessional mode as the vehicle for the protagonist to "speak the truth" indicates that individualization is still in process, and that he has not yet earned the privilege of a name in his own right. In short, he confesses and pays the price of making himself absolutely other: "Y esta mi triste existencia de no ser nada . . . y a la postre, como remate, tres palabras que lo definen todo, que lo hacen comprensible todo: un poeta decadente más; un poeta decadente hispano-americano más" (*UV* 46). "Poet" is tantamount to the

8. Foucault describes the diffuse disciplinary process of training and correction as a system of "infra-penality": "The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penality of time, activity, behavior, speech, body, and sexuality." At the same time, a series of mechanisms—humiliation, physical punishment, coldness, or indifference—is instituted to make the "guilty" feel remorse (*Discipline* 178–79).

absolute other outlined previously in the evolutionary discourse at the end of *Manuel Aldano*.

Manuel Aldano picks up where the protagonist leaves off in *Una vida*, as the narrator, unable to complete a law degree, goes from school to the workplace on orders from his uncle. As the title foreshadows, in *Manuel Aldano (la lucha por la vida)* there is a shift that corresponds to the *letrado*'s entrance into the struggle for life—the market—and which centers on the acquisition of a "legitimate" identity that distinguishes him from the anonymity of "una vida" and reveals an attempt at self-justification that commingles with the abjection of confession. With regard to this ambivalent identity, Jeremy Tambling, in a Foucauldian genealogy of confessional forms and their corresponding spaces, has identified what he calls the "Panopticon" confession, which is at once "self-accusatory and self-justifying" (9). This identity by no means appropriates the confessional element, but adds a dimension to its self-justifying impulse: "'Expert' knowledge is power in terms of the accepted dominant discourse, so the ability to marginalize functions to put the excluded person in a confessing situation, owning to failure in the terms of that discourse . . . his or her identity hollowed out from that discourse, to learn it through recording . . . failure to do so; to speak the language of the Other by confession" (210–11). For what the disciplined object of *Una vida* attempts to do in *Manuel Aldano* is to transform himself from an object to a subject of vision, and thereby exorcise his otherness, his "femininity," his *modernismo*.

At first, as Aldano wanders around trying to find his first place of employment, overwhelmed by the proliferation of foreign names of businesses, his vision is still that of the unfocused sight without perspective of his childhood vacation and therefore still a sign of his status as object. Accordingly, the disciplinary gazes that so mortified him in school and at home are transformed into the accosting gazes of the *patrones* and the lower classes:

> [S]us *miradas* se detenían en mí . . . y con una indefinida *amenaza* que me causaba menos molestia que su tenacidad. Y aquella primera espera en que, por desconocido, me daba en *espectáculo* a los próximos empleados que iban a ser mis vecinos, me enervaba . . . Unos minutos después vi llegar a un hombre alto . . . y una *sostenida mirada* al intruso, . . . es decir a mí, que en aquel instante sentía cernirse sobre mi vida una *amenaza* . . . Entonces el hombre alto pareció darse cuenta de mi presencia; me dirigió una *mirada cruel*. (*MA* 11–12; my emphasis)

The sheer proliferation of visual language is striking, as is the idea of imminent threat. The gazes appropriate the narrator, denying him subject status, and thereby recreating him as object defined by immobility and inertia. The image of the protagonist as object, and the expression of guilt, is perhaps never so present as it is in his accounts of his first jobs, as he turns inward to his own lack of vision: "de entre la multitud de solicitantes, yo me creía el peor dotado. Mi escasez de vista se había vuelto en mi ánimo, una idea fija" (43). From the "feminine" *letrado* of his school experience, he is converted into the passive object of foreign interests, in his own words "sin derechos y con deberes" (*MA* 18). Lack of vision combines with a lack of individuation and the absence of the right to take one's place as head of a family as part of the practice of a normative sexuality.

