

THE WRITINGS OF MANUEL ROJAS

by

Robert Scott  
A.B., Miami University, 1956  
M.A., Miami University, 1958

Submitted to the Department of Spanish and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	111
I. LIFE AND WORKS . . . . .	1
II. NON-FICTION. . . . .	23
III. POETRY . . . . .	41
IV. THE SHORT STORIES. . . . .	67
V. BEGINNINGS AS A NOVELIST . . . . .	111
VI. THE ANICETO HEVIA TRILOGY. . . . .	130
VII. <u>PUNTA DE RIELES</u> : A NEW DEPARTURE . . . . .	186
VIII. CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	201
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	213

## PREFACE

The present study is intended to trace the development of the writings of Manuel Rojas, the most prominent Chilean novelist and short-story writer of the generation of 1920, and to reach some conclusions regarding their significance. That such a study is justified is evident. In the passing remarks of reviewers who have commented on his works, critics who have studied one or two aspects of his novels and short stories, and anthologists who have chosen to include some few of his best short stories in their collections, there is a consensus that he is a writer of some significance. Nevertheless, there exists very little in the way of critical analysis of his works. Fernando Alegría has discussed Rojas' novels in a brief article; four or five significant studies have been done on Hijo de ladrón, all but one published in Chile; and Raúl Silva Castro has written some commentary on his short stories, although hardly a critical study. Other than this, Rojas has been singularly neglected by the critics. Since no single monograph attempting a synthesis of his works has appeared to date, it would seem that such a study should be made at this time. Moreover, now that Rojas has passed his

seventieth birthday, it is unlikely that he will add significantly to what he has already written. His total work may be said to have been completed.

Rojas' works fall rather neatly in terms of their chronology into a generic arrangement. He began, for example, as a poet, later became a short-story writer, and reached his peak as a novelist. The fact that he wrote one poem as late as 1954, an occasional short story after 1951, and a book of essays in 1960, does not alter the fact that his development can be seen most clearly by analyzing his works according to genre. Rather than trace his works within a rigid chronology, therefore, I have chosen to deal with each genre in a separate chapter. It will be evident, nonetheless, that the chronological development has in no way been neglected or denied by this method.

As has been mentioned, critical studies of Rojas' works are scant, and very little if anything would be gained by a bibliographical reference to every review that has appeared in every newspaper and magazine. I have, therefore, eliminated such references from the bibliography. At the same time, although the bibliography is selective, it is meant to include all significant studies to date as well as the anthologies in which Rojas' works, especially his short stories, have appeared.

Finally, I should like to express my sincerest gratitude to Professor Seymour Menton for his advice and critical assistance in the preparation of this thesis, and to Professor Raymond D. Souza who so kindly assumed advising responsibilities at the last moment.

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE AND WORKS

Regardless of the genre he may choose, no literary artist can avoid using his personal experiences in the creation of literature. On the other hand, no matter how close a relationship may exist between a particular finished work of art and the writer's own experiences, he can never offer a mere carbon copy of life. Indeed, when such is the case, as sometimes happens, there is no art at all. Most of Manuel Rojas' works are manifestly autobiographical. Yet it is evident that, despite the inseparable relationship between his life and his works, he offers us considerably more than thinly-disguised autobiography. It will be the aim of this introductory chapter to discuss Rojas' life as it pertains to his literary works.

Manuel Rojas was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on January 8, 1896, the son of Manuel Rojas Córdoba and Dorotea Sepúlveda. Were it not for his parents being Chilean and the fact that he later lived, wrote, and published his works in Chile, Argentina might have claimed him as her own. As it was, he first came to Chile at the age of four when his parents moved from Buenos Aires to Santiago.

Here, on the corner of Coquimbo and Nataniel, his father opened a modest general store. Although Rojas is unable to recall the physical details of his father's business--  
 "me inclino a creer que era pequeño y modesto"--<sup>1</sup> it is evident that he showed a keen interest in people and an uncanny eye for observation even at this early age, for he retains vivid images of the individuals and types who lived in the neighborhood. The numerous drunks, rough-necks, thieves, beggars, and tramps who drank at a nearby tavern are typical counterparts of the characters who were later to appear in his short stories and novels.<sup>2</sup>

Rojas' first stay in Chile, however, was brief. His father, a happy soul who loved music, was also fond of cognac; he died very suddenly when Manuel was no more than five, of nephritis brought on by too much alcohol. Rojas has only two vague recollections of his father:

No tengo de mi padre sino dos recuerdos, dos imágenes: en una me veo paseando con él sobre alguna parte del puerto de la ciudad de Rosario; en la otra le veo tendido sobre una camilla, cubierto por una sábana de hospital y muerto.<sup>3</sup>

Rojas' widowed mother returned with Manuel to the more familiar surroundings of Buenos Aires. After residing a very short time in a small house on Estados Unidos Street, Doña Dorotea and her son soon moved to a larger place in the Boedo district. Among the occupants here--the landlady, an Italian shoemaker, an elderly French lady, and a

socialist tailor-- , only the latter had anything approaching an influence on Rojas. With tongue in cheek, he recalls that the tailor taught him to sing the socialist anthem, "Hijos del Pueblo." Later as a young man, Rojas was to play a more active role in the left-wing social agitation of the early years of the century.<sup>4</sup>

It was in Buenos Aires that Rojas began what little formal education circumstances were to allow him. Within a single year, he attended three different primary schools. Only the last of the three does he recall at all, but the recollection is etched vividly in his memory. The school was run by a married couple whose physical ugliness was surpassed only by their autocratic and whimsical cruelty. On one occasion, for instance, the teacher-director, nicknamed by the boys "Nariz de Batata," proceeded to punish his pupils alphabetically for having played soccer instead of going to confession. Manuel squirmed in anguish as he waited for the tyrant to come to the R's. When the crucial moment was at hand, he jumped up and scurried out the side door. He never returned.

In sympathy with Manuel, primarily because she was dissatisfied with the couple's instruction, his mother enrolled him in another school. Rojas' experiences here were in sharp contrast to those just described. Without a doubt, the principal reason was his new teacher, a gentleman of whom he has only the fondest memories:



Su presencia animaba; parecía, más que un educador, un amigo. Bajo su influencia, en los días que siguieron a su aparición, me entusiasmé hasta el punto de pasar a ocupar uno de los primeros puestos; después, desvanecida la novedad, volví de nuevo a los últimos. Pero me distinguía y guardo de él, como maestro, el mejor recuerdo de mis escasos años de escolar. Se llamaba Félix Mieli. Y es curioso que sea el único nombre que recuerdo entre los de mis profesores.<sup>6</sup>

When his mother moved again, Rojas was forced to change schools once more. Before leaving, he chanced to meet Mieli on a street corner. He recalls his teacher placing his hand affectionately on his head and saying to him: "¡Hacéte un hombre, Manuel!"<sup>7</sup> Rojas not only remembered the words but seems to have taken them to heart, for his best works are concerned with the question of what it means to grow into manhood.

Illness prevented him from regularly attending his next school. Furthermore, scarcely had he recuperated when his mother made her third change of residence since returning to Buenos Aires, this time to the Caballito district. Rojas' years here were filled with the normal carefree experiences of boyhood. He was not above stealing pears, for example, from a near-by quinta, mostly for the thrill of being chased by the caretaker. At the same time, he showed an unusual sensitivity toward nature, spending long hours observing the birds and learning the names of the many and varied species.<sup>8</sup>

But what little leisure he was to know, came to a premature end. His mother's economic circumstances forced him to take on small jobs. Manuel worked for a week in a

tailor shop, learning little else than to sew on buttons; another two weeks were spent in a neighborhood butcher shop, sweeping the floor and answering the door; and he worked for a month as a messenger boy for the Buenos Aires service, "La Capital," a job which gave him an opportunity to learn the ins and outs of his native city. Later, when his mother left the city briefly, Manuel was placed in the home of an old friend of his father's who was a harness maker. Since he was to remain for some weeks, Manuel, ever industrious, had himself placed in the shop as a temporary apprentice.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after his mother's return, the two of them moved to Rosario, where they took up residence with a widow and her six children:

...una familia venida a menos. El jefe, desaparecido poco tiempo antes de nuestra llegada, tuvo figuración política y quizá social, pero no dejó a su gente otros bienes que aquella casa; esto, por supuesto, hablaba muy bien de su probidad; los seis hijos que dejó, en cambio, hablaban muy mal de su sobriedad. La señora, bondadosa, gobernaba el hogar como mejor podía, y los hijos mayores, dos mujeres y un hombre, la secundaban también como podían.<sup>10</sup>

Rojas seems to have been impressed by the quiet heroism of this widow, for women of this type, similar in many ways to his own mother, appear frequently in his fiction. It is worth noting, too, that it was this family which was to serve him many years later as the point of departure for his novel, Hijo de ladrón.

In Rosario, at this residence and later at a boarding house run by an elderly widow, Rojas spent the last days of his childhood. In school he continued to be little better than an average student.<sup>12</sup>

More influential in his formation than his schooling, perhaps, was the early interest he took in literature. He was thirteen when he discovered the world of fiction in an adventure novel, Devastaciones de los piratas, by Emilio Salgari.<sup>13</sup> But such juvenile tastes took a new direction when, under the influence of the elderly widow who ran the boarding house, Rojas was introduced to the popular folletines appearing in the daily newspapers. In these novels from different countries, he discovered worlds that Salgari was unable to offer him. "El mundo físico, el mundo sensible y el mundo moral se me ampliaron enormemente."<sup>14</sup> His curiosity had now been awakened, and he was ever after caught in what he refers to as the net of literature.

Manuel Rojas' early childhood, then, was characterized by humble surroundings, the tragedy of his father's untimely death, and the continuous movement which took him to two countries, three cities, countless neighborhoods and schools, but which, most importantly, introduced him to a wide variety of poor people. Although his mother was hardly wealthy, she was by no means indigent, and Rojas never suffered excessive hardships. There was always enough to eat, a roof over his head, and clothes to wear. What is more, Manuel

was constantly entertained by his mother's endless repertoire of stories and tales. But his childhood did come to an abrupt end when he had to leave school at the age of fourteen in order to go to work. From this time on, his only schooling would be that of his every-day experience.

While still living in Rosario, Rojas took a job as an apprentice in the carpenter shops of the Argentine Central Railroad. Later, when he and his mother moved from Rosario to Mendoza, he continued to work at a variety of jobs; he became both an apprentice painter and electrician. About this time also, the arrival in town of a circus and a theater troupe afforded him his first opportunity to work as an actor. With the latter, Rojas worked without pay, usually playing the role of a bohemian; with the circus, because of his unusual height, he played the part of a clown-policeman with a short companion serving as comic foil. Finally, after working for a short time as a grape picker during the harvest, he took a job as a construction laborer on the Trans-Andean Railroad in Las Cuevas. <sup>15</sup> These latter experiences were to bear fruit in such stories as "Laguna" and "El cachorro," and they make up one section of Hijo de ladrón.

Despite the termination of his formal schooling, Rojas continued to supplement his every-day experience by reading. While in Mendoza, he became associated with a group of anarchists and gravitated toward such revolutionary utopians as

Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Bakunin. At the same time, he extended his reading beyond these narrow confines as he continued to explore imaginative literature in such writers as Victor Hugo, Eduardo Zamacois, and others. Over and above this, he began to delve into the more academic areas of sociology, ethics, and history.<sup>16</sup>

In 1912, at the age of sixteen, Rojas returned to Chile. He explains his decision as follows:

¿A qué venía? A trabajar. Durante el verano de ese año trabajé en Las Cuevas, y al bajar a Mendoza dejé allí alguna ropa; tuve que volver a buscarla. La compañía del Transandino, para la cual iba a trabajar, me negó el pasaje: no pude presentar nada que certificara mi identidad, no estaba en condiciones de pagarme el pasaje y la alternativa fue volver a pie o perder un colchón y dos frazadas, una fortuna para un obrero como yo, aunque allí no fui más que peón. Pensé que debía aprovechar el esfuerzo y continuar hasta Chile.<sup>17</sup>

By hopping freight trains, he made his way to Guido and from there, by cattle car, to Zanjón Amarillo, arriving finally in Las Cuevas. With a man named Laguna and two anarchists, he then crossed the Uspallata pass on foot into Chile--no mean feat in mid-winter--, sleeping overnight in the shelter of the Christ of the Andes.<sup>18</sup>

In Chile, Rojas worked at part-time jobs. In Santiago he painted carriages and in Cartagena chalets.<sup>19</sup> After a May-day scuffle in 1914, he left Santiago for Valparaíso. The circumstances of his leaving are tinged with melodrama. Following an anarchist meeting, Rojas and some friends had

been accosted near his home by some strangers. Two shots rang out in the night, much to Rojas' bewilderment, and one of the assailants fell wounded in the street. Fearing her son might be arrested, Rojas' mother, who had earlier come to live with him, advised him to leave Santiago immediately. To this day, the shooting remains a mystery to him.<sup>20</sup>

In Valparaíso, through the help of a friend in the I.W.W., Rojas found work on the docks as a stevedore. It was a physically demanding job: "A las cinco de la mañana-- tenía que estar en el muelle a las seis--, me fue casi imposible levantarme: me dolían hasta las yemas de los dedos."<sup>21</sup> These experiences made a lasting impression on the young Rojas. Along with subsequent ones as a night watchman on a barge, they form the bulk of his first novel, Lanchas en la bahía.

In both Valparaíso and Santiago, Rojas remained active as an anarchist. It was in connection with this movement that he was initiated into the world of letters, writing editorials for his group's publication, La Batalla. At the same time, he was named correspondent to the Buenos Aires anarchist daily, La Protesta.<sup>22</sup> Speaking with no little irony about his contributions to these papers, Rojas says:

No recuerdo qué correspondencia envié, pero sí recuerdo que tuve la mala ocurrencia de escribir y de publicar en mi periódico, La Batalla, ...

un artículo que titulé Qué es el arte, que me valió la más escarneada y larga de las discusiones que haya debido sostener en mi vida.<sup>23</sup>

In the ensuing debate over his thesis of art for art's sake, a debate he held with an Asturian anarchist, Rojas was reduced to ashes. This, he maintains, was the only time in his life when he regretted having published his ideas.<sup>24</sup>

Rojas' initial efforts at writing creative literature were encouraged by the Chilean poet José Domingo Gómez Rojas. Under the stimulus of this friend, he began to compose poetry. His own evaluation of these early ultra-modernistic works is less than favorable: "...produje los peores que se hayan escrito en el hemisferio."<sup>25</sup> Perhaps because of the doubtful quality of his first poems, he soon moved to the realm of the short story. Yet he fared no better there. His first story, which he never published, was a vindication of an anarchist friend accused by the others of acting as an informer to the police. As it turned out, his first literary publication was a sonnet, "El gusano," appearing in 1918 in Los Diez, a review put out by the celebrated group of the same name.<sup>26</sup>

Rojas continued to support himself by taking a job as a prompter and part-time actor in a neighborhood theater which staged criollista plays by Antonio Acevedo Hernández. Later he joined an itinerant acting troupe, traveling as

far south as Chiloé. With this bit of practical experience, he commenced to work on a full-length drama, Daniel, about a consumptive poet modeled after his friend José Domingo Gómez Rojas. He never quite finished the play, but he did continue to experiment with drama, his second attempt being a sainete based on a short story by Rafael Maluenda. Although this was staged by Enrique Barrenechea, it was rather less than successful. Neither play was ever published, nor do the manuscripts exist today.

Ever interested in books, Rojas continued to read, the trends of the times turning his attention to more pessimistic things. He studied Ecclesiastes, Job, Schopenhauer, and Thomas á Kempis. In spite of the cheerless subject matter, however, his good friend José Santos González Vera points out that Rojas' own pessimism, reflected in some of his early poems, was in reality quite superficial, a conventional pose, and only transitory.

Manual Rojas' career as a writer really had its solid beginnings after he returned to Argentina for the second time. Earlier he had taken a job with an acting troupe and had traveled as far south as Punta Arenas. Upon returning to Santiago, he joined another troupe, this one going to Mendoza. It was while he was in this city that he was introduced to the editor of Ideas y figuras, a magazine which soon afterwards, under the title Poéticas,



published all of the poetry he had written up to that time.<sup>30</sup> When the theatrical tour finally ended in Buenos Aires in 1922, Rojas decided to remain in Argentina. It was while he was looking for work that he learned of a short-story contest sponsored by the Buenos Aires daily, La Montaña. Spurred on by economic needs, he quickly wrote "Laguna," entered it, and won the second prize of 100 nacionales. That same year, when the popular magazine, Caras y Caretas, sponsored another contest, Rojas again submitted a story, "El hombre de los ojos azules." This time, too, he was to win second prize, although a larger sum,<sup>31</sup> 500 nacionales and a gold medallion.

Stimulated no doubt by the success of the short stories, Rojas turned his attention once more to writing for the theater. He finished another sainete which was neither published nor staged. When he returned to Santiago, the actor Rafael Frontaura asked to read his plays. Unfortunately for Rojas, Frontaura was to lose all the manuscripts.<sup>32</sup> Far from upset--he now considers Frontaura his benefactor--Rojas seems to have taken the loss as an omen; he did not write again for the stage until 1958 when he collaborated with the popular Chilean dramatist, Isidora Aguirre, in a play called Población esperanza, performed that year by the Teatro Universitario de Concepción.<sup>33</sup>

In 1924, Rojas returned to Chile and went back to writing stories. "El cachorro," "Un espíritu inquieto," and

"El bonete maulino" were put together with the two previous prize-winners to make up Hombres del sur (1926), a volume which merited a prologue by Raúl Silva Castro. The following year, 1927, he came out with Tonada del transeunte, a collection of verse. Whereas the poetry made no reverberations, the stories were highly praised by the critics, including Silva Castro. Despite the praise, however, one critic, unremembered now, mentioned that he lacked style. Disturbed, but always desiring to improve, Rojas pondered the problem, consulted friends, and read everything on literary style he could find.<sup>34</sup> His conclusions can be found in some of his subsequent essays on literature and represent a synthesis of ideas taken from Buffon, John Middleton Murry, and Lionel Trilling.

Unable to support himself by his writings, Rojas continued to work at different jobs. He was a linotype operator for Imprenta Cervantes, El diario ilustrado, and La Nación. In 1927, he joined another theater troupe, acting in melodramatic historical plays and touring the small towns and cities in the north of Chile. With this he could say that he had seen all of Chile from Punta Arenas in the south to Arica in the north. But this was to be his last experience as an actor. He soon began to supplement his income by working as a journalist and writing short articles for Los Tiempos under the assumed name of Pedro Norte.<sup>35</sup> Rojas himself, however, scarcely considered this serious

journalism, composing as he did off the top of his head:  
 "...a veces componía en mi máquina mis propias producciones."<sup>36</sup>

These years, although filled with activity, were not without their romantic interests. In 1928, Rojas married a young primary school teacher, María Eugenia Baeza, and the two remained married for eight years until her death in 1936. She bore him three children, a son and two daughters.<sup>37</sup> These were the happiest if not the most exciting years of Rojas' life. Earlier, in 1927, while touring Argentina, he had had a rather unfortunate love affair with one of the actresses in the company, a somewhat neurotic girl named Dalila Barrios. The latter had abandoned her husband to live with Rojas. Although they were able to elude her husband without incident, the frustrating affair soon came to an end; "... el ambiente se hizo bastante tenso y tal vez para evitar mayores molestias o quizá porque estuviere aburrida, Dalila comenzó a salir en giras teatrales."<sup>38</sup>

The result was that she finally went off with another man while Rojas fell in love with María Eugenia. It is worth noting in passing that the experiences with these two women form the core of two contrapuntal incidents in his later novel, Mejor que el vino.

Between 1929, the year of his mother's death, and 1942, Rojas wrote and published regularly although not prolifically. His second volume of short stories, El delincuente, came out in 1929, and his third, Travesía, in 1934. In

the meantime, he had begun to write novels, Lanchas en la bahía appearing in 1932 and La ciudad de los césares in 1936. This same year he was named president of the Sociedad de Escritores. Finally, his only other important publications before Hijo de ladrón in 1951 were De la poesía a la revolución (1938), a volume of essays, and a biographical essay done in 1942 on José Joaquín Vallejo, the popular nineteenth century costumbrista more commonly known as "Jotabeche."<sup>39</sup>

During these years, still unable to live from his writings, Rojas continued to hold down numerous jobs. He was with the Biblioteca Nacional when it was under the direction of Eduardo Barrios, and in 1931, upon the creation of the University Press, he was appointed director of the Apales de la Universidad de Chile.<sup>40</sup> For a short time also, he held a part-time job at the Ercilla publishing house, correcting translations from French, German, and English and making them acceptable for publication in Spanish. In addition, he became involved once again in the journalistic profession, writing about three articles a week for Las Últimas Noticias. He was soon named redactor de planta for that newspaper and held the position for nine years.<sup>41</sup> In 1937, along with his other jobs, he calculated the betting results for the Hipódromo Chile, a task he performed until his retirement in 1961.<sup>42</sup>

Rojas' later years, subsequent to his second marriage to Valerie López Edwards in 1941, have been spent writing, lecturing, traveling, and collaborating in newspapers and magazines. An active anarchist as a youth, lately he has become apolitical. He did join, in 1951, the Chilean Socialist Party but withdrew almost immediately when in a moment of opportunism they supported the candidacy of the dictator Carlos Ibáñez.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1950's, too, he entered the teaching profession through the back door. Shortly after the creation of the Escuela de Periodismo by Ernesto Montenegro, he was offered a job as professor of journalism. Although he knew how to write, he was by no means certain he could teach others. To begin with, he had no knowledge of the necessary terminology and so was compelled to learn along with his students. After two years with the School of Journalism, Rojas left, convinced that the students in his classes were not really interested in learning to write: "...me convencí de que no se puede enseñar lo que se ama sino a quien realmente lo ama también."<sup>44</sup> He returned to work on Mejor que el vino, a novel he had put aside two years before.

After the publication of Mejor que el vino in 1958, Rojas resumed his teaching career. He had already received the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1957 and lectured in the United States at the invitation of the State Department.<sup>45</sup> In 1959, he was invited to teach Spanish American literature

in the summer school program at Middlebury College in Vermont.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, from 1961 through 1963, he was visiting professor of Spanish American literature at the Universities of Oregon and Washington respectively. His estimation of North American university students is no higher than his estimation of his Chilean journalism students: "...sus conocimientos son tan cortos como su horizonte, sumamente ignorantes de lo que no sea su estado, su ciudad y a veces su país."<sup>47</sup>

In August of 1962, in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, Rojas married a young Californian, apparently after a quick Mexican divorce from his second wife.<sup>48</sup> At this writing they live in Santiago where he writes short articles and book reviews for Ercilla magazine and teaches some journalism classes at the Universidad Técnica.

Since 1951, Manuel Rojas has produced his best and most complex works. The year 1951, of course, marks the appearance of Hijo de ladrón, his masterpiece and a landmark in the history of Chilean prose fiction. Seven years were to pass before the publication of his next novel, Mejor que el vino, the second in a trilogy dealing with the autobiographical character, Aniceto Hevia. In the interim, Rojas wrote and published a seven-stanza poem, "Deshecha rosa" (1954), recalling his years of marriage with María Eugenia Baeza. Finally, in 1958, he returned for a visit to his native Buenos Aires. Here, after an absence

of thirty-five years, he had an opportunity to revisit many of the scenes of his childhood.<sup>49</sup> Shortly thereafter-- there is no date on the publication--, he brought out his Imágenes de infancia, a book of childhood reminiscences.

The years following the appearance of Mejor que el vino have been Rojas' most prolific if not in many ways his most brilliant. In 1960, two more works were published by Zig-Zag, Punta de rieles, a novel, and El árbol siempre verde, a volume of essays. In 1961, the author himself edited his Obras completas (really a Selected Works), and in 1962 he composed a great deal of autobiographical commentary to accompany selections from his novels and stories in a volume called Antología autobiográfica. Rojas' latest important work of fiction, Sombras contra el muro, the final volume of the trilogy on Aniceto Hevia, was published in 1963 by Zig-Zag.

Recently Rojas has entered the realm of the literary anthologist and historian. In 1963, he published in Mexico an anthology of Chilean poetry called Escencias del país chileno, and in 1965 Zig-Zag published his Historia breve de la literatura chilena. Neither of these works have been well received. Pedro Lastra Salazar, for instance, in the Boletín del Instituto de Literatura Chilena, says of the poetry anthology that "...la invasión del territorio crítico llevada a cabo por Manuel Rojas en este libro, no favorece en nada su justo prestigio intelectual."<sup>50</sup> One suspects

that these works were written or compiled in haste and purely for economic reasons, capitalizing on his already established fame as a creative writer. One suspects, too, that Pasé por México un día, a diary account of his personal experiences in that country, was done with much the same motive.

Manuel Rojas' most productive years came after he had passed his fiftieth birthday. Speaking of himself in his history of Chilean literature, he says with his accustomed irony: "Rojas ha logrado, quizá gracias a que ha vivido tanto tiempo--no todos los escritores tienen la suerte de vivir muchos años, aunque a veces no sea una suerte--, desarrollar a fondo su prosa."<sup>51</sup> What stands out in his biography, in any case, is a life fully, actively, and productively lived, much of this owing to the robust health he has always enjoyed. In all his seventy years, he speaks only of one serious illness-- a gall bladder operation in 1928. A giant of a man, he is well over six feet tall and physically strong. Recent photographs reveal him to be craggy-faced with a full head of snow-white hair. In spite of his enormous physical stature, he is generally portrayed by others as a rather silent, even timid man, although not at all unfriendly, a man with a profound sense of dignity and genuine humility. The literature he offers us is of a special kind because of its close relationship with his every-day experience. In this regard, he is not unlike our own Mark Twain and Jack London. That he is a conscious literary artist, the following chapters will attempt to prove.



## Notes

1. Manuel Rojas, Obras completas (Santiago, 1961), p. 329.
2. Ibid., pp. 330-337.
3. Ibid., p. 339.
4. Ibid., pp. 340-342.
5. Ibid., pp. 345-349.
6. Ibid., p. 349.
7. Ibid., p. 353.
8. Ibid., pp. 354-358.
9. Ibid., pp. 358-360.
10. Ibid., p. 363.
11. Manuel Rojas, Antología autobiográfica (Santiago, 1962), p. 77.
12. Rojas, Obras, p. 366.
13. Ibid., p. 367.
14. Ibid., p. 372.
15. José Santos González Vera, Algunos (Santiago, 1959), p. 183.
16. Ibid., p. 182.
17. Rojas, Antología, p. 9.
18. Ibid., pp. 165-166.
19. González Vera, p. 184.
20. Rojas, Antología, p. 50.
21. Ibid., pp. 51-52.
22. Rojas, Obras, p. 12.
23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 13.
26. González Vera, pp. 187-188.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., pp. 188-189.
29. Rojas, Obras, p. 14.
30. Rojas, Antología, p. 173.
31. Rojas, Obras, p. 14.
32. González Vera, p. 192.
33. This play has never been published. Reference to its initial performance was found in Ercilla magazine in an article written by Juan Ehrmann in an issue dated January 21, 1959.
34. Rojas, Obras, p. 15.
35. González Vera, pp. 196-197.
36. Rojas, Obras, p. 15.
37. González Vera, p. 197.
38. Rojas, Antología, p. 174.
39. Rojas, Obras, p. 15.
40. González Vera, p. 201.
41. Rojas, Obras, p. 16.
42. Rojas, Antología, pp. 74-75.
43. González Vera, pp. 202-203.
44. Rojas, Antología, p. 162.
45. See Mary Cannizzo, "Manuel Rojas, Chilean Novelist and Author," Hispania, XLI (1958), 200-201.

46. Rojas, Antología, p. 240.
47. Hispania, XLVIII (1965), 354.
48. Manuel Rojas, Pasé por México un día (Santiago, 1964), pp. 22-24.
49. Rojas, Antología, p. 13.
50. Pedro Lastra S., "Manuel Rojas y un nuevo panorama de la poesía chilena," Boletín del Instituto de Literatura Chilena, Año IV, No. 9 (1965), 26.
51. Manuel Rojas, Historia breve de la literatura chilena (Santiago, 1964), p. 158.

## CHAPTER II

### NON-FICTION

Manuel Rojas is known first and foremost as a creative writer. Since the 1950's, he has been considered primarily a novelist and only secondarily a short-story writer. Although he can scarcely be thought of today as a poet, he did begin his career by writing poetry. Like many of his generation, however, he has also written works which lie outside the realm of the imagination. His expository writings, above all his essays on the subject of literature, should be treated first, before proceeding with the poetry and fiction. These writings span a variety of subject matter and may be grouped for the sake of convenience into the following classifications: journalistic odds and ends; autobiographical reminiscences; sketches and observations on his travels; and essays: biographical, social, political, and literary.

Of the first type, the journalistic miscellany, little will be said here. In terms of content, they uncover nothing of lasting significance. They are stylistically barren, composed on the spur of the moment to meet newspaper deadlines. At most, they reveal the author's

voracious reading in the sciences and humanities and his continuous efforts to educate himself. Likewise, the biographical, social, and political essays are peripheral and add little if anything to Rojas' prestige as a writer or thinker. One essay, "Máximo Gorki ha muerto,"<sup>1</sup> because it demonstrates Rojas' early interest in a writer with whom he has much in common, might be mentioned in passing; the content of the essay itself contains nothing concrete in terms of possible influences of the Russian on Rojas' own fiction.