However, after his first job, the narrator's amorphous identity begins to shift from self-condemnation to self-justification, as he receives a lesson from one of his employers in how to "read" customers, in which the realist tendency toward exhaustive description and the focus on the reading of the face (Goldstein 66) becomes the norm in *Manuel Aldano*: "hay que fijarse en el rostro y en la actitud del comprador . . . Los ojos del cliente también hablan al comerciante experimentado . . . La mayor generosidad se conoce en el rostro. Hay narices de lugareño, narices alargadas en forma de pico de ave, que con su sola presencia me indican que la batalla será reñida" (25). Along with his education of sight, courtesy of the market, Aldano achieves "modern" perspective with the purchase of glasses, after which "los objetos, que antes parecían tocarme . . . se alejaban, se definían, recortaban sus contornos precisos, estableciendo las distancias" (*MA* 54). Thus he has finally attained what Jay has called "monocentric perspectivalism," the God's-eye view created by the interpellation of language as representation, which defines the discourse on vision in modernity (69). He has now attained the symmetry and distance of realist vision.

Accordingly, Aldano's narrative begins to transform from overwhelming emphasis on internal feelings to a vision turned outward, and the resulting detailed descriptions, often racial, that are the trademarks of realist narrative. Philippe Hamon has enumerated what he considers the main traits of realist discourse, some of which are applicable in discerning the "transparent" elements of Aldano's narration. Among realism's defining characteristics are the use of memory, family situation, and heredity in order to maintain overall coherence; the primacy of psychological motivation; the use of visual techniques; avoidance of self-conscious narration; an assumption that the

external world (for example, the face) is decipherable; exhaustive descriptions that can eclipse characterization; imitation of scientific, historical, or technological discourse to enhance transparency; and a reduction of distance between "being" and "appearing," which avoids ambiguous characters or details superfluous to the realist aim (166–81). It is not that Aldano's narration has thus far been devoid of description, the cohesive devices of scientific and historical discourse, medical authorities, flashbacks, characterizations based on binary oppositions (masculine versus feminine, material versus spiritual, writing versus capital, upper versus lower classes). But such techniques up to this point, such as description, racial discourse, heredity, etc. have portrayed him principally as an object, and as someone who has been turned inward in the self-condemnation part of his confession. Thus it is that the realist obsession with physical characteristics becomes more detailed and exhaustive, seen in a plethora of detailed facial descriptions, which even include counting the hairs on the upper lip of a young ladinized indigenous character. These descriptions, and thus the attempt at self-justification, culminate in that of Santiago Navines Gall, a Catalonian avant-garde artist who represents Aldano's attempt to legitimize himself in the lengthiest description of all. It extends for seven pages, and exhibits the fullest expression of the scientific language of realism and its obsession with the face:

> [S]obre todo, en su rostro estaba tan acentuada la huella ancestral de la mano del progreso . . . Su ancha frente, su frente enorme, combada, cubierta por una piel sin mácula, surcada de azules venas y arterias palpitantes, lubrificada por una vivísima circulación sanguínea, que acusaba un corazón activo, irradiaba talento.
>
> Y luego la piel . . . haciendo destacarse una calavera de sabio, con amplio ángulo facial; y en aquella cabeza . . . no había más que la falta absoluta de organismo superfluo en un rostro ultracivilizado. (*MA* 69)

Here one can see the overt influence of criminal anthropologists, such as the Italian Cesare Lombroso, as well as the classifications of Social Darwinism in France, to create a semiotics of the civilized.[9] Arévalo Martínez's description also shows a special kinship with the work of Georges Vacher de Lapouge

9. Liano has found the influence of Lombroso's work in a variety of Arévalo Martínez's short stories (*Rafael Arévalo Martínez*), and Mike Hawkins gives a fairly comprehensive summary of the major social Darwinists in France (184–200).

and his three major classifications of races: Homo Europeaus, who was tall, pale-skinned, and long-skulled; Homo Alpinus, who was smaller, with a darker complexion and short skull, presumably closer to the simian state; and the Mediterranean type, who was long-skulled, but darker and shorter than Homo Europeaus (cf. Hawkins 193). Santiago falls into the third category: "[E]mergía de los tiempos pretéritos una vieja estirpe de civilizado; abuelos fenecios o egipcios, de la clase de sacerdotes, guardadores de una cultura superior que se ocultaba a las masas" (*MA* 70).

In Lombroso's schema, Santiago's curved, broad forehead and skull is indicative of superior culture, in contrast with the primitive type, whose small head, narrow skull, and retreating forehead were indicative of the criminal mental pathology associated with racial "others" in a "semiotics of degeneracy" (Stepan, "Biological Degeneration" 113). Aldano, rather enamored of the artist, tries to bolster his ambiguous subjectivity by attributing their friendship to "la ley que hace que lo homogéneo busque y encuentre el homogéneo" (*MA* 68), and by having Santiago confirm their common superiority: "[Ud.] no sirve para obedecer. Servirá para mandar" (*MA* 78). This, then, is the "vivaz latino" we see in the presumed Darwinian digression at the end of *Manuel Aldano*, and it is with this identity that the narrator tries to justify himself as a legitimate subject.

The ambiguity of Aldano's subjectivity again comes to the fore in his final attempt at employment, a coveted bank job, as he turns his gaze upon himself so that he is both subject and object during his interview with a British bank manager, "aquel aguilucho de los negocios": "Yo tenía toda la apariencia de un buen muchacho; un bicho débil, un animalillo asustado y bueno. Mi gran nariz, mis enormes orejas, tenaces, aferradas a la vida, enérgicas, eran desmentidas por la línea suavísima y espiritualizada de una barbilla tenue. Mi boca pequeña negaba la sensualidad" (*MA* 84). He at once places himself as object or other, through the eyes of the bird of prey, while the absence of sensuality connotes a "legitimate" sexual identity as he also positions himself as subject with the right to speak within the Darwinian discourse that frames his narrative. There exists simultaneously lack and legitimation in an identity that refuses to be pinned down. Homi Bhabba refers to this indeterminate state as the inevitable "hybridity" that characterizes colonial discourse, "the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys the mirror of representation" of integrated cultural knowledge (37). Joshua Lund, in a critique of the employment of the concept of hybridity in Latin

American criticism, views Bhabba's ambivalent hybridity as always inextricably linked to discourses on the racialized other in Latin America: "[T]hese discourses always express a desire to access the referential, indicative, reified thing behind hybridity: the radical heterogeneity of colonial, national, or civil society shot through with sociocultural intercourse (sexual, communicative, narratological, economic) between differently constructed social actors" (50). Such a hybrid irresolution of identity implies no original "purity" against which it is positioned at the heart of the dialogue with the writable text; therefore it is not an automatic transgression of that text, but lies "between prison and transgression" (188).

As Aldano moves toward the loss of another job, it is vision, along with adaptation, to which he clings, in order to justify his right to speak. Near the end of his tenure at the bank, the narrator provides a foil to the scene in the schoolyard at the beginning of *Una vida*, where he had discovered the multitude of mysteries with a premodern perspective and lamented the monocentric perspectivalism that depopulates the world. Once again, visual language proliferates, as he demonstrates his adaptive prowess in "seeing" his job: "*percibía* no sólo la parte encomendada a mi esfuerzo, como mis compañeros de Oficina o de Caja que sólo tenían la parcial, incompleta *visión* necesaria para . . . su empleo, sino todo el engranaje del Banco . . . Y sin duda tenía más clara *percepción* de lo que es la plaza comercial de Guatemala que ellos" (*MA* 129–30; my emphasis). Whereas earlier in the two novels, the narrator's obsession with vision centers on the physiological ability to see, in this passage vision has been overtly displaced onto discourse, thereby belying his text's—and his identity's—impurity.