Rojas' autobiographical book of childhood reminiscences, Imágenes de infancia, while it was obviously written with more perspicacity and attention to aesthetic effects than the above-mentioned essays, is decidedly inferior to his autobiographical fiction. This work is classified in the author's Obras completas as a novel. Although doubtless there are some superficial resemblances to his novels--numerous minor characters and the manner of their portrayal--Imágenes de infancia is hardly a work of imaginative fiction and should not be considered as such. The content of this very brief book is Rojas' own boyhood from the age of four to fourteen. In comparing it with Hijo de ladrón, one notices some similarities between Rojas himself and his fictional creation, Aniceto Hevia. The general circumstances of life, the absence of a father, the warm presence of a loving mother, and continuous movement from place to place,

as well as the character trait of timidity, are common to both individuals. But the similarities are superficial. The book's charm lies rather in its persistent humor and lightness of touch, both in the portrayal of characters and situations. It is a humor which stems primarily from amusing turns of phrase, most of which are used for the purpose of deflating the main character, Manuel Rojas. Speaking of his sexual knowledge in early puberty, for example, the author remarks: "Mis ideas al respecto eran tan confusas como las que tenía y tengo aún sobre las matemáticas, y si he aprendido algo sobre el sexo...no he aprendido nada, en cambio, de matemáticas." <sup>2</sup> The incident depicting his frog-hunting days also exemplifies Rojas' humorous approach. After falling into the slime of a canal, the great frog hunter could only return home, dripping with "agua y fango" and thoroughly humiliated:

Emprendí...el más triste de los regresos que un cazador de cualquier cosa haya hecho hacia su hogar. Al llegar a él recibí la mejor de <sup>3</sup> las palizas de la temporada. Renuncié las ranas.

The deflating effect of the understatement of the last sentence is typical of the manner in which many of the episodes, all of them impressionistic, are terminated.

Like his childhood reminiscences, which are a series of "pictures," Rojas' accounts of his travels also demonstrate a preference for the concrete. In such works as "Adiós a

la Habana", "Algo para Puerto Rico,"<sup>4</sup> and Pasé por México un día, rather than express himself entirely in the abstract concepts of the academician, Rojas prefers to adopt a highly personal point of view and to deal as much as possible with concrete people or groups of people in concrete situations. In his efforts to synthesize the nation of Puerto Rico, for example, their ideas about independence, their attitudes toward the United States, economics, religion, politics, etc., Rojas reproduces an imaginary conversation among anonymous Puerto Ricans; it is an impressionistic kaleidoscope of juxtaposed commentary. In his diary account of his trip to Mexico in 1962-63, he attempts to present a more complete picture of that country through an account of his personal experiences, editorial comment, a generous sprinkling of quotations from eminent Mexican historians, sociologists, and literary figures, synopses of Indian myths, and contrasts between Mexico and his own country or the United States. It is a book, however, which displays minimal coherence, is bogged down by trivia, insults the hypersensitive Mexican in its often condescending tone, and is at times stylistically affectatious in its occasional incorporation of Mexicanisms. As an introduction to Mexican life and culture, when compared to the countless books that have been written on the subject, it merely demonstrates its own inferiority and lack of direction and purpose.

As an essayist on the subject of literature, however, Rojas has a great deal to say; moreover, he says it with conviction and authority. Because his ideas here relate directly to his own works, it is enlightening to discuss them in some detail. He treats almost every ramification of the subject, not as a theoretician but from the more practical vantage point of the creative writer. While he scarcely deals systematically with the whole complex of themes implied in the word literature, at one time or another in his essays he is concerned with each of the following topics: the nature of literature (or more precisely its function); the role of the critic; the genre of the novel; and the practical problems of the craft-- structure, characters, setting, and style. In the discussion of his concepts, rather than analyze each essay separately, it seems more expedient to attempt a synthesis of his ideas by outlining his thoughts on each of the above topics.

To arrive at a precise definition of literature is no easy task. Rojas' thoughts on the nature of literature are set forth more by way of an indication, a pointing toward, rather than as a clear and precise exposition of a system of ideas; he has no doctrine to propound. Confronted as he is by the question "What is literature?", Rojas follows an oblique approach in the formulation of his answer. Rather than state what literature is, he asks himself what



literature should do, or more exactly, what it should not do. His answer to the question formed in this negative way is that it should not teach, that its function cannot be didactic. When he speaks of didacticism, however, he has in mind a much broader concept than the mere teaching of morals or ethics. As he sees it, a literary work cannot teach anything--philosophy, sociology, politics, or even psychology. To illustrate his point, he takes the example of Mariano Latorre:

¿Fue o no Latorre, como escritor, un profesor que escribió con el objeto de mostrar o de enseñar algo? La respuesta es, sin duda, afirmativa y esa respuesta afirmativa nos encara con el primer problema: ¿es conveniente o necesario que el escritor--novelista o cuentista, ya que de uno de ellos hablamos--tenga en su obra, aparte de la literatura, otra intención, una cualquiera, política, histórica, didáctica, económica, filosófica? La respuesta es, ahora, negativa.<sup>5</sup>

Without for the moment defining what he means by the positive function of literature, Rojas goes on to say that "Cualquiera otra intención, política, histórica, didáctica, económica, filosófica, resultará tan extraña como extraña resultará a la Política, a la Histórica, a la Didáctica, a la Económica o a la Filosófica una intención novelística."<sup>6</sup> Expressed in a positive way, literature must have integrity; it must be true to itself as literature and should never masquerade as something it is not. Latorre, as Rojas sees him, is basically a teacher dressed in the garb of the story teller.

Rojas' approach to the problem, however, is not only oblique. He states outright, and in a positive way, what he believes the function of literature to be. To his way of thinking, it is the writer's total communication of his personality. At the same time, he is cautious to warn us that this total communication of the personality is not to be confused with autobiography. Rather it is the making manifest of "la variedad infinita de matices que contiene su espíritu."<sup>7</sup> The creative writer is seen as a man of inner struggles and contradictions. It stands to reason, therefore, that the greater the contradictions, anxieties, and spiritual uneasiness of the writer himself, the greater the work of art he will produce and the more the work will be, as indeed it should, an agent of power as opposed to an object of knowledge. Rojas' example here is the Uruguayan, Horacio Quiroga:

Era un escritor de fuerza espiritual grande y de segura expresión. Narrativo por excelencia, absorbía lo que veía y lo que sentía, lo vivido y lo pensado, y en sus libros se le ve trabajar de cerca y se le siente respirar, vivir. Su ser se expresa en sus obras y había entre su vida, su espíritu y sus producciones una estrecha relación. Para conocer a Quiroga personalmente no hay más que leer su obra.<sup>8</sup>

In such a theory of literature, cultural environment plays a formative role of no little importance. It becomes the crucible in which the creative writer's spirit is forged. In order for the writer to possess deep spiritual

anxieties, it is necessary that these same anxieties be part of the cultural environment in which he lives and breathes. It is precisely because his own country lacks such an environment that Rojas believes Chile has produced so few novelists of transcendental worth. In Chile, what he calls the "lucha de las ideas" has never approached the intensity it has reached in Europe. What Chilean, Rojas asks, could possibly deal profoundly with the themes handled so well by such Europeans as Shaw, Gide, Unamuno or Dostoevski? These men reflect a culture which Chile quite simply does not possess. While he does not deny that Chile does have culture, he maintains that it is purely literary. As such it can not be instrumental in the forging of great personalities, the content of all great literary works. On the contrary, it has encouraged writers to look outside themselves to the picturesque landscape and to typical characters which they have proceeded to describe over and over again to the point of nausea.

To illustrate his thesis, Rojas takes the example of Miguel de Unamuno, a man of profound metaphysical anxieties. Rojas suggests that no small factor in the formation of Unamuno's inner struggle was the metaphysical concern of the Spanish people themselves, a concern which is reflected in their culture and tradition down through the ages. Imagining, then, Unamuno transferred to Chilean soil and weaned on the Chilean cultural environment, it is obvious

to Rojas that he would have been a lesser personality and therefore a lesser writer. Although he grants that there would still have been traces of anguish in Unamuno's personality, it would most certainly have been much less intense because the same anguish would not have been present in the culture. Chileans, according to Rojas, are anti-metaphysical by nature, at most ametaphysical. To his mind, Unamuno would doubtless have been either a fervent Catholic or a militant non-believer; his inquietude, which was his struggle between faith and reason, would have been resolved for him to a great extent by his environment. The same would have happened with Gide and Dostoevski, two other examples used by Rojas. The writer, his work, and his environment, in a word, are inextricably bound up together.

The ideas expressed above, although they approach the general problem of literature from the vantage point of the particular genres of the short story and the novel, may be said to express Rojas' views on the nature of literature per se and the function of the creative writer in general whether he be poet, playwright, short-story writer, or novelist. As concerns his conception of the genre of the novel itself, the ideas stated above are particularly relevant. Each novel, Rojas would say, should exist as an expression of its author's spirit in the manner of Gustave Flaubert's famous statement, "Madame Bovary c'est moi."

Rojas' conception of the novel, then, is that it should reflect first of all the author himself. To the degree that it achieves this, it is a successful novel; its greatness in turn is to be measured by the depth, intensity, and complexity of the personality who composes it. As long as this is the author's intention, there is no theme that the genre as a literary form may reject as being outside its scope or nature. In Rojas' own words, "La novela lo acepta todo."<sup>9</sup> An author may, of course, reject a particular theme because he does not choose to deal with it. What Rojas is saying is that there are no themes which are inherently novelistic or anti-novelistic. Since the narrative mode, however, demands human beings or at least the human condition, they cannot therefore be dispensed with. The only a priori requirement of the genre, then, is that it deal with people. This does not, as it may at first appear, take the novelist outside himself. It is Rojas' contention that there coexist within each novelist a multiplicity of personalities. Dostolevski, for example, is all of his characters, or more exactly, all of his characters are an integral part of himself; he has lived and felt the anguished contradictions present in each of them. He dramatizes himself, so to speak, in his novels.

It is obvious from all that has been said that Rojas' concept of the novel as a literary form is organic rather than classic. The novel has no preconceived form into which

is poured a content. The particular structure of a particular novel must grow organically from the nature of the theme that is to be treated. Rojas himself says, "No hay tema o técnica que la novela rechace, estilo o estructura que no admita."<sup>10</sup> It will become evident in the succeeding analyses of his fictional works that, for the most part, Rojas lives up to his theories. At the same time, it will be equally evident that, while he never contradicts in practice what he states in theory, he on occasions abuses the apparent freedom that his theory implies.

In the formation of his conception of the genre of the novel, its historical development, which Rojas has explored in some depth, has been instrumental. From its history, for example, he has been able to see that the only absolute requirement of the novel has been the presence of human beings. In his essay, "La novela, el autor, el personaje y el lector" from De la poesía a la revolución, he shows that the genre's development has been one of a progression in the manner in which the author focuses on his characters. He sees three essential historical stages in this progression. The first, which includes epic poems and their early descendants, the characters simply act and speak. Of the typical protagonist, for example, Rojas says:

Se desplaza como un cuerpo sólido, unitario, concreto, y sus acciones, tanto como sus reacciones, son simples: come, ama, duerme, ríe, llora, pelea, vence, o muere. Sus estados de ánimo son también simples: está alegre o triste, apacible o colérico. Nada más o muy poco más.<sup>11</sup>

Most important is the character's lack of inner life and volition. He does only what the author wants him to do and nothing more: "...y lo que el autor quiere es que se mueva y vocifere, pues teme que al enmudecer o al inmobilizarse, desaparezca o pierda interés."<sup>12</sup> This is the infant stage of the novel and it is exemplified by Homer's The Iliad.

The second stage of the novel's development shows the character to have acquired the additional factor of his own volition. No longer is he moved about at the whim of the author. At the same time--and this is by no means a contradiction of the concept of volition--, economic life begins to take on a formative role as it influences the actions and attitudes of the personages. Such characters appear in all the novels of Daudet, Dickens, and most of the novelists of the nineteenth century. The novelistic human being, however, has not yet, in this second stage, come into his full psychic maturity.

In the third phase, external adventure and action diminishes and environment and setting, which previously had been a purely extrinsic factor, is now internalized and becomes an integral part of the character's psychic being. The geographic radius of the action is sharply reduced and the novel becomes, in terms of physical movement, almost static as the character is developed psychologically to his fullest potential. Such internalization and

reduction of action is by no means a handicap:

Porque la vida psíquica de un hombre, la vida de relación psíquica, diremos, moral, espiritual, sexual, etc., es de por sí tan maravillosa y tan extraordinariamente densa en calidad humana, que su sola exposición, su sola expresión, basta para dar alta categoría a una novela aunque en esa novela no ocurra, exteriormente, nada extraordinaria. Pero jamás deja de ocurrir algo, pues la vida de relación psíquica de un individuo está conectada siempre a otros individuos o con otros grupos de individuos, con los cuales está en conjunción o en oposición. Por lo demás, es en este último aspecto donde interviene la realización literaria.<sup>13</sup>

Novelists of this third phase are Dostoievski, Proust, Lawrence, and Joyce.

Rojas is aware that there may be certain technical difficulties inherent in the psychological orientation of the latter-day novel. Characters of the psychic density described above can only be drawn from the model of the author's own psyche. In order to avoid confusion with autobiography, therefore, it is incumbent upon the creator to take special pains to disassociate himself from the work and not intervene as author. The novel must give the impression of being an autonomous organism completely apart from its creator, and it can not appear to be manipulated by him. In Rojas' words:

...el escritor debe proceder, en esta nueva e interesante manera de la creación novelística, de modo que su conciencia no impida la aparición y la libre expresión de esa misteriosa vida, cualquiera que sea la índole de ella. Debe tomarlas y expresarlas tal como aparecen,



sin interrumpirlas, sin influenciarlas, sin entorpecerlas por medio del juicio consciente. Lo que realmente vale es lo auténtico, lo genuino.<sup>14</sup>

The novelist by all means must express his own spirit, but he must express it artistically; he is at all times present in spirit, but as author he must be invisible in his creation. Although not nearly so sophisticated in his articulation of an aesthetic ideal, Rojas would doubtless agree with James Joyce, who said through one of his characters: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."<sup>15</sup>

Moving on now to his ideas on narrative prose style, it is evident that Rojas' conception of this spectre-like phenomenon corresponds in every way to his concept of the novel as an organism taking its life from the dynamic interplay between form and content. That the problem of style has concerned Rojas deeply is clear from his reaction to those critics who maintained that his early short stories evidenced none and from the subsequent research he did on the subject. The Frenchman Buffon, the Englishman John Middleton Murry, and the American Lionel Trilling, while not dictating ideas to him, most certainly have been instrumental in helping him to articulate what in the beginning were his own inchoate concepts.

Style, like literature, is difficult to define; and again, Rojas does not boil his thoughts down into a definition.

Nevertheless, his views on the matter are clear and coherent. For Rojas, prose style is neither a predetermined way of using language nor verbal ornaments taken from the writer's storehouse of technical devices to be used to dress up an otherwise colorless prose. While there is no doubt in his mind that this can be done, he prefers to call it "manner of writing" rather than "style". Still less is style an objective use of language. On the contrary, for Rojas as for Middleton Murry and Trilling, it is a highly subjective use of language, the expression in words of a quality of life, a manner, not of writing, but of feeling and reflecting. In short, it is the communication of the writer's personal vision of experience.

Rojas is by no means advocating sloppy writing. He has learned from years of experience that the communication of a personal vision of experience is an extremely difficult task; it is a task, moreover, that demands the most severe discipline. An awkward sentence structure, lack of balance, bad subordination, wrong words, and all other technical errors detract from the desired effect. Even the smallest comma, seemingly insignificant to the novice, is of the utmost importance. While he is doubtful that style can be learned, he is convinced that it is not the product of spontaneity (spontaneity is always an effect that is the result of much pain). It comes rather in a gradual growth and process of maturation in the manner of any living organism.

To conclude this analysis of Manuel Rojas' ideas on literature, a few final words should be said relative to his conception of the critic, especially as regards the latter's role in the Latin American countries in general and Chile in particular. As has already been seen in the above remarks, Rojas feels that writers in his own country, with a few obvious exceptions, have been superficial and lacking in personality. In his own words, "Nos falta personalidad en la literatura, personalidad de pensamiento, personalidad de espíritu y casi personalidad de expresión."<sup>16</sup>

This has been the natural result of the fact that Chile lies outside the mainstream of cultural and intellectual currents. Therefore, what Chilean writers need is a spiritual and intellectual guide, a critic, indeed, more than a critic, a literary philosopher who will be "la fuerza, la creación, el método, algo que actúa en una literatura como la excéntrica de una máquina, graduando y regularizando su andar."<sup>17</sup>

In Chile and Latin America, this kind of critic is almost unknown. Instead, there is an overabundance of the book commentator, a parasite in Rojas' words, who lives off the production of the creative writer and who is rarely ahead of him in culture. What the writer needs, on the other hand, is a man who has devoted his life to the great ideas and has steeped himself in the mainstream of world culture, a man who will orient the writer and indicate the way to a solution of his many questions: Where are we going? Can

we break out of our continental provincialism? How can we get into the main currents of great literature? Are we too descriptive? Do we use time-worn techniques? Do we imitate too much? Are we too psychological or not psychological enough? Too historical? Too social? What should we do? Are we capable of doing it? Until such men come forth, Rojas sees little hope for greatness in Spanish American literature.

In all of his essays on literature, Manuel Rojas is involved in the crisis of criollismo which manifested itself in his generation. It remains to be seen in the subsequent chapters whether or not his works represent a movement away from the local and picturesque, in a word the superficial, to a more universal view of experience.

## Notes

1. Manuel Rojas, De la poesía a la revolución (Santiago, 1938), pp. 125-131.
2. Rojas, Obras, p. 365.
3. Ibid., p. 356.
4. For both essays see Manuel Rojas, El árbol siempre verde (Santiago, 1960).
5. Rojas, El árbol, p. 156.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 145.
8. Ibid., p. 146.
9. Rojas, De la poesía, p. 87.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 93.
12. Ibid., p. 94.
13. Ibid., p. 102.
14. Ibid., p. 104.
15. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York, 1956), p. 215.
16. Rojas, El árbol, pp. 34-35.
17. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

## CHAPTER III

### POETRY

To say that Manuel Rojas is not primarily a poet would be a truism. He himself seemed to have sensed early in his career that his most natural medium of expression was prose and his genres the short story and the novel. It will be recalled, too, that he himself was his most severe critic as regards his very first attempts at poetry, referring to those poems as some of the worst to have been written in the hemisphere. These early efforts were ultra-modernistic, filled with princesses and the conventional trappings of Modernism at its worst, while the poems published later in Tonada del transeunte are certainly a rejection of that movement, rooted as they are in the author's personal experience and generally concerned with the inner man, without any of the artificiality so typical of the imitators of Rubén Darío.

In general, however, Rojas the poet lacks the intensity, complexity, and poetic imagination of the Chilean poets of the post-Modernist period. He does not convey, for instance, the emotional ardor of his contemporary, Gabriela Mistral; his poetry lacks the conceptual

complexity, verbal finesse, sense of rhythm, and imagination of Pablo Neruda; the metaphysical depth and careful architectural design, so indicative of the poetry of Pedro Prado, are either absent from Rojas' verse or they shrink by comparison; and finally, he displays none of the experimental verve of Vicente Huidobro. Such comparisons are, to be sure, unfair to Rojas, whose total output in verse is insignificant. Moreover, it is doubtful that Rojas ever took his poetry quite so seriously. At the same time, such comparisons do serve to give a clear idea of the quality of verse that was being written in Chile by his contemporaries, and in this way they place his poetry in its proper perspective.

In any case, although Rojas' verse may not merit analysis as exemplary poetry, it is worthy of study as a harbinger of his later prose works. The poems of Tonada del transeunte express a basic attitude toward life which is later developed and deepened in Hijo de ladrón. Likewise, the content of his later poem, "Deshecha rosa," is reworked and expanded along the same basic structural lines in his novel, Mejor que el vino. Since twenty-seven years were to elapse between the publication of Tonada del transeunte (1927) and "Deshecha rosa," (1954), it seems advisable to discuss these works separately.

Generally speaking, the poems in Tonada<sup>1</sup> oscillate between two seemingly contradictory attitudes toward the

human condition. At times, Rojas clearly states that life is meaningless and useless, filled with senseless suffering, pain, and anguish. This attitude has its culmination in the death motif seen as the great life-negating force which cuts our existence short before we have a chance to fulfill ourselves. On the other hand, many of the poems express a basic attitude of acceptance of life. Here the poet sees life as essentially harmonious, and it is his positive message that the individual person should strive to become part of this harmonious whole. In some poems, unity with the whole world is achieved through a kind of pantheistic, quasi-mystical experience; in other instances life is simply accepted; a third attitude is the challenging of life in open struggle. This general attitude of affirmation, like the attitude of futility in the other poems, also has its culmination in the death motif. This time, however, death is seen as the completion of existence, a logical consummation in terms of the whole.

Five poems in particular stand out as expressions of the futility of existence, "AES," "Palabras a mi corazón," "Balada de la primavera," "Plaza de juegos," and "Sonambulismo." The first two reach their climax in the same motif: life is negated by death. In the second pair, death is implicit rather than explicit, the dominant motif here being a variation on the old carpe diem theme: one is surely destined to die so one should live as intensely



as possible while here. Finally in "Sonambulismo," Rojas takes a secondary motif from "ABS," the inability of one person to express his inner being to another, and develops it as the central theme of the poem.

In "ABS," our human existence is seen as useless because ultimately we must die; death removes all sense from existence. The poet brings this idea to bear in the very first stanza:

Inutilidad de cantar, de llorar y de querer,  
cuando nos tendremos que ir  
para nunca más volver (p. 17).

The motif is then reiterated at the end of the poem:

Bocas amigas recogerán nuestro cantar.  
Y lo cantarán, en voz baja, cuando quieran llorar.  
Y nosotros, ya muertos, no lo podremos escuchar  
(p. 20).

It is typical of Rojas, who rarely expresses himself in emotional extremes, that the poem is more of a lament than a cry of anguish. What is more, this same subdued tone is maintained throughout the poem as Rojas laments the irrevocability of time--what was once beautiful must in time no longer be so--and the fact that his life, as symbolized by a song and by the poem itself, must be unavoidably truncated, cut off prematurely. The same theme is developed in "Palabras a mi corazón," death being set forth much more vividly through personification:

La muerte viene por los caminos del futuro.  
 En las noches percibo sus pasos claramente.  
 Siempre al final de un canto veo su rostro oscuro.  
 Nuestra vida es sólo un rápido aprendizaje de la  
 muerte (pp. 21-22).

If death as the central absurdity of human existence is an explicit motif in the preceding poems, it is no less a force in the poems "Balada de la primavera" and "Plaza de juegos," albeit implicit. "Balada" is quite similar, thematically, to those already discussed. Here, however, it is not only death which negates life but also suffering and pain. After the poet sings a joyful hymn to the flowering of Spring, which in this case is symbolic of youth, he ends on a note of ironic reversal with the realization that such joy is only transitory:

Yo sé que, para nuestros corazones,  
 tal vez no ha de volver  
 esta clara estación del buen vino.

Vendrá la pena, hermano;  
 vendrá la angustia, amigo.  
 Nos pondremos huraños y lloraremos (p. 26).

Not only is anguish and pain inevitable; it is necessarily more prolonged than the time of joyful youth. The almond flower, as the image states, is short-lived. The poet, therefore, in a gesture of brotherhood, offers his hand to a friend, not only that they may enjoy their youth together, but that they may also sustain each other in time of suffering. The variation on the carpe diem theme comes through

in the final lines: "Pero, siquiera una vez, ya nos habremos sonreído" (p. 26).

Carpe diem and the motif of youth as the only delight in life also comprise the poem, "Plaza de juegos." Reflecting a slight Parnassian influence, this poem, for the most part, is a description of children at play. Their joy is compared to the profound moment of love-making among adults. Intensely involved in their play, they are unaware of the pitiless irony of their situation, indicated first by the poet through reference to the indifference of Nature:

Pero al sol, qué le imploran lo que serán mañana.  
Para él es igual el tono verde de la serpiente  
que el dorado de la manzana (p. 41).

The irony is then brought out with more cogency in the final line as the poet makes the jolting comment regarding their play: "El único fruto dulce que da la raíz de la angustia" (p. 42).

But death, suffering, and anguish are not the only agents of absurdity; there is also the problem of the isolation of the individual through the human inability to communicate at the deepest levels. This was a minor motif in "ABS":

Nunca podremos darnos de lleno en la canción.  
Siempre ha de quedar algo dentro del corazón.  
¿Quién sabrá la belleza de lo que no se pudo  
mostrar al sol y al viento, como un cuerpo  
desnudo? (p. 18).

What was a minor motif of "ABS" becomes the central theme of "Sonambulismo." In this poem, the poet focuses on his relationship with a woman. He is able to perceive externals such as movements, breathing, a smile, or the warmth of her body, but he is unable to hear her voice, symbolic here of her inner being. On those rare occasions when he does perceive it, it seems to come from a distance, like a conversation long past. In short, when he tries to possess her in both body and soul, she eludes him. In the last line, with resignation, he declares:

Yo pienso que somos como dos sonábulos que nunca se encontrarán enteramente. Siempre andaremos en la sombra: oyéndonos sin encontrarnos y encontrándonos sin oírnos (p. 38).

In these poems, there is not a little of the stuff of the existentialist view of the human condition. Existence is viewed as essentially meaningless; there is a concern with the evanescent nature of the present moment; and the individual is to an extent isolated from others through his inability to communicate at any great depth. Yet there is none of the outrage and rebellion of a Camus, none of the anguished gnashing of teeth of an Unamuno; Rojas remains stoical in the face of suffering and death. Nor does he raise man's hopeless condition to the level of cosmic tragedy; these are quite simply the initial utterings of a young man's moods of the moment. These same moods,

however, will appear later in his novels, deepened by experience, sharpened through irony, and generally developed in all the nuances of their true complexity.

If the above poems are openly pessimistic in their expression of the uselessness and absurdity of life, those comprising the next group to be discussed reveal attitudes more similar to Rojas' later novels. These poems, for the most part, do not deny the above attitude entirely, but they are not pessimistic; rather they show the author's efforts to come to terms with life. Three poems, "Atardecer," "Viernes," and "María Estela," are closely related to the pessimistic poetry just discussed in that they contain many motifs pertaining to human suffering. They are different, however, in that they go beyond the reaction of stoical resignation in the face of the seeming senselessness of human existence. Each of these poems, in its own way, suggests that there is harmony beneath the apparent chaos.

"Atardecer" has some very concrete thematic affinities with the pessimistic poems. There is, for instance, the same preoccupation with the ephemeral nature of time. Each day, states the poet, brings a moment of beauty which will die with the coming of evening, never to return. Similarly, each day in our life ebbs away. But there is a note of optimism here, an almost religious reverence for these evanescent moments of beauty:

Hermano: sé piadoso ante el día que empieza  
a ahogarse en el lago gris del atardecer;  
ante su muerte, junta tus dos manos y reza  
porque mañana vuelva de nuevo a florecer (p. 15).

In other words, the beauty of life must be embraced, revered, and treasured. If this is done, order and meaning are brought to life. And death, even though it may not open the door to a future life, comes tenderly as the harmonious consummation of existence:

Y cuando ya la tierra te llame tiernamente,  
cuando todo tu cuerpo se sienta envejecer,  
lo mismo que tus días, tu vida, mansamente,  
se ahogará en el lago gris de su atardecer (p. 16).

If in "Atardecer" the poet attempts to bring harmony to existence through the reverent acceptance and intense cherishing of each moment of beauty, in "Viernes" he confronts squarely the problem of human suffering and death. In this poem, the poet addresses himself to the suffering Jesus. It is more the human Jesus, however, rather than Christ the God, who interests him:

Si tu no fueras más que un dios mi corazón te  
echaría en olvido  
y tu nombre pasaría por mi espíritu como un  
viento por el desierto (p. 40).

Jesus as the archetypal symbol of human suffering and self-sacrifice seems to be the theme here. But if Jesus shared the suffering of all mankind, the poet, in turn, suffers for Jesus:

Descansa en paz, maestro de las venas desangradas.  
 En esta hora de tu angustia yo danzo sobre tu  
 dolor como una hoja seca en el vértice de una  
 ardiente llamarada...  
 Estoy en medio de tu incendio como un tallo  
 reseco al sol (p. 40).

It is through sharing each other's suffering in an act of brotherhood symbolized by Jesus' suffering for others, which brings at least a semblance of meaning to life. This motif of human brotherhood through sympathy is a motif which appears in one guise or another in almost every one of Rojas' creative works whether poetry, short story, or novel. It will be seen to be of major importance to the theme of Hijo de ladrón.

The reverent, religious, even Christian tone of the two preceding poems becomes even more marked in "María Estela." There is an almost Gabriela Mistral-like religious modulation to the story it tells. The poet, who has recently experienced a life of spiritual desolation, has come to a convent to visit a former sweetheart who has become a nun. Conditioned by his own spiritual emptiness, he expects to find her emotionally dead. Yet during his first few moments alone in the convent library, he feels coming over him a certain tranquillity and peace of mind. Finally when he does see Sor María Estela, he realizes she has found serenity and fullness of life in the love of God. He, too, feels life return:

Y mi espíritu que había  
perdido el divino don de la melodía,  
siente,  
como en los buenos tiempos de la ilusión,  
hincharse como venas  
las trémulas flautas de la canción (p. 31).

Less religious and more pantheistic, though no less serene, is the poem "Canción de otoño." Here the poet expresses the desire within himself to feel whole, to lose his identity in order to become part of the harmonious unity which is life:

¡He sentido unas ansias de ser otro conmigo  
y de ser otro con todos! Y de ser más sereno (p. 10).

It is through Nature images, all of them incorporeal and ethereal, that the poet reveals his desire to lose his individual identity. He would like, for instance, to be like the soft perfume of freshly cut sandalwood. On another occasion, he wants to be like the water and the wind, elements which seem to be everywhere at once. The following image shows clearly his desire to lose his identity in the larger whole:

...ser una fuente  
y en un parque sombrío ir, momento a momento,  
muriendo en el murmullo del chorro transparente  
(p. 9).

But he not only seeks to be diffused into Nature. He wants also to be one with his fellow men:



Deseos de ser otro. De ser algún pastor,  
manso, tranquilo y fuerte. Y guiando el ganado,  
ir tocando en las flautas pastorales de amor  
y haciendo un ramillete con las flores del prado  
(p. 9).

The pastoral image is significantly tranquil, reinforcing the motif of harmony. Finally, significant too in the poem, is the time of year, autumn, the harbinger of death. The implication here, although never actually stated in the poem, is that death is the agent of a pantheistic, almost Whitmanesque, harmony, the key to the meaning of existence. All in all, however, this poem is not typical of Rojas, primarily because his view of things here is too idealized, even ingenuous. Witness, for example, his image of the shepherd quoted above. Even though most of his works reveal an essentially affirmative spirit, Rojas almost always has his feet planted firmly in the hard facts of reality.

If "Canción de otoño," therefore, seems incompatible with the rest of Rojas' poems because of its facile, if not spurious, optimism, "Gusano," although an affirmation of life, is much more in keeping with his realistic view of things. The theme as always is simple and direct: live life serenely, humbly, without pride, and have the patience to be creative. Like the caterpillar which turns into a beautiful butterfly, it is incumbent upon each individual person to create his own essence. The central image of the metamorphosis of the caterpillar is brought out in the first line and sustained throughout the sonnet:

He pensado que el hombre debe crear lo suyo  
como la mariposa sus alas de color (p. 11).

A life led in this way has its reward in the deep feeling  
of satisfaction with one's creation:

Yo, como tú, en mi rueca hilo la vida mía,  
y cada nueva hebra me trae la alegría  
de saber que entretejo mi amor y mi sentir (p. 12).

Finally, with such a life, death comes as a welcome con-  
clusion:

Después, cuando la muerte se pare ante mi senda,  
con mis sedas más blancas levantaré una tienda  
y a su sombra, desnudo, me tenderé a dormir (p. 12).

Implicit in this poem is the idea that if there is any mean-  
ing to a human life, it must be created by the individual  
himself. This theme is also developed by Rojas in one of  
his short stories, "Un espíritu inquieto."

The last of the poems of affirmation to be discussed  
here may be dealt with summarily. These are the four poems  
comprising the "Poemas en la mañana" which come at the end  
of Tonada del transeunte. Two of these are built around  
a sustained metaphor, much in the manner of "Gusano."  
Life in poem 2, for example, is a ship, and the poet is  
on deck; he accepts the advent of the new day with open  
arms as a welcome challenge:

¡Eh, marinero!  
Estamos listos otra vez, suelta las amarras (p. 62).

This same element of challenge is present in poem 3 where life is a wrestler. Each day the poet throws himself, fists clenched, against him. Nevertheless, it is a challenge he accepts willingly and with confidence, for the adversary is benevolent.

Poem 4, unlike the others, a song to freedom and the simple life, is not built around a metaphor. Here the poet is returning in the morning from the hills. He describes the beauties of Nature in contrast to the city below. He realizes that in the city freedom, and ultimately being, is lost and that he must continuously revitalize himself in the simple life of the fields and hills.

Finally, poem 1 is a bit more complex. As the poet and his lover walk along the street early in the morning after a night of love, they recall a song which sang of "un amor que se cortó como un cordel" (p. 59). Their hearts are saddened by the prospect that their own love may end in the same way. The final line, however, "Y la rama del día extendiéndose rosada y fresca" (p. 60), implies an acceptance of the new day and the intent to live it fully and with hope.

With the possible exception of "Canción de otoño," the two views offered by the poems in this volume do not in any real sense contradict each other. While it is true that the poems depicting futility offer within their own structures little way of consolation, those

depicting harmony for the most part do not deny suffering and chaos and take a realistic look at life. The fact that these two views may be synthesized is attested to by the title poem itself, "Tonada del transeunte." In this poem, the poet takes the seemingly contradictory motifs of life-as-senselessness and life-as-harmony and fuses them into a unified albeit paradoxical, attitude. The theme here is that our existence swings between the sense of being lost and the sense of possessing direction. The poet is seen walking along what are symbolically the streets of life. In the first stanzas, there is an impressionistic, almost kaleidoscopic, description of the city as he walks along. He feels that his steps are leading to death, but he follows nonetheless "el ritmo sencillo e inexplicable de la estrella" (p. 50). In other words, in the midst of chaos there is at least a vague sense of direction. Moreover, in all the confusion ("zona de sombra"), his soul seeks harmony: "libértate oh alma en tu espiral de espacio" (p. 52). This feeling of harmony is later actually experienced in the "zona de luz." Witness, for example, the following lines:

ahora soy un canto organizado  
 el pecho profundo y armonioso  
 que viene desde las primeras mañanas del mundo  
 con los bolsillos llenos de canciones (p. 53)  
 hijo del hombre con andar firme de oso (p. 54)

And yet this is only a momentary experience as he ultimately becomes lost on an unknown street:

mi canción y mis pasos han perdido su sentido  
y vacilan en el vértice de las rutas horizontales  
disgregándose en la corriente espesa de la mul-  
titud (p. 55)

por qué tránsito por este camino desconocido oh  
alma (p. 56)

Since the poem ends with the poet's feeling lost and confused, the more pessimistic aspect of the dual attitude seems to prevail. But it is precisely this outlook on life which Rojas develops in a more elaborate structure in his novel, Hijo de ladrón.

To conclude this thematic analysis of Rojas' early volume of verse, it is necessary to examine four poems which fall outside the general scheme outlined above. Three of these are merely expressions of the poet's momentary feelings and express no essential outlook on life. Two of them, "La última palabra" and "Hembra," deal with women; the former reveals his passing emotions tied up with his being rejected as the object of a woman's love; the latter is a simple description of his erotic sensations. "Abismos" raises the question of whether his life might not have been lived before; sometimes--and who has not experienced this--he has the vague feeling that a particular set of circumstances in his life has occurred before in exactly the same way. Finally, "Matilde," is a Parnassian

description of the graceful movements of a young girl as she dives into a swimming pool.

These, then, are the themes which Rojas treats in Tonada del transeunte. If this early poetry is thematically related to his later prose works, the form and style here is no less indicative in this regard. In these poems, as in his later novels, Rojas is unwilling, if not unable, to express himself in pre-established forms. He prefers freedom to the strictures of the classical tradition and lets the subject matter determine the structure. Two of the poems, to be sure, use the classical sonnet form, and one of them, "Gusano," is undoubtedly one of his best. Two others, "Atardecer" and "Canción de otoño," are written in regular quatrains, the former following the rigid rhyme scheme in consonants (abab throughout), the latter employing the same pattern with an occasional aabb. But this is the extent of the "regular" patterns. The rest of the poems are irregular in their "stanzaing" as well as in their versification; many have some rhyme, to be sure, but it is never rigid, never regular. Most are of the free verse variety, the freedom and irregularity culminating in "Tonada del transeunte" which has no discernible stanza or rhyme pattern of any sort. It does, however, have a kind of rhythmic pattern, alternating short lines with longer ones.

The extreme simplicity of the poems is due to a great extent to Rojas' consistent use of normal syntactic patterns. Rarely does he invert syntax, and when such inversion does appear, it is never to any radical extent. Indeed, many of the poems, if rearranged on the page, would read like rhythmic prose.

Despite the simplicity and straightforward quality of the poems, however, Rojas does use some very common poetic devices, the most frequent of these being direct address. He may direct himself to a woman, an assumed brother or sister, a friend, or simply to the reader himself. Often the device becomes apostrophe wherein a thing or an abstraction is addressed in personified form. Very few of the poems are without this common device. Yet in spite of its frequency, none of the poems suffer from the rhetorical artificiality so often associated with it.

Another common device used by Rojas is metaphor, which is rarely found in his later prose works. He abandoned it early, after using what he considered to be too many similes in Lanchas en la bahía, on the grounds that figurative language came unnaturally to him. Nevertheless, his early poetry abounds in the use of metaphors and similes. The sonnet "Gusano," is constructed entirely around the extended simile of man creating his inner self like the caterpillar who creates its essential being in the form of the butterfly. Other extended similes are seen in the

"Poemas en la mañana" where life is compared to a wrestler, a ship, and to a woman.

It must be admitted that Rojas' metaphors and similes are not highly imaginative; yet in spite of their lack of originality, they can often be effective poetically as the following examples will show:

¿Quién sabrá la belleza de lo que no se pudo  
mostrar al sol y al viento, como un cuerpo  
desnudo? (p. 18).

Mi deseo lo ronda con sus tardos pasos de oso  
y saborea tu presencia como la lengua saborea  
la fruta (p. 43).

¿Podrióse ya tu cuerpo como fruta madura... (p. 39).

Hierve de larvas humanas la plaza de juegos (p. 41).

Pájaros en el alba nuestras vidas pasan y se  
alejan... (p. 59).

The following examples, too, will show how sensitively Rojas can handle personification. The poetic effect of each of these is due fundamentally to their subdued nature; in no way do they call attention to themselves:

Ese camino va perezosamente hacia el bosque (p. 66).

Las acequias me invitan a detenerme (p. 66).

...el viento danza alrededor del mameluco azul  
ceñido a sus caderas (p. 45).

This, then is Tonada del transeunte, a book which has never been popular and which made no literary reverberations upon its publication. It is, however, interesting reading



in light of its author's later renown as a novelist and short-story writer. In miniature and inchoately, these poems reveal the Rojas of a later and more mature period. Evident in their content is the author's concern for the anguish of human existence, a concern tempered by an indestructible, if sometimes subterranean, optimism rooted in a basic confidence in the mystery of existence. Closely linked to this optimism is his implicit faith in the brotherhood of men, a motif which becomes far richer and more ubiquitous in his later prose works. Finally, these poems reveal his preference for the freedom of form and the simplicity and directness of language.

Most likely because of his success as a short-story writer and novelist, Rojas failed to produce any more poetry for the next twenty-seven years. Then, in 1954, he turned again to verse to express the nostalgia and sense of loss which he still felt over the death of his first wife, María Eugenia Baeza, who, it will be recalled, died in 1936. The result was the seven stanza poem, "Deshecha rosa," published in the literary magazine, Babel. It is an elegiac reminiscence of his early years of love and marriage between 1928 and 1936. Although it is patently autobiographical, Rojas mentions neither his own name nor María Eugenia's in the poem, and the characters remain anonymous.

"Deshecha rosa," like a short story, has the elements of plot, character, and atmosphere. But it is by no means a narrative poem. All the elements are tightly compressed into a compact unit in which the emotional force supersedes narration. At the poem's beginning, the author's own character is delineated through the mention of his essential characteristics of timidity, humble simplicity, and sexual passion. Salient events from his experience are also sketched in to complete the picture: his vagabond youth, his association with anarchists, humble laboring people, carpenters, and actors.

His own character, with its emphasis on his modest circumstances and hardship, is then juxtaposed to hers, a woman of a completely selfless nature. In parallel fashion, events from her life are recalled: the death of her former sweetheart from tuberculosis, her many companions from normal school, and the constant presence of school children in her life. Emphasis here is on the maternal and pathetic aspects of her character.

Having sketched in the actors, the poet moves on to an account of their courtship, suggested through the impressionistic mention of the places they frequented and the experiences they shared. Valparaíso, the wind, the trees, rural Chile with its chicha and its huasos, all of these images allude to the freedom and bliss of their first care-free days together. They are then brought together sexually

in marriage. This sexual side of their relationship goes beyond the mere physical and comes to symbolize their spiritual relationship of mutual self-giving; they are able in their early years of marriage to achieve communication and communion at the deepest level. Finally, in a kaleidoscopic synopsis of their eight years of marriage before her death, they mature together and achieve happiness even as sexual urgency declines. Their children are born and begin to grow up while in the affairs of the Republic one president succeeds another.

After recalling these images from the past, the poet brings us to the present and his own lament and sense of loss. He mourns the fact that he can no longer recreate her physical presence through memory. His visual images of her fade, and those that do appear intermittently are fleeting; she is paradoxically everywhere and nowhere at the same time. While there is some consolation in the fact that he can see her smile at times in the faces of the children, she remains, in the end, a "deshecha rosa."

The poem's stanza structure is very nearly symmetrical. There are, for example, two stanzas devoted to the depiction of character, two evoking the couple's married life, two dealing with the poet's lament at her loss, and one final stanza of consolation. Actually, a great deal of the formal coherence depends on this rather rigid symmetry, for otherwise the poem, which consists for the most part

of impressionistic images which flash by as in a kaleidoscope, would scarcely hold together at all. It has no rhyme scheme to give it form. Although there is an irregular rhyme in assonance, there is certainly no rigid pattern of versification. It would seem, however, that this lack of rigidity fits this type of poem in which recollections from the past are flowing freely into the poet's consciousness and in which emotion predominates over abstract concepts.

As in his earlier poems, Rojas uses simple direct language. It is easy to see the effects of his efforts to prune his style of metaphor. Figurative language is conspicuously absent. The only simile used here is the rose, symbolizing at times the girl herself and at other times their love for each other. It is unobtrusive, however, simply because it is such a universal poetic symbol.

The most important stylistic device used in "Deshecha rosa" is repetition for rhythmic effect. Most obvious is the repetition of the conjunction y from which is derived much of the kaleidoscopic movement. All in all, the rhythmic effects are quite successfully achieved. Indeed, there is an echo of Pablo Neruda in many of the lines. Compare, for example, the following lines from Rojas' poem with some others taken from Neruda's "Barcarola." Those quoted first are Rojas':

Ahora,  
 desde el fondo de mi ser,  
 desde donde el aire se transforma en sangre  
 y desde donde la sangre se transforma en semen...<sup>2</sup>

And Neruda:

si solamente me tocaras el corazón,  
 si solamente pusieras tu boca en mi corazón,  
 tu fina boca, tus dientes,  
 si pusieras tu lengua como una flecha roja...<sup>3</sup>

The similarity is manifest and is due to the alternating of long lines with short ones as well as the devices of repetition and alliteration.

"Deshecha rosa" is without a doubt Rojas' best work in verse. Unlike much of the poetry in Ronada del transeunte, this poem can be read primarily for its intrinsic merits rather than simply as a forerunner of one of his novels. It is important to keep in mind, nevertheless, that this same raw material will be treated four years later, and much in the same manner although in a more elaborate way, in his novel, Mejor que el vino.

To conclude this chapter on Manuel Rojas' poetry, it may be said that although he is not a great poet, adding nothing significant to the body of poetry of his generation, his verse can not be termed a total loss. There is evidence, especially in "Deshecha rosa," that he by no means lacks the poetic spirit. Much of the success of his poems, to the degree that they are successful, is derived

from the author's tone, that is, his attitude toward the reader. He is humble and unpretentious, making no effort to be profound, original, or even complex. In all his poetry the emotional predominates over the conceptual-- he has no interest in abstractions but is rather vitally concerned with life in the concrete. All the poems, too, are subjective; but although the "yo" is omnipresent, there is nothing of the bombast so typical of the Romantic school and many neophyte poets. Like the novels of his later period, it would be a mistake to try to place these poems within the framework of a literary school.

## Notes

1. Manuel Rojas, Tonada del transeunte (Santiago, 1927).  
All quotes are taken from this first edition.
2. Rojas, Obras, p. 55.
3. Enrique Anderson Imbert and Eugenio Florit, Literatura hispanoamericana (New York, 1960), p. 634.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SHORT STORIES

As a short-story writer, Manuel Rojas belongs to the generation of 1920. This group, which also includes José Santos González Vera, Luis Durand, and Marta Brunet, to mention only a few, was responsible for the general breaking away from the purely descriptive elements which had dominated Chilean prose fiction in the early years of the twentieth century. This latter manner, in which landscape dwarfed all other elements, reached its culmination in the short stories of Mariano Latorre whose interest in the Chilean countryside may be seen in his collection of stories, Chile, país de rincones. Here Latorre encompasses the whole of the nation's geography: the northern nitrate fields, the Central Valley and the Cordillera, the south, the sea, Chiloé, and Magallanes. A tourist in his own country, Latorre's stories, typical of the criollista movement, often reveal a notebook technique and a lack of real personal involvement in what he was writing about.

Reacting against Latorre, Rojas' generation was much more disposed to writing about their intimate personal experiences. González Vera recorded his early years in the



tenements of the city while Luis Durand based many of his stories on the rural types he had known personally in the south. Like Durand, Marta Brunet wrote of the peasants from her native Chillán. Manuel Rojas bears a closer resemblance to González Vera than to the others in his preference for a more universal rather than a picturesque type of literature.

It has been said that Rojas is the most genuine product of the generation of 1920.<sup>1</sup> This would appear to be true to the extent that his best works explore a rich autobiographical vein. He offers the reader a fascinating world, more often universal than local, and at times more real than fictitious. What is more important, his emphasis is on men rather than nature. From the very beginning, his interests gravitated toward people: "Conocí, andando por el mundo, muchos hombres que narraban, en un campamento, en una estación de ferrocarril, en una comisaría, sus historias y las ajenas."<sup>2</sup> This interest in people is evident in almost all his short stories. It will be shown that his principal purpose in the best of them is the revelation of character. Indeed, to remember a short story of Rojas' is to remember, in most cases, its protagonist.

Manuel Rojas presents the reader with a gallery of character portraits observed from life. In fact, many of them are taken directly from his personal contact with them and transferred with very little stylization to the

written page. Since they are portraits from his own personal experiences, the fact that they fail to embrace Chilean society from the aristocracy to the lower classes is not surprising. Rojas writes primarily about people from the uneducated and working classes, the kinds of people he knew in his formative years. Furthermore, his characters are generally restricted to certain kinds of occupations: railroaders, stevedores, transients from one job to another, and even thieves and bandits. Nor is it surprising that most of his characters are men, since it was with men that his job experiences brought him into contact. The few women who do appear in his stories bear striking similarities to each other, and one suspects that they were largely modeled after his mother.

Before proceeding to the analysis of Rojas' stories, it should be pointed out that the chronology of the three volumes, Hombres del sur (1926), El delincuente (1929),<sup>3</sup> and Travesía (1934), is not entirely without significance. In the first volume, the more picturesque criollista aspects predominate; only one of the stories, for example, is urban in its locale. In El delincuente, the author, in all but one story, deals with the dilemmas of the dispossessed in the large city; there is here a definite trend toward the more universal in human experience. Travesía shows the least unity of the three, the stories being nearly equally divided among the three categories of criollismo, the

universal, and the strictly entertaining. For purposes of discussion, however, it will be more convenient to divide Rojas' stories into the following four structural categories: those stories in which a single character is presented through one or more incidents; those revealing more than one character through interplay, contrast or both; those in which there is a dual emphasis on character and external action; and those whose purpose is other than the presentation of character.

From the first category, "Un mendigo" and "El vaso de leche" are character studies similar in their slow-moving pace to those of Chekhov. Although they are not autobiographical in their details--Rojas admits that the events of "El vaso de leche" actually happened to an acquaintance of his--, there are doubtless strong autobiographical overtones in the emotional feelings of each of the characters portrayed.

In "Un mendigo," Lucas Fernández has just been released from a hospital in a strange metropolis. He is weak from his recent illness, hungry, and without money. Remembering he has a friend somewhere in the city, he sets out to find him, can not recall his address, and becomes lost in the labyrinth of the city streets. When he holds out his hand to ask directions from a stranger, the latter mistakes him for a beggar and condescendingly gives him money. Through this ironic quirk of fate and his inability to

establish communication with another person, Lucas becomes exactly what he was thought to be, an anonymous beggar.

The unnamed youth in "El vaso de leche" is faced with generally similar circumstances. He has just been put off a merchant ship in a strange port. Too proud to accept charity from an English sailor, he finds work as a stevedore but is not to be paid until later. Alone, perplexed, and hungry, he finally enters a milk bar, knowing he can not pay for what he will drink. Through the maternal kindness of the Spanish proprietress, however, he is fed and replenished both physically and spiritually. He leaves the milk bar with a feeling of renewal.

Both characters are unfolded before the reader's eyes through the way in which they confront their dilemma. Both are bewildered and confused, the youth because of his inexperience, Lucas because of his physical weakness and helplessness. Each is handicapped from the start to meet his environment. Lucas is plainly victimized. The youth, too, is at least a potential victim, saved only by the establishment of a kind of communion with another. Of the two, the youth is the more successfully drawn character, the reason being that his conflict is internal; he has an intense desire to be a man, yet most of his acts reveal that he is still an inexperienced boy. Lucas' character, on the other hand, depends almost entirely on the external facts of his illness.

In addition to showing his characters in action, Rojas brings in events from the past by way of flashback in order to delineate them more fully. Once again, the information given about the youth is more integral, since it bears on his inner conflict; it is suggested, for example, that he left home in order to assert himself. What we learn about Lucas is purely extrinsic; he is from the north and his family still lives there. Even so, the mention of his family does serve by means of contrast to intensify his feelings of alienation.

In each of the stories, the author creates a realistic atmosphere for the action. But burdensome description is avoided, and the characters are by no means dwarfed by their surroundings. In "El vaso de leche," the atmosphere is impressionistic, merely suggested by the deft sketching of a few salient points: the port by the mention of the ships in the bay; the numerous beggars, and the stevedores busy at their jobs; and the milk bar by the mention of a single light on the ceiling, tables and chairs, and an old man reading a newspaper. The atmosphere in "Un mendigo" is more expressionistic, the maze-like city being distorted somewhat as it is seen through the eyes of Lucas. In this way, the city is made to reflect in a symbolic manner his inner state of confusion, anxiety, and alienation.

To conclude this analysis of the two stories, a word should be mentioned about the author's attitude. Given

the circumstances of each case, Rojas could easily have become sentimental. At the climax of each story, both Lucas and the youth give free vent to their emotions by crying openly. Both, to be sure, are to be pitied. Nevertheless, it is to the author's credit that sentimentality does not occur. To a great extent, this is due to Rojas' emotional detachment. While he no doubt portrays his characters sympathetically, he also maintains an objectivity throughout and avoids the use of emotion-packed words.

Two more stories belonging to this first category, "Un espíritu inquieto" and "La aventura de Mr. Jaiba," like those just discussed, are slow-moving character stories. Unlike the others, however, they lend themselves to comparison, not so much because the characters confront similar dilemmas, but rather because the author portrays them both in a benevolently ironic light, emphasizing by way of contrast the incongruity between the way they really are and the way they see themselves. Again, although neither story is autobiographical in its surface details, personal experiences very likely account for much that makes up the characters' attitude toward themselves and their circumstances. It would appear that to the extent that the author pokes fun at his creations, he is poking fun at what he sees in them of himself.

Pablo González of "Un espíritu inquieto" is jobless and generally dissatisfied with his lot. What is more, he is a neurasthenic who broods about death. One morning, as he walks along the streets of Buenos Aires, he is run down by an automobile and killed. As pure spirit on the "other side," he learns the hard lesson that it had really been up to him to create a worthwhile life. Able now to see the purpose of his existence, he wants to return to the world to try again. When he is told that this is impossible, in despair he leaps into the nearest river and is dissolved into nothingness.

Raúl Seguel of "La aventura de Mr. Jaiba" is also without a job at the beginning of the story. Although he has no talent as an actor, he accepts a job as a comedian in a circus, hoping this will mark the beginning of his proposed theatrical career. When he is humiliated by the circus clown and hissed down by the impatient audience, he vents his rage on the latter and is forced by their ensuing anger to flee. In the end, however, he must confront himself; he comes to see himself as he really is, a man with no talent, throws his actor's paraphernalia into the river, boards the nearest trolley, and simply falls asleep.

As in the first two stories, the characters here are developed before the reader's eyes. Unlike the first two, however, where the author's tone was objective, each

character here is given sharp relief through a tongue-in-cheek presentation. Though anguish-ridden, a normally tragic characteristic, Pablo González is first pictured in a ludicrous light as he tries to attract girls with his new overcoat at an incongruously early hour in the morning. He himself is unaware that he cuts a ridiculous figure. Raúl, too, is sympathetically ridiculed to some degree, believing himself to be a promising actor. Expository information given by the author really sets the tone. External facts about Raúl, for example, are presented through a flashback and concern his former experiences with an itinerant acting troupe. The author's good-natured mockery can be seen in the following passage:

La gira fue desastrosa. Raúl Seguel volvió con la misma ropa con que se fue y con veinte pesos en el bolsillo. Además, durante la gira descendió de categoría. Su poco interesante figura, su voz sin tono y sin gracia, su manera poco elegante de comunicar en escena y su escaso equipaje, no eran cualidades suficientes para desempeñar un puesto tan importante como es el de galán joven, cómico y dramático a la vez.<sup>4</sup>

The expressionistic presentation of atmosphere in "Mr. Jaiba," wherein the circus crowd, as seen through Raúl's eyes, by its distorted and nightmarish qualities, heightens the irony. It also adds a note of pathos, for the reader experiences through this the inner agony of his failure. Atmosphere, on the other hand, plays little



or no role in "Un espíritu." With Pablo and his spirit friend viewing human experience from beyond, there is ample opportunity for satire. The satire, however, which is a predominant element in the story, becomes in fact one of its destructive elements aesthetically since it is often merely preposterous. At one point, for instance, Pablo, who is watching his own cremation, listens to the impassioned dissertation of a worm whose complaint is that the practice of cremation is depriving the worms of sufficient bodies. The incident adds nothing to the story's theme.

The four stories discussed above are structurally similar due to the presentation of a single character. The author's focus in each case never wanders from the central figure. Each of these stories is constructed along a linear pattern, beginning in medias res, followed by a brief expository flashback, after which the story is resumed from the moment of its interruption. "Un espíritu inquieto" is the exception, being entirely chronological. In the handling of this general pattern, "El vaso de leche" is the best artistically due to the pertinency and integration of all elements. Whereas the flashback in the other stories is somewhat artificial, too obviously expository, in "El vaso de leche" the author, by avoiding a chronological sequence of events from the youth's past, makes it appear as if these images were actually called up in the boy's mind.

In addition to the temporal pattern, these stories show an emotional progression as they build slowly to a moment of climax followed by a rapid denouement. With the exception of "Un espíritu inquieto," which suffers from distracting incidents, each story is carefully controlled in this regard and demonstrates Rojas' mastery of the craft of short-story writing.

Whereas the above stories reveal a single character through a single incident, the following, "Laguna," "El bonete maulino," "Pedro el pequenero," and "El trampolín," depict a single character through a series of incidents or multiple episodes.

"Laguna" and "El bonete maulino," although among his earliest works, contain two of Rojas' most memorable characters. Both are faster-paced stories than those discussed above, despite the fact that the latter, which runs about 10,000 words, is quite long for a short story. "Laguna" is an account of some of the author's personal experiences on the Trans-Andean Railroad. According to Rojas, all the incidents in the story are true and actually happened as they appear in the work. The one exception is Laguna's death: "...no murió en la forma que se narra aquí...: lo maté por exigencias de la composición literaria..."<sup>5</sup> "El bonete maulino," on the other hand, while not based on personal experience, is a story Rojas had heard many times from his mother's lips. It supposedly

deals with a real personage who used to live in and around the city of Talca.

Laguna is a pathetic, hard-luck roto who is seemingly unable to elude his fate. While working on the Trans-Andean Railroad as a construction hand, he nearly freezes to death while on watch; barely avoids a falling post; and seriously injures himself jumping for his life from a run-away rail car. He finally meets his inevitable death while crossing the Andes on foot from Argentina into Chile, slipping from a snow-covered ledge and falling into the gaping precipice below.

Don Leiva, in "El bonete maulino," is a paradoxical character who, after a dissolute life as a youth, marries, settles down to raise a family, and works hard as a cobbler. After years of this routine, to say nothing of the small income, he becomes bored and decides to join a band of robbers, thinking he can make some fast money. He accompanies them on numerous jobs before he decides to quit. After their final sally, he is forced to hide his share of the loot and flee to Santiago where he must work, ironically enough, another seven years as a cobbler. At last, through a stroke of luck, his wife finds him and assures him it is safe to return home. He does return but forthwith contracts pneumonia, dying in a final twist of irony before he is able to enjoy his stolen loot.

Both these characters, despite the fact that they die in the end, are depicted with the tongue-in-cheek irony so typical of many of Rojas' stories. From the beginning, Laguna is seen in an amusing light. Physically he is skinny, bow-legged, and has a rat-like face. Moreover, he would often make fun of himself by telling in a melodramatic way the sad tales of his hard luck. In order to emphasize the tragic parts, he would cover his eyes with his hands and grimace, only to peek through his fingers to ascertain what kind of a reaction he was creating. However, although the reader can not help but smile at him, all this becomes double-edged irony in the end, for his death is described in stark tones as the Andean winter leaves no traces of his former existence.

In Leiva's case, the irony lies in his ever-changing, dual nature as well as whimsical twists of fate. Even in death, the author makes some sport of him, as is indicated in the story's concluding sentence:

Y cuando creía que su vida estaba ya arreglada por muchos años, y que vería realizarse lo que en un tiempo tanto anheló, una pulmonía cogida en una juerga, a la que se entregaba de vez en cuando para no olvidarse de ella completamente, lo despachó en dos días, como a cualquier mortal de vida tranquila (p. 247).

The creation of atmosphere, to the extent that it brings into focus the ironic view of the character, is also important. A good example is the scene describing in some detail

the robbery of a wealthy ranch house. The atmosphere here, heavy with suspense and anticipation, is in amusing contrast with Leiva, who, at the moment when the boss is designating special jobs to each of the men, volunteers in the event of a scuffle to handle the cats.

The creation of physical environment plays a greater role in "Laguna" than in any of the stories analyzed thus far. The cold harshness of the Andean winter permeates the entire story and points in this way to the inevitable conclusion, Laguna's death at the hands of Nature. Here, in the end, a superb climax is reached as the four characters, Laguna and his three companions, come face to face with the wind and the snow, transformed into an almost supernatural force through personification. Even so, Nature does not devour human beings completely. Laguna's death is simply the inexorable outcome of the fatalistic design of his life. The idea that Nature can be conquered, or at least outwitted, is evidenced by the fact that three of the four men reach Chile safely.

Unlike the slow-moving character stories, "Laguna" and "El bonete maulino" have more external drama and physical movement, and therefore a faster pace. These stories are not entirely dramatic, to be sure, but they do have their dramatic moments. The general pattern of construction is once again linear. "Laguna" is simply composed of four or five incidents, each of greater

intensity than the last, which build to the climactic finale and illustrate the essential characteristic of fatality. "El bonete" begins with a rather long, cumbersome, and somewhat irrelevant prologue describing Rojas' visit to a country inn where he discovers an unusual bonete. While there, the proprietor tells him the story of the violent death of a bandit to whom the bonete belonged. Even in the story proper of Leiva, different anecdotes are interspersed, one an incredible tale told by Leiva himself, illustrating his picaresque nature. However, once the story of his escapades with the robbers begins, it stays on the track and is carefully controlled. "El bonete's" principal weakness, it would seem, is a ponderous beginning.