This slippery subject thus reveals that he only exists and "sees" and speaks by obeying certain social and discursive rules, while at the same time revealing what was true all along—that the narrator's identity, like his vision, is dependent upon language and the nature of the discourses he chooses to frame his experience. The binaries that form that identity—premodern/modern, *ladino*/indigenous, interior/exterior, subject/object, art/science—collapse under the weight of the discourse that creates them. While the move from *Una vida* to *Manuel Aldano* shows a certain individuation that corresponds with the protagonist's apprenticeship and the narrative progression to the "transparent" language of realism, the very title of *Manuel Aldano (la lucha por la vida)* embodies the same simultaneous identities of named subject and anonymous object of reactive struggle as the other of Darwinian discourse, as the narrator appropriately ends the novel with the birth of a

prose poem that arises from an indeterminate position of enunciation. He thus leaves the reader with his "visión del trópico" (*MA* 248) in the face of "la ceguera del pueblo guatemalteco" (141), an indictment of a "sick" population that naturally falls prey to tyrants by the "emblema de la doliente nación del trópico" (*MA* 145). Nation and protagonist share the same indefinable position of subjectivity.

As a result of the narrator's attempt at individuation through confession and the internalization of degenerative discourse, throughout *Una vida* and *Manuel Aldano* the limits of genre remain as ambivalent and indefinable as his identity. Once again, the categories of confession and realism cannot be disentangled. Citing Derrida's ideas on genre, Lund asserts that the entanglement of genres is a key element in hybridization, describing not only the ambivalence of subjectivity as opening up a space for the questioning of the force of authorial identity, but also genre markers, which are also products of the effects of power (23). In his abject confession of guilt over his literary and physical shortcomings, dominant in *Una vida*, the narrator's attempt to counteract the guilt with self-justification leads him only to the bind of genres that parallels his presumed "education" of sight as he asserts the self, even as the realist aspects of the narrator's "readings" of physical characteristics are belied by the displacement of the physiological sense of sight onto the discursive. Aldano's narrative thus reflects what Tambling has identified as the self-policing confession of the late 19th century, where the reactionary spirit is both confessor and confessant, and mimics the voices of other authorities in the texts to help mold the confessor's self-justification (140)—in Aldano's case, the modern day Doctor, Priest, Employer, or Father.

Finally, in keeping with Lund's ideas on the indeterminate in identity images and genres (7–8), due to the narrator's appeal to science and degeneration, hybridity in *Una vida* and *Manuel Aldano* is suffused with biopolitics, and its application points to the relationship between work, sexuality, and access to the language of power. Like the *modernistas*, who find themselves in a bind as they guiltily praise the poetic work of those who embody degenerative discourse (gay males), while at the same time trying to avoid the danger of contamination through narrative strategies that efface or erase the unspeakable, Arévalo Martínez's narrator in *Una vida* and *Manuel Aldano* finds himself also in a similar bind. While I am aware that early studies by both Daniel Balderston (35–44) and David William Foster (43–50) include Arévalo Martínez's "El hombre que parecía un caballo" in their studies of gay- and lesbian-themed literature in Latin America, I am not prepared to

find in *Una vida* and *Manuel Aldano* definitive evidence of the narrator's homosexuality proper. For his part, Balderston questions whether the short story's "outing" of another (Aretal in "El hombre") by the narrator allows for avoidance of his own (42). My argument aligns more precisely with Foster's, which denies being a "homosexual reading" of "El hombre," and which focuses, rather, on the idea that the story, like the short novels treated in this study, "echoes the dominant practice of social exclusion, personal repudiation, and identity erasure in the face of alleged sexual deviance" (50).

Therefore, my point of view of Arévalo Martínez's "confession" focuses on the more ambivalent reading of a sexuality which does not always fit into the ideal that is negatively projected in the discourse that the narrator, Aldano, has chosen in his attempt at self-justification and individuation. It is thus a sexual identity inextricably tied to the idea of race and reflected in the obsession with vision, which mirrors the ambiguity of identity as a writer and as a "real man" in society's view, and, in turn, endangers his participation in cultural institutions of the nation. Like the *modernista* writers both attracted to and repelled by society's view of deviance, who superficially adopt certain elements of European decadence not to subvert, but to be modern or to titillate, Aldano's adoption of evolutionary and decadent discourse is equally superficial. Furthermore, the attempted adoption of such a discursive identity and its resulting ambivalence can be, regardless of motive, as both Lund and Molloy ("Politics of Posing" 187) have suggested, a way to highlight the ambiguity of all constructions of presumably fixed identity, gender, genre, and other categories, and to begin to seek less exclusionary alternatives.

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