The final two stories belonging to the first classification, "Pedro el pequenero" and "El trampolín," are artistically inferior and may be dealt with summarily. The first is an attempt at a humorous tale, told by a grandfather to his grandchildren, and concerns an habitual drunk who met Christ and was saved. Although supposedly set in New Testament times, it is told with an abundance of Chilean colloquialisms and takes the point of view that Pedro was a Chilean roto. Depending for the most part on the chilenismos for its humorous effects, the story soon becomes tiresome and can not be reread profitably. "El trampolín" is obviously an attempt at a more serious

story which, like "Laguna," treats the theme of fate. It concerns a murderer who, having killed his best friend unintentionally, is assisted after his arrest in his attempt to escape justice by two casual acquaintances on a train. The author is doubtless trying to elicit the reader's sympathy here for a murderer who has been victimized by adverse fortune; the result, however, is one of triteness. Furthermore, the story is faulty in its construction and poorly controlled as to climax and resolution; it ends without a proper emotional release and leaves the reader wondering and unsatisfied.

While all the above stories do contain minor characters, none of them is developed to any great extent. Indeed, their development would have been a distraction. The absence of supporting characters in "Un mendigo" emphasizes the anguish of Lucas' loneliness. In "El vaso de leche," the maternal kindness of the Spanish proprietress serves only to stress the boyish aspects of this youth who wants so much to be a man. In "Laguna" and "El bonete maulino," the author himself enters the picture as a minor character, establishing a kind of factual basis which lifts them outside the realm of fiction. The purpose of these stories has been very obviously the revelation of a single character. And in all but two cases, the author has accomplished his task with considerable craftsmanship.

The seven stories of the second classification, on the other hand, depict more than one character, and they do it through interplay, through contrast, or by a combination of both methods. Included in this group are "El delincuente," "Un ladrón y su mujer," "Poco sueldo," "Bandidos en el camino," "La suerte de Cucho Vial," "El fantasma del patio," and "La compañera de viaje."

Because the first three in a general way resemble each other--they are set in an urban environment, are objectively told, are essentially serious, and make at least an implicit social comment--, they lend themselves to comparison.

The theme of "El delincuente" is that of one man's discovery of the paradoxical nature of another. In more specific terms, it is Garrido's discovery that while a thief is certainly pernicious, he also has his human side. One evening, Garrido, a barber, surprises a thief in the act of "rolling" a drunk in the hallway of the conventillo where he (Garrido) lives. As the latter and a friend take the thief to the police station, a camaraderie develops among them through their common efforts to move the drunk. Later at the comisaría, the thief offers Garrido a cigaret, an act which here transcends its every-day triviality and comes to symbolize the growing human relationship between them. After the thief is divested of his human dignity by the police interrogation, Garrido is filled with compassion



for a fellow human being. Yet despite his discovery of the thief's humanity, Garrido remains at most ambivalent toward him, especially after witnessing the man's obvious duplicity when he insists that his picklock is really his house key.

"Un ladrón y su mujer" also treats the subject of thieves. Although here there is the same attempt to humanize the thief as in "El delincuente," the real theme of this story is the martyrdom suffered by a thief's wife. When Pancho Córdoba is jailed for petty larceny, his wife appears at the jail to bring him some clean clothes. After the guard takes the package, she is turned away and not permitted to see her husband. In the meantime, he escapes with two other prisoners. Upon learning of this, his wife is concerned for his life. Even though they are reunited in the end, it is clear that Pancho is quite unaware of the extent and intensity of her suffering. It is evident, too, that she is resigned to her fate, for she makes no effort to communicate her suffering to him.

The third story, "Poco sueldo," while it does not deal with the subject of thieves, is similar to "El delincuente" in its portrayal of a man brought to an awareness of human suffering and misery. Too busy to take much notice of his office handyman, a business administrator is shocked into cognizance when the poor man's wife, after her husband's sudden death, comes to him requesting her insurance money.

He is shocked not only by her disheveled physical appearance but even more so by the sordid story of her husband's habitual drunkenness which has, throughout their married years, caused continuous deprivations for her and her small child. Despite the shock and the pity which results, the administrator can not at the same time help but admire the woman's uncommon heroism.

In each of these stories, the author unmask appearances and goes beyond stereotype to the human being underneath. In "Poco sueldo," the administrator is shaken beyond belief at the despicable person beneath the outward appearance of the handyman. On the other hand, the wife emerges as the epitome of human dignity in the midst of misery and deprivation. In the other two stories, we are forced to look beyond the generic category of thief. Although Garrido realizes that the police are probably right in the cynical way they handle the thief, nonetheless, he pities him as a suffering human being. Pancho Córdoba, too, is humanized through the fact that he has a wife who loves him and worries about him. Even though he is unaware of her martyrdom, he does reveal his humanity through his devotion to her. It might be objected at this point that Rojas sentimentalizes the whole matter. However, this is not the case. The reader is never asked to overlook the despicable side of these people but simply to see them in all their human complexity.

In all three of these stories, the creation of atmosphere adds immeasurably to their effectiveness. In each case, Rojas creates an atmosphere in which it is difficult for the characters to see each other as human beings. In "El delincuente" and "Un ladrón y su mujer," it is the cold, dehumanizing surroundings of the jail as well as the impersonal and objective way in which people are treated by the police. This atmosphere is intensified by the author's emphasis on sustained silence in which metallic sounds like the jingling of cell-door keys or the turning of a lock stand out by contrast. In "Poco sueldo," Rojas suggests the impersonal efficiency of the administrator's office by insisting on the routine and by the detailed and matter-of-fact description of the personnel and furniture. The use of the present tense in this instance is especially effective:

El secretario es un hombre joven, casi un muchacho. Viste de negro, pulcra pero pobremente. Su cara es de forma irregular y no se la afeita todos los días...

En la tercera habitación, que da hacia la calle, hay que entrar con el sombrero en la mano. Es amplia, llena de luz; los muebles son más numerosos y cómodos que en las anteriores. Hay una imponente caja de fondos, un escritorio grande con cubierta de vidrio y cajones que se abren suavemente, llenos de papeles en orden... (p. 151).

In their construction, these stories differ in some of their details although they all develop in a chronological fashion from beginning to end. "El delincuente" represents

one of the few examples of Rojas' use of the assumed first person narrative, a device which he uses with greater frequency in his novels. Here the choice of the first person point of view is appropriate to the story's theme, bringing the reader into a closer association and greater intimacy with the character within whom the change in attitude occurs. Besides the viewpoint, however, this story is developed artistically through a series of epiphanies or revelations which culminate in the exposure of the thief's picklock: "Puso el cabo sobre la felpa verde del escritorio una ganzúa larga y fina, que brilló a la luz como un pececillo plateado al sol" (p. 179). The simile here as well as the contrast made by the metal against the background of green, call such attention to the picklock that it can be nothing less than symbolic of the total revelation of the thief's duplicity in the eyes of Garrido.

Whereas "El delincuente" retains the assumed viewpoint of one character throughout, "Un ladrón y su mujer" uses the angle of the omniscient narrator who, in this case, shifts back and forth, focusing alternately on the two characters. In this way, the author is able not only to show the wife's suffering by concentrating on her, but he can also show in a concrete way why she suffers by focusing on her husband's activities. The reader has a much deeper understanding of her agony and concern for her husband's

life after witnessing at close range Pancho's rather danger-ridden escape from jail. In addition to these devices, Rojas also suggests her inner suffering through physical description:

Una tarde de principios de invierno, en aquel pueblo del sur, una mujer apareció ante la puerta de la cárcel. Era una mujer joven, alta, delgada, vestida de negro. El manto cubría la cabeza y descendía hacia la cintura, envolviéndola completamente.

El viento, que a largas zancadas recorría las solitarias callejuelas del pueblo, ceñía la ropa contra el cuerpo, haciéndola ver más alta y delgada (p. 187).

The construction of "Poco sueldo," unlike the other two, is based on a unity of place, all the action occurring in the administrator's office. Although this story shows the use of the objective narrator, there is in reality a breaking away from this viewpoint as the woman gives an account of her husband's drunkenness and death. This constitutes a story within a story, a device already pointed out in "El bonete maulino" and which becomes still more common and more sophisticated in Rojas' later novels. What is uncommon in the construction of this story, as far as Rojas is concerned, is the extended stage setting at the beginning. Ordinarily Rojas prefers to suggest setting by interspersing salient points throughout the story.

While the above stories have urban settings and point in the direction of Rojas' later novels, especially Hijo

de ladrón. "Bandidos en los caminos," another of the multiple-character stories, is set in rural Chile. It bears a similarity to "El bonete maulino" in its treatment of rural bandits, but it is by far inferior as a work of art and seems hastily written. The story tells of two bandits who, after years of separation, are reunited and decide to work together again. Out in the country on horseback, they chance upon a fundo in which a young wife has been left alone by her husband. They do not harm her, but her husband returns in time to find them still in the house. He knows, of course, that their purpose is to rob him, but he is nonetheless grateful to them for having acquitted themselves honorably with his wife. In the end, he lets them take his money without a fight. This story is little more than an exaltation of the free and uninhibited life of a bandit. Despite the fact that the characters show paradoxically that they live by a code of honor, they are hardly individualized and remain idealized stereotypes.

A somewhat better story is "La suerte de Cucho Vial," which has elements of both the urban and rural environs. It is Rojas' purpose here to contrast the two ways of life and the effect of the different environments on character. Cucho Vial, a huaso and rugged individualist who has been successful in the animal business, comes to the city of Osorno where he runs into Etchepare, an old friend. The latter has become a successful city lawyer. In a card

game, Cucho wins one of Etchepare's mistresses. Unable at first to take his friend seriously, Cucho comes to realize that Etchepare means to keep his word. The huaso decides to take the girl with him but only on the condition that she be given a free choice in the matter. As it turns out, she chooses to go with Cucho, but what started out as a rather cruel joke on Etchepare's part turns out to benefit the girl, for she begins to blossom in the healthier air of the country.

Here the characters are individualized through contrast. Cucho seems to have thrived both physically and morally from the more wholesome rural surroundings while Etchepare has become decadent from city life. The former "...había tenido que luchar, trabajar, sufrir un poco, esforzarse, para aumentar el reducido caudal que sus padres le ofrecieron al manifestar su deseo de trabajar solo" (p. 258). Etchepare, on the other hand, "...vivía simultáneamente en dos casas. En la primera...habitaba una mujer rubia, alta, joven, elegantísima, muy alegre y muy amable. En la otra, una mujer morena, más baja de estatura que la rubia, muy atenta, un poco silenciosa y triste" (p. 258). The characters, however, are broad types, although more real than the bandits of "Bandidos en los caminos." The story suffers primarily from an incredible plot.

If "La suerte de Cucho Vial" is not one of Rojas' best stories, it does nevertheless sum up his attitude

toward the city and the country. Often in his urban stories, he portrays human beings as confined, boxed in, and dehumanized by their environment. His non-urban characters, while they are many times victimized in other ways, at least have the freedom to move about in the open spaces and this often has a salutary effect.

Of the multiple-character stories, there remain to be discussed "El fantasma del patio" and "La compañera de viaje." Both of these are manifestly humorous and reveal character through exaggeration and confrontation with unreal situations. In neither case, though, does Rojas go so far as to make caricatures of them. Those of the first story are, according to Rojas, modeled after the members of the family of his first wife, María Eugenia Baeza. The plot itself, however, is imaginary. After an evening of ghost stories, the household is aroused by a mysterious apparition in the patio. It is the family dog, so they learn after killing it, with his head stuck in a milk jug. The resolution is somewhat of a letdown, to be sure, but the characters are indeed comic as they react in different ways to the apparition. While Don Carlos "...hablaba como si ya estuviera enterrado" (p. 109), Don Jorge, by contrast, "...juzgó oportuno observar primero la situación" (p. 109). The contrasting reactions of the elderly couple, Doña Fortunata and Don Eleuterio, when told of the apparition, is even more amusing. While the former shouts "¡Ave María



purísima" and "...buscando su rosario reanudó precipitadamente sus interrumpidas oraciones" (p. 111), her husband, prone to catching colds, "...se agachó y buscó a tientas sus zapatos y sus calcetines; los encontró y, echando la ropa un poco atrás, procedió a ponérselos con toda calma" (p. 111). In short, the success of the story's humor lies entirely in the portrayal of the characters, a fact which redeems it from its contrived ending.

"La compañera de viaje" is less successful. Here the characters are again set against each other by contrast. The viewpoint is the first person. A debonair and cultured diplomat in Italy tells some friends how, after meeting a shy, innocent young lady on a train, circumstances led them to a torrid moment of temptation in a hotel room. After leading his listeners to this suspenseful moment, however, the gentleman relates how he did not have the heart to deflower the young lady. Along with the fact that the story fizzles at the end, Rojas is unable to do justice, even in a humorous fashion, to the upper-class nobleman. "La compañera de viaje" is a complete departure from his personal experience and most likely suffers on that account.

The majority of the stories discussed thus far in the preceding pages, whether they portray a single character or more than one, are typically slow-moving with

little physical action or drama. Exceptions to this rule are "Laguna" and "El bonete maulino." The group of stories to be discussed next, on the other hand, make use of a great deal of physical movement, action, and adventure. These elements become at least as important as the portrayal of character and at times even outweigh it. The fact remains, however, that the element of character, even when subordinate to drama, gives these stories much of their literary worth.

The three which make up this group are "El cachorro," "El hombre de los ojos azules," and "El rancho en la montaña." The first, although one of Rojas' earliest stories, is by far the most artistic of the three and one of the two or three best of his entire short-story production. Like "Laguna," it exploits his personal experiences in the Andes. The protagonist is a youth named Vicente Martínez. While the boy was still quite young, his father, El Lloica, a construction worker on the Trans-Andean Railroad, was baited by an Argentine into a knife fight after a card game; he killed his antagonist in self defense. While fleeing with his young son, Vicente, El Lloica was shot in the back and killed by police sergeant Chaparro. Some years later, Vicente in turn is goaded by the same sergeant into an act of vengeance. Silently and patiently awaiting his moment, the youth knifes Chaparro in a railroad tunnel. He must afterwards flee, thereby sacrificing a possible happy life married to his foreman's daughter.

Three characters take on sharp relief in this story, El Lloica, Vicente, and Chaparro. The colorful personality of the first is delineated in a kind of thumbnail sketch:

Jugador y pendenciero, trabajador infatigable, el Lloica era querido por los guapos, por los tímidos y por los indiferentes, porque nadie lo vio jamás enderezarse contra un débil, achicarse ante un valiente, o decir que no cuando el trabajo era duro y se necesitaban hombres firmes.<sup>6</sup>

The author goes on to say that he always paid his debts and was a good father to Vicente. His only fault, a tragic flaw as it turned out, was his addiction to gambling. In addition to the thumbnail sketch, El Lloica's character is revealed through his actions. His violent nature stands out during the knife fight as does his ability to take care of himself. He is seen to be a man of honor and courage. When his friends move in to help him, he turns them back and takes up the challenge alone: "No compañeros. Esta naipada es para mí solo. Soy el tallador y tengo la banca. ¡Doy carta!"<sup>7</sup>

Vicente, the protagonist, is a less colorful character, but he is more essential to the drama. By denying the reader access to his thoughts, Rojas creates a character who is enigmatic: "No jugaba nunca, apenas bebía, era serio. Sin embargo, en el fondo de sus ojos vivía el recuerdo de su padre..."<sup>8</sup> Even as he is goaded by Chaparro, he remains uncommunicative, at most laconic. Moreover, he is presented

as a creature of destiny: "...la fatalidad del padre se continuaba en el hijo."<sup>9</sup> And his final act of vengeance is foreshadowed by his comparison to a tiger: "Pero el cachorro ya no era tal. Le crecieron las garras en la desgracia..."<sup>10</sup> Not only do these techniques create a brooding character but a dramatic suspense as well which adds considerable impact to the final act of violent revenge.

The third character, Chaparro, is presented in simpler terms, the embodiment of cowardice and meanness, a man who is entirely deserving of the kind of death he receives in the end. He is the antithesis of both El Lloica and Vicente, the dramatic foil and catalyst for the action.

As already seen in the character of Vicente, there is a dark augury of fatality which hangs over this story from beginning to end, a fatality which lends it a tragic dimension and raises it above the level of the melodramatic. The style, too, terse, direct, matter-of-factly understated, and devoid of emotional adjectives, shears away any melodrama. Furthermore, the atmospheric effects add to the tension. The knife fight between El Lloica and the Argentine takes place at night, the steel blades flashing in the moonlight; and Vicente watches silently as the silhouette of Chaparro approaches him in the darkness of the tunnel. Even the harsh Andean environment plays a role in turning the youth into the animal he becomes in the end.

Finally, as to rising action, climax, and resolution, this story is a masterpiece of control. In short, "El cachorro" demonstrates a near-perfect balance among the elements of drama, character, and atmosphere.

In "El rancho en la montaña" and "El hombre de los ojos azules," while there is still character interest, the balance is tipped radically toward violent physical action. The latter story owes something to Bret Harte, although it is by no means an imitation. Rojas himself admits to a slight plagiarism: "Por los días en que escribí ese cuento había leído los Bocetos californianos de Bret Harte, y bajo su influencia bauticé a dos de mis personajes con nombres de individuos de ese libro: Kanaka Joe y Pedro el francés." <sup>11</sup> A quick check reveals that both these names are mentioned in "The Luck of Roaring Camp." But Rojas only pilfered the names; the characterizations remain his own creations.

In this story, a group of smugglers, Matías, Juan el Fielche, and Mariluán (an Indian), know the whereabouts of a lost Andean gold mine. But some rivals, Kanaka Joe, a Californian, and Pedro el francés, learn of their secret by getting the Indian drunk. When the three finally set out into the Andes to find the mine, they are pursued by Kanaka and Pedro. In the final climactic encounter, after the chase has gone on for days, all are killed off with the exception of Kanaka and Mariluán. The Indian then

lugubriously prophecies Kanaka's death. In fulfillment of the prophecy, although he finds the gold, Kanaka slowly freezes to death in the Andean winter under the ironic hallucination that he has gotten away.

"El rancho en la montaña" also deals with smugglers. In this story, Don Floridor Carmona industriously turns an old abandoned mountain ranch into an inn for transients. His son, David, however, uses it to his own advantage, unknown to his father, for smuggling animals between Argentina and Chile. One of David's gang, El Negro Isidro, a legend in the vicinity, is captured by the border guards, escaping later with the help of his companions. During the rescue, Isidro is tied to a mule, dragged along a precipice, and his face is badly mutilated. Finally, in a last wild dash for freedom, they manage to elude the law, wounding in the process one of the border guards. In the end, because of his son, Don Floridor is forced to vacate the ranch.

In the first of these stories, the characters of the smugglers are highly individualized while those in "El rancho" are little more than the broadest types. Matías, Juan el Puelche, and Mariluán, as well as Kanaka Joe, are characterized mainly by synoptic character sketches, passages which narrate past adventures and exploits. What stands out is their loyalty to each other despite the fact that they have all committed crimes and are fugitives from justice. In "El rancho," Don Floridor and his wife are

seen to be tireless workers, and the latter is a good singer, but beyond this they are not developed. Isidro, too, is quite one-dimensional, strong, quick, summed up as the "very devil." In both these stories, the author would have us look sympathetically at the social outcast, not so much because he feels that we should be cognizant of their humanity, as was his purpose in the urban stories with the thieves, but as a way of getting us involved in an interesting and exciting adventure yarn.

Even in this limited purpose, however, Rojas is only partly successful as some analysis of techniques will show. The use of Nature in "El hombre" is certainly integral to the creation of an atmosphere of fatality and heightens the tension; moreover, it becomes an instrument of sardonic irony in the end. On the other hand, the story's construction, which depends upon the device of the chase, is faulty. It is slow getting started, as Rojas must fill us in on the past exploits of all his characters and show us how fortuitous circumstances brought them together. This prelude constitutes about one fourth of the total narrative. Although this technique is successful for characterizing, it is also destructive of the very dramatic tension he is trying to create. The story has other weaknesses as well. The chase itself, for example, drags on and on, and there is an awkwardness in the fact that during the chase the pursued keep seeing Kanaka behind a bush or a rock; this

goes on ad nauseum, and the monotony which results quite obviously works against the author's purpose. "El rancho" is a much more tightly constructed story, but paradoxically has very little character interest to sustain it. What is the virtue of one becomes the defect of the other and vice versa.

In the stories discussed thus far, there are many memorable characters. Most have an authenticity about them as though quite possibly they had existed in flesh and blood. Furthermore, each has an individuality about him which keeps him from being confused with any other. In the last group of stories to be discussed, however, the depiction of character is subordinated to a great extent to some other story element, either an idea, pure suspense, folklore, or atmosphere. Making up this group are "El hombre de la rosa," "Historia de hospital," both of which rely almost entirely on suspense, "Canto y baile," an atmospheric piece, "El colocolo," a folklore tale, and "El León y el Hombre," an animal parable.

"El hombre de la rosa" and "Historia de hospital" may be compared as regards their handling of suspense. The former treats the theme of black magic. One day a mysterious stranger confesses his knowledge of the black arts to Padre Espinoza, a Capuchín friar. After trying to persuade the man that this is only a superstition, the padre, perhaps because of a spark of belief, agrees to let him prove his



powers: within the hour the man must bring a rose from the Capuchín monastery in Santiago while locked in a cell in Osorno. When the friar out of curiosity opens the cell door before the allotted time is up, he is astonished to find the decapitated but still living body of the man. Horrified, but still curious, he awaits his return. And return he does; moreover, he has the rose. The friar will ever after be followed by "el hombre de la rosa."

Although character is subordinate in this story, the friar is sympathetic and credible, a combination of pragmatism and naiveté. His hard-headed disbelief in black magic is tinged with uncertainty and herein lies the humor. Because of this flicker of uncertainty, he is tricked by one who could very well be the Devil himself. The story is well constructed to build suspense, starting slowly, but moving gradually and effectively to its climax and resolution. The final words, too, have a forceable dramatic thrust and contain no little irony:

El padre Espinoza volvería hacia Valdivia.  
Pero ya no iba solo. A su lado, montado en un  
caballo oscuro, silencioso y pálido, iba un  
hombre, alto, nervioso, de ojos negros y  
brillantes.

Era el hombre de la rosa (p. 225).

While "El hombre de la rosa" is an excellent example of a suspense story, "Historia de hospital" is little more than an extended joke, and not a very good one at that.

Here some hospital interns are led into the operating room as surgical assistants in what appears to be a life and death situation for one of their friends. They learn, however, that it is all a trick when the patient at the critical moment sits up and begins to laugh; it is the twenty-eighth of December, el Día de los Inocentes. Needless to say, the reader feels as much the butt of the joke as the interns.

One of the best stories of this group is the atmospheric piece, "Canto y baile." Here Rojas paints a picture of the low-class brothel. The effects are achieved by means of the following devices: a description of the crass interior of the house, especially its furniture, avoiding a static presentation through a subtle personification; the subsequent attention to the music, insisting on the monotonous rhythm of the cueca played over and over again, and the reproduction of the chorus of a popular song; and the dizzying description of the dancing and drunkenness as it contrasts with the madam who "...sentada junto al piano en una amplia silla de paja, desbordante de grasa y de trapos, contemplaba la baráunda humana..." (p. 209). From this, the author proceeds to a description of the character types who frequent the place, the women themselves, and the finally the thieves and toughs who form two distinct rival groups. The description finished, a dramatic incident is added to round off the total effect;

the rivalry between the thieves and the toughs over the women comes to a dramatic and violent climax in a knife fight between the leaders of the two groups. The denouement is then effected rapidly in a few lines:

Quando la policía, procedida de la dueña de la casa, entró al salón, encontró en el suelo al Maldito Atilio que se desangraba copiosamente y en los sillones a tres borrachos que dormían a pierna suelta. Los demás habían desaparecido.

Así terminó, en la casa de doña María de los Santos, aquella noche de canto y baile (p. 217).

"El colocolo," the folklore story, is less successful, for once the reader learns what this weird thing is there is no reason to return to the story. The colocolo is a mythical bird-mouse which slowly drains a man of his life by sucking his saliva. The story concerns a huaso named Vicente who believes only what he can see. As he listens one evening in a drunken stupor to a friend's account of how his father was nearly killed by a colocolo, the seeds of fear are sown in his mind. That evening while riding home on horseback, he thinks he sees one in front of him. After he is thrown from his horse and knocked unconscious, he awakens to "see" an "eye" glaring at him from the darkness. Remembering vaguely the story and how the animal had been crushed to death, he smashes the "eye" only to discover later that it was his beloved Waltham watch which had fallen from his pocket. The characters here are huasos,

buffoons who add some low humor and serve as vehicles for an otherwise incredible story. "El colocolo" is constructed around anecdotes (there is also a pseudo-ghost story preceding the account of the colocolo), is loose, hastily stuck together, and has little real unity.

The last story, "El León y el Hombre," is an animal parable modeled after those of Horacio Quiroga. The characters of the man and the lion are symbolic of civilization and nature respectively. The idea here is that civilization, which is man-made, is gradually encroaching on the freedom inherent in the natural state. Variations on this theme have already been seen in "La suerte de Cucho Vial" as well as in some of the poems in Tonada del transeunte; the theme is by no means alien either to the later novel, Hijo de ladrón, and other of Rojas' subsequent writings. In "El León y el Hombre," the affinity that the author has for the freedom found in nature is expressed in the lyrical description of the countryside, seen from the point of view of the lion. The following is a good example:

Aquella mañana, echado al sol sobre el vientre, con la cabeza levantada y los sentidos en tensión, el León joven oteaba la lejanía. Miraba el río, los bosques colgados de la faldas amplias de las montañas, las vertientes que salían de los macizos de árboles, brillando entre ellos como pequeñas culebras plateadas;... El cielo estaba de un azul radiante y el aire, alto y puro, llenaba hasta los bordes el cuenco del espacio (p. 250).

From all the above analyses, it is possible to formulate some generalizations about the short stories of Manuel Rojas. The conflicts are of two kinds: man versus his environment and man versus man. In the case of the former, Rojas' characters are revealed as individuals who are inadequately equipped to carry on their struggle effectively. They are victims of bad luck, chance, hunger, or illness; often it is a combination of these things. It is evident, too, that one of Rojas' recurring themes is the insufficiency of the individual unto himself. Yet, while it is true that his characters need others, they are not always successful in communicating these needs. They are for the most part withdrawn into themselves and shy. Consequently we see them alone, alienated, boxed in, yet reaching out, awkwardly to be sure, in a truncated attempt at communication and communion. Those transitory moments when the real presence of another is felt by the character are revealed through allusive symbols, evanescent epiphanies like a gesture or an expression, or the spiritual, wordless communication that comes from the offering of a cigaret, of milk and wafers, or a simple act of kindness. In spite of such difficulties in establishing communication, what shines forth in all Rojas' characters is their human dignity. Regardless of what they may be--thief, barber, prisoner, or just plain poor--, they are all of them men, human beings above all else. To deprive them of their

dignity, Rojas seems to be saying, is to deprive them of being men.

While the above conflict of man versus his environment is found in Rojas' most serious stories, the conflict of man versus man is generally treated on the lower level of pure adventure. The one exception to this is "El cachorro," a story which develops with the inexorability of genuine tragedy. In most cases, however, we are dealing here with stories written primarily for their entertainment value rather than for the purpose of widening our concept of reality. The same may be said of the purely humorous stories.

In matters of setting, it has been shown that at all times Rojas insists on a functional approach rather than a picturesque one. Setting is always somehow related to character, either as an antagonist, as a projection of inner feelings, or simply in terms symbolic of a mental state or condition. Rarely is description used merely to create picturesque background. Although atmosphere is surely suggested at times, he never weaves dense textures, always permitting his characters to stand above it. Finally, if he is descriptive, he always seeks to bring his description to life and never offers a static picture.

Rojas' forte is the creation of characters. Few Chileans of his generation rival him in this regard. He limits himself, however, to the types he knows well. On

some occasions, Don Leiva for instance, his characters go through a process of change; they are dynamic. Nevertheless, such changes are never complex; nor does the fact that they change mean that they cease to be essentially one-dimensional. At the same time, although they are flat characters, they appear vivid and real, people of flesh and blood. Rojas achieves this illusion of reality through character description, character synopsis, and by showing individuals in action; he also reveals, though to no profound extent, their thoughts and feelings. While they are by no means complex psychological beings, we do see them come to life on the page.

As regards techniques, Rojas is seen to use the time-honored devices of point of view (omniscient narrator or first person) and temporal development (in medias res, linear). He makes absolutely no conscious effort to experiment with such problems of the craft. His stories are told, however, with spontaneity and naturalness, and in no instance does technique call attention to itself. In matters of technique, he bears a great deal of resemblance to Maupassant, Bret Harte, Jack London, and Horacio Quiroga.

Since in its general characteristics Rojas' style remains the same in all his short stories, an understanding of it can best be had by examining closely only one. For this purpose, "El vaso de leche," perhaps his most accomplished, has been chosen.

In the first place, in his attempt to convey an agonizingly slow rhythm (the youth's indecision to act perhaps demands such a pace), Rojas uses many long, rather involved sentences. For example: "Una nueva ola de llanto le arrastró los ojos y lloró con tanta fuerza como la primera vez, pero ahora no angustiosamente, sino con alegría, sintiendo que una gran frescura lo penetraba, apagando eso caliente que le había estrangulado la garganta" (p. 186). On the other hand, breaking the slow rhythm from time to time in order to give the story at least a semblance of movement and contrast is the more dynamic veni-vidi-vici construction based on three preterite verbs. The following is one of many instances: "Acudió la señora, pasó un trapo por la cubierta de la mesa y con voz suave, en la que notaba un dejo de acento español, le preguntó" (p. 185).

In addition to the predominantly long and leisurely sentence structure, other devices employed to produce a slow rhythm are 1) repetition and 2) parallel constructions. Examples follow:

- 1) Se fue inclinando, inclinando... (p. 184).

...lo importante era comer, comer, comer...  
(p. 184).

Hacia tres días justos que no comía, tres largos días (p. 182).

No podía hacerlo, no podía hacerlo nunca (p. 182).

- 2) Y más por timidez y vergüenza... (p. 182).



...que contuviera restos de guisos y trozos de carne (p. 182).

callejuelas llenas de tabernas y posadas pobres... (p. 182).

Most likely because he is not trying to create a dense atmosphere, Rojas' style is singularly free of metaphors and similes. Perhaps for this reason those he does use become doubly effective. One simile, for example, which is also a personification, implies the whole psychological basis for the characterization of the youth--his need to assert himself as a man: "Estaba poseído por la obsesión terrible del mar, que tuerce las vidas más lisas y definidas como un brazo poderoso una delgada varilla" (p. 182). Here the sea is transformed into an adversary against whom he must struggle. On another occasion, a simile is used not for psychological reasons but rather to stress an intense physical sensation, in this case hunger: "Un hambre que lo doblé como un latigazo pesado y ancho" (p. 183). Finally, Rojas employs a simile to describe in a vivid way the pitifully useless lives of the beggars on the pier: "...atorrantes abandonados al ocio, que se mantenían de no se sabe qué, mendigando o robando, pasando los días como las cuentas de un rosario mugriento..." (pp. 182-183).

As regards Rojas' vocabulary, it is simple and concrete, eschewing the colorful, the extravagant, the regional, and the picturesque, characteristics so typical of many criollistas. More narrative than descriptive or analytical, the

story is naturally built around the use of the verb and is economical in the use of the adjective. One idiosyncrasy of Rojas', and it cannot be said whether this adds or subtracts from the story's effectiveness, is the inordinate use of the enclitic form of the verb (sacóse, enviáronlo, contestóle). One tends to consider them an affectation in a style that is otherwise entirely free of them.

Such are the short stories of Manuel Rojas. Whereas his early poetry made no literary reverberations, these stories were an immediate success and brought his name to the fore. It remained for him now to try his hand at the novel.

## Notes

1. See, e.g., Antología del cuento chileno, Instituto de Literatura Chilena, 2a ed. (Santiago, 1965), p. 277.
2. Rojas, Obras, p. 17.
3. The stories discussed in this chapter appear as follows in each of the volumes: Hombres del sur: "Laguna," "Un espíritu inquieto," "El cachorro," "El bonete maulino," "El hombre de los ojos azules"; El delincuente: "El delincuente," "El vaso de leche," "Un mendigo," "El trampolín," "El colocolo," "La aventura de Mr. Jaiba," "Pedro el pequenero," "Un ladrón y su mujer," "La compañera de viaje"; Travesía: "Bandidos en los caminos," "El hombre de la rosa," "La suerte de Cucho Vial," "Canto y baile," "El León y el Hombre," "El fantasma del patio," "Historia de hospital," "Poco sueldo," "El rancho en la montaña."
4. Rojas, Obras, p. 82. Quoted passages from the short stories are all taken from this volume.
5. Rojas, Antología, p. 31.
6. Manuel Rojas, Hombres del sur (3rd. ed., Santiago, 1963), p. 63. This story does not appear in the Obras completas.
7. Ibid., p. 66.
8. Ibid., p. 71.
9. Ibid., p. 72.
10. Ibid., p. 74.
11. Rojas, Obras, pp. 14-15.

## CHAPTER V

### BEGINNINGS AS A NOVELIST

Manuel Rojas' last volume of short stories, Travesía, was published in 1934, two years after the appearance of his first novel. Nevertheless, all of the stories in that volume had been published separately in newspapers between 1927 and 1930 and were behind him when he started to write novels. In a sense, he had served a kind of apprenticeship as a short-story writer before graduating to the more complex genre. Even so, his first two novels, Lanchas en la bahía and La ciudad de los césares, should more properly be viewed as transitional works, since it is quite evident from their structure that they can not be considered novels in the fullest sense. They are little more than expanded short stories. Nor is the similarity merely structural; there are thematic affinities as well. Lanchas en la bahía bears a close resemblance to both "El vaso de leche" and "Canto y baile." Like the first story, this novel portrays with strong autobiographical overtones the character of an adolescent in the ambivalent stage between boyhood and manhood, alone and away from

his family in a strange port city. The similarity with "Canto y baile" is seen in the depiction of the atmosphere of the low-class brothel.

It is also interesting that these first two novels show the same general dichotomy evident in the earlier stories. Whereas Lanchas en la bahía has an urban environment and is a serious study of character and circumstances, the second novel, La ciudad de los césares, with its suspense plot, recalls the Rojas of "El hombre de los ojos azules," the writer of entertaining adventure stories. While the former indicates a deepening of the author's powers of observation, the latter shows him to have become more superficial, perhaps less interested in adventure for adventure's sake.

In beginning the discussion of Lanchas en la bahía, it is enlightening to examine some of the circumstances surrounding its origins. In 1930, Rojas read The Informer by Liam O'Flaherty. By his own admission, rarely has a novel left him with a deeper impression, both in terms of its content and its form. Reflecting on this book, he says:

He leído, con seguridad, antes y después mejores novelas..., pero ninguna me dio, con tanta evidencia, una imagen de lo que llegaría a ser la novela nueva; el tratamiento del tiempo, la relación entre pensamiento y acción, el desprecio por los detalles, el mantenimiento de una tensión mental, la robustez de la prosa, el sentimiento de la humanidad, me dejaron admirado y entusiasmado.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps even more important, because of the more discernible influence made on Rojas' own novel, was the magnetic attraction of O'Flaherty's central character, Gypo Nolan, who was to become the model, if not entirely at least in part, for Rucio del Norte, the most fully developed minor character in Lanchas en la bahía. Of Rucio, Rojas says:

...se parece, física y mentalmente, al personaje de O'Flaherty, con las diferencias morales y psicológicas que se pueden apreciar en las dos novelas: Rucio del Norte no sería jamás un delator...<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances of the reading of The Informer were compounded when in the same year the Santiago daily, La Nación, announced that it would sponsor a novel contest. Rojas decided to enter. The raw material he planned to use involved his experiences in 1914 as a stevedore and night watchman on the docks of Valparaíso. However, it was The Informer, especially the character of Gypo Nolan, which furnished him with the idea as to how he could integrate these personal experiences into a novel. The idea was to create the character of Rucio del Norte as "...el ser-símbolo del lanchero porteño."<sup>3</sup> With the concept of the novel now vividly in mind, Rojas began to write in extended bursts of enthusiasm and as intensely as possible. In this way, he attempted to finish the novel in the briefest span of time possible in order to

maintain the mental tension he desired. It was his belief that this method would lend his novel the same dynamic force he had admired so much in The Informer. Whether or not this was the case is a moot point. In any event, he shared first prize in the contest with Magdalena Petit.

The theme of Lanchas en la bahía is limited in scope; it is the simple story of a shy and inexperienced adolescent's struggle with himself to assert his latent manhood. Having left home and family, Eugenio Baeza comes alone to Valparaíso where he finds a job as a night watchman on a falucho. After only a few nights on the job, he falls asleep and gets himself fired. The following day, with the help of a union leader named Alejandro, he goes to work on the docks as a stevedore. Here he becomes acquainted with a gruff and exuberant lanchero, Rucio del Norte, and a warm friendship develops between the two. Rucio, unlike Alejandro the union man, would rather spend his time off taking pleasure in wine, women, and song. He asks Eugenio if he would like to go with him to a house of prostitution. Unsure of himself, the boy vacillates but finally agrees to go along. That evening, he meets a young prostitute named Yolanda and forthwith falls in love with her. He returns to see her on different occasions and ultimately decides that he must take her away from such a life. At this juncture, however, a complication arises when a merchant sailor, one of Yolanda's boyfriends, returns to Valparaíso

and comes to see her. When Eugenio sees them together, he becomes irate and jealous. In his rage, he resolves to have a showdown with his rival. He and Rucio return to the brothel together where Eugenio finds the sailor dancing with Yolanda. Eugenio provokes a fight, is arrested, and must spend the next seventy days in jail. When he is released, he feels he has gotten everything out of his system and has finally asserted himself as a man. This, he realizes, and not Yolanda, was his problem all along. Feeling himself to be a new person, he will now accompany Rucio and Alejandro to Guayaquil as a sailor in the merchant marine.

Eugenio's character may be viewed as a conflict between his efforts to assert his manhood and his adolescent feelings of insecurity, expressed in bewilderment and confusion, as to how to go about it. Throughout the novel there is an amusingly ironic contrast between the end he seeks and the efforts he makes to achieve it. Indeed, since he is telling the story, reflecting back on his own experiences, the irony with which he views the events is directed at himself.

At the beginning of the novel, during his first night on board the falucho, having been warned ahead of time to be on the lookout for pirates, he is afraid that everyone he sees is a potential pirate. When he does in fact encounter some, he is fearful of appearing ridiculous in



the eyes of others if he attempts to turn them in--they may not be pirates after all--, and he therefore lets them go. Ironic, too, are the circumstances of his living with an older couple. He has left home and family to prove to himself that he can be independent. Yet he must depend on Miguel and his wife just as he had most likely depended on his own mother and father. Even the voice of Miguel's wife has a maternal ring to it that reminds Eugenio of his own mother. Each incident in the novel sharpens the irony as he is seen more and more through amusing contrast. While on the job as a stevedore, he is overly conscious of his high-pitched voice which contrasts with the rough masculine tones of Rucio. From time to time, he glances at the muscles in his arms to see whether they are growing from the heavy lifting. And just as he thinks that he must be a man after all, he becomes so frightened as the first load is lowered from the ship that he feels the urge to run and hide.

It is the central incident in the novel, however, which brings the ironic view to its culmination. As Eugenio walks through the dimly-lighted brothel district, in his apprehension he is scarcely able to keep from trembling, yet he wants to show Rucio that he is completely self-assured. His state of mixed emotions at this point makes a particularly amusing contrast--he wants desperately to turn back but realizes that such a suggestion would expose his boyish

weakness to the very person he is trying to impress. At the brothel, he is conspicuously shy and self-conscious when Yolanda speaks to him. He looks ridiculously like the child he is struggling not to be when he later cuddles up in her arms; it is almost as if she has become for the moment his maternal protector.

Eugenio's adolescent insecurity is brought into its sharpest focus, however, through juxtaposition with the contrasting character of Rucio del Norte. Physically, the latter is robust, muscular, and powerful; Rojas compares him both to an oak tree and an elephant. He is the repository of a prodigious physical energy as seen in his bellowing laugh, his grotesque eating habits, his love of wine, prostitutes, dancing, and a generally boisterous good time. But he is a paradox too, since contrasting somewhat with this massive physical image is his benevolent, even gentle, nature. In both his physical and psychological traits, Rucio is the obvious foil to Eugenio. On the physical side, Rucio is powerful and robust while Eugenio is stooped and thin. On the psychological level, the lanchero is impulsive and oblivious to what others think of him; Eugenio is overly cautious in his actions, fearful in his insecurity of appearing childish in the eyes of others. Finally, Rucio is at home and self-assured in the company of prostitutes, wisely avoiding emotional attachments; Eugenio, on the other hand, becomes emotionally involved with Yolanda and gets himself entangled in a triangle.

Lanchas en la bahía, however, can not be viewed entirely as a novel of character; it must be seen as a novel of atmosphere as well. Besides the creation of character, it was Rojas' aim to evoke the surroundings--the docks, the city of Valparaíso, and the low-class brothel. Nevertheless, the atmosphere is no mere backdrop. It is integrally bound up with character since it is presented through Eugenio's sense perceptions and at times becomes indicative of his inner feelings.

In the early chapters, the author gives us an impressionistic picture of the wharves at night:

Empezaba la hora triste del mar, la hora en que todo movimiento enérgico cesa, la hora en que prenden las luces de los barcos, haciendo así más oscura la soledad de la bahía. Las últimas voces declinaban frente a la noche. Empezaban los deslizamientos furtivos, los ruidos fugaces, los movimientos reptantes, el desfilar de los chinchorros tripulados, quién sabe por quién y que se dirigen quién sabe hacia dónde. Había ya luces en la ciudad, en el plano, en los cerros, y se extendían en racimos, en guirnaldas, como en honor de alguien, dando a la atmósfera que gravitaba sobre el puerto un tono rojizo y blanco. Una imagen de la Virgen, rodeada de luces, refulgía como un diamante en el pecho de un cerro.<sup>5</sup>

The passage reads like a Modernist description with its emphasis on visual and auditory images depicting the ephemeral twilight between day and night. Worthy of special attention in this regard are the references to the sounds as fugaces and the effect of the light as rojizo.

Enhancing the effect of loneliness on the quiet wharves is Rojas' use of auditory devices. The reader hears the sounds of anonymous voices amidst the silence and solitude of the night: "¡Iza! ¡Un poco más!... ¡Arrea! ¡Guarda abajo!" (p. 284). Even more effective, in the chapter devoted to Eugenio's first night on watch, is the repetition of the anonymous call, "¡Guachiman de la W!" Moreover, Rojas captures the poetic effect of the cry as it echoes in the night: "¡Guachiman de la W!...!...de la W!...!... de la W!" (p. 249). In addition to the anonymous shouts of human voices we hear repeated the tolling of the ship's bell marking the hour: "¡Tan! La una. ¡Tan, tan! Las dos. ¡Tan...!" (p. 285).

In his description of the red-light district, however, Rojas abandons the impressionistic mode in favor of the expressionistic. Here the atmosphere becomes a reflection of Eugenio's inner anxieties. As he goes deeper and deeper into it, the district becomes more and more distorted. At first, for example, "...La Plaza Echaurren...parecía un pozo de sombra dividido por la amarillenta faja de luz de la calle" (p. 304). Some moments later, the people moving through the darkness are described as "...seres que se movían en ella como en agua fangosa" (p. 304). The street itself comes to look as though it were illuminated "...a través de un grueso vidrio pintado de rojo, de blanco, de azul, de verde" (p. 305). The prostitutes along the way

are dizzying in their variety and grotesque in their appearance: "Las había morenas y rubias, blancas y pálidas, esbeltas, gordezuelas y graciosas como cacharros, monstruosas como sapos, riendo conversando las más serias y graves como mercaderos las menos" (p. 305). To Eugenio it seemed as if he had been thrown into "...un mar revuelto, donde, marinero incipiente, iba a flotar como una chalupa dejada al garete" (p. 306). This entire scene, atmospheric as it is, is much more than decoration. By the mere fact that it represents Eugenio's inner fears, it contributes to the irony with which the character is drawn.

Turning attention now to the construction of the novel, it should be pointed out that were it not for Rojas' own words regarding the method employed in writing the work, that is, that he conceived it as a whole before he started, the reader might very well question the unity of purpose. The first chapter is very nearly a self-contained unit, almost a short story in itself. Moreover, the character of Rucio is not brought in until the novel is well underway. It is only after his appearance that the story seems to take on new life and a new direction through a contrapuntal presentation of the characters. This apparent lack of direction at the beginning can probably be best explained by the author's use of autobiographical material. Evidently Rojas starts his novels with his personal experience in the

raw and then attempts to form a loose pattern around it rather than deciding first on a theme and then drawing on his personal experiences, selecting only those things which would contribute to the development of the theme. And yet, there is a kind of paradox here, for it is most likely this method which, although it begets some minor structural weaknesses, is in part responsible for the vitality and "real-life" authenticity found in almost all of Rojas' fiction.

The structure of Lanchas en la bahía, as has been suggested, is essentially that of an expanded short story. The number of actors is limited, and what plot there is involves the simple solution of a single dilemma. Preceding the central episode concerning Yolanda are some loosely connected "pre-plot" chapters depicting Eugenio as a night watchman, as a stevedore, and developing his relationship with Miguel and his friendship with Rucio. To the extent that they pre-establish character, they are integrated with the principal episode; considered strictly from a plot point of view, they seem "tacked on" and could easily have been omitted. However, once the plot itself begins, the author seems to be in complete control of his medium; he is on the old familiar ground of the short story. As in the earlier shorter works, Rojas builds slowly and deliberately to the moment of climax after which he effects a rapid denouement. Furthermore, the central character is brought

to a moment in time when he is forced to look at himself in a different light. It is a pattern, in short, which he has already shown himself quite capable of handling with a high degree of artistry.

If the above devices are common to the short stories, the use of the artistic motif to unify individual chapters and to connect others is something new for Rojas. One such motif which unifies the first three chapters, for example, is the repeated phrase "Guachiman de la W." Chapter four is framed by the mention of the Plaza Echaurren both toward the beginning and again at the end. Eugenio's career as a night watchman, although involving two chapters, is framed in a similar way; at the beginning of chapter one, alone on the falucho, he watches his companions pull away in a small boat: "El motor resopló como lobo que sale a flote, giró la hélice y la lancha desatracoó a cabezadas" (p. 281); again, when he has just been fired, he watches the same boat pull away once more: "Resongó el motor y la lancha despertó sobresaltada, movióse, retrocedió un poco y después de virar a estribor empezó a correr suavemente" (p. 294). In each case, it may be said to Rojas' credit that the use of the motif is subtle and restrained, never calling attention to itself as a device.

In matters of style, Lanchas en la bahía shows no essential change from that of the short stories. There is in general the predominance of the long, involved

sentence. However, in the more introspective passages, where Eugenio is alone with his thoughts, such convolutions must be viewed as the germination of the more complex stream-of-consciousness type of syntax developed later by Rojas in Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino. The following example will illustrate this point:

Olvidado de mi personalidad real, vacía mi conciencia, viviendo en ese instante como olvidado o aparte de mí mismo, transformado en una especie de tubo de cristal, sin que los acontecimientos pretéritos o futuros empeñaran mi superficie, la vida llenábame de un agua clara y fresca, dándome la sensación de claridad y frescura que sentía (p. 293).

The one outstanding difference between Lanchas en la bahía and the stories, as well as with the later novels, is the number of similes. Although Rojas considers them to be the principal defect of the work, most of them are quite effective. To the extent that they show any pattern at all, many of them refer in some way to the sea and thereby contribute to the creation of the atmosphere of the port city. On two occasions comparison is made to the sea gull. On another, a fleet of boats is compared to "una bandada de patos que se hubieran abatido sobre la bahía para pasar allí la noche" (p. 326). Other animals used are the fish and the seal. Many of the similes, on the other hand, falling into no pattern, are used simply to



make a descriptive point more vivid: "La conversación giraba siempre alrededor de los mismos motivos, como un murciélagó alrededor de la misma torre" (p. 315).

If Lanchas en la bañía can by no stretch of the imagination be considered a great novel--its theme is much too limited--, there is no doubt that it marks a felicitous beginning for Rojas in the genre. Its charm lies in its simplicity, in its honesty, and in its naturalness of style. Rojas' second attempt at the novel form, however, La ciudad de los césares, must be regarded as his worst work in any genre. Considering his apprenticeship, it is inexcusable. The utter mediocrity is undoubtedly due to the circumstances under which it was written:

...escrita a instancias de don Carlos Silva Vildósola para publicarla como folletín en el diario El Mercurio. La escribí a medida que se publicaba, lo que me impidió corregirla o reanimarla, a lo que se debe sin duda su irreparable mediocridad, y digo irreparable porque después procuré arreglarla y creo que quedó peor.<sup>6</sup>

Rojas goes on to point out that some impetus was given to the novel by a Stanford University professor who edited it for North American college students,<sup>7</sup> but he leaves little doubt that he would like, if it were possible, to disown the work. It does not appear in his Obras completas.

La ciudad de los césares is based on a Chilean version of the El Dorado legend. According to the story, somewhere

in the southern Cordillera there exists a lost city, rich in gold, founded and colonized by a group of Spaniards, both men and women, who had been shipwrecked in the Straits of Magellan during the colonial days. While searching for fellow Spaniards, they became lost in the mountains and were never able to find their way out. Resigning themselves to their fate, and with the help of the Indians, they established their city of gold and have been living there unknown to the world for generations.

The legend outlined above appears in the second half of the novel, the first half being devoted to the bringing together of a motley band of adventurers. A synopsis of the story runs as follows: Onaisín (an Ona Indian), Enrique (Onaisín's white friend and companion since boyhood), Smith (a crusty gold prospector), Queltehue (an adventurer and cook for the group), and Henríquez (a Spaniard and mysterious stranger), after a series of chance events brings them together, embark upon a search for gold in the Cordillera of southern Chile. Like the smugglers in "El hombre de los ojos azules," they have a map. After some months of tramping through the mountain forests, they quite by accident come across the lost city of the Caesars. They are at once taken prisoners. During their imprisonment, they learn that after hundreds of years of peace and harmony the city now finds itself divided between the "césares blancos" (the Spaniards) and the "césares negros"

(the Indians). Motivated by greed, the leaders of the whites are determined to collect their share of the wealth, leave their city, and strike out for civilization. The Indians, on the other hand, are just as determined to keep them from leaving. Our heroes, too, have become divided: Smith decides he will lead the whites back to civilization since they have offered him substantial amounts of gold; Henríquez will accompany them as well, but he will return later to help the Indians left behind; Enrique and Onaisín take no sides in the conflict but will aid Sasiulp, a young Spanish woman who as figurative leader of the city is caught between the desires of the conflicting factions. Enrique, however, is imprisoned by the whites only to regain his freedom almost immediately. Meanwhile, Onaisín, enraged at his friend's imprisonment and unaware that he has escaped, informs Smith of the whites' treachery, and Smith returns to his friends. Finally, in a massive confrontation between the two factions and a model of anti-climax, a bloody war is avoided; the whites are made to realize that they have been misled by the greed of their leaders, and they decide to return to their city. What is more, our heroes also decide to remain. Enrique will marry Sasiulp; Queltehue will marry an Indian girl; Hernández, as it turns out, is a friar in disguise, and he will become the city's religious leader; Smith will return to civilization but only for the purpose of bringing back his wife and children to this newly-found Utopia.

This is the story of La ciudad de los césares. The novel itself is not much less ridiculous than it sounds in synopsis form. The theme, if the book may be said to have a theme--"honor overcomes greed" perhaps--, is presented in the most puerile and naive manner imaginable. Moreover, the characters are never developed beyond the most simple outlines. Weakness of theme and character is surpassed only by the weakness of the plot. From the very beginning, it moves along as if the author himself had no idea of where it was headed. There is, for example, a great deal of exposition on Onaisín in the initial chapters, inordinately more than on the others, and yet he assumes no more important a role than they do; indeed, as the story progresses he assumes less. Furthermore, as Rojas walks his characters through the forest, it would appear that he has no clear idea where he is sending them; consequently, he has them pause, observe, and talk about the exotic birds and plants along the way. Whenever he feels the story needs a bit of suspense or drama, he gets one of his characters captured or in trouble; it then becomes necessary for the others to come to his aid. The whole plot, in short, is of the cheapest hero versus villain type. There is even the time-worn recognition device in the case of Hernández, the adventurer who is really a priest. Finally, the language, and especially the dialogue, is stiff and unnatural. Considering Rojas' proven integrity

as a writer, La ciudad de los césares is difficult indeed to explain.

There are, in conclusion, no radical trends in Rojas' first novels away from what he was already doing in the short stories. In terms of theme and character, he is again at his best when he remains close to his personal experiences. It would seem that in Lanchas en la bahía, any awkwardness in his handling of the structural problems inherent in the novel form itself is overcome by the simple honesty with which he treats his theme. It is evident in La ciudad de los césares, on the other hand, that in his attempt at a story that demanded a more involved and at the same time more tightly-knit plot structure, he was bound to fail.

It was not until 1951 that his next novel was to appear. But it will be recalled from the chapter on his essays that Rojas had in the meantime evolved for himself a personalized concept of the structure of the novel. It was a concept, as will be seen in the analysis of the Aniceto Hevia trilogy, that opened new pathways for him in his examination of the more transcendental aspects of man's condition in the world.

## Notes

1. Rojas, Antología, p. 53.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 54.
5. Rojas, Obras, p. 284. All quotes from this novel are taken from the Obras completas.
6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. Manuel Rojas, La ciudad de los césares, ed. Roberto Bengalia Sangiori and Grace Knopp (New York, 1951).

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ANICETO HEVIA TRILOGY

The novel, Hijo de ladrón, published in the year 1951, marks the turning point in Manuel Rojas' career as a novelist. For some critics, it also marks a significant new trend in the development of the Chilean novel in general. According to Fernando Alegría, whereas the earlier Rojas, like the other writers of his generation, had been only a somewhat better than average follower of the criollistas, the Rojas of Hijo de ladrón emerges as a highly complex artist of universal significance. At the same time, he becomes the adopted leader of many of the younger generation of novelists as they attempt to transcend the regional, the picturesque, and in general all limiting confines of Chilean criollismo. In the words of Alegría:

Es importante hacer notar el hecho de que no hay otro novelista en su generación que comparta con él esa urgencia de proyectarse hacia un plano universal y de expresar, desde Chile, la angustia fundamental del mundo contemporáneo.<sup>2</sup>

As regards Rojas' approach to the novel form, it is evident just from a cursory examination of Hijo de ladrón

that he offers the reader a deeper and more complex vision of reality than is apparent in any of his previous works. The author himself became aware of the transformation upon revising the preliminary drafts of some of the first chapters:

...me di cuenta de que tenía la tendencia a examinar las cosas, los seres y los hechos de una manera diferente a como los examinaba antes, aunque antes no los examinaba; simplemente, los describía, presentaba. Al mismo tiempo, advertí que los relacionaba entre sí, más que de un modo inteligente, de un modo emocional, no escapando a esa tendencia ni siquiera lo que de por sí parece no tener emoción; los muebles de una pieza, por ejemplo, o el sonido de una fábrica. Todo ello daba la impresión de que, más que la descripción de los hechos, los seres y las cosas, me interesaba la sensación que producían.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, if the literary method of the trilogy differs from the earlier works, Rojas' raw material is still his own personal experiences. Indeed, the character of Aniceto Hevia, the protagonist of the three novels, is to a very great extent Manuel Rojas himself. Many of the circumstantial facts in Aniceto's life--the riot in Valparaíso, for example--, are right out of the author's life. On the other hand, the character is also modeled in part after a real-life individual, Luis Hevia, the son of a nocturnal jewel thief known as El Gallego. The following comments by Rojas clarify to some extent just what the genesis of the fictional Aniceto was:



...decidí, por último, convertirme en Luis Hevia, un Luis Hevia que se llamaría como su padre y que viviría con el nombre de su padre, la a medias imaginaria y a medias real infancia que le iba a dar, y, después, una ya imaginaria parte de su adolescencia, hasta el momento en que Manuel Rojas tomaría su lugar y su nombre... Los movimientos ya son míos y la personalidad es la de él, aunque sólo hasta cierto punto: está reparada. Yo puse lo que era mío, la sensibilidad, además de hechos que Luis Hevia no conoció.<sup>4</sup>

Whether Aniceto is an autobiographical character or not is perhaps a moot point. For the purpose of analysis, he must be considered a fictional character and the novels discussed as literary works and not autobiography.

The three works which make up the trilogy are Hijo de ladrón (1951), Mejor que el vino (1958), and Sombras contra el muro (1963). The first explores Aniceto's early childhood and youth, the second takes him through a series of relationships with women and brings him to middle age; and the third, which flashes back in time, examines some of his formative experiences as a young man involved in the anarchist movement around the year 1915.

The theme of Hijo de ladrón is the existential one of man in a broken world. Such a world is seen as fractured, discordant, at war with itself. In many ways it is a mechanized world deprived of passion and divorced from being. Man in this kind of a world is seen as a homeless wanderer, alienated by his inability to comprehend the apparent absurdity which surrounds him and even engulfs him. For

most existentialists, being is the ground of all, but not necessarily identified with God. With Rojas, because his characters are not metaphysically minded, the question of God does not come up. Rather it would appear that he links being, although he does not necessarily identify it, with human fellowship. To the extent, then, that men can live together in a general spirit of brotherhood, they achieve their authenticity and are able to participate in being. This kind of participation, in turn, has a healing effect on the wounds inflicted by the brokenness of the world.

Aniceto is a wanderer in such a world. Removed with jarring abruptness from the rather secure community of his family, especially the warmth generated by a loving mother, he is thrown into the world, alone and estranged from others, to fend for himself. Hereafter his quest is for reintegration. After working a short time on the Trans-Andean Railroad, where he experiences the companionship of his fellow workers, he goes to Valparaíso. There he unwittingly gets mixed up in a street riot of rather large dimensions, is jailed for complicity in the looting of a jewelry store, takes ill with pneumonia, and is finally set free, still sick, to continue his struggle to stay alive. In the end, he is able to establish a community of friendship with two vagabonds, El Filósofo and Cristián.

The larger structure of the novel, then, consists of a dialectical movement from communion to estrangement back to communion.

In the analysis of the thematic development of Hijo de ladrón, attention must first be centered on Aniceto's world. How is it a broken one? The title of the novel is itself indicative. Significantly, Aniceto is the son of a thief, a man condemned for the misdemeanors of his father. Although Rojas in no way suggests the comparison, the taint of the father, like the stain of Original Sin, rubs off on the son and will remain with him throughout his life. Moreover, Aniceto is aware of this:

Había pasado malos ratos, es cierto, pero me pareció natural y lógico pasarlos: eran quizá una contribución que cada cierto tiempo era necesario pagara alguien, desconocido aunque exigente, y no era justo que uno solo, mi padre, pagara siempre por todos. Los cuatro hermanos estábamos ya crecidos y debíamos empezar a aportar nuestras cuotas, y como no podíamos dar lo que otros dan, trabajo o dinero, dimos lo único que en ese tiempo, y como hijos de ladrón teníamos: libertad y lágrimas.<sup>5</sup>

Aniceto himself is an honest man and by no means a thief, but he pays dearly nonetheless. Although irony may mask his true feelings, there seems to be, in spite of everything, little bitterness toward his father. But whether there is resentment or not, there are certainly grounds for it. A true father and son relationship had never been established between them. For the most part, El

Gallego existed for Aniceto as an object of curiosity. He recalls how he would mark his father's itinerary on a map as the latter traveled through such fascinating places as Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile.

That there were barriers between El Gallego and his son is attested to by Aniceto's two most vivid recollections of him. The first is when in jail he discovers his father's profession. The wordless encounter that occurs there points up the father's shame at the deceit he has perpetrated for years while the son's shock at seeing his father under such strange circumstances prevents him from expressing the tenderness and even pride that he still is able to feel for his father. Aniceto's second recollection goes back to the day of his mother's death; he can only recall the pitifully awkward and groping manner in which El Gallego approached the unfamiliar role of father. In the last analysis, the elder Aniceto Hevia was little more than a shadow, an enigmatic mystery to his son.

The absence of a father was compounded by the family's nomadic movement from city to city in an effort to elude the law. According to Aniceto, they changed residence almost as often as they changed their shoes. Furthermore, there were no grandparents nor aunts nor uncles around, since El Gallego's family was as much a specter as he was, and Doña Rosalía's relatives had been dispersed many years before. After the death of his mother and the imprisonment

of his father, Aniceto found himself alone in the world with no one to turn to. What was worse, he had not been prepared for life. His father, who had harbored the vague notion that his sons would become professional men--doctors, lawyers, etc.--, had failed to prepare him for any of the more humble trades.

If the incidents described above are only cracks in an otherwise stable family life--stable because of his mother--, Aniceto's experiences in Valparaíso reveal a world that is rent to the core.. He could not even prove his identity to the immigration officials in Chile because he did not have a birth certificate; he was unable to persuade them that his presence in flesh and blood was more convincing than a piece of paper filled with objective data. The riot in which he later becomes involved is an incomprehensible absurdity to him. The block is suddenly and inexplicably filled with a dehumanized mass; fires are started, people are pushed, stores are looted, and trolley cars, upset by the mob, crash noisily on the street. All around him he witnesses the process of dehumanization. The police do not look like men but "...máquinas o herramientas, objetos para usar" (p. 464). When a fight develops, it is not between two human beings but between an "hombre-herramienta" and an "hombre-cuchillo" while "hombres-ratas" form groups of spectators. After the riot subsides and the mob breaks up into smaller groups,

Aniceto finds himself in a slum district filled with bars. He is conscious not of individual people but of anonymous shouting and fighting: "¡Pégale, pégale! ¡Déjenlos que peleen solos!" (p. 473). Reality becomes distorted as he sees only "...bocas desdentadas, ojos magullados y camisas destrozadas" (p. 472).

This process of dehumanization is carried even further when he is taken to jail. The first human being Aniceto sees here is a drunk; lying on the floor in his own filth, he looked like an animal or worse: "...menos que un animal, una bestia; menos que una bestia, no sé qué" (p. 477). As he is transferred from one cell to the next, he hears only coughing, anonymous conversations, and the ringing of telephones. Later he is questioned, along with others, in a room filled with enormous dusty record books by a man who "...nos recibió con cara de pocos amigos" (p. 481). Finally, he is placed, for some unexplained reason, in a pitch dark cell, separated from the other men by darkness. In the morning, they are all brought before a judge who drums his fingers on the desk in boredom, treats them like information on a dossier, and dryly sentences them to a fine or five days. Although the next day Aniceto becomes somewhat friendly with one prisoner, he soon refuses to talk to him, learning that the man is in jail for having raped a young girl: "...la muchacha nos había separado" (p. 520).

The brokenness of the world, as evidenced by Aniceto's experiences in the riot and in jail, makes itself felt most acutely, however, in his illness. Significantly, his illness takes the form of a wound, a break, a lesion in his lung. But, more than the wound of a single man, it becomes symbolic of the human condition in the world as Rojas raises it to universal significance by means of his protagonist's discourse on it. The latter addresses himself in the familiar second person to all men:

Imagínate que tienes una herida en alguna parte de tu cuerpo, en alguna parte que no puedes localizar, y que no puedes, tampoco, ver ni tocar, y supón que esa herida te duele y amenaza abrirse o se abre cuando te olvidas de ella y haces lo que no debes, inclinarte, correr, luchar o reír; apenas lo intentas, la herida surge, su recuerdo primero, su dolor en seguida; aquí estoy, anda despacio (p. 450).

The wound, too, is indicative of man's being condemned. In Aniceto's case, one might even say that his wound is his having been born the son of a thief. In any case, it points up in a vivid way the absurdity of being-in-the-world. Moreover, the fact that many are born with such wounds and are beyond cure, beyond salvation, only compounds the absurdity, because paradoxically these individuals seem to endure the longest:

...podrás ver en las ciudades...a seres...parecidos a briznas de hierbas batidas por un poderoso viento, arrastrándose apenas, armados algunos de un balde-

cillo con fogón,...vestidos con andrajos color orín o musgo que dejan ver, por sus roturas, trozos de una inexplicable piel blanco-azulada, o vagando, simplemente, sin hacer ni pedir nada, apedreados por los niños, abofeteados por los borrachos, pero vivos, absurdamente erectos sobre dos piernas absurdamente vigorosas (p. 454).

Aniceto's world, then, is indeed a broken one. Yet, in spite of the fact that Aniceto seems to rule it out in his discourse on the wound, there is a salvation for men, albeit a transitory one. This salvation, which is human brotherhood and which Aniceto himself experiences, is not always a homecoming, although his friendship in the end with El Filósofo and Cristián must surely be considered such. Often it is just a brief manifestation of a fraternal feeling, expressed in the offering of a small gift or a simple act of kindness on the part of someone Aniceto hardly knows. Fernando Alegría has referred to this as the Good Samaritan motif, and it runs throughout Hijo de ladrón. Many are the examples of such encounters. Coming into Chile by cattle car, Aniceto is pulled aboard, perhaps even saved from death, by the helping hand of a stranger. During his first night in jail as a boy, he hears the poignant story of a police detective who, moved by the suffering of the thieves he arrested, ends up dedicating his life to helping them. Later, in jail in Valparaíso, he becomes friendly with El Azarcón, an uncommonly ugly man who, after being released, has a hot meal sent back to his young companion. The camaraderie among the



construction gang in the Andes as they work together is a particularly salutary experience for Aniceto. Finally, Aniceto's vagabond friend with the turtles, whom he met upon arrival in Chile and later "lost," told him his whole life's story and gave him a pair of shoes to wear. All of these manifestations of brotherhood are only momentary to be sure, but they reinforce the larger dialectical movement of the novel on a smaller scale. And lastly, by indicating the possibility of human communion in a broken world, they point ahead and prepare the way for the more lasting friendship among Aniceto, El Filósofo, and Cristián.

In order to bring into focus Aniceto's more permanent communions in a broken world, it is necessary to look for a moment at the novel's structure. Hijo de ladrón opens with, and has as its central reference in time, Aniceto's release from jail. It is a moment when his feelings of loneliness and estrangement are most intense and when his illness seems to take on an oblique symbolic significance as it relates to his solitude. In a sense, his wound is his isolation (like all successful literary symbols, the wound has a multifarious meaning). From this point in time, Aniceto's boyhood reminiscences go backward to his family life, cherished years of communion, while at the same time the novel moves forward chronologically toward his meeting with El Filósofo and Cristián and a new communion.

Most of the flashbacks to Aniceto's childhood are dominated by the figure of Doña Rosalía, the loving, self-sacrificing mother, the faithful wife of El Gallego, and the women whose home is always open to receive her husband's friends whether or not they be fugitives from justice. While family life is in a sense broken because of the father's profession, her acts of charity and love are seen as a curative influence on all who come into contact with her. She, and she alone, holds the family together; it is she who is able to obtain El Gallego's release from jail; and it is she who, on one occasion, nurses back to health a gravely-ill friend of her husband's who has been turned away by his own wife. Aniceto's mother, in short, stands as a luminous symbol of compassion, tenderness, fidelity, and love, the essence of all communion.

It is not only Aniceto's reminiscences, however, which point up his nostalgic desire for restoration. As he wanders down to the beach in Valparaíso, shortly after having been released from jail, he philosophically ponders the river as it swells and finds its natural destiny in the bluer waters of the sea:

No tienes más remedio que entregarte; ya no puedes devolvarte, desviarte o negarte. Por lo demás, saldrás ganando al echar tus turbias aguas, nacidas, no obstante, tan claras, en esas otras, tan azules, que te esperan (p. 423).

Although Aniceto never makes a conscious association, there is a correlation between himself, the river and the sea. A psychic identification takes place between man and nature, an identification which raises the observations to the level of symbol. It must be understood, however, that this is not an image of suicide, for Aniceto never denies life despite the hardships and never for a minute contemplates self-destruction. Rather it is an image of communion which reinforces his nostalgia for his mother and his family while, at the same time, it foreshadows his friendship with the two vagabonds, since he meets them only moments later on the beach. It is a symbol of his homecoming.

That this friendship is his homecoming is indicated by the correspondence between its gradual growth and the equally progressive healing of his wound. Moreover, as this friendship grows, the flashbacks to Aniceto's boyhood become less frequent until finally the author foregoes them entirely to concentrate on the present. In other words, the new communion is now complete and fills the void left by the old one which had been lost.

The development of the friendship is a gradual one, and the essence of its growth is evoked in numerous poetic passages. It begins with a simple but warm glance from El Filósofo, a glance which "...venía desde más allá del simple ojo" (p. 541). Moments later, the glance turns into a smile "...que le sobraba y de las cuales tendría muchas"

(p. 541). Following this, Aniceto is invited to join them in their search for bits of metal washed up on the shore by the waves of the sea. The money "earned" from selling them is then divided three ways instead of two. Another invitation follows as El Filósofo asks Aniceto to eat with them, and, although their staple is beans, it is significant that they also share bread and wine together. Finally, the friendship is sealed when Aniceto is received into their home as one of them; it is a humble home, to be sure, a dirty room in a conventillo, but it serves as their home nonetheless. The effect of this new-found friendship is life-giving to Aniceto; he reflects that "En ocasiones, sin tener nada, le parece a uno tenerlo todo" (p. 571).

This is no sentimental pap, however, and a simple reading of the text reveals why. There is no denial here of the broken world. Life has been hard for all three and will continue to be so. Cristián is mentally retarded and can neither read nor write. He is even unfit as a thief; on numerous occasions he has been caught and jailed. Without El Filósofo it would be impossible for him to subsist. El Filósofo himself, although intelligent and healthy, is hopelessly in love with a married woman in the conventillo. Knowing that she loves her husband, a good provider despite his sporadic drunkenness, El Filósofo can only respect her marriage. At most, he receives some satisfaction from helping her periodically to get her husband

into bed. Also, the friendship itself among the three vagabonds has cracks in it. Cristián, for example, is hermetic in the extreme. When he apparently gets into a fight the night before they leave Valparaíso and comes home with his face mangled, El Filósofo knows there is nothing he can do to console him. He can only leave Cristián alone to sit silently and spit blood on the floor.

There is, nevertheless, a bond among the three, and, although they still exist in a broken world, the misery, suffering, and absurdity are conquered by brotherhood. The final lines of the novel carry no facile, sentimental optimism, but they do radiate a light of hope. In the end, the three are leaving Valparaíso to work together as house painters. There is some doubt as to whether Cristián will choose to come along:

Quando después de dar unos pasos quise darme vuelta para mirarlo una vez más, Alfonso me advirtió:

--No lo mires y no te apures.

Bajamos paso a paso y cada uno de esos pasos era para nosotros más y más doloroso. Creí, durante un momento, que El Filósofo se detendría y volvería hacia Cristián, pero no lo hizo. Aquello, sin embargo, terminaría pronto: veinte pasos más y llegaríamos al punto en que el camino tomaba hacia abajo, doblando bruscamente; allí perderíamos de vista a Cristián y al conventillo. El grito nos alcanzó allí:

--¡Espérenme!

Era un grito ronco, como de desgarramiento. Nos detuvimos. Cristián avanzó hacia nosotros. Cuando se nos juntó reanudamos la marcha (p. 599).

The ending of Hijo de ladrón, rather than a closing off, is an opening out, a preparation for the sequels which will follow. As Aniceto himself says at one point: "El hombre no se quedará en ninguna parte; se irá siempre" (p. 556). He will be a wanderer in time for as long as he lives because this is his human condition.

The sequel which had been prepared for did follow, although not until seven years later, under the title of Mejor que el vino. The theme of the earlier novel, man's need to overcome his solitude through communion, is reiterated here, but it is now developed entirely around the motif of love and its many subterfuges, hence the title from The Song of Songs. It is Rojas' aim in Mejor que el vino to explore the highly complex and unfathomable phenomenon of the man-woman relationship. True to his task, he offers no romantic view of what in reality is an intricate maze of psychological, physiological, and circumstantial factors. For the most part, these relationships consist of "...miseria y desperdicio, de podrido compromiso, de simulación, de ataque, asalto y difamación..."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the concept that authentic love is an impossibility or at most an illusion, while no doubt it prevails in the majority of instances and permeates the novel, is by no means held to be universal. There is in Mejor que el vino, as in Hijo de ladrón, a contrapuntal breaking through of authentic communion in "...la luz pura y sólida del genuino

amor, realizado en un sentido de profunda fidelidad."<sup>7</sup>

Such moments of authentic love, characterized by fidelity and the humble offering of the self to the other, transcend, at least momentarily, the prevailing atmosphere of debasement. The pattern here, which is essentially that of Hijo de ladrón, is to develop the theme through a series of major variations dramatizing the dynamic flux of human relationships. In this novel, there are four such variations involving Aniceto with as many women. Additionally, in a kind of counterpoint, clustered around these major incidents and serving by contrast or parallel to underscore the particular tone of each, are the lives of numerous minor characters, all of them friends or acquaintances of Aniceto's and all of them somehow involved, and in many cases entangled, in a love relationship.

The first of the major variations on Aniceto's quest for fulfillment in love involves him with an actress named Virginia whom he met while working in an itinerant theater troupe playing in Buenos Aires. That the affair has its origins in adulterated compromise, deception, and self-interest can be gathered from the less than sincere motives of each. Virginia chooses to live with Aniceto in order to escape from a violent, jealous, and often drunken husband who used her primarily for the satisfaction of his biological urges. She is interested in Aniceto not as a person, and not for himself, but as a means of escape. If the latter's

own motives appear slightly less selfish, it is only because they are thoroughly confused in a labyrinth of psychological ambiguity. Undoubtedly, his pressing need is for communion, but it is by no means clear to him why he wants to enter into a relationship with this particular woman. It is conceivable even in his own mind that he wants her available to him at all times to facilitate the satisfaction of his sexual exigencies. Furthermore, he feels a need to prove to himself that he is really a man, for on one occasion, while pondering his timidity, he momentarily questions his heterosexuality. Love, it would appear, does not enter his mind, although he is not unconscious of a certain gallantry within himself, an altruistic feeling based on pity for Virginia and the suffering she has known with her husband.

Such motives, while certainly complex enough, are not the only factors operating against them. The deep-seated incompatibility of their individual temperaments, which is not long in manifesting itself, leads progressively to an agonizing state of frustration. Because of her past experience, Virginia is sexually frigid, unable to divorce from her mind the idea that all men must necessarily use women for sexually selfish reasons. To complicate matters, Aniceto, who has had experience only with prostitutes, is nervous and awkward in initiating the sexual act and paradoxically it is she who must encourage him. In addition



to their sexual difficulties, they have very little in common. Although Virginia, in the beginning at least, makes a pretense at feeling tenderness toward him, Aniceto realizes that she has no real interest in him and that there can be no hope of a spiritual encounter between them. Their relationship succeeds only in driving them both, but especially Aniceto, into an almost neurotic preoccupation with self.

It is not difficult to see why their life would degenerate into a drab and pointless routine. Aniceto, particularly, moves in a cyclical rut as he fights crowds on the trolley on his way to work, sweats all day at the linotype machine, talks ad nauseam with his fellow workers, and in the evening returns home in a state of near exhaustion, too tired to utter a single word to Virginia. It is not long before even the pretense breaks down; Virginia, who is obviously bored, begins to leave him for long periods of time, and he must ultimately return to prostitutes. In the end, he is left alone, longing for the fulfillment he lacks: "¿Cuándo podría ya conocer todo aquello, que parecía hacerle falta, como si fuera algo indispensable para él, una parte de sí mismo que algún día debería incorporarse a él?" (p. 685).

Dovetailing with the Virginia affair, and in sharp contrast to it, is the novel's second principal variation which deals with Aniceto's courtship and marriage to

María Luisa, a primary school teacher whom he had met briefly many years before. His second encounter with her, although by chance, is more significant than the first and, coming as it does during the waning days with Virginia, finds him when his need for communion is most acute. His feelings for María Luisa are at once shrouded in mystery, a mystery which undoubtedly has some nexus with an almost subconscious recollection of her as a girl and with a certain pity he feels for her now, since her sweetheart has recently died from tuberculosis. It is important to note here, however, that sexual undercurrents, so manifest in the initial stages of the Virginia affair, play no motivating role, since María Luisa is not at all sensuous to his eye. Instead, what attracts him is something ineffable, something he can not explain, which seems to emanate from the deepest regions of her being.

The gestation of their love is also mysterious as it seems to grow quite apart from their conscious understanding of it. Aniceto's own verses, which he composes in an attempt to articulate the meaning of his love, can not hope to transform into words what he so deeply feels for her. His images of her as an "ídolo chino," a "marchita rosa," and a "tór-tola herida" fall pitifully short of expressing what he knows in his heart to be her personal reality. Beyond their rational understanding, then, this inscrutable bond between them freely follows an undirected and spontaneous

course. One day--and as he reflects back on it, he can not remember how or when it happened--, Aniceto finds her in his arms "...y él la besó y encontró que sus besos eran bastante buenos, siempre mejores que el vino" (p. 715).

To be sure, although love, fidelity, and mutual respect have grown from the very beginning, there are difficulties to overcome. Aniceto is still the same essentially timid and uncommunicative person he has always been. Shortly after meeting her, for example, María Luisa saw him with Virginia. Fearful of losing her, Aniceto lied to her, explaining that Virginia was the sickly wife of a close friend. Later, when Virginia had left him, he was too ashamed to admit that he had lied and consequently allowed the deceit to be perpetrated in María Luisa's mind. Even so, when she discovers the truth through another, her own profound understanding of Aniceto and her forgiving nature serve only to deepen the communion between them. Yet Aniceto is never able to overcome completely his hermiticism; he could neither tell María Luisa of Virginia's frigidity nor of his return, during the latter's absences, to prostitutes. Most of all, he could not reveal the fact that he and Virginia had slept together like two strangers forced into the same bed. Nevertheless, María Luisa holds out the hope that as time passes he will ultimately share more and more of his inner self.

When their total commitment to each other is formalized in marriage, sexual love takes on a completely new and profound meaning for Aniceto:

...la desfloraste como uno de esos capullos cuyos sépalos suele abrir el jardinero, con sumo cuidado, para saber de qué color son los pétalos y si ya, antes de florecer, el perfume está allí, sin que nunca se haya sabido en dónde está, y cómo, en la alta y oscura noche de los amantes, te trascendiste en ella y ella se trascendió en tí, y supiste, desde ese momento, que entre tú y ella existiría para siempre un secreto que no podría decirse con palabras, sino de susurros, un secreto, sin embargo, que te ataría a ella y le ataría a ella a tí (p. 724).

Furthermore, their growing love is reflected in her pregnancy:

...había allí, bajo tu mano, dentro del tibio y blanco y redondo e hinchado vientre, que tanto amabas, algo inquietante, sordo, invisible, moviéndose, revolviéndose, ...pugnando como la semilla en trance de brotar...una voz desconocida, una voz nueva, de alguien que no había entrado antes en la pieza, resonaba en los oídos de todos: ...y te acercaste a ella y rompiste en llanto (p. 725).

Two more children follow, a son and another daughter, as the years are full and fruitful. At the same time they are not easy ones. There are the usual sicknesses, economic worries, and the tragedy of a necessary abortion. Yet their love never fails, even in times of trial.

It would seem that Aniceto has reached the pinnacle in this truly mutual relationship. And so he has. But he is still the son of a thief, seemingly condemned throughout his life to pay either with his freedom or his tears: "cuando ya pensabas que a pesar de todo saldrías

adelante, ella murió" (p. 727). Nothing in his broken world remains for always; everything in its dynamic flux eventually turns to dust. The death of María Luisa, then, becomes one more absurd event in a life which has been, and will continue to be, an inexorable chain of absurdities. Nevertheless, he knows that he must survive; "...podrá resistir, ...deberá resistir. Su vida ha sido despedazado. No es la primera vez. La vivirá así. No tiene otra" (p. 689).

From his most sublime moment, Aniceto is plunged to his lowest depths as he now moves into a simultaneous relationship with two women, a prostitute named Flor Cedrón, and a young woman, Jimena, with whom he attempts to establish a communion similar to the one he had known with María Luisa. With the former, the arrangement is entirely non-committal, an unspoken agreement based solely on their common need for the physical proximity of the opposite sex. The barriers between them are insurmountable as everything operates against an authenticity based on a truly interpersonal relationship. Aniceto had met her at a brothel party where all the men were accompanied by prostitutes; since Flor was the only one left, he had no choice but to take her. During the evening, it seemed hypocritical to him--as indeed it was--the way the men pretended to be having a good time, whereas they were only concerned with taking the girls to bed as soon as possible.

Later, when he was alone with Flor, Aniceto was further disheartened by her mechanical act of washing herself and the bluntness of her words, "Me voy a acostar" (p. 757). Subsequent bedroom scenes are no less cold, impersonal, and uncommunicative. Two or three words at most pass between them as Aniceto, his mind on Jimena, smokes one cigaret after another while Flor lies silently with her back to him, staring blankly at the wall. Even the objective, matter-of-fact description in a subsequent chapter of the brothel and of Flor's practical business sense--she seems to have assumed a more masculine role than Aniceto--emphasizes the hollowness of their feelings.

With Jimena things are not any better. At most, because of the simultaneous relationship, Aniceto's situation is ambiguous. Communication is blunted and communion is hopeless primarily because they are not honest with each other. Indeed, their relationship is quite the opposite of communion as it takes on the characteristics of a duel. Because of Aniceto's silence, Jimena suspects he desires her only in a sexual way, a not altogether groundless suspicion. Such a lack of communication has its culmination when, on what is to be their second night together, Jimena reveals to him that she is in the middle of her menstrual period. Her final reply to him, after he persists in asking her to marry him, is less than kind, but if the words shock him, it is only because he never

really understood her character:

Mira: no quiero casarme contigo por varios motivos. En primer lugar, por tu carácter, que no me gusta; en seguida, porque tienes hijos; no sería capaz de soportarlos ni de hacer que ellos soportaran a mí; finalmente, no quiero casarme contigo porque debería sacrificar todas las esperanzas y deseos que tengo, viajar, dedicarme a algo, llegar a ser algo; contigo no sería más que tu mujer, tendría dos o tres hijos y ahí terminaría todo.... Para mí el matrimonio es mucho más delicado que el amor... Eso es todo (p. 790).

At the end of the novel, then, Aniceto is back where he began--with nothing. And yet, despite this, and despite the fact that he is now middle-aged with nothing to show, he is not broken in spirit: "Estoy como empecé, sin nada, y el otoño ha entrado en mí. Pero los picaflores suelen volver en el otoño" (p. 791). He seems to realize that fulfillment is not given but that it is rather up to the existing human being to be forever seeking it anew, always mindful of the risks involved, as he travels along the road to authentic being.

Such is the nature of Aniceto's search for fulfillment. As mentioned earlier, his love affairs represent the bulk of the novel and constitute major variations on the same theme. There are also, however, contrapuntal minor variations involving less significant man-woman relationships which sometimes run parallel with the major ones or offer a contrast to them.

Obliquely related to the Virginia affair are numerous such minor stories. The actress, Blanca, for example, had been sold into prostitution by her parents; when Aniceto meets her, although she is married to one of the actors in the troupe, she continues to work in the evenings at a brothel. In a mock-romantic story, Enrique Gallardo, another of Aniceto's acquaintances, tells how he had rescued his present wife from her overly strict parents; Aniceto sees her now, however, victimized by the more mundane task of caring for her husband and six young children. Benito Roas, an ardent union leader and Utopian revolutionary, is supported by a wife who works herself to death as a laundress. And finally, Aniceto's own brother, Daniel, lives an emotionally barren life with a sickly wife. All of these relationships, by their failure, parallel Aniceto's experiences with Virginia.

In the last part of the novel, the existential emptiness of Aniceto's relationships with Flor and Jimena is projected against a contrasting account of the growth of a genuine love between two others. This rather lengthy story, comprising about one half of the whole last part, concerns Aida, a young prostitute who works for Flor, and Octavio, a seventy-year-old widower. Their eventual love grows out of a paradox. They meet entirely by chance through a telephone conversation resulting from crossed



wires. Moreover, their friendship begins with a lie when Afda tells Octavio that she is a student in Santiago living with an aunt. As their relationship develops, however, and Octavio learns the truth, a mutual pity stemming from the lie begins to bind them together in a more emotional way. Eventually, as they see more and more of each other, what began as pity evolves into an authentically spiritual love. As they begin to find transcendence in each other, Aniceto's own search for transcendence is carrying him in the opposite direction when, after losing Jimena, he becomes more and more a prisoner of himself.

Whereas the Virginia, Flor, and Jimena episodes are counterpointed by lesser stories in the manner described above, the account of Aniceto's courtship and marriage to Marfa Luisa stands by itself. Indeed, support of the kind outlined above would most likely have blurred its illuminating qualities. Rather it is allowed to radiate greater intensity by contrast with the previous Virginia affair and the subsequent Flor-Jimena incidents.

The contrapuntal structure of Mejor que el vino, which at times pushes Aniceto into the background, becomes more radical in the last novel of the trilogy, Sombras contra el muro, published five years later. In this novel, it is often difficult to locate Aniceto among the multitude of characters and numerous episodes which make up the book.

In terms of the protagonist's life, Sombras contra el muro is a flashback, taking up where Hijo de ladrón left off and advancing in time to where Mejor que el vino begins. Like the other two novels, it develops further the theme of man's attempt to overcome fractional existence by participating in being through some kind of community relationship. In Sombras contra el muro, reintegration is sought through participation in a collective social movement. More specifically, the novel depicts Aniceto's experiences as a young man involved in the international anarchist movement in Santiago and Valparaíso around the year 1915. Rojas is content, however, to concentrate on the human implications of such "unification" and avoids analyzing the movement's broader historical and political implications.

In Sombras contra el muro, the theme is developed kaleidoscopically from a panoramic vantage point, Aniceto serving not as the protagonist but rather as a central axis, an observer around whom the many characters and events revolve. The author's approach is ironic and satirical as the group is shown to be unified only to the extent that they have in common the vague dream of obtaining something more in the future than they have at the present. In reality, they are not a group at all, being flung apart by the centrifugal force of their actions, ideas, and motives. Again, as in the other novels, while absurdity, contradiction, and fragmentation abound, there are

intermittent manifestations of human brotherhood which flicker in the darkness.

Serving as a catalyst for the anarchists' action are the deplorable living conditions of the metropolis. Aniceto is particularly distressed by the utter deterioration of one slum district. It is a squalid garbage heap, filled with dirty bars and brothels, a likely place for a man to pick up lice, the mange, or venereal disease: "...aquí vomitó alguien, otro orinó, un desesperado hizo algo peor."<sup>8</sup> In another section, he observes dead dogs and cats, which no one bothers to bury, slowly decaying in the streets. Here, in the squalor of cités and conventillos, live most of Aniceto's friends.

Conditions like these, brought about by the increased birth rate and the mass migrations from the rural areas, breed crime and revolt. What is worse, the judicial structure and the law enforcement agencies, unable to cope fairly with the problem, can only perpetrate injustice. Cristián, Aniceto's friend from Hijo de ladrón, is shot through the head by the police, causing El Filósofo to lament the loss of a human being. In another episode, two of Aniceto's friends are picked up by the police and charged with disturbing the peace. In reality, they had only been singing in the park. Aniceto himself was arrested and jailed overnight on one occasion just for looking suspicious; he comments that those who are jailed for breaking

the law in most cases have broken a law "...según el criterio de sus aprehensores" (p. 94).

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the reasons for the anarchists' revolt. On the other hand, their scheme to rebuild society contains the seeds of its own destruction in the wooly rhetoric of their creed:

...el anarquismo, el ideal y el sueño de los hombres libres, sin gobierno, sin religión, sin ejército, sin policía, el apoyo mutuo, la conquista del pan, así hablaba Zaratustra, la sociedad futura, la Revolución, sí, la Revolución, la huelga general, la Grande, abolición de la propiedad, socialización de los medios de producción, el amor libre, el libre albedrío, parecía un sueño... (pp. 27-28).

And so it goes, inarticulate, incoherent, only half digested by all of them, but above all, impractical. These ideas, for the most part negative, serve only to intensify the chaos and injustice they were meant to overcome. Any attempt to implement them, rather than bringing men together, separates them all the more.

To speak of the implementation of the ideas is to speak of the characters of the novel. Numerous as they are--and it would be pointless to discuss them all--, they fall roughly into four principal categories: the artists and intellectuals; the non-intellectual idealists; the self-seekers; and the positive workers.

The artists and intellectuals are the embodiment of the pure ideas themselves. To be sure, these individuals

are aware of the suffering and misery all about them, but they live, nonetheless, with their heads in the foggy clouds of theory. Their efforts at practical solutions to the human condition are pathetically absurd. Filin, a myopic painter--and his myopia seems to be appropriately symbolic--, is particularly cut off from concrete reality. He reads only the most abstract and theoretical anarchist tracts, but his most visible effort to apply them is the feeble attempt to learn and teach Esperanto. Antonio, a would-be playwright who would like to put the roto and the peasant on the stage, is possessed by the burning desire to establish a writers' colony in the mountains where they could commune with nature; yet he continually falls short of his ideal because "...siempre faltaban hachas, tres hachas, ¿qué hace un leñador o un carbonero sin su hacha?" (p. 30). And Daniel, a man with no formal education himself, starts a school for adults; he plans to teach himself as well as the class. Daniel, however, is run down and killed one night by a train, too engrossed in his mystical meditations on the egg, a symbol in his mind of the genesis of the new humanity, to notice that he was walking on the railroad tracks.

If the artists and intellectuals are harmless, albeit quixotic, their non-intellectual counterparts find their outlet for the most part in violent acts of destruction. While potentially more dangerous, they are no less ludicrous.

Voltaire, for example, bombs a church, leaving the Virgin with no clothes on her body and the child Jesus "...bizco y con el poto pelado" (p. 184). In an "heroic" act, Miguel Briones holds up a defenseless middle-class gentleman carrying the payroll for a local bakery and is forthwith captured by the police. The shoemaker, Pinto, sits quietly and dreams of the glory of the coming Utopia; while he perpetrates no violence, his dreams are no more than barren fantasies.

But whether they are intellectuals or not, the true idealists are in the minority. Far more numerous are the anarchists who are motivated by self-interest. For the most part, they belong to Alberto's gang and hold the belief that bourgeois society can best be attacked by assaulting bourgeois banks. Yet never quite getting around to such a big order, their most daring criminal act is the less spectacular robbery of a hat shop. Rojas' irony is again evident in the disparity shown between their grandiose plans and the actual, rather nonsensical, assault of the hat shop. The characters involved here are as ridiculous as the robbery. Alberto, their leader, has a Narcissus complex about his physique, symbolic perhaps of the whole group's self-interest. His professed adherence to anarchist ideals is little more than a psychological rebellion against a complacent middle-class father and an indifferent mother. Although as leader he desires the

admiration of the others, when the time comes to plan and carry out the robbery, he yields his position to a professional thief alongside whom he looks extremely naive. A more ludicrous figure is Emilio Cáceres, alias El Chambecco, who is the physical opposite of Alberto: "...cuando se movía a cierta velocidad sus carnes, que se agitaban con frenesí, amenazaban desprenderse de su cuerpo y correr a la par de él" (p. 68). In his effort to avoid work and at the same time eat, he goes about the city checking for unlocked doors; yet he exhausts himself in this way more than if he had worked all day at a job. His innate cowardice is revealed in a particularly amusing scene during the robbery; in his fear, he feels the need to defecate and proceeds to drive his comrades out of the store with the prodigious odor.

Not all of those whose motives stem from self-interest belong to Alberto's gang. El Checo considers work humiliating and prefers to steal or simply live off his sister. Pepín is able to earn a substantial profit from his work as an arsonist by sharing in the insurance money with the bourgeois proprietors of the establishments he burns. But the Frenchman, René, a thief with an exaggerated sense of hauteur, is perhaps the most ridiculous of all. When some years ago he was in need of some quick money, he decided to turn to robbery. Considering himself a man of

distinction, he concluded that it would have to be a crime of some grandeur. In an ingenious undertaking, he stole a Velázquez original from a Santiago museum only to discover later, much to his dismay, that there was no market for it in Chile. Incapable of destroying such a beautiful objet d'art, he saw himself obliged to return it, an undertaking almost as ingenious as the robbery.

Although very few of the anarchists work in a positive way to advance their cause, there are some individuals who come forth from time to time with the genuine acts of brotherhood which contrast sharply with the chaos and stupidity around them. If they have any concrete traits in common, they are respect for honest work and a concern for the dignity of the individual person. Aniceto, of course, is always willing to work and attaches more importance to the personal relationships he is able to establish than to the abstract anarchist creeds. Two other characters also stand out in this regard. The first is the barber, Teodoro, a practical man who owns his own shop and caters to a regular clientele. He is very much disillusioned with those of his friends who belong to Alberto's gang. He is sure they are not honest anarchists because "...no quieren trabajar y ...se buscan alguna manera fácil y chueca de ganarse los porotos: estafadores, cuenteros o simplemente ladrones" (p. 143). In one incident especially, Teodoro demonstrates his inherent sense of



values. When little Rodolfito's father dies and his mother runs off the day after the funeral with another man, Teodoro takes the boy into his care until he is able to find him a permanent home. Like Teodoro, Eriones, too, is a steady worker and a man of charity. He even mixes a little Christianity with his anarchism: "...el deber del anarquista es vivir honestamente, dar el ejemplo, en fin, ser un poco cristiano" (p. 188). His advice to his younger brother, Miguel, to avoid violence and those who advocate it, although it is given in vain, indicates that he considers himself his brother's keeper.

These, then, are the many faces of anarchism in Sombras contra el muro. It is an anarchism which fails at every turn in its plan to bring about a human community. In the words of one of Aniceto's friends, words which echo in his mind at the end of the novel, nothing has been accomplished: "¿Nú crees que todo se ha arreglado? No, no se ha arreglado nada" (p. 230). Aniceto has the feeling that they are bumping up against an impenetrable wall:

...muy alto, como el de los Lamentos o como los de Jericó, ... , un muro que no se podía penetrar ni subir y ante el cual no hacían más que hablar, gritar, llorar y morir; detrás del muro existía una posibilidad de amor, de justicia, de abundancia, de paz, pero miles de individuos, acompañados de sus sirvientes, estaban en lo alto, y aunque no disfrutaban sino guiñapos de aquella posibilidad, guiñapos con dientes y uñas, impedían que nadie

entrara o subiera. Había que buscar y encontrar armas más finas y más poderosas que las palabras y el llanto para subir o penetrar el muro (pp.230-231).

Implied here, it would seem, is the idea that human brotherhood must be built upon the inner reform of the individual both inside and outside the ranks of anarchism.

Sombras contra el muro, when compared to the other two works of the trilogy, is decidedly inferior. The most obvious reason for this is that Rojas has failed to probe beneath the surface of the experiences he is depicting. It will be recalled from his own comments, which he made regarding his method in Hijo de ladrón, that in the process of writing that novel he discovered that he examined phenomena in a different light from his earlier works. What the difference amounted to was his penetration into the poetic essence of experience whereas before he had merely described people and action on the surface. In view of this, Sombras contra el muro is a regression, for once again Rojas is on the surface of character and action, making little effort to record the complex emotional atmosphere in which the characters' experiences take place. There is nothing in this novel, for example, which can begin to compare with the sheer poetry of the friendship between Aniceto and El Filósofo in Hijo de ladrón. Perhaps the failure is inherent in the technique Rojas has chosen. By spreading himself too thin over so many characters and incidents,

he has necessarily been superficial. The result is that the authentic feeling for life, so evident in the other novels, can be found here only on rare occasions,

Having discussed in detail the content of the three novels, a few words about the character of Aniceto are in order. Any impression left by the above discussion that the trilogy is a character biography, in the manner, say, of Eduardo Barrios' Un perdido, has been entirely unintentional and should be dispelled. The emphasis in Rojas' novels is entirely different. It was Barrios' purpose to develop a personality from certain psychological determinants. It is entirely possible for the critic to explain the why and wherefore of Lucho Bernales. He is made up of a combination of observable character traits combined with an equally observable temperament. This temperament may be said to have been determined by his childhood environment and to some extent by his heredity. Within this framework, then, he develops certain traits which are gathered together by the author into certain habit patterns which in turn make up his personality.

Whereas Un perdido is psychologically oriented within a Naturalistic framework, Rojas' trilogy may be said to be existentially oriented. What the reader encounters in Aniceto Hevia is not a personality exposed or available for his analysis. Rather we witness a being searching for the meaning of his existence. Aniceto's personality is never

laid bare before our eyes. The minute we have traits exposed, we have an "object" we can observe and pin down. This, it would seem, is what Rojas tried to avoid. To some extent, Aniceto's character reflects the crisis of self-identity so much in evidence in contemporary literature. Compared to Lucho Bernalés, he is difficult to identify. Even he himself in Hijo de ladrón is unable to present us with a clear picture. And in Mejor que el vino, he is presented by the author in a blurred manner through ever-shifting states of consciousness and moods. The only constants in his make-up are his timidity, his lack of will, and his sensitivity.

In his temperament, Aniceto is manifestly timid. However, hereditary and environmental factors are nowhere explicit. One might attribute it to the protection given him from the world by his mother as revealed in Hijo de ladrón. In any case, his timidity is evident in his introverted nature; he is generally the observer rather than the participant. It is El Filósofo who takes the initiative in the establishment of their friendship, and in each of his love affairs he is handicapped by his tendency to withdraw into himself. Name the incident and it will always be evident that it is the other person who opens himself first to Aniceto. Then and only then is he able to offer himself in return.

Undoubtedly related to his timidity is his lack of will. In every situation in which he finds himself, he acts passively, indeed, at times paralytically. He is moved about by the forces of circumstances and carried along willy-nilly not to any logical conclusion but simply to another experience. Rarely if ever does he stop to analyze what an experience means to him in rational terms. Quite the contrary, he has little intellectual understanding of any of his experiences. Throughout Mejor que el vino, such phrases as "Aniceto no sabe cómo" or "Sin saber cómo" underscore this lack of comprehension. It is significant, too, that this characteristic is brought to light in the very first paragraph of Hijo de ladrón: "¿Cómo y por qué llegué hasta allí? Por los mismos motivos por los que he llegado a tantas partes. Es una historia larga y, lo que es peor, confusa" (p. 379). Finally, his passivity can be seen in the stoical tone in which he relates the events of Hijo de ladrón. One might possibly note a hint of rebellion in the irony with which he sometimes views his experiences. Nevertheless, even here it would not be wrong to say that he is mostly unconscious of the fact that he is being ironic.

At all times, Aniceto is a man who approaches his experience through feeling and intuition rather than through logic or reason. This is true whether it be in terms of people, places, or ideas. It is most clear in his

sensitivity. Above all, he is sensitive to people; he has a desire to feel intimacy with others. Unlike Juan Pablo Castel in Ernesto Sábato's El túnel, whose hyper-rational approach to other people only resulted in his total alienation, Aniceto is often able to participate in the being of others. Such participation is always achieved, when it is achieved--there are many times when Aniceto, too, feels isolation--, by a kind of mysterious intuition which is inexplicable in rational terms.

In addition to his sensitivity toward people, Aniceto is also sensitive to the landscape and, in a broader sense, to his surroundings whatever they may be. Landscape is never, for example, presented as pure background but is psychically related to the character. It becomes part of him through emotional and psychological associations. The following passage taken from Mejor que el vino clearly illustrates this point. Aniceto is observing a familiar portion of the Cordillera as he crosses the Andes by train into Chile:

...mira desde el tren cada roca y cada torrente, cada río, los precipicios, los senderos de mulas, los caminos. Anduvo mucho por ahí, hace algunos años, no a caballo ni en tren sino a pie, y todo le es tan conocido como sus manos, no sólo el paisaje, que ya está en él, sino además las sensaciones que produce, de día, de noche, de la tarde, en el amanecer, en invierno, en verano. Podría bajar y echar a andar hacia cualquier parte, trepar o descender... Sí, todo aquello le es

conocido; no sólo lo ha visto, lo ha vivido, y el hecho de haberlo vivido es lo que da a su cuerpo y a su mente, en relación con ello, una resuelta seguridad (p. 694).

Numerous other examples could be cited. In Hijo de ladrón, the sea seems mysteriously to participate in the friendship that is being established on its shore; the vast reaches of white snow in the Andes is integrally tied up with Aniceto's feelings of solitude; and finally, the sun and the wind, the sea and the sky have the same effect on him when he is released from jail.

It is this predominance of the emotional over the intellectual in the character of Aniceto which has prompted some critics, oriented perhaps toward a nineteenth century concept of characterization, to berate Rojas for creating a character who lacks color, tone, and personality. To an extent, they are correct in their criticism; Aniceto has no ideas to give him substance, no will to give him magnetism, no external description to give him body; he is an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of emotions, moods, and sensations, and more often than not he is overwhelmed by his surroundings. Yet he can only be what he is, and Rojas can not make him other than he is. It is at least part of the author's message that men like Aniceto exist, suffer, feel, and search for themselves, if not rationally at least emotionally, in a baffling sea of experience.

Since Aniceto's character is by no means magnetic, Rojas seeks other ways to draw us near to him. He does this primarily through narrative viewpoints designed to establish a feeling on the part of the reader of intimacy and participation. Hijo de ladrón, for instance, is written entirely in the first person. In this way, the reader participates directly in Aniceto's attitudes toward people and events, in his different moods, fears, and astonishments, and, most importantly perhaps, in the innocently ironic way in which he views many of the events of his life. In Mejor que el vino, although Rojas switches the viewpoint from Aniceto himself to the third person (omniscient narrator), he does not assume an aloof and objective distance from his character. Rather he tries to get as close to Aniceto as possible within the framework of the narrative convention. Although he writes in the third person, what Rojas really does is let the reader in on Aniceto's interior monologues by following, even in his sentence structure, the ever-changing course of his feelings, moods, thoughts, and sense perceptions. These interior monologues, nevertheless, are always on the conscious level of Aniceto's mind and never descend, in a Joycean manner, to the deeper levels of the subconscious. At times, in order to achieve an even greater intimacy with the character, Rojas will switch to the second person tú. Usually this occurs when he is dealing with the more emotional experiences in



Aniceto's life and it often creates a rhapsodic effect. Rojas had experimented with this viewpoint earlier in Hijo de ladrón when he had Aniceto give a discourse on his wound. All in all, if it is not overused, it has the effect of establishing a bond with the reader.

The closeness of the reader to the protagonist, although it achieves the desired intimacy, precludes our seeing the character clearly and objectively. But then this seems to be the effect Rojas wishes to create. The minor characters, on the other hand, are observed from without and are much less complex. The more integral secondary characters like El Filósofo, Aniceto's mother, the women in his life, and the anarchists in Sombras contra el muro, like the characters in the short stories, are one-dimensional. Doña Rosalía may be summed up as faithful and self-sacrificing; Virginia is sexually frigid and self-centered; El Filósofo is a prolix vagsbond constructed around a paradox--a kind of tramp-philosopher. Often, as is the case with the ugly El Azarcón, the minor characters are physically described in some detail. On other occasions, as in the case of Aniceto's picaresque friend with the turtles, they are sharply delineated through their actions (this character especially contrasts with Aniceto by the fact that he has a strong will and to an extent creates his circumstances). Still others are presented by means of character synopses.

Octavio and Flor both relate their past to the reader through soliloquies, silent interior monologues which by their coherence seem to assume some sort of audience. Jimena similarly is revealed by means of entries in her diary. Finally, in Sombras contra el muro, reference to a character's past is handled through kaleidoscopes which are only syntactically different from the more traditional device of narrative exposition. In the last analysis, however, it is questionable whether the narration of a character's past is really sufficient for good characterizations. It would seem that Rojas relies too heavily on it, and the result is that at times the reader has the impression that he is simply alluding to characters.

Important in the presentation of all the characters, including Aniceto, is the author's benevolent, and at times pathetic, irony. He is a master at bringing out the ridiculous in their situation. Nevertheless, there is at times an aesthetic dilemma here, especially in Mejor que el vino, which is not quite resolved. In this novel, Rojas is so close to Aniceto that it is sometimes difficult to discern whether the irony is meant to stem from Aniceto's view of things and himself or whether it is the author viewing his character with tongue in cheek. The reader should be willing to accept any tone an author may choose to select, even a coherent and meaningful mixture of tones; but when the author inconsistently changes his tone, thereby

sacrificing coherence, it can only result in confusion and is nothing less than disturbing to the reader.

In the discussion of the characters and the techniques employed to present them, reference was made to the structure of the novels in general. Perhaps it is in matters of structure that Rojas has departed most radically from his earlier works. In all three novels, the structural techniques used are designed to jar the reader out of any complacent or comfortable view of reality that he may hold in order to focus his attention on the human condition viewed as anarchic, incoherent, and always in flux. In Hijo de ladrón, the course is that of Aniceto's memory as it wanders over past experiences:

...nunca he podido pensar como pudiera hacerlo un metro...; y mi memoria no es mucho mejor: salta de un hecho a otro y toma a veces los que aparecen primero, volviendo sobre sus pasos sólo cuando los otros, más perezosos o densos, empiezan a surgir a su vez desde el fondo de la vida pasada (p. 379).

In Mejor que el vino, although it is third person narration, much of the novel follows the same course of psychological association. The last novel, Sombras contra el muro, which gives us a picture of the confusion of anarchism, is entirely arbitrary in the selection of the sequence of what are at most very loosely connected events.

In the development of the main action (everything directly related to Aniceto), there is a calculated effort

on Rojas' part to avoid as much as possible any chronological progression. There are numerous spatial and temporal displacements without any of the traditional transition devices. Such displacements are at times quite jarring and require no little perspicacity on the part of the reader to orient himself. The narrative pace, too, undergoes abrupt changes. Many incidents may be passed over with dizzying speed, years may be telescoped into a single chapter, whereas other incidents may be taken up in their most minute details. Moreover, there is often an inner projection, a viewing of things from an extremely subjective perspective. Yet while interior monologues are often used, Rojas is never so extreme in the distorting of reality as the more surrealist writers like, say, Agustín Yáñez or Alejo Carpentier.

Many of the most jarring displacements involve changes in character focal point. Such changes often give the somewhat cubistic effect of fragmentation. Indeed, at times these focal points change with such rapidity, especially in Sombras contra el muro, that a giddy kaleidoscopic impression results. In this latter novel, the focal point in Chapter One is changed as many as nineteen times within the confines of forty pages.

Finally, it has already been suggested that the central action may be interrupted by seemingly unrelated side stories. These, too, contribute to the general effect of

fragmentation in addition to slowing down the pace of the novel. In Hijo de ladrón, there are three of them: the story of the police detective, Victoriano Ruiz; an account of the life of Aniceto's vagabond friend with the turtles, an interpolated picaresque novel; and the shorter story of El Filósofo's relationship with the woman in the conventillo. Mejor que el vino has many more, and they will be recalled from the earlier discussion of that novel.

But in Sombras contra el muro--in each succeeding novel, the device becomes progressively more radical--, Rojas seems to be aware of the fact that Aniceto can no longer sustain the narrative, for the entire novel is lacking in any central character or action, the composition being made up of loosely connected side stories. Perhaps it is incorrect even to refer to them as side stories in this case, since many of them are simply fragments of stories stuck together as in a shattered mosaic.

While the above devices create in the three novels a feeling of fragmentation, in Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino, Rojas makes an effort to give a tighter unity to the smaller units within the whole. Various devices are used to give the individual chapters a greater unity than they would otherwise have. The most common is the framing of a chapter by means of variations on a single phrase. The chapter summarizing Aniceto's barren years with

Virginia, for example, begins with "...el amor...no se toma gratis (p. 704) and ends with "Sí, no te lo darán gratis" (p. 707). Another common device is the use of the leit-motif. The chapter in Mejor que el vino describing a rather tedious birthday party at Flor's brothel repeats variations at spaced intervals on the following dialogue:

--¿Quiere Ud. otro sandwich?  
 --Gracias, no; ya he comido tres.  
 --¿Un traguito de ponche?  
 --No; prefiero un poco de vino; el ponche está demasiado dulce.  
 --¿Tinto o blanco el vino?  
 --Prefiero el tinto, gracias (p. 777).

The repetition of such banalities, in addition to reinforcing the structure of the chapter, points up the utter lack of human warmth in their party; it takes on all the trappings of a meaningless ritual. Another instance of the use of this device occurs as Aniceto is lying in bed with Flor. This chapter is punctuated throughout by Flor's words: "¿Por qué me hablas tanto de esa mujer?" (p. 739). Finally, the side stories within the larger whole of each novel are given a tight unity through a rigid chronology which contrasts radically with the absolute lack of chronology of the greater structure. Such smaller units, blocked out within the larger whole, also suggest certain superficial similarities with cubistic painting.

A final word on structure must deal with the unity of the trilogy itself. Although it is true that each of

the novels is independent of the others, it is also true that each complements the others and that together they comprise a unit, a kind of roman fleuve. Beyond the fact that Aniceto appears in each of them, they are given a greater unity through allusions to previous events and through recurring characters. Hijo de ladrón alludes to each of the sequels by mention of Aniceto's sexual inexperience and anarchists. In Mejor que el vino, there are many allusions to Aniceto's earlier experiences in the first novel, characters who have disappeared now reappear-- Daniel, his brother and Patricio Reyes, the anonymous vagabond with the turtles--, and themes suggested earlier are expanded. Finally, Sombras contra el muro is linked with Mejor que el vino toward the end when Aniceto joins an acting troupe, the same troupe in which he will meet Virginia. At the beginning of this novel, the recurrence of the characters of El Filósofo and Cristián ties it to Hijo de ladrón.

The over-all structural design of the trilogy is more akin to music than to architecture. That is, themes are suggested, dropped, picked up again later and developed, fused with others, counterpointed, while all the time new themes are emerging from the old. The structure, in short, is expansive rather than intensive; it is slow-moving, anti-climactic, anti-dramatic, capturing in this way the insignificant minutiae which make up the experience of the son

of a thief. It must always be remembered, however, that in spite of the insignificance of his life, he is portrayed as possessing human dignity, a dignity stemming from Rojas' reverence for human life no matter how humble the person. This, after all, is Rojas' message--that human dignity must ever be proclaimed against the countless forces in a broken world which are seemingly bent on obliterating it.

The tedious, ponderous rhythm, so typical of the novels' structure, is reflected also in Rojas' style. To be sure, the slow, involved sentence has always been a favorite of his, even in his short stories. Here, however, the syntax becomes infinitely more complex, especially in those instances when Aniceto becomes introspective. In Hijo de ladrón, his discourse on the wound is an excellent example. Later, in Mejor que el vino, the style at times becomes Proustian as the flow of Aniceto's thoughts are followed through interior monologue. The tela in the following example refers to his memory:

Hay instantes en que sobre esa tela, apretada o suelta, o sobre ese borde, recto o dentado, aparecen figuras de cosas y de personas, árboles, casas, montañas, playas, un río, un hombre, una mujer, un niño--todo en blanco y negro (quién sabe si los pintores los ven con sus propios amarillos, rojos, azules o verdes)--, y la mirada del hombre que piensa, esa mirada interna, las ve y no sabe si él mismo las ha sacado de alguna parte que ignora o si han aparecido de modo espontáneo, con una vida propia, independiente de la suya, con una fuerza propia que las empuja hacia arriba y después las lleva hacia abajo o hacia el lado, hasta que desaparecen (pp. 777-778).



Rojas' style reflects, too, the same concern for contrast and change of pace as does the structure. Just as a dramatic scene may relieve by juxtaposition the slow-moving rhythm of events, the more dynamic veni-vidi-vinci sentence relieves the otherwise laborious movement of the prose. It is always based on three or more preterite verb forms. Sentences like the following abound in Hijo de ladrón:

Hubo un breve diálogo, la puerta sonó como si la empujara con brusquedad y un paso de hombre avanzó por el corredor de baldosas (p. 338).

Recogí una frazada, la hice un paquete que metí bajo el brazo y salí (p. 430).

Despite their frequency, the dynamic sentences of this type offer relief only as a change of pace; always predominant is the slow, more intricate sentence.

Besides involved syntax, other stylistic devices employed to achieve slowness are 1) word repetition and parallel constructions, 2) enumeration, and 3) accumulation of adjectives. A few examples follow:

1) Repetition and parallel constructions

...pensaba en la posibilidad de tener una mujer, una mujer que escogiera para sí solo y a quien acariciaría y poseería y en quien engendraría un hijo, una mujer que sería exclusivamente suya, por días y por noches, no una mujer por ratos... (p. 684).

...en donde las familias se crean y destruyen, aparecen y desaparecen, silenciosamente, como aparecen y desaparecen los árboles (p. 539).

2) Enumeration

...circulamos por pasillos llenos de pequeñas oficinas, cuchitriles de secretarios, receptores, copistas, telefonistas, archiveros, gendarmes...(p.500).

...y quien dice dinero dice comida, luz, calor, ropa limpia, libros, ambiente...(p. 710).

3) Accumulation of adjectives

...encontré a alguien, una mujer, delgada, baja, vieja ya...(p. 578).

...está sumergida en un río de grasa, despeinada, desarreglada, rodeada de párvulos... (p. 655).

If all of the above-mentioned devices slow down the pace of the novels, thereby emphasizing the anti-dramatic nature of Aniceto's life, the singular absence of expressive metaphorical language may be said to effect a certain drab and colorless mode of expression commensurate with this same atmosphere. Infrequent metaphors and similes, nevertheless, are used at times to bring about a change of pace. Most always they are of the popular, colloquial kind:

Hay gente que tiene mucha plata, y que, sin embargo, se siente tan segura como una salchicha en el hocico de un perro (p. 681).

Un olor a bacalao surge de toda la caleta y lo recibe a uno como un puñetazo recibe a un rostro, dándole en la nariz (p. 455).

Hyperbole is also employed at times to add color.

The example below refers to a fish sandwich:

La habría comido, sin embargo, aún en el caso de que se me hubiese probado que la pescada

era originaria del Mar Rojo y contemporánea de Jonás (p. 474).

Most often, however, it is irony, the author's mock-serious tone, which relieves the tedium. The first example cited below refers to the poetry Aniceto had written about María Luisa; the second concerns the anarchists who were always making plans to rob, only to encounter problems when the time came to carry them out:

Aniceto se dio cuenta y días después, seducido por la idea de que escribir versos resultaba más económico que escribir prosa, ya que se escribía menos, llenó de rosas, juncos, narcisos, ...varios dorsos de formularios de telegrama (p.712).

Éra un plan estúpido, matemático, sólo faltaba realizarlo. El primero sábado que fueron vieron que, justo en el momento en que el hombre bajaba del tranvía, surgían como del aire varias mujeres que se detuvieron en la acera del frente y miraron hacia dentro del taller. ¿Quiénes son? ¿Tal vez piensan también asaltar al pagador? (p. 61).

The form of irony most frequently used by Rojas is understatement, usually occurring at the end of a chapter for dramatic effect. The following example, taken from the first chapter of Hijo de ladrón, is an ironic commentary on Aniceto's freedom; just released from jail, he is still sick and weak:

En ese estado y con esas expectativas, salí a la calle.

--Está en libertad. Firme aquí. ¡Cabo de guardia!

Sol y viento, mar y cielo (p. 379).

A few final words should be added concerning Rojas' vocabulary. Popular conversational words are used almost exclusively. Given the fact that Aniceto and his friends are of the lower, uneducated class, there is no need for Rojas to use learned and erudite expressions. It is true that some intellectual vocabulary appears in Sombras contra el muro, but it is present for ironical and satirical purposes only. Although Rojas uses popular language, unlike the criollistas, he eschews regionalisms and picturesque expressions. To be sure, there are some Chileanisms, but these are kept to an absolute minimum. The following examples are the most frequent: cabros-muchachos; pescar-hallar; gallo-hombre. Profanity and vulgar expressions are also avoided, although in Sombras contra el muro, Rojas seems to have left behind some of the modesty of the previous novels. Here he shows an unusual penchant for scatological humor. In the last analysis, perhaps Rojas' greatest stylistic achievement comes in the fact that the reader feels that here is a sensibility that is entirely spontaneous and natural; rarely is the reader conscious of effects being artfully contrived.

In conclusion, there is little doubt that Rojas' importance as a novelist will rest on the Aniceto Hevia trilogy. Among the three, Hijo de ladrón remains his most probing exploration of human experience as well as his most accomplished work. Mejor que el vino is also a dense

novel, offering a vision of reality in all its inherent complexities and contradictions; however, it is less successful as a work of art and at times reads much like an essay. The last of the series, Sombras contra el muro, adds little to the vision itself and is rather superficial in its treatment of experience.

## Notes

1. Fernando Alegría, Fronteras del realismo (Santiago, 1962), p. 37.
2. Ibid.
3. Rojas, Obras, p. 27.
4. Rojas, Antología, pp. 77-79.
5. Rojas, Obras, p. 387. All passages quoted from Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino are taken from the Obras completas.
6. Alegría, Fronteras, p. 104.
7. Ibid.
8. Manuel Rojas, Sombras contra el muro (Santiago, 1963), p. 170. All quoted passages are from this first edition.

## CHAPTER VII

### PUNTA DE RIELES: A NEW DEPARTURE

In many ways, Punta de rieles represents a new departure in Rojas' concept of the novel. The slow, ponderous rhythm of the trilogy gives way to a more dynamic and accelerated movement. Sociological elements, important in the establishment of atmosphere in the Aniceto Hevia trilogy, are subordinated to the psychological study of personality. In terms of language, too, Rojas reverses himself, employing abundant colloquialisms. So true is this in fact that some critics have accused him of turning his back on the universal, once more to embrace criollismo.<sup>1</sup> Such judgments seem a bit hasty, however, for the psychological bent of the two stories which make up the novel belie a return to the picturesque.

Most important, perhaps, in terms of change, is the fact that Rojas has turned away from the exploration of his personal experiences. Even so, it is a mistake to see this work as a product pure and simple of the author's imagination. The story concerning Romilio Llanas was told to him in 1927 by his friend Julio Asmusen, the director

at the time of El Mercurio in Antofagasta. Rojas explains the circumstances:

Nos contó, aquella noche, que en la madrugada anterior, en los momentos que pensaba cerrar el diario y marcharse, un hombre solicitó hablar con él...

...el hombre le dijo que acababa de matar a su mujer y que venía a pedirle consejo:... El individuo le contó una oscura y larga historia de carácter sexual.<sup>2</sup>

Deeply impressed by the story, Rojas made detailed notes, intending later to write a novel. Over the years, he intermittently returned to them, only to lay them aside each time. That same year, Rojas was introduced to an individual who a few hours later in a long conversation related to him the entire story of his life. Struck by this man's deep sense of guilt, Rojas again made copious notes. It was not until 1959, however, in Middlebury, Vermont, that the idea occurred to him to counterpoint these two stories in a manner similar to Faulkner's Wild Palms.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of Punta de rieles--or more precisely the motif which serves to hold the two stories together--is the image of railroad tracks; as the tracks meet in the distance, so may the lives of two individuals. Yet, whereas the meeting of the tracks is an optical illusion, the coming together of the two lives is real. The point of encounter here--and this is one of Rojas' recurring themes--is the moment when one human being helps to sustain



another in an hour of grave need. In this novel, two men are trapped by the circumstances of their lives, victimized by their human frailty and insufficiency. Alone and without help, each is unable to cope with his life. Romilio Llancas, a proletarian, and Fernando Larraín Sanfuentes, an aristocrat, live through different circumstances. Although each story has its own "fable" so to speak, each is the acting out of a similar human condition.

Fernando, indolent as a youth, over-dependent upon his mother and ignored by his father, becomes trapped by an unsatisfactory marriage and family difficulties which he is helpless to rectify. He is seen to descend morally into alcoholism and drug addiction, rising at the end of the novel to what may be only temporary salvation and fulfillment through the love of a lower-class woman. Romilio, after a stifling childhood on the farm, is seen to conquer by sheer strength of character the unfortunate contingencies of his life; he becomes a successful carpenter, an important trade-union worker, and later overcomes the hardships of a northern nitrate field. An unusually timid man, his undoing is his inability to relate to women in general. In the end he is led to the brutal murder of Rosa, a woman whose pathological sexual appetite he is unable to satisfy.

Romilio's basic temperament is explained primarily by his family background. A childhood spent in rural isolation

is responsible for his timidity with women. Even so, although this is a psychological determinant, Rojas has not gone back entirely to the Naturalists' conception of personality. Through the choices he makes, Romilio is able to transcend in many ways the narrow boundaries of his heredity and environment.

In his reactions to situations in no way involving women, Romilio elicits only admiration. While it is true that he did not choose to serve in the military, it was by his own choice that he sought broader horizons and was ultimately able to break free from the restrictions of his childhood. If his freedom to select job apprenticeships was limited, it was through his own initiative that he developed a sense of pride in his work as a carpenter. In his resoluteness to learn all he could from books, he exhibited a laudable strength of character, although to some extent, perhaps, books were a refuge for him, an unconscious way of avoiding interpersonal relationships with women. Finally, Romilio was determined to discipline himself ascetically to the austere conditions of the nitrate field; in this he contrasted sharply with the many who, unable to do so, sought diversion in the city or soon left altogether.

Romilio's reactions to situations involving women, on the other hand, are extremely pitiful as he fails miserably on every occasion to relate in a meaningful way. In

his experiences with prostitutes in Antofagasta, his naiveté is lamentable; here he finds himself caught between the satisfaction of his immediate physiological impulses and the more profound need to establish a deeper psychological relationship. His weakness is manifest once more when he hesitates to initiate an affair with Rosa, even though she has shown more than a little interest in him. When she finally takes it upon herself to initiate a sexual relationship, a psychological conflict takes shape within him, becoming progressively more acute as the relationship develops. He has normal physiological and psychological needs--primarily the latter--, especially the assertion of his manhood. Faced with Rosa's dominating sexual passion, Romilio experiences complete frustration. His ambivalent attitude then comes to the surface: he desires at the same time to possess her and to be rid of her. Such frustration has its logical and inevitable outlet in the brutal act of murder. In the end, he has been incapable of gaining his freedom in the area most essential to man's being--the giving and receiving of love. Both psychological determinism and adverse fortune have worked against him.

Finally, in the psychological portrayal of Romilio, his attitude toward himself is revealing. In spite of the fact that he has committed murder, he is by no means guilt-ridden. His story, as he relates it to Fernando, is simply

an attempt to explain, if not justify, what he has done. Throughout, he sees himself as a victim of circumstances.

Fernando's as well as Romilio's character is revealed against his family background. His fundamental weakness of character can be traced to his relationships with his father and mother. Although the former was an alcoholic, Fernando's own alcoholism seems to stem more from his environment than from heredity. Despite his weakness, however, there is much that is admirable about him. He is entirely capable, for instance, of examining his life in retrospect. What is more, he exhibits a profound sense of guilt, rooted in the realization that he has been totally responsible for his acts. This is most evident in the remorse he feels for his abominable treatment of his wife and children. He constantly ponders, too, the idea that as an aristocrat it was incumbent upon him to develop a constructive civic responsibility. At times he lashes out at his entire social class for being remiss in this regard. Finally, as he looks back over his life, he is able to see that human dignity, as he had tacitly assumed, has nothing to do with one's social station. He has come to see that true dignity cuts across social and economic distinctions to include the most humble individuals, individuals like Romilio Llanca. In short, in all of this healthy self-criticism, Fernando is seen as a reformed man.

His conduct during his early years, however, elicits a combination of pity and disgust. Given the mores of his society, it is natural that he would indulge in the sexual pleasures so readily available to him. Yet when he gets a prostitute pregnant, he callously leaves her to the solution of her own dilemma. The first three years of his relationship with his wife Clara are on the surface praiseworthy. He is even overjoyed at the birth of his children and welcomes the responsibility of raising a family. Nevertheless, such conduct is in fact pitiful, since Fernando is unaware that it has its motivation in a mawkishly sentimental and dubious love for Clara.

His weakness of character manifests itself the minute the slightest problem arises. When he tries to help his sister with her marital problems, for example, she misunderstands his truly charitable motives, believing him to be concerned only with family honor. Incapable of communicating with her, he feels personally inadequate and dodges the problem altogether by getting drunk. As regards his financial problems, he resents the fact that his own family is able but unwilling to assist him. In his job at the bank, a job he owed to his mother's influence, rather than set his mind on working for a higher and more lucrative position, he can only lament the boredom and seeks escape in alcohol. In his efforts to explain away his alcoholism, he becomes increasingly pitiful. Like all who rationalize, he becomes convinced of the truth of his rationalizations.

In the end, completely enslaved by his drug habit, he is nothing less than wretched, a man in a state of utter degradation, a sub-human creature without a will. What is most unfortunate is that he is alone. The only helping hand had come from his brother-in-law, a hand offered not out of kindness, however, but out of a concern for saving face. Refusing such help, Fernando embezzles money, reels and totters through countless lost weekends, struggles off and on against his addiction, but inevitably continues to regress. It is only the gratuitous act of charity by a humble woman that saves him finally from total destruction. Her subsequent self-denying commitment to him, along with his willingness to accept full responsibility for what he has been, establishes the nascent hope that he may become something more worthy, namely, a human being on the way to becoming free.

Structurally, each of these stories, except for certain elements of foreshadowing at the beginning, follows a rigid chronological sequence. Even though Fernando's takes the form of an interior monologue, Rojas makes no attempt to follow a psychological free-association of ideas in the manner of Joyce or Faulkner. Such an approach has certainly been instrumental in creating two intensely dramatic stories.

Upon closer examination of the structure, it becomes evident that both are blocked out in precisely the same

way. First, each narrator offers introductory information about his youth. This prelude in turn is followed by the complication of events leading to a turning point after which the character's life takes a new direction. For Romilio it is the beginning of his relationship with Rosa; for Fernando, it comes with the knowledge of his sister's marital difficulties. Following these turning points, each narrative builds gradually but deliberately to a moment of extreme emotional intensity which is in turn resolved quickly in the denouement.

Suspense as to the outcome of each story is unimportant. In both cases, this is revealed at the very beginning. Just as Juan Pablo Castel in Sábato's El túnel begins his confession by stating that he has murdered María Iribarne, so does Romilio Llanças begin his: "Nunca había matado a nadie, nunca pensé en hacerlo. Pero la maté. Me extrañó, más que me asustó, el chorro de sangre." Similarly, although in a more indirect way, Fernando refers early to his drug habit, his alcoholism, and the woman who has been his salvation. This method of revealing the outcome at the beginning focuses the reader's attention squarely on the psychological process of the stories, on character rather than plot.

Although these stories may be read independently, they are, nevertheless, tied together in various ways. Both men are physically present in the same room; each relates his

story in the first person. The early chapters, all of them very brief, are narrated by the author himself only as a means of bringing the two men together. After this short introduction, both narratives proceed without interruption by the author, alternating with each other every twenty pages or so until the final chapter when the author again intervenes to bring the novel to a conclusion. The novel is therefore framed by the presence of the omniscient author at the beginning and at the end.

The alternating chapters are counterpointed as the two lives are juxtaposed, sometimes to emphasize contrast, at other times to point up parallels. In the early chapters, it is primarily the former that is at work. Fernando is a wealthy aristocrat closely tied to his family; Romilio is a poor peasant who left home at an early age. Fernando's free-wheeling sexual relationships are set against Romilio's emotional immaturity. What Fernando lacks most, a sense of responsibility, is seen to be Romilio's greatest strength. Whereas the early chapters primarily offer contrasts, the later ones stress parallels stemming from the human weaknesses of the two characters: both are victims of circumstances; both are drawn into a vortex of overwhelming forces; both live in a veritable hell. The one prevailing contrast which is maintained is the different attitude of each character toward his life: Fernando feels guilty and is self-critical; Romilio often borders on self-pity.



Finally, although the musical term counterpoint seems to be the most appropriate to describe this technique, the analogy is not altogether a successful one. The novel is too rigidly blocked out to really be compared to music. Since it appears to have been built rather than composed, its structure is more akin to architecture. In the trilogy, motifs were stated, repeated, interrelated, and played out in almost infinite variation; here they are stacked together like bricks. And although this is Rojas' deepest penetration into the psychological inner workings of his characters, the artificiality of the novel's construction removes something of the feeling of vitally lived experience so omnipresent in Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino.

Nevertheless, it can not be denied that these stories are dramatically compelling. Whereas in the trilogy there were many digressions, much philosophizing, and minute analyses of the nuances of emotional experiences, in Punta de rieles every incident bears directly on the inexorable process of the characters' degeneration or victimization and every word develops and intensifies the psychological drama. Due to the introspective nature of the characters and the intensity of the narrative, there is a similarity with other novels of the 1950's and 60's, two examples being Eduardo Mallea's La sala de espera and Ernesto Sábato's El túnel.

Not a little of the intensity achieved is due to Rojas' style. Contributing to the rapid pace, for example, is the accumulation of brief, epigrammatic sentences and, at times, even sentence fragments:

La mayoría es gente seria, muchos brutos, pocos inteligentes. Algunos, buenas personas. Otros, unos bandidos. Algunos no toman más que agua. Otros no toman más que vino. Unos son más generosos que Nuestro Señor. Otros más avaros que el diablo (p. 55).

It will be noticed from the example that in addition to the epigrammatic sentences, the dramatic qualities are intensified by the use of antithesis.

Hemingway-like simple sentences joined together by the conjunction y are to be found on virtually every page:

La miraba y no le respondía (p. 165).

Había que ser caballero y le escribí una carta en que le conté todo y le dije que era mejor que no nos viéramos más (p. 85).

Unlike all of Rojas' other works, colloquialisms, especially Chileanisms, are ubiquitous here. Countless examples could be cited. The following is a selected list of the most common:

Vocabulary

cabro-muchacho  
ña to-muchacho  
curado-borracho  
pega-trabajo  
neque-fuerza

pololear-ser novio de  
sifítico-cursi  
guagua-bebé  
harto-mucho  
boliche-negocio

Idiomatic expressions

armó la gran pelotera  
 levantan rocha  
 pégale el sorbetón  
 al tiro  
 le tincaba  
 peor es mascar lauchas

Diminutives

añitos  
 ligerito  
 coloradita  
 trajecito  
 traguito

Colloquial similes

me metieron en la casa como un saco de papas  
 me levantaba como una tuna  
 me había portado como una hueveta

Although such popular language is quite natural in the mouths of the characters, one wonders whether Rojas has not chosen a facile way of characterizing these men. He was dealing with the common man in Hijo de ladrón, yet by avoiding popular jargon he seems to have been highly successful in capturing the reality of those kind of people,

To conclude this analysis of style, it should be mentioned that since these lives are related in retrospect and move rapidly over events, there is an abundance of preterite verb forms. This also accelerates the pace and helps to achieve some of the novel's dynamic qualities. Adjectives are extremely rare as, once more, narration takes precedence over atmospheric effects.

In conclusion, although Punta de rieles has certain shortcomings in structure and style, and, although in the

creation of characters of some psychological depth Rojas can not compare with the best, this novel has some admirable qualities, namely its dynamic intensity and the magnetism of the characters. It withstands more than one reading.

## Notes

1. See Ricardo Latcham, "Punta de rieles por Manuel Rojas," La Nación, 18 de febrero de 1961, p. 14.
2. Rojas, Antología, p. 238.
3. Ibid., pp. 239-240.
4. Manuel Rojas, Punta de rieles (Santiago, 1960), p. 19.  
All passages quoted are taken from this first edition.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSIONS

Manuel Rojas' works, from his earliest poetry to his latest novels, have been analyzed in some detail in the preceding chapters. Some conclusions regarding his writings are now in order. In reflecting back on what has been said, certain questions inevitably arise. What direction, over the years, has Rojas' writing taken, both in terms of content and form? What influences have come to bear on him? What is his ultimate value as a writer? And what is his place in Chilean prose fiction?

It has been possible to see in the process of analysis that Manuel Rojas' writings have grown, like a living organism, from infancy through adolescence to a richness in maturity unsurpassed by any single Chilean writer of his generation. In his latest works, however, he shows signs of having worked out those themes which have always yielded most in terms of depth and density. It is doubtful from all indications that he will hereafter produce anything to equal in density, richness, and depth his two great novels of the 1950's, Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino. Be that as it may, Rojas' works show a general

tendency to move gradually away from the restrictions of the criollista's concern with the local and the picturesque toward the more universal problems and mysteries of man's existence in the world. It can be seen that his early stories and novels, concerned as they are with things peculiarly Chilean, lead to a dead end in the year 1936. Criollista tendencies in his work, then, atrophy and ultimately disappear.

The road that leads directly to Hijo de ladrón is obviously the more important and the one that gives Rojas his lasting significance as a writer. An inclination toward the universal is already clearly discernible in his early poetry. Considering the reaction of the poets of his generation against the formalistic superficialities of Modernism, it is not surprising that his own poetry should deal with themes of a more transcendental and philosophical nature. It will be recalled from the chapter on Tonada del transeunte that he was trying to express something of the anguish of the human condition in the world. Although hardly an intellectual kind of poetry, it nevertheless takes the form of a metaphysical quest for the meaning of human existence. In the poems, Rojas faces the ultimate mystery of man's fate, his suffering, his misery, and his death and extinction. In an embryonic way, he also touches on the theme he will develop in his later novels, that of loneliness and the need to participate in

a community of friendship and brotherhood. These early poems, then, entirely universal in theme, reveal Rojas' own view of life as a quest.

Some few of Rojas' early short stories show him still involved with these same universal questions. In the best of them, he portrays rather insignificant human beings confronting crises in their existence. Usually they are somehow victims of suffering and misery. The theme that takes on all-embracing significance, however, is the dialectical one of man's essential loneliness and need to be integrated into a community of fellowship. The crisis of each of the protagonists in the best stories involves his attempts to reintegrate himself into a communion from which he is momentarily separated. One need only be reminded of the youth in "El vaso de leche." Here it is not merely the working of the reader's unbridled imagination to see in the milk and wafers, freely served as a gift to the youth by the proprietress, a symbol of the communion which is established between them.

While man's existential condition in the world, his loneliness and need for love, is the theme of a few of the short stories, numerous others reveal Rojas to have been taken into at least the outer edges of the mainstream of Chilean criollismo. Such stories as "Laguna," "El bonete maulino," "El rancho en la montaña," "Bandidos en los caminos," "El colocolo," and others, may be called to mind



as examples. Here the criollista concern for locale becomes an important element. The Andean region, the Chilean countryside, while incontestably less significant than in the stories of Latorre, are nevertheless manifestations of the same tradition. Although character is always of more interest to Rojas than setting, it is not difficult to see that even here the typical takes precedence over the universal; the roto, the bandit, the Andean smuggler, and others are close relatives of characters like Latorre's Domingo Persona. It is Rojas' chief purpose here to tell an interesting story for its own sake, and, while many are excellent works from a dramatic and technical point of view and highly entertaining, they can scarcely be said to widen the reader's view of reality.

Rojas' first attempts at the novel also show a certain ambiguity in terms of the direction he will ultimately follow. There is no doubt that Lanchas en la bahía is in some ways a universal story. This is true, for example, in its treatment of the ambivalent stage between boyhood and manhood in the adolescent. Although more submerged, the theme of loneliness and communion is also manifest. At the same time, however, the story is told within the confines of criollismo. This can be seen especially in Rojas' efforts to establish in a concrete way the setting of the port city of Valparaíso. Furthermore, Rucio del

Norte is the typically colorful criollista-type character, drawn along essentially humorous lines and moderately exaggerated just short of caricature; he is symbolic, too, of the typical lanchero, a purely Chilean element. Once again, however, this is peripheral criollismo. Rojas' second novel, on the other hand, La ciudad de los césares, leaves little doubt as to its classification; it is wholly criollista. In it, Rojas emphasizes exotic landscape, the region of the Cordillera, portrays typically Chilean characters, especially Onaisín, the Ona Indian, and deals with an exclusively Chilean legend. Perhaps the novel's greatest significance lies in its mediocrity, for it demonstrates in a lucid way the author's weariness with the superficial and local. It is evident that he can no longer put his heart and soul into such works.

Rojas' essays, which came out two years later in 1938, are a more dramatic revelation of his weariness with criollismo. In them, he denounces the superficiality inherent in an essentially descriptive approach to literature. It is significant, moreover, that he includes himself in the denunciation. Yet more important is his exhortation to Chilean and to Spanish American writers to take a more universal outlook. At the same time, he recognizes that a creative writer can only proceed from his own experience and circumstances; he would not have us confuse universality

with cosmopolitanism. D'Halmar's novel on Spain, Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto, is after all a tourist's view; since the latter was not Spanish, he could not communicate from his soul what he could not feel. Cosmopolitanism, then, like criollismo, can only be superficially descriptive. Rojas would rather have Chileans begin with their own circumstances and deeply felt experience and transcend the local in the universal. As for himself, he was to remain silent as a creative writer for thirteen years.

With the appearance of Hijo de ladrón in 1951, Rojas is seen to have chosen a definite direction and to have turned his back entirely on criollismo. In this novel and its sequel, Mejor que el vino, there is nothing that is of purely local significance. The character of Aniceto Hevia is raised to the level of a universal symbol of man and his existence in a broken world. His many experiences take the form of a metaphysical quest, of man in search of his authentic self and his relationship to being. In line with an existentialist view, Aniceto is seen as a man who is never complete in any given moment. Rather he is a man without an essence, involved in a constant process of becoming; he is a potential man in search of completion and transcendence. In Rojas' world, the search for transcendence is an indication that man is often estranged from himself. Aniceto therefore seeks his authentic self through

various modes of communion. At those times when he is able to participate in the being of another, he has the feeling of authenticity and fulfillment. More often, however, he can not participate, since circumstances both within him and outside him operate against it. On such occasions, he has the feeling of having lost himself; he feels the inauthenticity of being a non-man, an object among other objects in the world, a "what" instead of a "who." His situation in the world, in short, is one of continuous oscillation between loneliness (loss of self) and communion (fulfillment of self).

Although these two novels deal with the inner man and the ephemeral nature of his participation, they are not written in a vacuum; they are not allegories. There is external action and the realm of this action is Chile and Argentina; more specifically, it is Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, and Santiago. Yet to refer to the novels on this basis as criollista works, as some have done,<sup>1</sup> is clearly a misreading. In Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino, external action and local circumstances are rarely if ever present for their own sake. The purpose of the riot in Valparaíso, for example, is not Latin-American local color; rather it is a manifestation of a broken world in which it is difficult for man to orient himself. Similarly, the jail scenes are not intended as a study of criminal life; they parallel in an almost symbolic way

man's captive existence in the world of time. The novels are entirely in line with the program laid out by Rojas in his essays; the local circumstances of Aniceto's life have been completely transcended in the universal.

In the last analysis, Hijo de ladrón and Mejor que el vino, but especially the former, will always be the point of culmination in Rojas' total work. His two last novels, Sombras contra el muro and Punta de rieles, do not add significantly to his prestige in terms of density and the universal vision. Indeed, the latter is something of a turning back. What it contains that is new for Rojas, its emphasis on the psychological development of character, is relatively unimportant, for he can not stand on the same level with other psychological novelists in Chile or Latin America. It is doubtful that he will continue along these lines.

Attention must now be turned to the development of Rojas' formal patterns and technical devices. His early poetry shows a preference for a free, organic form as opposed to a classical one. In his short stories rather the opposite is true as he remains at all times within the well-established confines of narrative traditions. His masters in this period are Chekhov, Maupassant, and Quiroga. Most of his stories are solidly constructed, linear, beginning in medias res, and move chronologically to a moment of recognition on the part of the protagonist. His early

novels follow the same pattern. In the trilogy, however, Rojas breaks away from the older tradition as, under the influence of Proust, Joyce, Faulkner, and perhaps Dos Passos, he experiments with more modern structural concepts--spatial and temporal displacements, smaller stories imbedded within the larger whole, counterpoint, and techniques of inner projection such as indirect interior monologues and soliloquies. The multiple-story novel is quite likely traceable to his reading of Proust as is the use of introspective techniques and the recording of the most minute sensations in Mejor que el vino. Temporal and spatial displacements could be traced to any one of the above-mentioned novelists; the kaleidoscopic structure of Sombras contra el muro bears a great deal of similarity with Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer. In any case, it should be understood that such influences are superficial, purely structural, and in no way extend to content. Most certainly the techniques themselves were not used out of a desire either to experiment or to appear avant-garde but only because they best expressed in terms of form the complex nature of his theme.

An evaluation of Manuel Rojas as a writer must necessarily rest on his greatest works. As a criollista, he can have little more than an historical significance. Even in his best novels, however, where he treats themes of no little complexity, he can not be legitimately compared to

the great writers of his age. Although influenced superficially by them, it would be ludicrous to place him on the same level. Faulkner gives us, through an intricate mythical structure, a highly tragic vision of life; Rojas, by comparison, can rarely rise above the level of the pathetic. James Joyce is generally seen as a master of high comedy; the Chilean, at most, deals with characters and experience in a benevolently ironic light. Compared to Proust, a keen analyst of the complex psychological fluctuations of the human psyche, Rojas is seen to be singularly lacking in depth and insight. Finally, all the above-mentioned writers demonstrate a vast breadth as well as depth in their analyses of their particular societies. Proust gives us a vast panorama of the process of decadence of French society at the turn of the century; Faulkner's main theme is the tragic fall of an entire social structure and way of life in the American south; and Joyce's Ulysses spans the entire Irish nation, historically, socially, economically, and psychologically. Projected on this screen of world literature, then, Rojas is most assuredly a writer of the second or third rank.

While the above comparisons are admittedly unfair, they do serve to place Rojas' work in perspective. One could go on to point out, too, that in terms of artistic sophistication, intellectual content, and psychological and social analysis, Rojas can not stand with many of the

greats of his own generation in Spanish America. Names like Miguel Angel Asturias, Eduardo Mallea, Alejo Carpentier, and Agustín Yáñez need only be mentioned as examples. In his own native Chile, on the other hand, he must be considered as a writer of the highest rank, a key figure in the crisis of criollismo, an innovator in novelistic structure, and a stylist, who despite his use of simple, every-day vocabulary and the rhythms of the spoken word, is able to express poetically the deep anguish of man's loneliness and the heart-felt joys of his moments of true communion.

In conclusion, Manuel Rojas is a novelist of limited scope. Great literature as an agent of power must be compelling for one reason or another. While it is true, as Ortega says,<sup>2</sup> that the structure forms the property of a work of art, it is equally true that the artist needs something of substance with which to work. A great novel must be formed with compelling ideas and complex, magnetic characters conceived in depth. Unfortunately, it is compelling substance which Rojas' works lack. In part, perhaps, this stems from the limitations of his own life and intellectual formation. As subject matter for his novels, his personal experience can only yield so much. Hijo de ladrón is a highly engaging work; Mejor que el vino strains the theme as far as it will go; in Sombras contra el muro and even Punta de rieles, the reader discovers that the author is merely repeating himself.



## Notes

1. See Ricardo Latcham, "Historia del criollismo," Anales de la Universidad de Chile, año CXIII, No. 94, (1954), 5-22.
2. José Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (New York, 1956), p. 69.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Works by Manuel Rojas

- Rojas, Manuel. Obras completas. Santiago, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Poéticas. Mendoza, 1921.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hombres del sur. Santiago, 1926.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Una pelea en la Pampa." Claridad, VII (octubre-noviembre de 1926).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Tonada del transeunte. Santiago, 1927.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Una historia sin interés." El Mercurio, 13 de febrero de 1927.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El delincuente. Santiago, 1929.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "El zorro." La Información, No. 136 (enero de 1930).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Lanchas en la bahía. Santiago, 1932.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Travesía. Santiago, 1934.
- \_\_\_\_\_. La ciudad de los césares. Santiago, 1936.
- \_\_\_\_\_. De la poesía a la revolución. Santiago, 1938.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "De qué se nutre la esperanza." Babel (julio-agosto de 1948), 201-202.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Muerte en otoño." Babel, XIII (2o trimestre de 1950), 99-110.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hijo de ladrón. Santiago, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Páginas excluidas de Hijo de ladrón." Babel, XIV (4o trimestre de 1951), 170-176.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mares libres." El Mercurio, 26 de agosto de 1951.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Pancho Rojas." Occidente, No. 71 (septiembre de 1951).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Una carabina y una cotorra." El Mercurio, 28 de octubre de 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nacimiento de una literatura: Chile." Revista Lyceum, VIII (febrero de 1952), 31-44.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ramon Díaz Sánchez, escritor venezolano." Atenea, CX (abril de 1953), 89-105.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Deshecha rosa. Santiago, 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Imágenes de infancia. Santiago, n.d.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Mejor que el vino. Santiago, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Punta de rieles. Santiago, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El árbol siempre verde. Santiago, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Zapatos subdesarrollados." Política, XIII (enero de 1961), 54-63.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Sombras contra el muro. Santiago, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Pasé por México un día. Santiago, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Historia breve de la literatura chilena. Santiago, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. El bonete maulino. Santiago, 1943. Contains: "El bonete maulino," "El delincuente," and "Laguna."
- \_\_\_\_\_. Antología de cuentos. Santiago, 1957. Contains: "Una carabina y una cotorra," "Bandidos en los caminos," "Oro en el sur," "La aventura de Mr. Jaiba," "Pancho Rojas," "Pedro, el pequenero," "El fantasma del patio," "El rancho en la montaña," "Mares libres," "Historia de hospital," and "Poco sueldo."
- \_\_\_\_\_. El vaso de leche y sus mejores cuentos. Santiago, 1959. Contains: "Laguna," "El delincuente," "El vaso de leche," "Un ladrón y su mujer," "El colocolo," "Canto y baile," "El hombre de la rosa," "El bonete maulino," and "El León y el Hombre."

- \_\_\_\_\_ . Antología autobiográfica. Santiago, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . El hombre de la rosa. Buenos Aires, 1963.  
 Contains: "El hombre de la rosa," "Un espíritu inquieto," "El fantasma del patio," "Pedro, el pequenero," "Oro en el sur," "El rancho en la montaña," "El bonete maulino," "Historia de hospital," "El vaso de leche," "El delincuente," "Un ladrón y su mujer," "Poco sueldo," and "Zapatos subdesarrollados."
- \_\_\_\_\_ . Esencias del país chileno. Mexico, 1963.
- B. Books and Articles about Manuel Rojas
- Alegría, Fernando. "Manuel Rojas: Frascendentalismo en la novela chilena." Cuadernos Americanos, CIII (1959), 244-258.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . Fronteras del realismo. Santiago, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana. Mexico, 1959.
- Blanco, Guillermo. "Manuel Rojas, novelista sin 'ismos'." Finis Terrae, IV (2o trimestre de 1957), 56-58.
- Cannizzo, Mary. "Manuel Rojas, Chilean Novelist and Author." Hispania, XLI (1958), 200-201.
- Clariana, Abelardo. Relatos humorísticos. Santiago, 1957.  
 Contains: "El fantasma del patio."
- Cortés Larrieu, Norman. "Hijo de ladrón de Manuel Rojas: tres formas de inconnexión en el relato." Anales de la Universidad de Chile, CVIII (4o trimestre de 1960), 193-202.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . "Hijo de ladrón: una novela existencial." Revista del Pacífico, I (1958), 33-50.
- Cuadernos de Literatura. Tres cuentos chilenos. Santiago, 1933. Contains: "El rancho en la montaña."
- Donoso, Armando. Algunos cuentos chilenos. Buenos Aires-Mexico, 1943. Contains: "El colocolo."

- Espinoza, Enrique. "Notas sobre Manuel Rojas." Atenea, No. 346-347 (abril-mayo de 1954), 108-121.
- Goic, Cedomil. "Hijo de ladrón: libertad y lágrimas." Atenea, No. 389 (julio-septiembre de 1960), 103-113.
- González Vera, José Santos. "Manuel Rojas." Babel, XIV (4o trimestre de 1951), 164-169.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Algunos. Santiago, 1959.
- Instituto de Literatura Chilena. Antología del cuento chileno. Santiago, 1963. Contains: "Laguna," "El vaso de leche," and "Una carabina y una cotorra."
- Latcham, Ricardo. "Historia del criollismo." Anales de la Universidad de Chile. CXIII (1954), 5-22.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Punta de rieles por Manuel Rojas." La Nación, 18 de febrero de 1961.
- Lichtblau, Myron I. "Ironic Devices in Manuel Rojas' Hijo de ladrón." Symposium, XIX (Fall 1965), 214-225.
- Menton, Seymour. Antología del cuento hispanoamericano. 2 vols. Mexico, 1964. Contains: "El vaso de leche."
- Montecinos, Manuel. El mar en la literatura chilena. Santiago, 1958. Contains: "El vaso de leche."
- Silva Castro, Raúl. Los cuentistas chilenos. Santiago, 1937. Contains: "El León y el Hombre."
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Manuel Rojas, novelista." Cuadernos Hispano-americanos, XLIV (octubre de 1960), 5-19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Historia crítica de la novela chilena, 1843-1956. Madrid, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Panorama literario de Chile. Santiago, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Manuel Rojas y sus cuentos." Revista Hispánica Moderna, XXVII (julio-octubre de 1961), 325-328.
- Solar, Hernán del. Breve estudio y antología de los premios nacionales de literatura. Santiago, 1964.
- Torres, Aldo. "Manuel Rojas, premio nacional de literatura, es argentino." Continente, LXXX (agosto de 1954), 34-36.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Encuentros literarios: un hombre andariego y tranquilo." Atenea, No. 355-356 (enero-febrero de 1955), 164-169.
- Undurraga, Antonio de. 28 cuentistas chilenos del siglo XX. Santiago, 1963. Contains: "Laguna."
- Yáñez, María Flora. Antología del cuento chileno moderno: 1938-1958. Santiago, 1958. Contains: "Pancho Rojas."